



## THE VAN GOGH “HEALING LANDSCAPES” DECLARATION

On 7 October 2020 we – Nature For Health, IUCN-The World Conservation Union, Van Gogh Nationaal Park, Wageningen University organized - with involvement of Kunstloc Brabant - The Debate “Healing Landscape, Healing the Landscape”, in Noord-Brabant, The Netherlands, as part of the Healing Landscape Day in the Van Gogh National Park. The Day was a partner event of the EU Green Weeks 2020 and was honoured by the presence of the Director-General of the World Health Organization and the EU Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries.

The Van Gogh National Park itself has a lot of potential to link health and happiness to local communities and offers an inspiring testing ground for healing landscapes. In this way, the Park can become “the landscape of the future”. Vincent van Gogh himself was inspired by the Brabant landscapes he knew from his youth. But he also badly needed nature for his sanity later in life.

We invite you to reflect on this Declaration, resulting from the Healing Landscape Day, to share your perspective and to picture our world in the spirit of Vincent van Gogh.

### OUR OBSERVATIONS

Preparing for the Debate we made the following observations.

1. The concept of “healing landscapes” has become more important lately due to the Corona crisis. Our society was forced by the pandemic to face the inextricable link between human health and a healthy environment. We should not go back to what used to be “normal” but move forward and restore the balance between society and nature. We need nature to take care of us, so we had better take care of nature. Our society, therefore, needs a recovery of this pandemic where long-term prevention is considered to be more important than a quick cure that only serves the short-term.
2. The “healing landscapes” concept implies a two-way relationship: a direct and close relationship with our natural environment that positively affects our physical and mental health; and this increased connectedness to the landscape that surround us, subsequently, helps us to better appreciate how to take care of its unique qualities. A positive relationship between humans and nature also contributes to lowering the ever-increasing costs of our healthcare systems. Understanding our health as something that is directly connected our relationship with nature and our environment will radically shift the focus of our healthcare systems and how we perceive our health.
3. It is of great importance that the restart of our society after the lockdown of the Corona crisis will give a high priority to the positive relationship between nature and public health. Consider In particular the mental impact that the Corona crisis has. The natural qualities of our living environment can help us to regain balance and offer a much-needed mental rehabilitation process.

## OUR CONSIDERATIONS

We invite you to follow in the footsteps of Vincent van Gogh, re-iterating the following important statements of the WHO Director-General and the President of the European Union:

*"Making nature healthy again is key to our physical and mental wellbeing and is an ally in the fight against climate change and disease outbreaks", President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, 2020*

*"The pandemic is a reminder of the intimate and delicate relationship between people and planet", WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, May 2020*

The World Health Organization has included in its "Manifesto for a healthy recovery from Covid-19" protection of nature as priority number 1. The United Nations is also giving higher priority to the themes of health and biodiversity, via the Global Sustainable Development Goals and the same is true for all relevant EU policies, including #EU4Health, the 'EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030' and the integration of nature based solutions in the European Green Deal to make Europe climate neutral by 2050.

Now is the time to restore the balance between people and nature at all geographical levels. However, a strong support for action and engagement at local and regional levels is called for in particular.

Acknowledging the importance of the concept of Healing Landscapes in realizing this support for local action and activities that contribute to the health of both, people and nature.

And welcoming the exchange of views and conclusions of the debate "Healing Landscapes" during the Healing Landscape Day on 7 October 2020 in the Van Gogh National Park.

We invite you to consider and share the following Appeal together with us.

## OUR APPEAL: THE VAN GOGH HEALING LANDSCAPES DECLARATION

1. We want to be part of a worldwide movement on nature and health and will work with overriding priority on restoring the balance between humans and their natural environment for the health of both, people and nature alike. After the Corona epidemic there should be no intention to go back to the old “normal”. We define the new “normal” as a world where the well-being and health of people and of nature are in balance.
2. Creative, connected and innovative ways of thinking are welcomed and necessary to achieve this goal, and expressions of art are important ways to reconnect people and nature
3. We will explore and use nature’s potential to assist us in healing in our private lives, our work environment, and in health care. Likewise, we will make all the efforts needed to heal nature.
4. We will put prevention and positive health at the centre of our attention, in particular when considering our public healthcare system. As a result the choice for positive health and a sustainable lifestyle in touch with nature will be our first priority.
5. We will cherish and promote the healing landscapes at all levels of this world. From green balconies and gardens, to green zones and local parks at local levels, from nature conservation areas to rural landscapes at regional levels, and from our national parks to Natura 2000 sites and world heritage sites at national and international levels.
6. We will stimulate health care workers to prescribe nature and to benefit from nature themselves and thus cultivate and use health benefits from green and blue spaces.
7. We will promote health care policies at all geographical levels that acknowledge the important role our natural environment has to play, and support concrete actions to that effect, including contributions from health care to the protection and restoration of nature.
8. We promote green environmental and nature policies at all geographical levels that acknowledge the importance of nature and a clean environment for human health.
9. We welcome in-depth and practical multi-disciplinary research into the benefits of nature for our mental and physical health and we welcome international exchange of views and expertise.
10. We will work towards tangible actions for health and nature, that bring people together, such as healing landscape paths, green meeting places in and around health care centres, and greening urbanized areas

## OUR COMMITMENT

We will communicate this Van Gogh Healing Landscapes Declaration to policy-makers, citizens groups, health care organizations, enterprises, scientists and other stakeholders all around the world, and will reflect the essence of this appeal in our policies and actions.

We are part of a worldwide movement that promotes the interrelationship between health of people and nature at all geographical levels, from global to local.

*“We are all Vincent van Gogh”* (Quote: President Van Gogh Nationaal Park, Yvo Kortmann)