



URBAN GREEN SPACE AND NATURE FOR ALL

Maurizio Laponi is a tree grower, author and business consultant from Mantova, Italy and previously served as President of the European Nurserystock Association (ENA).

"Strolling through a leafy park, woods, or a green countryside can ease brain fatigue, and the serenity of nature makes us feel empowered and carefree.

Our daily life can be hectic, stressful and uncertain, so there's something reassuring in the life cycle of a plant. After pollination, flowers become fruiting bodies, protecting the seeds inside. Seeds mature, and flowers fade and drop. Dried seeds are ready to sprout again, repeating a flowering plant's life cycle over and over. The cycle of plants will never disappoint us.

At this year's MyPlant&Garden show in Milan, the *Associazione Nazionale Imprese di Difesa e Tutela Ambientale (Assolmpredia)*, Italy's environmental protection agency comprised of green space contractors, greenkeepers, parks and green spaces folks, and not-for-profit organisations, hailed 2023 as the year of inclusiveness. Their 'Nature and Fun: health for all, no one excluded' conference, held at MyPlant, drew awareness to the inclusivity issue, demonstrating ways of creating inclusive and innovative green spaces.

Speaking at the conference, Assolmpredia President Luca Bartolini referenced how the increased focus on inclusiveness in today's workplace prompted his organisation to make city parks and urban green spaces more inclusive. "Our collaboration with the Polish company Terma,



a Gdansk-based designer and manufacturer of inclusive, quality playground equipment for parks, helped to take our work to the next level."

Izabela Adamska from Terma explained how the company differentiates itself in a crowded marketplace. "Our mission and vision are innovative, revolutionary, and person-centred, looking first at the individual needs of children with disabilities. We believe children of all ages and abilities have the right to play. Our design principles help to create certified playground equipment that is accessible, rehabilitating, and safe and allows children of all abilities to interact and play together."

Cinzia Bau of the *Fior di Loto Social Cooperative of Mantua* showed great enthusiasm for Terma and Assolmpredia's joint work, which, she thinks, transforms spaces into genuine meeting places that celebrate inclusiveness and will make children with disabilities better aware of what they are capable of.

Elena Grandi, Milan's councillor of Environment and Green Areas, concluded the debate, by showing a good understanding of the issues at stake and presenting a solution-driven approach.

She said: "Large cities will be increasingly faced with challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and pollution, and more and improved urban green spaces are part of the solution. The big cities of the future must be welcoming, healthy, and safe for everyone. Cities with lush green spaces accessible to everyone, where no one is left behind. Cities in which parks, playgrounds and sports facilities are accessible for all."

The Assolmpredia conference also provided an eye-opener as it invited attendees to reflect on the term inclusiveness that goes beyond disability inclusion. People from all walks of life, for various reasons, can feel excluded from society. Ideally, inclusive green spaces provide many social benefits, including a sense of community, connectivity and belonging."