

Concept Note World Cities Day

31 October, 2019, UNESCO HQ

1.) BACKGROUND

The United Nations General Assembly has designated the 31st of October as World Cities Day¹, to explore issues around global urbanization, encourage cooperation among countries and to contribute to sustainable urban development. **This year's theme** is:

“Changing the world: innovations and better life for future generations”.

Many trends are affecting cities: rapidly growing populations (particularly in the developing world); changes in demographics; increased citizen engagement and participation for more robust, inclusive policies; the advent of new technologies and their impact on the creative economy, and greater risk of disaster, including as a result of climate change.

UNESCO advocates for more people centre urban development models, including in the area of urbanisation where we aim to “re-humanise” cities. The Organization’s long-standing experience in the sciences, education, culture and communication and information provides insights into the multifaceted transformations of our urban spaces.

For many years, UNESCO has been pivoting many of its activities and research towards challenges in urban communities, in step with changing demographics. UNESCO’s multidisciplinary approach offers a unique added value to international debates on development, as well as effect real, positive change at the heart of communities. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an important opportunity to build on UNESCO’s long-standing transversal experience. The platform is part of UNESCO’s response to the 2030 Agenda, reflecting the transversal nature of SDGs.

31 October 2018 marked the first celebration of World Cities Day at UNESCO. The theme was “Building sustainable and resilient cities” and aimed to highlight the key role of cities in promoting social inclusion and diversity.

UNESCO will use the opportunity of World Cities Day in 2019 to showcase the Organization’s full range of activities contributing to the attainment of SDG11 on sustainable cities and communities. In line with the theme of 2019 World Cities Day - *“Changing the world: innovations and better life for future generations”* – the UNESCO Cities Platform will organise this year’s event that will include thematic panel discussions, networking opportunities, audio visual presentations and exhibitions. Innovation is at the heart of UNESCO’s role in working with stakeholders to devise policies adapted to contemporary challenges. Today’s youth, who will be leaders of the “future generations” are key interlocutors, as outlined in UNESCO’s [Operational Strategy on Youth](#).

The cities with whom we work are the best placed to describe their work within their communities, so priority will be given to their perspectives. We will also aim to ensure there is youth representation.

¹ <https://undocs.org/a/res/68/239>

2.) THE EVENT

Provisional programme: "Urban Dialogues"

9:30 -10:00	Launch of UNESCO's celebration of World Cities Day 2019
10:00- 11:15	Panel 1 – Cities 4 SDGs: linking UNESCO cities to the Agenda 2030
11:15 – 12:30	Panel 2 – Cities 4 Climate Action: environment and education
	LUNCH
14:00 -15h15	Panel 3 – Cities 4 Communities: social inclusion and accessibility
15:15 – 16:30	Panel 4 – Cities 4 the Future: urban-driven innovation
16:30 – 16:45	Announcement of the winners of Netexplo Smart Cities 2020
16:45 – 17:15	Closing remarks

Launch of World Cities Day 2019

It is hoped that DDG, who leads the work of the UNESCO Cities Platform (UCP), will be available to make welcoming remarks. ADG will make an intervention to introduce the UCP. Another high profile "champion" for cities should also be invited to set an inspirational tone of the event.

Panel 1 – Cities 4 the SDGs: linking UNESCO cities to the Agenda 2030

The seventeen goals of the globally endorsed United Nations Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030 has given fresh impetus for strengthening the linkages between the social, economic and environmental areas of development. Goal 11 in particular aims to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". Whilst many countries have struggled to make progress on the seventeen goals of the Sustainable Development Agenda, cities have proven to be agile and innovative. Moreover, well-designed policies in cities can also have positive effects on neighbouring, rural areas, meaning development in cities resonates beyond municipal boundaries.

For many years, UNESCO has been pivoting many of its activities and programmes towards challenges and opportunities in urban communities, in step with changing geo-demographics. This cities related work has focused on water systems, world heritage, lifelong learning, resilience to disasters, creativity, biodiversity, advances in information and communication technologies, as well as combatting discrimination. This panel will discuss the challenges and opportunities related to working on cities.

Panel 2 – Cities 4 Climate Action: environment and education

Cities play a role in tackling climate change. They are major contributors to climate change: for example, they produce 75% of greenhouse gases. Furthermore, hundreds of millions of people in cities across the world are increasingly susceptible to the extreme weather events that are the result of climate change - these are often the most vulnerable populations. Marginalised groups more often face the threat of water scarcity also in city space, often paying extortionate rates to meet their basic needs. In addition, many UNESCO urban World Heritage Sites – important depositories of human history – are suffering degradation due to changes in the local climate.

Climate Action is essential for transformative sustainable development. UNESCO programmes, in collaboration with our city partners, offer unique opportunities for mitigating and adapting to the consequences of climate change. The Science Sector provides research and advice to cities on water management through the Megacities Alliance for Water and Climate. This network of municipal policy-makers and researchers aims to share best practices on adapting to climate change by minimising urban water and energy footprints. Education for sustainable development is also a key vector for changing behaviours that contribute to climate and the work of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities demonstrates how effective learning projects can be in urban spaces. In addition, the iconic status of urban World Heritage sites, as well as the creativity of contemporary artists – many of whom are based in urban areas - can raise awareness of the issue of climate change. Finally, cities, with their dense populations, present an opportunity for inclusive policy-making to ensure that all citizens can contribute to making the decisions that affect the future of their urban neighbourhood, as well as accessing the information necessary to adapt to climate change via digital technologies.

Panel 3 – Cities 4 Communities: social inclusion and accessibility

Cities are not only becoming bigger, but also more diverse. The rapid social transformations of our cities, driven by the compounded impact of economic and social crises, can result in undermining social cohesion. Certain populations – whether they be youth, migrants, older people, for example – feel excluded from civic life, which further degrades trust in public institutions, peace and prosperity. Some vulnerable segments of society, particularly those in the newer slum settlements, indeed lack basic services such as access to water making them even more exposed to the consequences of disasters. Often the education system is unable to respond to the demands placed upon it, for example, in the case of large refugee populations.

Diversity adds advantages and competitiveness to cities by building social cohesion, enhancing economic vitality, fostering cultural belonging, driving innovation and promoting creativity. To realize these advantages equity and inclusion require fostering in every aspect of civic life. UNESCO enables cities to share experiences of public policies that increase social inclusion and accessibility, in order to make positive social change. The International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities brings together cities in the common struggle against racism, xenophobia and other forms of prejudice, often through tackling the systemic barriers to social inclusion, as well as encouraging collective decision-making. Broader, more inclusive, consultation on public policy can ensure more sustainable city infrastructure, such as water management systems that are not only more equitable but more environmentally sustainable. Valuing heritage sites can foster a sense of collective identity, whilst creativity can create a vibrant city life, serve as a platform for diverse expressions and generate income. A city's ability to adapt to an uncertain future is vital for its resilience and creating lifelong learning opportunities for all, including safely making the most of digital technologies.

Panel 4 – Cities 4 the Future: urban-driven innovation

Innovation is fundamental to achieve sustainable development in all spheres of human activity, given the unprecedented, ecological, demographic and technological challenges the world faces. Investments in research and development strengthen resilience and help build cohesive societies. Research and development equally provide new perspectives to address contemporary challenges by stimulating creativity and problem-solving to adapt to the evolving world. Encompassing both the

challenges and the opportunities of sustainable development, cities are accelerators of innovation and laboratories of experimentation for sustainable solutions. Innovation can be present in public policies to foster greater inclusion, technological solutions to natural hazards, educational strategies to prepare the public adapt to the consequences of climate change.

The UNESCO Cities Platform is a way of bringing several issues together to be able to examine them, from a holistic perspective, and propose fresh ways of tackling emerging issues. Science, technology and innovation policies in cities, for example, may include sustainable water management, as well as harnessing the latest know-how to reduce the risk of disaster caused by natural hazards. Placing creativity at the heart of local economy is an innovation in public policy, embraced by the members of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. The members of the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities and the Global Network of Learning Cities are pooling experiences of innovative public policies to reach marginalized populations and ensure lifelong learning opportunities for all. Cities, which are highly connected through digital technologies, can also use innovative ways of raising awareness about Media and Information Literacy. These are just some of the examples of how innovation underpins UNESCO's work, both in cities and more broadly. This panel will explore fresh, intersectoral ways of thinking about policy-making