



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# **UNESCO Global Report on Culture and Sustainable Urban Development**

**CONCEPT NOTE**



In recent decades, **cities have become prominent actors** in the promotion of sustainable development policies. Today, more than half of the world's population lives in an urban environment and it is expected that in 30 years, the exponential population growth and urbanization of the world will mean that 70% of humanity will live in cities. Cities already play a major role within the broader international development framework: this will increase in the future as a large number of metropolises and intermediate cities are developing at an unprecedented rate.

Culture is a key tool for promoting sustainable urban development, by preserving the urban identity and the environment, attracting activities and visitors, fostering the development of the creative economy and of the quality of life. This is why, in consideration of the main entry points for culture in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNESCO has launched the elaboration of a **Global Report on Culture and Sustainable Urban Development**.

The elaboration of such a global report will be particularly timely as the General Assembly of the United Nations mandated UN-Habitat to lead the UN action on the issue of the world's urbanization and by its Resolution 66/207, decided to convene a third United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development (**Habitat III**) in 2016. The objective of this conference is to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable urbanization that should focus on the implementation of a "**New Urban Agenda**", in the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

The UNESCO global Report intends to present an up-to-date picture of the current policies and practices of urban regeneration and sustainable development that have put culture at their core. By providing an assessment of the experiences conducted in all regions of the world, the Report will provide **guidelines and recommendations** aimed to foster culture-based urban sustainable development initiatives at the international, national, regional and local levels.

### **The background: A "New Urban Agenda"**

One of the main outcomes of Habitat I Conference, in 1976, was the decision to create the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). Habitat II, in 1996, acknowledged the difficulty of reversing the exponential urban development processes at the global scale and the need, for the UN system, to elaborate a common response to this major issue. In 2001, the UN General Assembly adopted the **Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements** in the New Millennium. This declaration reaffirmed the fundamentals of the Habitat Agenda and renewed the commitments made during the Habitat II conference in Istanbul.

The Habitat III Conference is expected to **review the actions undertaken** during the last twenty years, notably on the basis of key figures: the world's urban population represented around 2% of humanity at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 10% at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 50% at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and should reach 70% in the coming 30 years, for a total of 9.5 billion people in 2050.

The evolution of the approaches since **Habitat II** (Istanbul, 1996) makes it essential to focus, on the notion of sustainable urban development. From UN-Habitat's point of view, the new approaches can be summarized as follows: integrated national urban policies; compact and efficient cities through urban planning and city extensions; institutional and legal reforms; and partnership – mobilizing all stakeholders.

The **Seventh World Urban Forum** (Medellin, Colombia, April 2014) confirmed the need for a paradigm shift on urban development processes, the urbanization model used since World War II having reached its limits and needing to be rethought. It also reiterated the fact that in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the challenge of sustainable development will be gained or lost in cities and notably in Africa, expected to become the most urbanized continent by 2050. Finally, it acknowledged that the success of key development strategies, such as poverty reduction, gender equality, social justice, risk reduction and quality of life will depend largely on the capacity of cities to integrate the social and economic changes and to enhance their resilience.

Habitat III will be the **first major UN Conference** following the approval by the General Assembly of the United Nations of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. It will therefore be a strategic forum where UNESCO's Culture and Development approach is expected to play a major role.

### **UNESCO's contribution to the definition of a New Urban Agenda**

UNESCO has been addressing the issue of human settlements for several decades through its different programmes and normative instruments and did so for the first time in 1976 in Nairobi, Kenya, with the adoption of the *Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas*. In 2011 when UNESCO's General Conference adopted the **Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape**, the Organization reaffirmed the urging necessity to focus on human settlements and culture by adopting an instrument on the historic environment and the need to reaffirm the links with development.

Since 2010, four Resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) dedicated to culture and development acknowledged the role of culture, as an **enabler and driver** of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development through heritage and creativity. Culture thus has full legitimacy in the sustainable urban agenda.

The theme of cities is at the heart of UNESCO's mission. The two priorities of the Organization, **Gender Equality and Africa**, are directly concerned as well as the overarching objectives of Culture of Peace and Sustainable Development. The urban context is the most challenging one in terms of gender equality (one of the sessions at the 7<sup>th</sup> World Urban Forum addressed this issue) and Africa holds today the largest number of slums in the world, in addition to the fact that it is expected to become the most urbanized continent by 2050.

Concerning the normative instruments dealing with culture, the UNESCO Culture Conventions<sup>1</sup> are directly linked to the "urban context". Cities and urban ensembles in general are the most represented category on the **World Heritage List** and most of the critical cases in terms of conservation concern World Heritage cities or urban ensembles.

The starting point for the development of sustainable urban development strategies is the **conservation and safeguarding of tangible and intangible heritage**. Without an effective safeguarding action, the legacy of the past can rapidly be lost, as it is happening in many urban contexts characterised by intensive and rapid development processes, with the loss of connection between communities and the built environment in which they live. Promoting the regeneration of downtown areas and the conservation and adaptive reuse of their cultural heritage assets can improve the liveability and living conditions for poor communities. **Culture-led redevelopment** of urban areas and public spaces helps to preserve the social fabric, improve economic returns and increase competitiveness, giving impetus to a diversity of intangible cultural heritage practices as well as other creative expressions, thereby creating sustainable urban spaces. In addition, a **vibrant urban life** can differentiate a city from other locations, and allow it to establish its own identity within the national and international sphere, thus helping it attract investments. The **cultural and creative industries**, as well as heritage-based urban revitalization and sustainable tourism, are powerful economic sectors that can generate green employment, stimulate local development and foster creativity. **Cultural infrastructure**, such as museums and other cultural facilities, should be used as civic spaces for dialogue and social inclusion, helping to reduce violence and foster cohesion and promote a culture of peace as well as economic development for cities. Finally, the proper understanding of traditional cultural practices can be a powerful tool to enhance the **resilience** of cities facing threats linked to natural phenomena and climate change.

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<sup>1</sup> 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict; 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage; 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

## **The Global Report on Culture and Sustainable Urban Development: global approach**

The Global Report on Culture and Sustainable Urban Development is intended as a **contribution to the common UN action towards a New Urban Agenda**, in line with the main entry point for culture in the framework of the 2030 Agenda which is under the Sustainable Development Goal on sustainable cities. The Report will analyse the situation, trends, threats and existing opportunities in the different regional contexts and include a global picture of urban tangible and intangible heritage conservation and safeguarding (policies, legislation, practices and challenges), with the aim to assess its role in social inclusion and development. This assessment will also include the review of policies based on the promotion of the cultural and creative industries and the creative economy as a basis for sustainable urban development. The two dimensions of UNESCO'S cultural policies, Heritage and Creativity, will be linked to define an innovative approach to urban regeneration and development. The Report will also propose a reflection on managing change in cities with cultural heritage as a lever for development, as well as methodologies to improve monitoring and reporting processes, with the aim to support communities, planners and legislators involved in conservation policies and heritage focused urban development.

### **Preparation of the report: two key steps**

#### ***Implementation of regional studies (April 2015-January 2016)***

In order to collect data for the preparation of the Global report, UNESCO initiated, in collaboration with its partners, a series of regional studies. Those studies, prepared by technical or academic institutions, will explore, on a regional basis, the role of culture in urban development. They will be conducted between June 2015 and January 2016 in the following regions:

- East Asia and the Pacific
- South and Central Asia
- Europe, including South-East Europe
- Central and Eastern Europe & Central Asia and Caucasia
- Arab States Region
- Sub-Saharan Africa
- North America
- Latin America and the Caribbean
- Lusophone Africa and America

## ***International Conference on “Culture for Sustainable Cities” (Hangzhou, People’s Republic of China, 10-12 December 2015)***

An International Conference on “Culture for Sustainable Cities” will be organised by UNESCO in cooperation with the City of Hangzhou and the National Commission for UNESCO of the People’s Republic of China on 10-12 December 2015, to present and discuss the draft results of regional studies and collect additional contributions and data. The Conference will gather High-level representatives of Governments and International Organizations, mayors and city managers, internationally renowned experts, representatives of the private sector, Universities and non-governmental organizations from all regions of the world to discuss and expand on the themes to be presented in the Report.

### **Preliminary summary of the Report**

#### ***First part - policy papers***

The first part of the Report will contain a set of policy papers reflecting the vision of UNESCO and its partners on the role of culture in the different components of the urban agenda (urban planning, social inclusion, job creation, protection of the environment...). It will analyze the relevance of the cultural approach in meeting current urban challenges (inequalities, migration, density, energy efficiency, inclusive growth etc.) and will outline a vision for the future.

#### ***Second part - regional surveys***

The second part of the Report will display the results of regional studies conducted by UNESCO partners, outlining the current situation, case studies, challenges and best practices in the area of urban conservation and regeneration.

### **Partners**

Partners will include international organizations, universities, research centres, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations, etc. including, partners for the implementation of the regional studies:

- ALECSO
- WHITR-AP
- Srishti School
- IUAV
- Strelka Institute
- Arterial network
- Willowbank
- Pontifica Universidad de Chile
- Coimbra university

***Donor Partners:*** the City of Hangzhou, Spain

### **Organisational framework**

The process of preparation of the Report will be coordinated by UNESCO and implemented in close cooperation with its partners. A ***Steering Committee*** the task of reviewing periodically the progress of the Report and providing technical advice in its preparation.