



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Online Meeting Report

# URBAN SOLUTIONS: LEARNING FROM CITIES' RESPONSES TO COVID-19



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The online UNESCO Cities Platform meeting would not have been possible without the contributions of many people. The UNESCO Cities Platform (UCP) would like to acknowledge their support and express warm gratitude to all the contributors for their time and effort.*

*The meeting is a collective, intersectoral work led by Ernesto Ottone R., Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO, who supervised the conceptualization, preparation and organization of the meeting.*

*Our sincere gratitude goes to the meeting participants and moderators for their immense contributions by providing key inputs as well as expert views that stimulated the different e-debates. A special thanks to the audience who followed the meeting online and for proposing thought-provoking questions.*

*We are grateful to the colleagues from the eight networks and programmes on the UCP for their timely support and close cooperation in the organization of the meeting.*

*Finally, special thanks goes to the organizing team for their time and effort in the preparation and organization of the meeting, in particular the UNESCO Creative Cities Network team and the Communication, Cities, and Events unit within the Culture Sector of UNESCO.*



# FOREWORD

**Ernesto Ottone R.**

**Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO**

Over the last few months, all over the world, cities have devised innovative measures to implement lockdowns, promote social distancing and encourage increased hygiene measures. As parts of the world start to ease these measures, cities are once again leading the way, building on their proximity to the people, and devising creative solutions to craft “a new normal”. For cities that are currently facing the worst of the pandemic, I believe that the experiences of these cities can provide useful guidance and help ease their burden during the challenging times.

This was what inspired UNESCO, through the UNESCO Cities Platform (UCP), to organize the online meeting entitled Urban Solutions: Learning from cities’ responses to COVID-19. The UCP is composed of UNESCO’s eight city networks and programmes, and is a highly relevant platform for cities around the world to discuss experiences and share ideas on responses to COVID-19, but also to shape together the cities of the future in the post-pandemic era.

Organized into three panels – on the emergency response, early recovery and planning for the future, respectively – and one special session on city tourism, the online meeting first and foremost aimed to build on the tangible experiences acquired by cities over the past months, as part of a larger reflection on the future of cities. Throughout the debates, the central message was the need to design a more inclusive, sustainable, greener cityscape. Such a future cannot be secured without addressing the structural imbalances and inequalities that the pandemic has made us all, once again, aware of.

COVID-19 has disrupted all of our lives, not merely for a few months, but in a far more profound way. Nevertheless, the pandemic offers an opportunity to conceive of, and actively work towards, a better future for cities and their inhabitants. UNESCO, through its city networks and programmes, stands ready to assist cities worldwide in this, by continuing to connect cities around the world, providing them with an international platform for sharing experiences and ideas, and devising effective urban solutions and actions that can help cities turn this vision into reality.

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# CONCEPT NOTE



## CONTEXT

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted cities around the world and raised fundamental questions about urban development. With over half of the world population living in formal and informal urban settlements, the ongoing crisis has demonstrated the ability of cities to address such challenges but also unearthed fundamental issues of equality, access, and participation amongst others.

The multi-dimensional impact of the pandemic, for example, resulted in lockdown measures, the closure of schools, public spaces and cultural institutions, and the rise of unemployment, as well as a collapse of tourism and related incomes in cities notably. It exacerbated deep-rooted social and economic inequalities that led to a surge of racism and xenophobia and the proliferation of domestic violence. Repercussions are unevenly impacting vulnerable populations, who often live in densely populated or informal areas, have precarious employment and little financial resilience, combined with difficulties in accessing distance education, healthcare and other essential services. The pandemic has thus left an indelible mark on the outlook of the cities and has led us to rethink cities' development in different dimensions - social, cultural, economic, and environmental.

Cities were amongst the first affected, but also those first to respond. Large numbers of people living together, combined with vibrant economic and cultural life, make cities particularly vulnerable to disasters. This is also why cities are where numerous creative solutions are devised. By providing immediate local responses, as well as rethinking and reinventing urban structures and tissues to be more sustainable, cities have demonstrated their capacity to adapt to the evolving global situation.

In the same way that cities are composed of diverse neighbourhoods, urban development is multifaceted and encompasses different development aspects and dimensions, to cater to cities' various needs and constant transformation. Response to the COVID-19 has shown that this is often a strength, marking the agility with which cities have been able to act and devise locally relevant solutions. Future models of urban development should thus recognize and take into account the strong bonds and interlinkages between the diverse dimensions of city planning and development.

The experiences of cities and the innovative solutions that emerged, but also the key challenges they faced, including ways to develop and promote a more resilient and sustainable tourism, can teach us how to create more sustainable and equitable urban living environments for tomorrow and have better-informed policy-making in the coming months.

## Cities at the forefront of COVID-19 response and recovery: UNESCO Cities Platform

UNESCO is uniquely positioned to assist governments and other stakeholders at national and local levels in the recovery processes and in crafting forward-looking solutions. Through the UNESCO Cities platform (UCP), which brings together 8 UNESCO city Networks and Programmes<sup>1</sup> from all its fields of expertise - education, culture, sciences, and communication, UNESCO harnesses its unique comparative advantage and transversal approach to support city decision-makers in mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 crisis.

Built on three interconnected sessions and a special session, the UNESCO Cities Platform aims to use this meeting to bring together diverse city stakeholders and actors to discuss how to revamp urban policies and plans, as well as develop innovative local actions and practices towards sustainable cities of tomorrow in the post-COVID-19 recovery phase and beyond.

### OBJECTIVES

This online meeting aims to:

- Share best practices and initiatives from cities' responses to COVID-19 to allow cities to better adapt and recover
- Understand the challenges and opportunities in various sectors to devise more resilient solutions and enhance urban risk preparedness and mitigation
- Demonstrate cities' enabling and transformative power in shaping resilient, inclusive and sustainable societies through innovative and well-rounded policies and programmes
- Identify appropriate guidelines for addressing multiple dimensions of the pandemic that resulted in disproportional repercussions on vulnerable populations;
- Strengthen cross-cutting synergies and trigger an international dialogue between various city networks and programmes
- Foster innovative partnerships, exchange and collaboration within and amongst city networks and programmes, and across stakeholders at all levels
- Build a future-oriented and transversal vision for urban sustainable development

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<sup>1</sup> UCP is comprised of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), UNESCO/Netexplo Observatory, Megacities Alliance for Water and Climate, UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), World Heritage Cities Programme, Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience, the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable cities (ICCAR), and the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Cities.



## THEMES FOR THE E-DEBATES AND THE SPECIAL SESSION

The meeting is composed on 4 sessions: 3 e-debates and a special session. The three e-debates are structured to take into account the different timelines of responses – short-, medium-, and long-term, focusing respectively on cities' immediate responses to the pandemic, early recovery in cities, and building resilient cities for a sustainable future. The special session on tourism reflects upon the impact of the pandemic on one of the most affected emblematic sectors. While measures are being or foreseen to be implemented to revive the tourism sector, the cross-cutting nature of tourism can further support others sectors in building a resilient and sustainable city. For each session, all UNESCO cities Networks and Programmes are foreseen to participate, addressing different dimensions of urban issues.



### **E-Debate 1: Cities' Responses to Covid-19**

Cities have been at the forefront of the pandemic, and have provided multi-dimensional responses to allow their inhabitants to better respond and adapt to the outbreak.

During the acute phase of the emergency, cities led the way in implementing national or regional regulations and guidelines at the local level. The session aims to understand the key common challenges faced by cities during the pandemic and their immediate responses, financial assistance and capacity development (civil society initiatives, government responses, etc.). Thereby, it seeks to share good city practices and understand lessons learnt for better preparedness for future emergencies.



### **E-Debate 2: Learning from Early Recovery**

More than 4 months after the global outbreak of the pandemic, many cities around the world have started easing measures and working towards early recovery. Cities are often in the lead for translating deconfinement rules into practical measures adapted to local needs. By doing so, they also start moving towards new adaptive measures to resume their activities, that often admits restrictions. Guiding these actions is usually a need for returning to normal, giving inhabitants' perspective, allowing people to safely meet and come together. This can be particularly challenging for cities. Whereas the acute phase—often in the form of a lockdown—focused on the cities' inhabitants, deconfinement also reignited a cities' central role within a broader region, drawing workers and commuters, but also students, shoppers, visitors and tourists for example.

The panel will seek to illustrate how cities have implemented measures to initiate recovery, including, enabling the restart of the local economy and tourism, devising ways in which cultural and educational institutions can be mobilized, engaging with youth and enhancing mobility. It will consider the challenges of balancing the response for cities' inhabitants with the need to cater to a broader region. In all of this, cities have also started thinking about recovery in a way that would make their cities more resilient, greener and more sustainable.



## E-Debate 3: A More Resilient Future: Imagining the Cities of Tomorrow

As cities manage their immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic and are looking ahead to plan and resource long-term recovery efforts, there is an opportunity to transform cities in meaningful ways that not only protect vulnerable people from immediate threats but also build resilience for the looming climate crisis and other emergencies. This work must be guided by the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, Goal 11 'Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.' Other complementary elements may include, use of new technology such as big data and Artificial Intelligence, socio-economic demographics including gender-disaggregated data, consultancy studies, technical and administrative assistance, global inter-city collaboration.

The panel will discuss how the current crisis can be seen as an opportunity to rethink the way we live in cities, the symbiosis between cities and their inhabitants, the role of physical and virtual urban public spaces, and thus to design the cities of tomorrow. Cities are redefining their identity and priorities. It will consider how cities can rethink their urban policies to strengthen their risk preparedness and response capacity, and become more resilient by making cities smarter, greener, more inclusive and resilient.



## Special Session: Transformative City Tourism



As the COVID-19 crisis unfolds, it has had an unprecedented impact on travel with the closing of virtually all destinations worldwide. Tourism was a major source of growth, employment and income for many of the world's developing countries with over 1.5 billion people crossing international borders in 2019. Yet, millions of jobs in the travel and tourism sector are being lost every day and up to 120 million are under immediate threat.





Before the crisis, the popularity of cities as tourist destinations was growing at a significant rate by providing rich and meaningful cultural experiences to visitors. The exponential growth however came at an increasingly high price to both local residents and the cultural infrastructure, which were straining under the pressure of more and more visitors. Now as certain cities begin to reopen, the landscape has shifted dramatically. New measures and approaches are needed to restart tourism which reflect new standards of health, safety and social interactions. This poses enormous challenges for cities that will require new ideas and innovation that encourages residents to rediscover and invest in new approaches encompassing social and environmental dimensions for a more sustainable tourism and to welcome visitors back.

Taking stock of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on city tourism with local actors and city stakeholders as well as civil society, this session will also present an opportunity to discuss the post COVID-19 environment and allow cities to share their assessments of the real value of tourism and the importance of balancing needs and interests of both residents and visitors. The panel will reflect on the emerging lessons learned from the pandemic keeping in mind that tourism is an essential pillar of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and discuss how cities can make their destinations more resilient, particularly for their communities, and encourage a vibrant and robust tourism recovery.

### Wrap up session

To build the sustainable cities of tomorrow, there is a need to identify gaps in cities' existing systems, support the needs of their inhabitants, as well as address future risks and known and unknown challenges. It is, therefore, necessary to partner with local authorities, community-based organizations, educational and cultural institutions, the private sector and professionals, for instance. In the aftermath of COVID-19, leaving no one behind and reaching the most vulnerable will be fundamental for achieving an equitable and more risk-resilient society.

This closing session will aim to instigate and allow all participants to reknit the social, economic and cultural fabric that has been frayed and torn by the COVID-19 pandemic, and rethink their communities in a more resilient manner.





# OPENING REMARKS

Xing Qu

Deputy Director-General of UNESCO

Distinguished mayors and representatives,

Panel members,

Dear colleagues, dear friends,

I would like to warmly welcome you all to this discussion organized by the UNESCO Cities Platform, which, due to present circumstances, is taking place online. It's an honour to be delivering these opening remarks, as we look to cities for inspiration on urban solutions in response to COVID-19. Cities are home to more than half of the global population.[1] As such, they concentrate people, resources and activities – and it is this concentration that makes them vulnerable to crises.

Indeed, where there is less room for people, there is more room for illness.

This creates health risks, of course – as the COVID-19 pandemic is teaching us. Many vulnerable populations live in urban areas, including economically disadvantaged groups, who are at higher risk of contracting the virus. For those living in the slums of Mumbai, for example, “social distancing is a curious privilege”, to quote the Indian journalist Rana Ayyub.[2]

This concentration also creates risks for the economic, cultural and social fabric of urban areas.

Because of the crisis, millions of workers face losing their jobs and income. This will have a disproportionate impact on cities, which generate more than 80% of global GDP.[3]

Cities are also home to museums, concert halls and theatres, many of which have been forced to close their doors to the public, threatening the diversity of cultural expressions.

And yet, precisely because cities concentrate people, resources and activities, they will undoubtedly be one of the driving forces behind our recovery.

By leveraging the creative industries, for instance, cities can use culture to support urban regeneration, through the promotion of social cohesion, well-being and intercultural dialogue.

By building on their urban heritage, cities can develop tourism that is fairer, more sustainable and less destructive.

[1] UN DESA, “68% of the world population projected to live in urban areas by 2050, says UN”, 16 May 2018: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/population/2018-revision-of-world-urbanization-prospects.html>

[2] “Social Distancing Is a Privilege”, Foreign Policy, 28 March 2020: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/28/social-distancing-is-a-privilege/>

[3] World Bank, “Urban Development”, updated 20 April 2020: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview>

By implementing inclusive strategies for migration, actions to fight stigmatization, affordable housing and other initiatives, cities can fight the root causes of racism and discrimination, which have increased during the pandemic.

Ladies and gentlemen,

For cities to play the role of laboratory of ideas and innovative solutions, we should call on our collective intelligence.

Strengthening cities' economic, social and cultural fabrics and building a fairer and more resilient urban model are ambitious projects. They consequently require sharing experiences and resources.

This is where the UNESCO Cities Platform comes into the picture. Composed of eight Networks and Programmes, it connects cities around the world, by focusing on culture, tourism, creativity, innovation, harmony and social cohesion - all transversal questions that are central to our societies.

This platform thus helps us to consider a crucial question: how cities are responding to the COVID-19 crisis and what can we learn from them?

To answer to these prospective issues, we will address, together with UNESCO cities representatives, development agencies, academics and experts, cities' experiences worldwide during the crisis. On the other hand, in order to devise perspectives and concrete solutions, we will discuss inspirational proposals from urbanists, architects and experts, to place urban development at the service of all.

Epidemics and crisis have always left their mark in the cities' architecture and planning. The one we are currently facing is no exception.

However, today, we have the opportunity to build on this crisis to think ahead. Today gives us the occasion to build a better city for a better life.

That is why it was particularly important to be present with you today. I wish you all fruitful discussions.

Thank you.

# E-DEBATE 1

## CITIES' RESPONSES TO COVID-19

### **SPEAKERS**

#### Moderator:

Ms. Mirian Vilela, UNESCO Chair on Education for Sustainable Development with the Earth Charter

Ms. Maria Francesca Merloni, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Creative Cities

Ms. Lanke Taiwo, Director, Lagos State Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources

Ms. Selley Storino, Focal point of Santos UNESCO Creative City of Film

Mr. Juma Assiango, Head of Safer Cities Programme, UN-Habitat

Mr. Camilo Younes-Velosa, Professor of Universidad Nacional de Colombia at Manizales, Electric Engineer and Lawyer



### **SESSION FOCUS**

When disaster strikes, whether a pandemic, an earthquake or a hurricane, most aspects of life suddenly take on a different shape. The immediate response involves focusing on basic needs and preventing secondary risks. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, this has often taken the form of a lockdown, combined with the prioritization of healthcare. The primacy of basic services such as food soon became clear, as long queues formed at supermarkets and marketplaces. Others, like schools, were closed around the globe, and wherever possible virtual and other solutions were sought. In this, cities have been at the forefront, providing multi-dimensional responses to allow their inhabitants to deal with the outbreak. City governments, but also communities and individuals, have led the way. Images of people singing, clapping and chanting on balconies were shared around the world, online services were devised to help neighbours, and tools were developed to share information on rapidly changing measures to large groups of people. What were some of the most successful of such efforts, and how did they help cities and their inhabitants deal with the pandemic? How was information spread and accessed, but also, how was feedback received from citizens?

During the peak of the emergency in countries that were impacted the earliest, cities led the way in translating national or regional regulations and guidelines to the local level, and ensuring their implementation. Local implementation requires a concerted effort on the part of leadership, services and inhabitants, as well as the provision of feedback to the national level. In many cities, the immediate response to COVID-19 showed how flexible and adaptive local systems were in addressing the crisis, often fostering cooperation between services that were not trained or used to coordinating among each other. From others, it required a rapid adaptation to a new reality. Whether this meant an unforeseen closure, moving to a new form of operating, or being innovative and facing a much-increased demand, no sector was left untouched. How did sectors work together? What were the main challenges and what were some of the most innovative solutions? This cooperation also increased awareness on the importance of risk preparedness, whether for a pandemic, for the effects of climate change or for any other risk the city may be prone to. Will any efforts be made to be more prepared when the next crisis arrives, and how will this be done?

The pandemic also exposed the vast inequalities that increase vulnerabilities in times of emergency. Lessons from responses to crises all over the world have unearthed how a crisis is ultimately a social issue in which vulnerable groups are disproportionately affected. Though there is a vast difference between cities, including in population size and the hazards they face, cities tend to have on average much greater inequalities than rural areas. For example, one third of urban dwellers in the developing world live in slum-like conditions. This means that the challenges of addressing COVID-19 were significantly different among and within cities. A one-size-fits-all approach in most cases did not work. A slow economy leads to job loss, which affects mostly those without access to savings or social security. Closing of schools is not experienced in the same manner for those without access to electricity or internet, or those sharing a room with numerous siblings. A health pandemic that requires heightened hygiene measures is vastly more difficult to address in densely populated areas without access to clean water. Cities, and especially those that have to manage major inequalities, had to devise ways to address these differences, and while the COVID-19 response has been said to exacerbate inequalities, many have also devised ways to reach the most vulnerable among their citizens.

There is no doubt that being at the forefront of the direct response to the pandemic also put a strain on cities, in terms of budgets and capacities, which is why the session also aimed to understand how some of these challenges were tackled, including accessing financial assistance and additional capacities. It further explored how some of these initiatives may be the start for longer-term engagement or strengthening of existing systems. Some cities have a long history of tackling disasters, others are far less used to large-scale crisis situations.

Over the past months, UNESCO's city networks, such as its Creative Cities Network and ICCAR, have already begun initiatives that allow member cities to share experiences and solutions. The session first and foremost focused on continuing to learn from valuable solutions devised during the acute phase of the pandemic, and which can help cities around the world to better prepare for the future, but can also inspire those cities and communities that are still at the start of the outbreak.



## Questions for Reflections

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- What lessons were learnt on cities' preparedness to deal with such a crisis, as well as from community/neighbourhood responses to the COVID-19 crisis? What preparatory measures, across sectors, were particularly helpful?
- How to strengthen city preparedness and emergency response capacity?
- How could cities continue their role as public service providers (access to water, green spaces, safety, education and learning, cultural content and participation, media and other information services, etc.) in times of crisis?
- How to manage information flow and access to information between different levels – local, national and global?
- How could culture and creativity be used to help cities and people to better deal with the crisis?
- How could the education system adapt from classroom education to e-learning spaces?
- What social innovation solutions were applied to challenges such as homelessness, domestic violence, racial prejudice and racial injustice, amongst others?
- How could intercity collaboration contribute to our common efforts to face global challenges?



The e-debate started with the introduction by the moderator Ms. Mirian Vilela, UNESCO Chair on Education for Sustainable Development with the Earth Charter, who emphasised how cities had initiated the immediate responses amidst the pandemic. Next, Ms. Maria Francesca Merloni, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Creative Cities focused on what we are currently living with as citizens of the world during the crisis. She emphasized an understanding of how we as humans are dealing with the pandemic and what the environment is trying to tell us. She noted that time is of the essence in understanding and rebuilding, as “we are crossing a change, even if we resist, as something is changing deeply.”

On behalf of the Mayor of Santos, Brazil, Ms. Selley Storino, Focal point of Santos UNESCO Creative City of Film, explained how the city of Santos has creatively responded to the pandemic. ‘Culture time at home’- an initiative launched by the city focuses on providing cultural actions focused on training, entertainment and physical activity (dance, photography, gastronomy, crafts and music) online via social networks. In this manner, when people cannot come to experience culture outside, culture comes to their homes.

For Mr. Juma Assiago, Head of Safer Cities Programme, UN-Habitat, his emphasis was on how we need to look at the pandemic with a long-term recovery response and what we need to do differently. “We need to deal with the historical inequalities that has confronted our cities, villages and towns,” he explained. His focus was to change the way we view cities, to look beyond the brick and mortar model and that “the 2030 Sustainable Agenda calls for new thinking of our local governments on cities, villages and towns.” He also added the idea of security during the times of COVID19, and how domestic violence has been on a rise during this period. In conclusion, Mr Assiago stated that there is a need to “rethink the concept of safety in cities, one that is more socially integrated.”

As an educator, Mr. Camilo Younes-Velosa, Professor of Universidad Nacional de Colombia at Manizales, spoke from an educational viewpoint. His focus was on how to rebuild cities after the pandemic, with an emphasis on the city of Manizales. “Students are the future of our country and the world,” he stated referencing how we need to move forward with educating more young people, especially at the higher education level.

Speaking from Nigeria, Ms. Lanke Taiwo, Director, Office of Drainage Services and Water Resources, Lagos State Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources, highlighted the importance of having clean water facilities running during this time. For their city, following the rules of social distancing and other COVID-19 instructions to stay safe in both private and public spaces was key in keeping essential workers safe. In this case, she explained that “access to water in times of crisis” is imperative in keeping a healthy population.

Overall, the e-debate I focused on the way global citizens are responding to the crisis be it through online learning, following government instructions, bringing cultural activities to people, or reflecting on what the crisis has pushed to the surface. There was an agreement that people need diverse outlets to properly deal with the sanitary crisis. Based on this, and across gender, across age and across culture, cities will re-think their current model and move towards a more inclusive, sustainable society.



## E-DEBATE 2

### LEARNING FROM EARLY RECOVERY

#### SPEAKERS

Moderator:

Mr. David Wilson, Director of Bradford UNESCO Creative City of Film

Ms. Geraldina González de la Vega Hernández, President of the Council to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination of Mexico City (COPRED)

Ms. Andrea Laverde, Deputy Director of International Relations of the Office of the Mayor of Bogotá

Mr. Jordi Pascual, Coordinator, Culture Committee, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

Mr. Vimlendu Jha, Environmentalist, Founder of Swechha

Ms. Jia Zhou, Researcher, Wuhan Academy of Educational Sciences



#### SESSION FOCUS

More than 4 months after the global outbreak of the pandemic, many cities around the world have started easing measures and working towards early recovery. As soon as measures are being eased, the management of the ongoing crisis needs to go hand in hand with a multidimensional recovery process, in which different sectors—often at different speeds—restart.

Lockdown is in principle relatively straightforward, gradually re-opening is considerably more complex. Early recovery is perhaps the most difficult phase for central governments to devise clear guidelines, because of the different speeds with which sectors will restart, the different needs of different parts of the populations, and of different localities. Therefore, cities play a crucial role, perhaps even more so than during the acute lockdown phase. We have seen local governments leading the way for safely reopening businesses and guiding larger numbers of visitors. How did cities communicate these changing measurements? How was information shared, social networks used, and the urban environment adapted—e.g. info panels, markings, limiting traffic, etc.—to manage this phase? How did cities come up with better provisions for public hygiene and other services, capacities for which vary vastly across the world, and even within cities?

All of this can be particularly challenging for cities, because of their impact on people beyond their own inhabitants. Whereas the acute phase—often in the form of a lockdown—focused on the cities' inhabitants, deconfinement reignites a cities' central role within a broader region, drawing workers and commuters, but also students, shoppers, visitors and tourists. Whereas safe, distanced ways for using public transport, or for accessing green areas may have been manageable during lockdown, all this tends to become much more challenging once the city is no longer reserved for inhabitants only. In this, the strength of cities as a catalyst for regional economies, education and social and cultural life can easily become a weakness if not managed properly. Luckily, cities of all sizes, all over the world, have found or are making efforts towards ways to address these particular challenges. What were some of the ways in which this has been handled?

Thanks to this catalysing role, cities also tend to be the beating heart of countries. They are where people go to work, to seek higher education, to enjoy a museum or attend a concert. They are transit points for workers and commuters, within a country and internationally. This is what makes cities vibrant, diverse and creative. While this vitality is essential for city life, it may be particularly hard to reinvigorate it. Deconfinement was much longed for, but people may be hesitant to once again move in large groups, to visit a restaurant, go shopping or make a trip. Safety had to remain a priority, which resulted in a fragile balancing of restrictions with encouraging "life". How did various sectors cooperate to bring their cities back to life? How were citizens encouraged to safely engage, interact and take part in post-lockdown life?

Restarting the economy in such a manner often required thinking out of the box, and tapping into new markets. All over the world, SMEs, cultural enterprises, and sites and businesses depending on tourism revenue had to be creative and innovate, often using this time to rethink business models and audiences. From a museum needing to rely on local visitors, to young designers making hip facial masks, schools providing distance education, and cities easing rules for placing terraces or markets on public terrain; what are some of the ways in which businesses, public and private, have repositioned themselves, to develop new products or attract new publics? How have cities aided these sectors?

This panel sought to illustrate how cities have implemented measures to initiate recovery, balancing confinement restrictions with a gradual re-opening across sectors. This included restarting the local economy and tourism, devising ways in which cultural and educational institutions can be mobilized, engaging with youth and enhancing mobility.



## Questions for Reflections

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- How to jumpstart the local economy and livelihoods by creating an enabling environment for local businesses, especially SMEs? How to achieve this objective with certain restrictions still in place?
- How to support. educational, cultural and social participation, promoting social cohesion and local development in the early recovery stage?
- How to mitigate the medium-term impacts on vulnerable sectors, groups and individuals?
- How to engage young people? What particular measures have been and could be devised for them?
- How do cities address the particular challenges of deconfinement, such as bringing back people from outside the city?
- How can we ensure that local policy responses are inclusive? How can we foster an approach that is inclusive and works for different communities as a whole?
- How could local city measures and initiatives influence national and regional levels to have a broader impact?



Mr. David Wilson, Director of Bradford UNESCO Creative City of Film moderated the debate by introducing the that focused on how cities have implemented measures to initiate recovery, including, enabling the restart of the local economy and tourism, devising ways in which cultural and educational institutions can be mobilized, and engaging with youth and enhancing mobility.

Ms. Geraldina González de la Vega Hernández, President of the Council to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination of Mexico City (COPRED), began the debate by explaining the role of Mexico City during the pandemic. She accentuated the role that discrimination plays in how the pandemic affects people across gender, class, disability, status and sexual orientation. Ms. González de la Vega Hernández stated that clearly “the pandemic did not provoke the inequality that we are now seeing, it just rose the inequality gaps and social injustice.” She concluded her intervention by stating “quarantine is a privilege” because “not everyone can stay home,” citing homeless people, sex workers, migrants and other groups.

Following this, Ms. Andrea Laverde, Deputy Director of International Relations of the Office of the Mayor of Bogotá, presented the city’s approach to both the response and reopening process. Ms. Laverde explained how the city changed the way they were taking care of health—how they used both public and private networks to guarantee that every citizen could have proper health care no matter their affiliation to the health care system. In addition, they city implemented special care zones, differentiated programmes depending on vulnerabilities, and a 24-hour day scheme for the economy. She stated that the pandemic led the city to “revisit their 4-year plan to build a more resilient society” with a social and environmental focus, and then concluded by saying that there is a need to “fight disadvantages and structures shaped by racism, classism and chauvinism in our society.”

Speaking from a culture perspective, Mr. Jordi Pascual, Coordinator, Culture Committee, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), focused on culture as the center for urban policies. During the crisis, UCLG wrote a decalogue with ten points that puts culture at the center as, “culture is central to people’s lives...diversity, heritage and culture [should be] at the core of any international plan.” He stressed the importance of an inclusive approach, stating, “We are here together. We are inhabitants of the earth.”

Mr. Vimlendu Jha, Environmentalist, Founder of Swechha, brought the environmental point of view. His insights reflected that of the previous speakers, stating that the “new normal cannot go back to the previous normal, it needs a disruption.” The focus was on how democracy has not been equitable for everyone, and how cities have failed to ensure equal access to services and participation among its inhabitants. “We have been using private solutions to solve public problems - it needs to be reversed.” He also brought attention to the air pollution problem, stating “air pollution doesn’t attract attention as much as this virus is attracting. We have been dying. The poorest of the poor have been dying. We need to think about it.”

With a focus on the economy, Ms. Jia Zhou, Researcher, Wuhan Academy of Educational Sciences, explained how the city of Wuhan is aiding the economy through temporarily postponing repayment loans and the implementation of social security fees for SMEs and more established enterprises. She highlighted that “the joint participation of [the] whole society” was a key contributing factor in dealing with the pandemic.

In conclusion, Debate II emphasized the need to build cities that are more inclusive across economic, social and environmental domains for a more sustainable future. Cities cannot go back to a situation of huge injustices and inequalities. The widening of the inequality gap should be stopped. The pandemic made many inequalities more visible, ones that we cannot look away from, even as we face the challenge of implementing de-confinement measures.

## E-DEBATE 3

### A MORE RESILIENT FUTURE: IMAGINING THE CITIES OF TOMORROW

#### SPEAKERS

##### Moderator:

**Mr. Riel Miller, Head of Futures Literacy, UNESCO**

Mr. Sameh Wahba, Global Director, Urban, Disaster, Risk Management, Resilience and Land Global Practice, World Bank

Ms. Soo-Jin Kim, Deputy Head of the City Division, Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Mr. Carlos Moreno, Scientific Director of the eTi Chair (Entrepreneurship–Territory–Innovation), Panthéon Sorbonne University – IAE

Mr. Jean-Michel Wilmotte, Architect, urban planner and designer

Mr. Benedetto Zacchioli, Advisor to the Italian National Office against racism (UNAR), President of the Global Steering Committee of ICCAR and President of ECCAR

Ms. Judith James, Head of Strategic Regional Collaboration, Swansea University

Youth outlook by Ms. Weyyn Muganda, Founder of Beyond The Lines (UNDP 16x16 initiative)



#### SESSION FOCUS

Whilst cities are managing their immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic, they are also looking ahead to plan and resource long-term recovery efforts. The two first e-debates discussed experiences of how cities responded to the pandemic, and how they are working to ease lockdown measures and embrace a robust recovery. Many parts of the world are still in the first or second phase of the pandemic, but that should not prevent us from looking ahead. Reflecting on cities' experiences thus far, as well as on lessons learnt from cities that have advanced further in the response cycle, will bring forward ideas of how cities can remain at the forefront of response and innovation, how they can best cater to the needs of their citizens across economic, social and cultural dimensions.

This offers an opportunity to transform cities in meaningful ways to build resilience and sustainability for the looming climate crisis and other emergencies. Global hazards and challenges are multiple. Cities across the world tend to be well aware of the risks they face, be it from rising sea levels, increasingly frequent and intense disasters, or rapid population growth. What are some of those key lessons learnt thus far and how can they be addressed? Will cities be better prepared in the future?

Numerous initiatives in the past years have tried to rethink city living. Being a pandemic, COVID-19 has affected the entire world, and thus led a much broader group of experts, professionals and innovators to jointly raise questions and take this as an opportunity to rethink how the world's population can live better, more safely, harmoniously and more sustainably. How to move beyond the new normal by 'not merely rebuilding but rethinking'? Are we moving towards 'cities of tomorrow' and what will they look like?

This challenge is particularly big for cities, not just because this is where most people live, but also because the way in which cities work today raises questions in face of a global crisis. The crisis may provide citizens and planners with an opportunity to rethink drastically, from the ground up, the way we live, consume, produce and travel. Cities are where everything and everyone connects, which makes cities thrilling and vibrant, but also vulnerable. People living in cities are more dependent on public and private services for transportation, food, and enjoying open spaces. COVID-19 has shown that the urban interconnectedness can be a vulnerability, where inadequate access or interruption of services leave them vulnerable. At the same time, neighbourhood initiatives that sprung up around the world have also shown that there is also another way to live together in cities. What are some of the successful initiatives that merit being continued into the future and how can this be sustained beyond the pandemic? Which particular urban challenges need to be addressed in order to provide sustainable and healthy living solutions for citizens in the long run?

A key aspect of this is the need to make cities more inclusive. The UN has announced that the impact of COVID-19 will be the highest in poor and densely populated urban areas, especially for the one billion people living in informal settlement and slums. Images of low-paid migrant workers struggling to get home amidst lockdown will surely return once these people need to find ways and means to return to their places of work. Once the long-term recovery phase begins, a rethinking of urban living should not just be a matter of design and architecture, but also one that addresses these structural inequalities through policies and tangible actions. How can policies in various sectors make cities more inclusive and reduce these vulnerabilities? Which projects are being devised to address this?

But inclusivity is about more than the most vulnerable. It also relies on broad participation. Young people in particular can and should play a key role in shaping the city of tomorrow. After all, it will be them who will build and live in them. During the response to COVID-19, cities but also various entrepreneurs and other urban actors, devised ways to ensure their participation. What can be learned from that and how can a broad variety of citizens participate in thinking and shaping new initiatives? What efforts are there to foster creativity, innovation and support start-ups?

This work should be guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as by other global frameworks like the Paris Climate Agreement. In particular, SDG Goal 11 'Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' should be highlighted further to guide our collective response to the contemporary development challenges, providing a general urban roadmap that crosses sectors and development priorities.

The panel discussed how the current crisis can be seen as an opportunity to rethink the way we live in cities, the symbiosis between cities and their inhabitants, the role of physical and virtual urban public spaces, and thus to design the cities of tomorrow. It considered how cities can rethink their urban policies to strengthen their risk preparedness and response capacity, making themselves smarter, greener, more inclusive and resilient.



## Questions for Reflections

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- How to make cities more inclusive and more sustainable based on the COVID-19 experience?
- How to balance the use of big data while respecting individual freedoms? What ethical frameworks could be leveraged?
- How to conduct on-the-ground research to build an evidence base of socioeconomic data to inform policies?
- How to move beyond the new normal by 'not rebuilding but rethinking'? How to foster collective ambition and imagination to create the cities of tomorrow?
- What is the role of different economic and social groups, particularly youth and women, in this common objective of creating the cities of tomorrow?
- How can the SDG framework help guide thinking about cities post-pandemic? How to enhance Voluntary Local Reviews as an effective tool to push forward sustainable development at the local level?
- What are some of the 21st century competencies and skills that city dwellers need to develop to promote solidarity and cooperation beyond the COVID-19 crisis?
- How to enhance cities' capacities as laboratories of innovation, offering adequate grounds for business, creativity, research, policy testing, etc.?
- How could local city measures and initiatives influence national and regional levels to have a broader impact?
- How to reinforce information literacy coupled with intercultural competencies to build resilience against so-called 'fake news' given the growing role of social media and the importance of correct information at a time of crisis?





Mr. Riel Miller, Head of Futures Literacy, UNESCO, moderator introduced the debate and pinpointed how the current crisis can be seen as an opportunity to rethink the way people live in cities, the symbiosis between cities and their inhabitants, the role of physical and virtual urban public spaces, and thus to design the cities of tomorrow.

Mr. Sameh Wahba, Global Director, Urban, Disaster, Risk Management, Resilience and Land Global Practice, World Bank, took the viewpoint of how the existing structure of cities is not the most beneficial and the pandemic is highlighting all its cracks and weaknesses. “It’s the way density is managed and mismanaged and turns into overcrowding,” notably when it comes to “places that lack public infrastructure especially for water and sanitation such as in slums...informal settlements.” In the future, he foresees cities with much wider spaces and a higher investment in digital infrastructure to deal with future emergencies and responses. As a conclusion, Mr Wahba expressed his opinion on the different amenities that will attract us to the city, namely “the inclusion, the culture, the diversity.”

Ms. Soo-Jin Kim, Deputy Head of the City Division, Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), said we are “shifting from the logic of mobility to accessibility.” For Ms. Kim, how we choose to get out of the pandemic depends solely on us. There is a need to adapt to a more circular model to reduce waste and change our consumption patterns, as the crisis has shown us that current practices are not sustainable. She further notes that, “policy choices we make today to exit this crisis will shape the cities of tomorrow for decades to come.”

Mr. Carlos Moreno, Scientific Director of the eTi Chair (Entrepreneurship–Territory–Innovation), Panthéon Sorbonne University – IAE, spoke about his concept of the 15-minute city. As we build new city infrastructure going forward, we have to think of proximity as the new way of life. He stated, “the point is not to have more cities, it’s to have happy citizens, to have a happy life.”

Mr. Jean-Michel Wilmotte, architect, urban planner and designer, took to explaining why public spaces will have to be transformed in any future design concerning cities. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, there is a need to create places in cities where we can store beds, materials and/or health equipment to be able to be better prepared for the future. He noted that as we are living in an exceptional time, which calls for exceptional measures.

Mr. Benedetto Zacchiroli, Advisor to the Italian National Office against Racism (UNAR), President of the Global Steering Committee of ICCAR and President of ECCAR, brought the civil society aspect to the conversation. “What we called normality cannot be synonymous with social justice,” he observed as he called for building together a common ground for human rights. He explained that policymakers and others alike cannot wait for citizens to come to them. They have to reach out to their citizens. He concluded by stating that “[we need to] stress that people’s realities are really different...we cannot think about not changing.”

Another educator, Ms. Judith James, Head of Strategic Regional Collaboration, Swansea University, reminded us that we need to have “greater tolerance of differences” if we want to stop inequalities from rising. She noted that there is a need “not to increase the gap between the rich and poor—that’s the real social distancing. We have the potential to create an inclusive future. Our future lies in understanding the needs of people.” Coming from a city that has focused on teaching entrepreneurship to the younger generation, Swansea stressed that without innovation and progress, the city cannot collectively move forward.

Ms. Weyn Muganda, Founder of Beyond the Lines (UNDP 16x16 initiative), brought the youth perspective to the table. She called for a “prioritizing of young people at the decision-making level and across other sectors so that the decisions are not made for youth but made with youth.” Any sustainable city in the future will have to reconcile the treatment of its inhabitants and must look at how housing, access to health and employment is shaping its population. In order to be truly inclusive, she observes, “human rights is key in the development and sustainability of any city.”

In summary, the Debate highlighted how every decision affects people very differently. As no one in the world was prepared for this pandemic, it has created tremendous vulnerability, but has also shown us how to be more interconnected through digital means, urban spaces and opportunities. At the core of re-imagining any city or re-inventing any model, cities must come to grips with the end of the old normality and embrace the new normal and beyond—one that will have to be more open both literally and metaphorically, more local and, most importantly, more accessible, to create a sustainable urban environment for all.

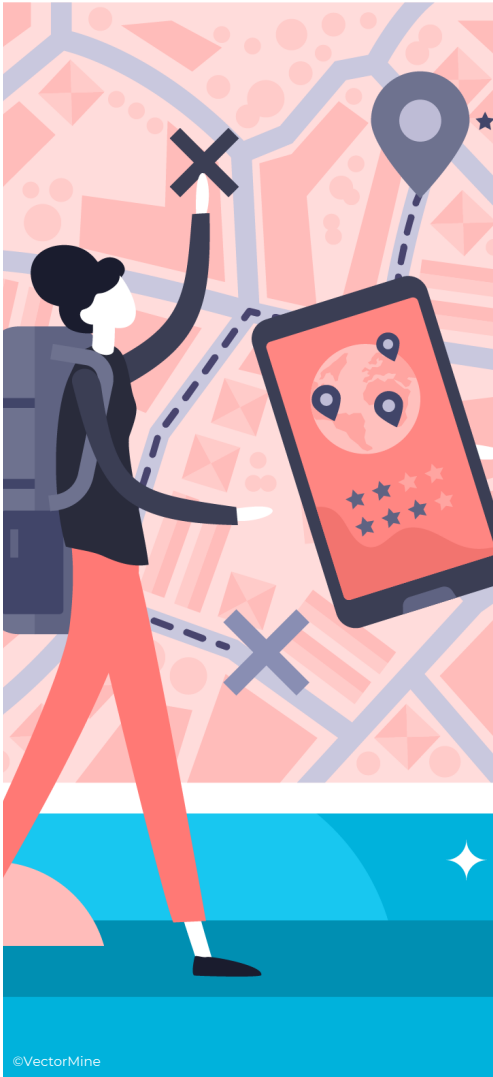
## SPECIAL SESSION: TRANSFORMATIVE CITY TOURISM

### Background

As the COVID-19 crisis unfolds, it has had an unprecedented impact on travel with the closing of virtually all destinations worldwide. Tourism was a major source of growth, employment and income, with over 1.5 billion people crossing international borders in 2019. Before the crisis, the popularity of cities as tourist destinations was growing at a significant rate by providing rich and meaningful cultural experiences to visitors. The exponential growth however came at an increasingly high price to both local residents and the cultural infrastructure, which were straining under the pressure of more and more visitors. Now as cities gradually begin to reopen, the landscape has shifted dramatically. New measures and approaches are needed to restart tourism while reflecting new standards of health, safety and social interactions.

This special session will look at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on urban tourism with perspectives from a panel of mayors, local actors, city stakeholders, civil society, and international institutions. It will discuss the post COVID-19 environment and allow cities to share their assessments of the real value of tourism and the importance of balancing needs and interests of both residents and visitors.

The panel will reflect on the emerging lessons learned from the pandemic and recommend how cities can make their destinations more resilient, particularly for their communities, and encourage a vibrant, sustainable and robust tourism recovery.



### Moderator:

**Ms. Mechtild Rössler, Director of the World Heritage Centre, UNESCO**

Mr. Manuel Butler, Executive Director, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

Ms. Somjai Suwansupana, Mayor of Phuket, Thailand

Ms. Armandina Saleiro, Vice-President of Barcelos Municipality (Portugal) and Coordinator of the Barcelos Creative City Project

Ms. Betty Addero Radier, Chief Executive Officer, Kenya Tourism Board

Ms. Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, Director of Macao Government Tourism Office and Macao SAR Focal point to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network

Ms. Ang Ming Chee, General Manager of George Town World Heritage Incorporated



## SPEAKERS

# Objectives

- Understanding of current impacts of reduced tourism in cities
- Identification of sustainable recovery approaches/strategies for tourism recovery
- Defining resiliency aspects in the context of future tourism development
- Defining areas of consideration and intention to support resiliency of local communities.



## Questions for Reflections

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### LOCAL LEVEL:

- How has the Covid-19 crisis impacted your city's relationship with tourism?
- What has the Covid-19 crisis taught your city about the value of tourism? Has it shifted your perspective on balancing the needs and interests of visitors and residents?
- Has the crisis changed or reinforced your city's long-term tourism strategy?
- How has your city worked to recover tourism while supporting a stronger and more resilient community?
- How has your city supported the creative industries and other involved sectors to thrive throughout and beyond the crisis?
- Many destinations are turning their focus to domestic tourism in the short term. In this context, how can cities work to promote and encourage residents to rediscover their local heritage?

### GLOBAL LEVEL:

- In the post Covid-19 landscape, how can we ensure that tourism is a platform for recovery and a pillar of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?
- How can we achieve a strong recovery for tourism, while supporting climate action and other steps to advance sustainability and build resilience?
- How can cities work more closely together, such as through the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, to support recovery from the crisis?
- What opportunities has the crisis presented in terms of transforming urban tourism?



Ms. Mechtild Rössler, Director of the World Heritage Centre of UNESCO, moderated the session. She initiated the discussion by highlighting the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism sector.

Mr. Manuel Butler, Executive Director, World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), kicked off the debate with forward looking scenarios and how they depend on the reopening of borders. Furthermore, he outlined points for tourism recovery that touched on security, sustainability, innovation and collaboration. He explained that for now it is hard to predict how people will travel in the upcoming years, and that we must understand that interest in travel will take a couple of years to peak again. For him, “resilience and sustainability in tourism is key.”

Ms. Somjai Suwansupana, Mayor of Phuket, Thailand, offered a local perspective on how the city has been impacted during this time. She explained that the pandemic has led the city to “reconsider how to do tourism” and “realized that we have to take the issue much more seriously.” In the end, the lesson learned was to consume less, improve waste management, and encourage businesses to put in place a new standard operating procedure to better protect its inhabitants and tourists.

Ms. Armandina Saleiro, Vice-President of Barcelos Municipality (Portugal) and Coordinator of the Barcelos Creative City Project, continued the conversation by saying, “the new normal after COVID19 is a matter of safety and positive thinking.” There is a need to promote sustainable tourism. She explained how the city of Barcelos has been working to keep the artist community afloat, for example, by commissioning one work of art from every registered artist in the city. Moving forward, Ms. Saleiro expressed that the city should “create a happy community” which is creative and safe and which will attract tourists interested in the distinctive features of creative tourism.

Ms. Betty Addero Radier, Chief Executive Officer, Kenya Tourism Board, spoke about how her country is recovering, especially as tourism is the third highest grossing sector of Kenya’s GDP. Again, highlighting opportunities for growth, she observed how “this period has allowed the state to consider the diversity of markets and products especially in conservation and focus more on other things that cities can offer.” She explained that the future of tourism will rest in “repacking products to appeal to a more domestic market.”

Expanding on the future of tourism, Ms. Maria Helena de Senna Fernandes, Director of Macao Government Tourism Office and Macao SAR Focal Point to the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, noted that “tourism will not be what it used to be.” She echoed Ms. Radier in saying, “we need to look at what the local population feels, whilst looking at the population crossing borders.”

Ms. Ang Ming Chee, General Manager of George Town World Heritage Incorporated, focused on the people in the local communities that carry out these tourism jobs—from tourist guides to taxi drivers to hospitality workers. She emphasized that we need to invest in the local community by having more education surrounding digital marketing and strategies. She ended on a positive note stating, “although we are physically distancing from each other, it doesn’t mean we cannot socially engage—that is the power of tourism.”

In sum, the special session highlighted several issues that will determine how we rebuild tourism for the years to come. Many who relied on foreign visitors for their tourism are now shifting their outlook to think and consume locally. This trend is opening a conversation between those at the top of the tourism food chain and the local communities that support it. By starting this conversation, people are re-discovering what makes their communities beautiful and diverse. In the near future, we will see a shift towards not just more digital travel, but also towards local travel and an expansion in cultural and intangible heritage education.

# Reflections from the Online Chat Room



- **Naonobu TERUMINE:** What do you expect to new normal of the sightseeing and trip?
- **Leentjek:** Question from Paris, France: have there been any "model" responses around the world when dealing with the COVID and, at the same time, protecting vulnerable populations?
- **CH:** I am having hard time during this covid time ! some students who need to graduate in this year are postponing, and me staying at home learning is not good as in campus. will it be ok?
- **Pau RQ:** Higher demography and lower-income are aspects of most vulnerable groups, what specific actions could be implemented without aggravating these very same aspects or develops a paternalist dynamic?
- **Leentjek:** given the (unexpected!) positive impacts of confinement, how irrational or interesting would it be for countries/cities to launch a "confinement week" each year? That would give them an opportunity to practise for future pandemics, not to mention give citizens a chance to live differently and reflect on their lifestyles for a few days.
- **Bradford UNESCO City of Film:** We need to remember that many people around the world do not have direct access to digital means
- **Anna Bolengo:** Thank you for the great presentations. I'd like to ask how is sustainability built in the tourism recovery plans for the destinations presented?
- **Mindfully Flourish:** business owners need to reach out for those less fortunate @UNESCO



## CLOSING REMARKS

**Ernesto Ottone R.**

**Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO**

Dear speakers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the past months, we have heard a lot about COVID-19, and as the virus continues to spread, I am sure that this will remain an important topic, not only to act and recover, but also to reflect and contribute to a sustainable future.

UNESCO organized this meeting with various objectives. These were to look at how cities had been at the forefront of addressing the pandemic, but also to share and learn experiences from across different regions of the world.

Cities are where most people live. They are where most people work and go to school. They are particularly diverse and they also are confronted with major imbalance and inequalities.

For UNESCO, cities are also places where many different dimensions of our work come together. And it is in this multi-sectoral approach that lies UNESCO's main assets and actions, because this allows to approach cities not as places, but as platforms where all dimensions of human activities intersect.

We have heard from mayors, architects and planners, academics and experts from a broad range of sectors, and from all over the world. From Wuhan in China to Santos in Brazil, from Phuket in Thailand to Barcelos in Portugal, they have shared their experiences about what has been done in cities worldwide in response to COVID-19, and what is being planned for the future.

Much food for thought can be taken from this online meeting and be used as inspiration for our future programming. At this stage, I would like to highlight a few points, as a way of concluding this meeting.

We started this discussion with looking at how cities were truly “at the forefront” during the pandemic. Cities were or are implementing numerous restrictions, while devising ways to make the lockdown and the pandemic manageable for people and services. And while the situation remains difficult in many places, cities have been learning a lot from dealing with the situation

Clearly, education, culture and the sciences are key for the success and sustainability of local recovery strategies.

We have relied on culture as a resource to deal with the crisis, and now, culture and culture professionals need the strong support of decision-makers at local and national levels.

We have relied on education to facilitate inclusive learning opportunities for all during the crisis, and now, education leaders, decision-makers at local and national levels need to collectively reassess learning systems to ensure what people learn is truly relevant to their lives and to the survival of the planet.



The COVID-19 pandemic has paved the way for the exacerbation of structural inequalities and discrimination that vulnerable populations are confronted with. The “new normal” requires a rethinking of governance approaches that will underline an intersectional whole-of-community approach in order to ensure that inclusive social policies are developed and implemented.

The role of water security in protecting citizens and in monitoring COVID-19 is clear and evident. Water Sensitive Urban Design can help face similar pandemics and provide the foundation for sustainable development. Invest in water, today.

Cultural and linguistic diversity as central development framework foster media and information literate societies for human solidarity in building sustainable cities.

We will continue to leverage our city-networks to make sure that you can continue sharing experiences, so that those who are in full swing of the pandemic today, can benefit from others’ lessons over the past months.

In the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, cities once again are leading and will lead the way, working across sectors and being agile. We all agree that it is not an easy time. It gives hope to see life slowly going back to “normal”, but it also comes with restrictions and new ways of utilizing public space, transport, businesses, of ensuring education or visiting a culture institution.

For the long-term recovery, we have glimpsed into the future. The cities of tomorrow would be cities that are more sustainable, that are more “liveable”. They would also be cities that are more inclusive and have devised ways to better live together. Not only have we heard our colleagues from World Bank and from OECD on how this experience can make cities more resilient but also from experts, architects and urban planners on how these ideas can be turned into concrete designs, in using space differently, reconceiving the relation between people and place, and thus into a rethinking of how cities function.

When talking about UNESCO’s cities networks—that are platforms—there is also this very tangible way of connecting cities and citizens around the world, and that is through tourism. The Special Session on Transformative City Tourism acknowledged how cities are working to restart tourism while putting culture and creativity at the heart of their recovery efforts. With millions of jobs and livelihoods at stake, it is key that we support resilient and robust communities and build back tourism to balance the needs and interests of both residents and visitors and reshape urban tourism into a more sustainable sector.

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed and amplified all major global challenges of our time. Cities being at the frontline in our response to the crisis fully highlights once again the ultimate importance of the local dimension in all development issues and paths. UNESCO is thus more committed than ever to engaging with cities worldwide, alongside its Member States, stakeholders and partners, to renew and upscale the international momentum for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the post-COVID-19 era.



I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank all of our moderators and speakers, and I hope it has been an interesting and inspiring few hours that can help us be better prepared, but especially to develop more sustainable and more inclusive ways of living together in cities and beyond.

Going back to the “normal life” before COVID-19 should not be an option. We should seize this moment and focus on the new possibilities triggered by the crisis towards transforming cities into resilient, socially inclusive and green communities.



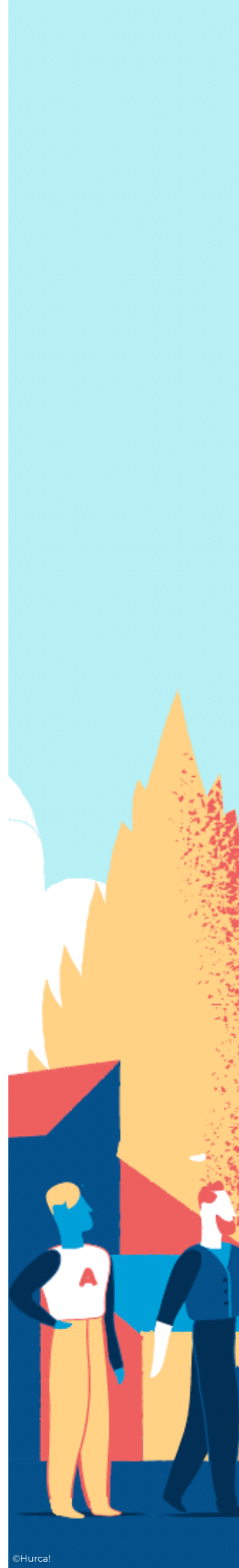
# GENERAL OBSERVATION AND OUTLOOK

## "Cities spearhead the local dimension of sustainable development, connecting the global and the local"

The COVID-19 pandemic affected smaller cities and mega-cities, richer and poorer countries, in all regions of the world. Yet the pandemic did not affect everyone at once. Reflecting on “time”, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador Maria Francesca Merloni talked about how the pandemic brought cities and many aspects of life to a standstill. With some cities recovering, others in lockdown, and others at the start of the pandemic, the globalized system has been challenged. Factories re-open in one country but rely on a supply chain that involves a country in lockdown. Universities re-open, but students are not always able or allowed to return. Borders open in some places, but remain closed in others. By disrupting the pre-pandemic landscape in which the world was much more connected and synchronized, COVID-19 made us aware of how globally connected we all are, but also of the limits of globalization. These ideas of “standing still”, and of the pandemic having revealed the extent of globalization’s impact on our daily lives, became the focus of the online meeting and can guide the future outlook for cities around the world.

Concrete findings and reflections that issued from the online meeting have been brought together around eight themes that combine actions that have already been taken, with those that are envisaged for the future.

- **Addressing social inequalities**
- **Localizing urban emergency response and recovery**
- **Increased investment in public services**
- **Liveable cities that put people first**
- **Culture and creativity unite people**
- **Cities as places of connection**
- **Investing in greener and more climate resilient cities**
- **Localized and diversified city tourism**



# Addressing Social Inequalities

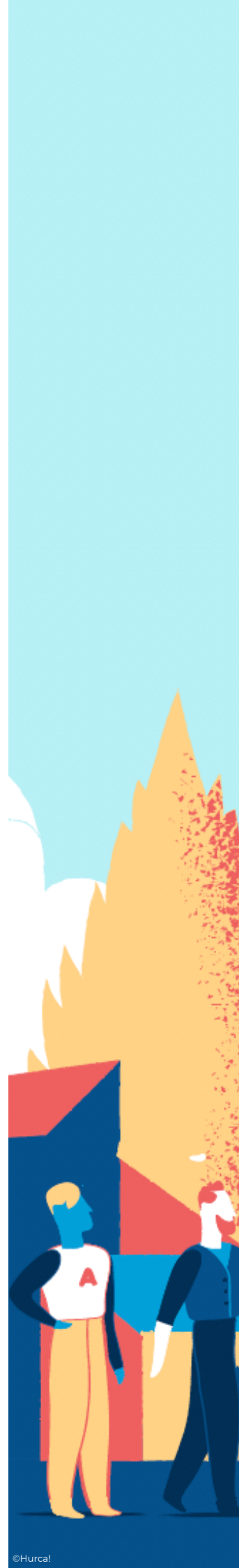
COVID-19 has disproportionality affected the most vulnerable and marginalized. Not only were some at greater risk of catching the virus, but measures to contain the virus were, at times, impossible or much harder to implement for certain groups. Mr Juma Assiago of UN-Habitat emphasized that, among these, the urban poor were the most affected by the various control measures. Slums and poor and densely populated neighbourhoods faced the majority of challenges. There, people were unable to isolate. Distance education does not equally reach children living in poverty or with less access to ICTs. These areas tend to be less well serviced e.g., there are on average less doctors or ICU beds available per inhabitant, there is less green space for people to safely spend time outdoors, and less access to clean water. COPRED (Mexico) also drew attention to the particular challenges of women living in situations of domestic violence during the pandemic. A key challenge thus resides in ensuring that such actions address these vulnerabilities.

Cities are already trying to address such inequalities, proving that it is possible to work towards a more equal society. Successfully fighting the pandemic required an inclusive approach, because leaving groups of the population behind, meant that the virus could not be contained. In Lagos (Nigeria) poor neighbourhoods and local markets were provided with access to clean water, efforts that are to become permanent infrastructure. Bogota's "special care zones" were part of an intricate system that aimed to assist the most vulnerable; to make sure as many economic sectors as possible could start up; and to do that while taking care of health and safety.

A guiding principle for the way forward is to consider "the new normal" as an opportunity to be more socially ambitious. Mr Vimlendu Jha of Sweccha (India) warned against a fast return to the situation from before the pandemic, since this would not just mean a return to "normal" but also a return to some of the problems of the pre-COVID-19 era. The SDGs, for example SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, were seen as a roadmap that could help guide such a process for a people- and rights-based approach, as was reflected on by Mr Benedetto Zacchiroli of UNAR (Italy).

## Localizing urban emergency response and recovery

The pandemic revealed how emergency preparedness and response are often nationally led and locally implemented, which challenges its effectiveness. For city authorities, which tend to be closer to people, this has posed particular challenges – to reach the entire population, to obtain their cooperation, but also when thinking about solutions for the future. The COVID-19 experience demonstrates that it is important to involve citizens, locally, when devising recovery plans, and to enhance emergency preparedness plans.



**Preparing for future emergencies should be done in dialogue with citizens.** Disaster risk management is significantly more successful if citizens participate starting from the design process, as it makes the approach more locally relevant and enhances ownership and cooperation. COVID-19 has shown that it is more difficult to implement emergency plans when citizens are not sufficiently aware, or when these plans do not respond to the realities in which most citizens live. The way in which vulnerable groups were left out in some cases is only one example of this. Cities are close to people and are thus well-positioned to guide a localized process.

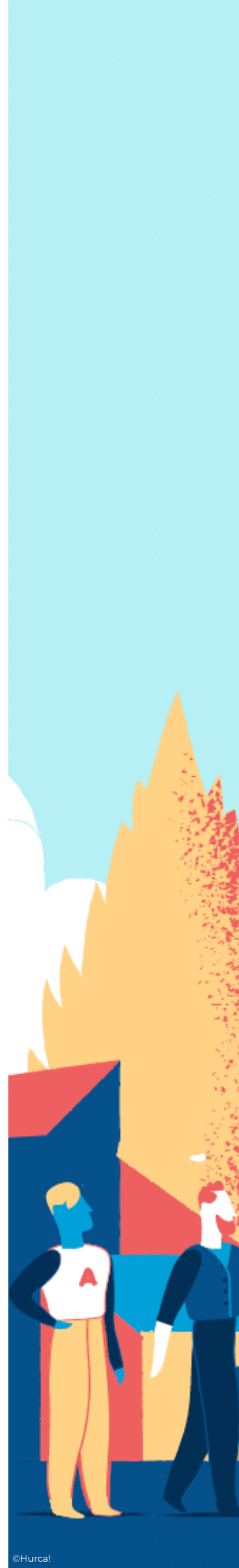
**Engaging with youth is particularly important.** Young people are the city dwellers of today and tomorrow, and thinking about how these cities should look and function cannot be successful unless these primary users are involved. Ms Wevyn Muganda, representing youth in these debates, vividly advocated for decision makers to listen to and involve young people.

## Increased investment in public services

COVID-19 highlighted the importance of public services in cities. Urban residents depend much more on public services — e.g., transport, green space, leisure — than those living in rural areas. The pandemic increased the demand on some of these services, for example, open public space where people could safely pass time during lockdown, health services or a reliable public water supply system. Other services, like public transport and public education came, fully or in part, to a halt or started operating differently, which revealed how important they are in people's daily lives.

**At the same time, the pandemic revealed the impact of decades of decreased investment in these public services.** Major efforts were needed for public services to handle the pandemic response. In Bogotá (Colombia), the city took control over both public and private healthcare, to make sure everyone had access to healthcare when needed in such a trying time.

**A sustainable future, and a safer life in cities, will depend to a large extent on more robust public services, particularly in crises and emergencies that affect all population and all sectors.** A more sustainable city calls for moving away from a one-dimensional focus on privatising services, as if private automatically equals good quality and better return on investment. Instead, investments should be redirected towards good quality and inclusive public services like healthcare, education, culture, housing, and transport, placing people at the centre of our endeavour towards sustainable societies.



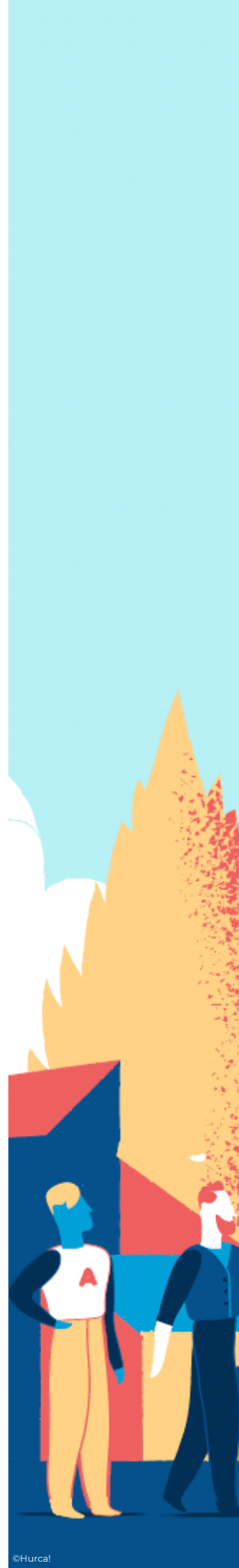
## Liveable cities that put people first

The COVID-19 exposed how some cities have become gradually alienated from people. The challenge now is to move from an economy-based society to a people-based one. The online meeting was a timely call for a positive outlook on the “new normal” and warned against a return to the less desirable aspects of pre-pandemic life. Worldwide, if re-opening goes too fast, cities run a risk of returning to polluting, to the old ways of consuming, to traffic overload, and to perpetuating unfair labour conditions. Recovering from the pandemic offers a window of opportunity to lay the foundations for a better future.

The guiding question should be, how to invest in the wellbeing of future generations? Swansea (UK), a UNESCO Learning City, offered a glimpse into what such a future could look like. Swansea has over the past years rethought its use of public space and has worked towards becoming more inclusive and innovative. An “entrepreneurship ecosystem” promotes entrepreneurship, innovation, and thinking-out-of-the-box throughout the education system. Public spaces were repurposed to focus on social interaction, green spaces and digital infrastructure. The response to the pandemic has proven that these measures work and are valid avenues to further explore and test out elsewhere.

Well-being and liveability should be guide designers in shaping the future of cities, as was proposed by Architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte (France). A concrete example of this was the “15-minute city” advocated by Mr Carlos Moreno of the Panthéon Sorbonne University (France). Such a city functions as a group of villages, with core services and functions being within a 15-minute radius. This would improve liveability, reduce commuting time, and enhance the links between people and public services. It would also result in closer social contacts since people would primarily move in a much smaller radius.

A city is not merely where you work, it is where you live, which calls for a better management of space. Cities are designed and operate as a function of the economy, and have a strong tendency to reduce “space” for people to live. Architect Wilmotte proposed to think beyond a simplified distinction between public and private areas, but to imagine, for example, semi-public / semi-private areas. Such spaces would allow for use (semi-public), but in smaller groups (semi-private), and would foster social interaction. According to Mr Sameh Wahba of the World Bank, it was not population density in itself but the way in which that density was managed that had made cities vulnerable. Some trends have been accelerated by the pandemic and will likely define how people use cities e.g., home-based work. This has become a norm now, and means that cities are used, thus defined, differently. If there is no more need to come to a city for work, then cities need to be more attractive in other aspects, like their amenities, social and cultural life.



## Culture and creativity unite people

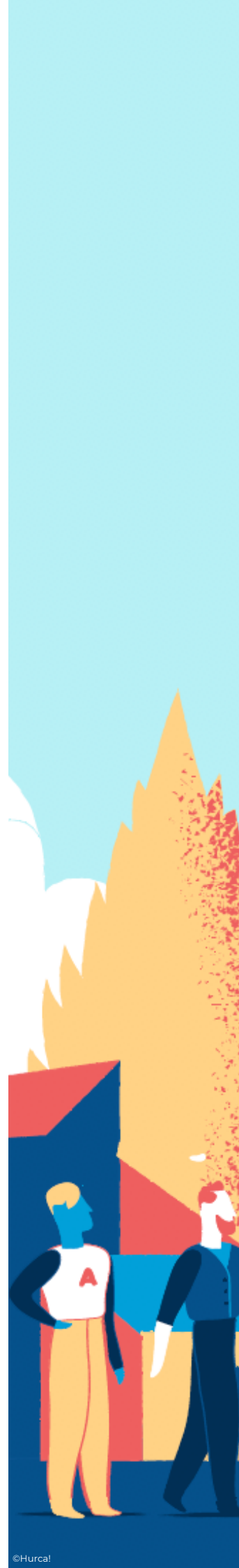
Cities are at the core of cultural life, and better recognizing the value of culture can help reshape cities that are more inclusive. When people played music on balconies, longed for religious services to restart, orchestras performed online, and artists embellished public spaces, the pandemic showed that culture is important in people's lives, but also that culture brings people together. During the pandemic, this unifying role of culture was a strength in cities. Therefore, Mr Jordi Pascual of UCLG advocated for a central role for the culture sector.

Valuable sectors that have been badly affected should not be neglected in the recovery. The culture sector has often been considered as particularly affected by COVID-19, in part because public events and (large) gatherings are particularly hazardous, but also because this sector often includes numerous small businesses, and is at times a highly informal sector. At the same time, culture is highly regarded by citizens. A shift in attention of decision-makers towards those sectors, which are valued by people in times of need, was called for. This is not just the case for the cultural and creative sectors. Other sectors too, like healthcare, sanitation and the food industry have called for more recognition and support in the post-pandemic period.

The creative sector is an important asset in making cities, urban life and public spaces more inclusive. For this reason, many cities have devised efforts that include, or fully rely on, the creative industries to address some of the challenges during and after the pandemic. In Santos (Brazil), a UNESCO Creative City of Film, the needs of the culture sector were combined with those of the citizens by devising ways to use the Internet to bring culture to the citizens, while providing a much needed public to the culture sector. Free online lessons in, for example, theatre, dance and crafts were offered to those under lockdown. In the aftermath of the pandemic, culture offers opportunities, to bring people together again, to reshape public spaces, and make them to represent a more diverse group of citizens.

## Cities as places of connection

During lockdown, cities were foremost the terrain of residents, but once measures ease, the connecting function of cities returns. When cities serve as hubs for transport, the economy, education, and socio-cultural life, they are far more at risk of spreading the virus. At the same time, cities' role in connecting different spaces and functions makes cities thriving and inspiring places. Cities are where young people from different places and backgrounds go for education, jobs and often homes. Cities are where generations and cultures meet, and this connecting role of cities has been interrupted by the pandemic.



Taking up this connecting role once more requires ensuring that people feel confident enough to venture back into public life. Wuhan (China) made people and re-connection its primary concern. Re-opening can only be successful if citizens feel that their cities are sufficiently safe. Therefore, practical measures were installed across sectors, and throughout cities all over the world, not just to combat the pandemic, but to allow cities to retake their role as places of connection. In Manizales (Colombia) the re-starting of higher education was considered essential for re-connecting the city with people. Ensuring that students feel safe enough, at university and in the city, to return and continue their studies, was a guiding principle. For university-cities across the world, devising ways to allow students, and student life, to return, is essential.

Fully reviving the connecting role of cities also means reviving travel, and doing this is a way that makes this connection meaningful and safe. Tourism, the “connecting” sector par excellence, requires urban residents to feel safe enough to welcome visitors once again. In Macao (China) and Phuket (Thailand), both of which are UNESCO Creative Cities of Gastronomy, and in George Town (Malaysia), many efforts are being made to ensure that citizens feel sufficiently safe to start receiving visitors. For Ms Ang Ming Chee of George Town, the power of tourism is about connecting visitors with local people. “Physical distancing does not mean that we cannot be socially engaged.”

## Investing in greener and more climate resilient cities

COVID-19 revealed that cities are not living up to their potential when it comes to reducing the impact of climate change. Yet, cities are home to a majority of the world population and will continue to grow. Panellists agreed that it is impressive how similar issues arose in cities around the world, thereby revealing a number of core issues that make cities and their inhabitants vulnerable in face of risks. Such risks will only increase in face of climate change and should be addressed. A greener future must thus involve cities.

The pandemic challenged some of the perceived strengths of cities. For example, cities were considered more environmentally effective since, for example, more people could live on a smaller space, and thus shorten their commute. The pandemic, however, quickly neutralized those strengths. More people working from home, meant distance and traffic were no longer factors to be considered. Instead, lockdowns were challenging for those living in small apartments, without access to private or semi-private outdoor spaces, and those who lacked basic infrastructure and services.





The opportunity should not be missed to turn the massive post-COVID-19 incentives into an investment in more resilient, green cities, according to Mr Sameh Wahba of the World Bank. He advocated for more open spaces, larger sidewalks and more bike lanes, but also for localized supply chains. The pandemic's disruption of globalized supply chains is likely to push for a shorter supply-chain. Ms Soo-Jin Kim of the OECD stressed the importance of "building back better", and to avoid going back to the old way of doing things. For instance, if some of these investments are not directed towards improving public transport, people will have no choice but to get back into their cars. This is exactly the approach that has been taken in Bogota (Colombia), where the recovery plan is investing in public transport and bicycle lanes, amongst others.

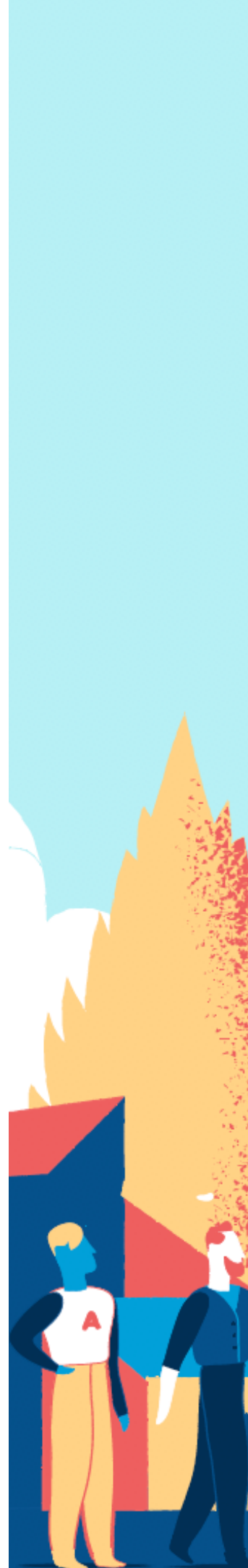
## Localized and diversified city tourism

Tourism has been particularly strongly affected by the pandemic, but this is also an opportunity to rethink how tourism works. The sector, which relies heavily on a globalized economy, came to a halt when airlines stopped serving, borders closed, and people were confined to their homes. Global data presented by Mr Manuel Butler of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), but also local ones shared by Phuket (Thailand) and Barcelos (Portugal) from the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, referred to a significant drop in tourism.

COVID-19 exposed the strong interlinkages between the tourism sector and the globalized economy. Travel is foremost a global matter. In addition, the travel industry scaled up to cater to an increasingly large tourist crowd – e.g., large resorts, higher capacities of planes, the flourishing of the cruise industry, and tourism-oriented local markets. COVID-19 has indirectly called us to rethink this, and pushed the tourism sector to harmonize and enhance relationships with the local population, and to diversify the tourism offer through smaller-scale initiatives.

Better linking tourism to urban residents meant devising an offer for this domestic market. Tourism operators and city authorities seek to devise offers for the local public itself, a market that in many places had lost its appeal prior to the pandemic. In Macao (China), for example, the new routes that are devised for local visitors will later also be offered to foreign tourists. Likewise, the Kenyan Tourism Board also realized the need to tap into domestic tourism and adapt the offer to a local public.

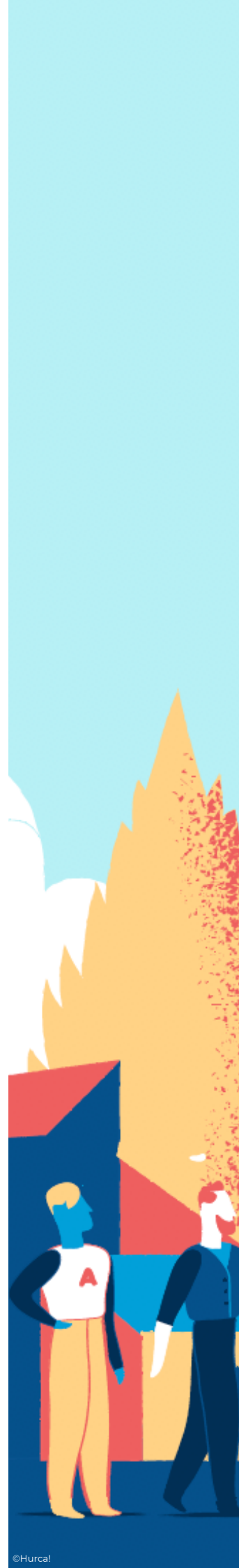
Tourism will need to be safer and more competitive, which calls for a turn towards a more small-scale offer, e.g., exploring additional sites and products so that visitors can be more easily spread across locations. Such approach involves an important role of the creative sector, which is both local and "small-scale" in many cases. Barcelos (Portugal), a UNESCO Creative City of Crafts and Folk Art, and George Town (Malaysia) stressed the importance of promoting products and services provided by the community. Traditional performers and crafts people are not only the real capital of the tourism sector, they have also been strongly affected when tourism comes to a halt.



**In summary**, whether implementing emergency lockdown measures or planning for a sustainable recovery, cities led the way in turning central government measures into a workable and livable reality at the local level. The pandemic revealed some of the main problems that rapid and unbalanced urban growth resulted in, including inequalities, the exclusive interlinkages between cities and the globalized economy, and the focus on economy-based urban design and functioning rather than a “people first” approach.

The global challenges that were highlighted by the pandemic are multifaceted, and therefore the urban solutions must be multidisciplinary and holistic. Cities are called on to be more socially and environmentally ambitious and not to miss the opportunity to work towards greener and more sustainable cities. The cities of the future should be about people and have advanced public services that contribute to addressing the equality gap.

Cities have spearhead the local dimension of sustainable development, emphasizing that the 2030 Agenda is global but its implementation is intrinsically local. This was not a call against globalization, but rather one to encourage *cities* to claim their role as *connecting* places, which embrace open and inclusive aspects of *the global* but also make sure to address *the local*.





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## HIGHLIGHTS

### TWITTER: MEDIA VIEWS



**12,334**

**8 VIDEOS**

Number of times a video or GIF has been seen by users.

### FACEBOOK: PEOPLE REACHED



**160,041**

**8 POSTS**

How many people saw either a specific post or any content posted by our page.

### LINKEDIN: IMPRESSIONS



**60,600**

**4 POSTS**

Number of times the post was shown or was viewed by users.

## SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH

Content on social media was disseminated starting on 22 June 2020 leading up to the UNESCO Cities Platform Online Meeting. Content was shared across Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

### Twitter

For the UNESCO Cities Platform Online Meeting, a total of 12 tweets for English and French platforms were completed. These included visuals, GIFS and videos. The **average engagement rate was 1.4%** for the tweets. Twitter's average engagement rate is between 0.5% to 1%.

\*Engagement Rate: The number of engagement (clicks, retweets, replies, follows and likes) divided by the total number of impressions.

### Facebook

For the UNESCO Cities Platform Online Meeting, a total of 8 posts for English and French platforms were completed. These included visuals. For facebook, the total **engagement was 3,510**.

\*Engagement: The total number of actions that people take involving your adverts. Can include actions such as reacting to, commenting on or sharing the ad/post, claiming an offer, viewing a photo or video, or clicking on a link.

### LinkedIn

For the UNESCO Cities Platform Online Meeting, a total of 4 posts were completed. The UNESCO LinkedIn account is only in English. These included visuals. The **average engagement rate for LinkedIn was 2.34%**, above LinkedIn's average of 0.054%.

\*Engagement Rate: Typically, it's the the number of interactions divided by impressions.

# UNESCO Cities Platform

The UNESCO Cities Platform (UCP) is composed of eight UNESCO city Networks and Programmes from all its fields of expertise - education, culture, nature and social sciences, and communication and information. The Platform has a comprehensive and transversal approach to UNESCO's work in the urban context for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

To know more about each Network/programme of the UCP kindly visit:

- **UNESCO Creative Cities Network**
- **UNESCO Global Network of Learning\_**
- **International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities**
- **World Heritage Cities Programme**
- **Media and Information Literacy Cities**
- **Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience**
- **UNESCO-Netexplo Observatory Cooperation on Smart Cities**
- **Megacities Alliance for Water and Climate**

Further information on the meeting can be found at the dedicated webpage:

<https://en.unesco.org/urban-solutions-Learning-from-cities-responses-to-COVID19>

To discover more about UNESCO's work on cities, please visit:

[UNESCO for Sustainable Cities](#)

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