

WUF 10 - Theme Paper

Cities of Opportunities: Connecting Culture and Innovation

February 8-13, 2020

1. Global Agenda

The increasing recognition of sustainable urbanization as a key global transformative force was reflected in the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, which includes the urban goal (SDG 11) *make cities and human settlements safe, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable*. The year 2016 marked another milestone in global urban policy with the endorsement of the New Urban Agenda (NUA) — the outcome document of HABITAT III, which seeks to chart the course and provide an action-oriented roadmap to guide sustainable urban development globally to 2036. The NUA and SDG 11 firmly place urbanization at the forefront of international development policy. This goes beyond viewing urbanization as simply a demographic phenomenon, but as a transformative process capable of driving sustainable development. This is also an appreciation of the role that cities can play in contributing to achieving sustainable development goals.

The above global frameworks have placed cities and human settlements at the centre of development debates owing to the greater appreciation of the positive nature and benefits that accompany the process of planned urbanization. When well-planned, urbanization is associated with greater productivity, socio-economic opportunities and quality of life for all, while protecting the environment. Cities drive human progress and innovation; they also offer greater societal freedoms. As economic powerhouses, cities play a key dominant role in the global economy.

The World Urban Forum (WUF) is the world’s premier conference on urban issues, convened by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). The conference supports the strategy and work of UN-Habitat and its partners in realizing sustainable urbanization and presents as an advocacy platform. It is guided by the interrelated objectives of the NUA, the SDGs, particularly, Goal 11; and other global accords related to sustainable urbanization such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction; and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda for financing development.

New ideas, priorities and working models identified in the Forum are incorporated on a recurring basis into the strategic plan and the work programme of UN-Habitat. The Forum presents an opportunity at the international arena, for a variety of stakeholders to exchange views and experiences in the pursuit of sustainable urbanization. The inclusive nature of the Forum, combined with high-level participation, makes it a unique United Nations conference and a premier opportunity for international gathering on urban issues.

2. Cities of Opportunities: Connecting Culture and Innovation

The World Urban Forum operates as a forward-thinking, open-ended platform, providing a for multi-stakeholder dialogue, collaboration, including public-private cooperation. From 8-13 February 2020, Abu Dhabi will host the Tenth Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF10) - the first time an Arab country hosts the landmark Forum.
The proposed theme for the Tenth session of the World Urban Forum is: *Cities of opportunities: Connecting culture and innovation*. As urban challenges become more complex with rapidly changing economic, social, political and technological and demographic contexts, advancing cross-sector partnerships and collaborative solutions is an important objective for WUF10. Promoting global and regional partnerships, through the exchange of knowledge, will permit to advance a sustainable development agenda based on culture, creativity and innovation.

Urban culture comprises material - physical infrastructure, streets, palaces, places of worship, opera houses, museums, places of entertainment, marketplaces; and nonmaterial- beliefs and lifestyles, of urban residents.¹ The consideration of urban cultures in sustainable urbanization can serve as a strategic tool for city promotion and development and are increasingly becoming an essential component in urban economic development and regeneration. The idea of using culture as a motor of economic growth in part reflects the transition from manufacturing cities to sites of more flexible, design-, knowledge-, and service-based activities. This is evidenced by the growth of services sectors and development of knowledge-based economies and creative industries in the framework of the so called fourth industrial revolution.

Many city authorities all over the world are using culture-related activities to market themselves internationally, to promote civic identity, sense of place, and to boost economic growth and generate employment. Current trends in many parts of the world suggest that culture will play an increasingly important role in the competitiveness and identity of cities and nations. Of significance among these trends are: culturally-driven redevelopment of inner-city areas; preservation of historic buildings as well as reviving of traditional crafts for enhancing the global tourism of cities; including the gentrification of inner-city residential areas. All these have the potential to contribute immensely to the wellbeing of cities.

Culture can contribute to sustainable urbanization in various ways. Firstly, it promotes urban tourism, which in turn generates spending and employment, as well as a variety of backward and forward linkages that have the multiplier effects of creating further jobs to cater for visitors and audiences in restaurants, shops and hotels. Moreover, it presents an incentive for greater public good.

Second, cultural elements are widely perceived to enhance the image and attractiveness of the city.² Cultural elements- infrastructure of a city not only have a strong appeal and an attracting power over highly-skilled and creative workers; but can improve a city’s image acting as a powerful magnet for creative and innovative people.

Third, investment in urban culture could contribute to the diversification of the local economy by providing the foundation for the emergence of new economic sectors that could eventually grow into major growth engines in knowledge economies, such as culture-related economies. Fourth, city authorities and urban development agencies are using culture-related activities as tools of urban renovation and revitalization, especially where cultural facilities play a key role in iconic development.³

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Fourth, culture has important implications for how built environments are managed; urban planning will need to seek the right balance between cultural groups seeking to preserve their identity in cities and the need to avoid extreme forms of segregation and urban fragmentation. Culture can play a role in achieving the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Finally, apart from serving as a tool for economic development, culture can also be used as a political instrument in pluralistic societies to help define sense of belonging and identities. Advancing the NUA through the World Urban Forum will promote national implementation plans that are aligned with local context and cultural landscape, technology and the new challenges created by the fourth industrial revolution, framing the role of cities as places of opportunities.

Innovation is essential for city growth. From technology to institutions, organizations and modes of operation, to information and knowledge, innovation is a creative capital that is brought to bear on various dimensions of development and prosperity. Innovation unleashes undeveloped potential to make fuller use of local resources and assets; it also connects to frontier technologies that can boost economic growth, improve service delivery and the management of cities, while promoting broad-based inclusion and novel forms of participation and engagement.

Innovation is needed to meet sustainable development challenges and to accelerate human progress. It can come from a creative worker, a community leader, a business person, an artist, a public servant or a scientist. Innovation solves problems, anticipates challenges, creates new products and processes and harnesses existing and emerging opportunities.

Cities of opportunities use innovation to improve living conditions and make the most of the urban advantage. Innovation is about connecting ideas, efforts and opportunities, and they result from cooperation, dialogue, funding opportunities and partnerships. WUF 10 is in this respect an excellent platform to discuss the state-of-the-art innovations that are influencing decision-making and contributing to improved quality of life in urban areas.

Cities of opportunities are SMART cities that are not dominated by technology, engineering, capital and consulting companies, but use data and digital technology to supply information to better manage assets, resources and opportunities. A SMART city enhances the quality and performance of urban services such as transport, energy, utilizes energy in a more sustainable manner, minimizes wastage and overall costs of urban management, as well as increasing forms of citizen participation.

WUF 10 is an opportunity to address current critics against the SMART city concept that seems to be subject of corporate power, unable to respond to the informal character of the city, reproducing unequal spaces and exacerbating the urban divide. The Forum will discuss the factors that stand in the way of urban innovations, presenting examples and best practices of cities that adopted innovative solutions in different development areas, particularly those that meet the needs of underserved populations in a more efficient and sustainable manner. WUF will be also a good platform to analyze how cities can move beyond pilot stages and embrace more integrated and holistic smart solutions, connecting urban areas through networks of interconnected regions.
3. Abu Dhabi Context

Hosting the WUF10 will be a significant opportunity for Abu Dhabi to further showcase its achievements in promoting and implementing sustainable urban development as well as playing a significant role in leveraging innovation and cultural.

WUF10 will provide an opportunity to discuss solutions that are being tested by pioneering cities around the world. Abu Dhabi will advocate for the potential of developing and implementing a new sustainable four-pillar urban development scheme (economic, social, environmental and cultural) as a key enabler to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This four-pillar scheme awards a more enlarged scope for the integration of urban culture in future sustainable development strategies, through using innovative tools and approaches.

WUF10 will contribute to advance a broader strategy that centrally places an element of cultural sustainability to the global development framework, including to address increasingly present multicultural urban environments. As a nation that champions its cultural heritage and history, as well as its rich cultural diversity in cities, the United Arab Emirates can lead the way by advancing this approach through integrative national policies and programs.

In the run-up to WUF10, Abu Dhabi in partnership with UN-Habitat will also seek to promote effective multi-stakeholder initiatives in the cities of the region, gathering substantive contributions and experiences to maximize the value of the Forum to the region and contributing valuable regional inputs to the global debate and efforts towards sustainable urban development.

In that context, Department of Urban Planning & Municipalities (DPM) will organize a Pan-Arab Urban Development Symposium (PAUDS) in 2019 with key decision makers, city authorities and urban experts from the 18 Arab countries engaged in implementing the New Urban Agenda. PAUDS will invite the exchange of strategies to make Arab cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, and share experiences about urban challenges facing fast-changing Arab cities.