



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

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## Message to the participants of the World Conference on Development of Cities

A century ago, only 4% of the world population lived in cities. Today, more than half of the planet's population lives in urban centres, from this total, around 2 billion people live below the poverty line. Faced with this scenario, the urbanisation phenomenon requires the coordination of a broad range of public policies aimed at improving life conditions of these human settlements, where challenges are as notable as what the potential for wealth and intellectual generation represent.

UNESCO, since its foundation, over 60 years ago, was able to see in cities their great potential for integral development, be it in innovation and democratic participation, or in the wealthy production of knowledge and technology. It is in the city that we find the challenge of making globalisation human and we implement innovative experiences of citizenship, access to infrastructure, sustainable use of the environment and the construction of a culture of peace.

The so called "right to city", in the sense of increasing citizens' access to the resources and potentialities that a city may offer, is one of UNESCO's flags and of partners' such as UN-Habitat, one of our most important allies in the effort of promoting urban planning good practices, fostering local governance or stimulating the participation of minorities in municipal assemblies and forums. In Brazil, as well as developing activities at the municipal level – such as the opening of schools at weekends, professional capacity the building or protection of historical heritage – UNESCO also has the strategic support of partners that represent municipal interests, like the National Municipal Education Managers Union (UNDIME) or the Brazilian Municipality Association (ABM), as well as its involvement with a number of municipal administrations.

Therefore, it is with the intention of describing in a practical way some of UNESCO's inter-relations with cities, that it is my pleasure to present to you the brochure "UNESCO and Cities Partners". In the following booklet, we present an intersectoral and multidisciplinary approach from UNESCO to aid us in the challenge of rethinking the cities for the 21st Century. The brochure offers a brief summary of the actions that UNESCO's five programmatic sectors (education, natural sciences, human and social sciences, culture, communication and information) have been carrying out with the purpose of contributing to the construction of integrating cities, adapted to socio-environmental issues that affect our urban centres.

We understand that education and the production of knowledge are, without a doubt, values very much associated with the development of cities. Thus, one of UNESCO's greatest missions is to ensure universal access to quality education, in particular in urban centres, characterised by ever more demanding and excluding work markets. The importance of the "educating cities" in the broader conception of the word is certainly, one of the work hubs that UNESCO will develop together in partnership with civil society and local authorities.

Environmental issues many times require intervention from UNESCO. Good management of water resources is becoming an ever more survival factor for our cities, as far as access to drinking water and basic sanitation is concerned, great development challenges of the 21st Century. In the same way, the vulnerability that comes from the high concentration of humans has required huge efforts from UNESCO, in the development of prevention strategies and mitigation of environmental disasters, such as tsunamis or the protection of buildings of centres that hold great historical value.

The city also presents several social challenges, which were not there in the past. As the main link between the individual and the State, the city requires policies aimed at the full exercise of citizenship and human development free of prejudice, built on values of tolerance and mutual respect. Relevant actions have been conducted in the whole world by UNESCO in this area, such as the Programmes Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination and MOST (Management of Social Transformations). Extensive academic research on issues related to urbanisation, such as migration and urban sustainability, has also been fostered by UNESCO through its network of Chairs, among them the UNESCO Chairs in Montreal, Lyon and Mexico.

The cultural aspects related to cities are equally the object of analysis and cooperation by UNESCO. The protection and preservation of historical and urbanistic heritage, development of sustainable tourism, as well as raising the value of cultural diversity found in urban centres, justify an increased action by UNESCO in cities, important laboratories of cultural policies. Among the many actions being developed in Brazil, UNESCO has been cooperating with local institutions in the preservation of material heritage, through the Monumenta Programme, and also fostering normative debates linked to UNESCO's Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity and Cultural Expressions.

Lastly, there is no way of ignoring the immense technological potential of contemporary cities. In response to the daily challenges of the big urban centres, cities have shown to be the drivers of successful innovative solutions, many times with great potential for international replicability. UNESCO's Communication and Information programme has tried to encourage the use of new Communication and Information Technologies (CITs) in education and media's pluralism. Freedom of expression and the development of democratic communication means – that include issues like digital inclusion or the creation of community information centres – are matters equally approached by UNESCO throughout the world.

Cities will continue to exercise great attraction to migration flows or will be responsible for the inevitable emergence of socioeconomic tensions in our urban centres. Urban violence, pollution or traffic in our metropolis, are symptoms which signal the need of urgent intervention. On the other hand, there is no way of denying that the phenomenon that cities represent are, at the same time, a creative force with no precedent in human history. UNESCO, institution traditionally aimed at the culture of peace and integral development of the human being, will not omit itself from the discussion and search for alternatives that favour more inclusive, sustainable and creative cities.

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