

Address by Dr Mechtild Rossler
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"The UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape"
on the occasion of the
European Heritage Heads Forum
Leuven, Belgium, 22 May 2014

Excellencies,

Dear colleagues from other agencies and organizations,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am very pleased to participate in this European Heritage Heads Forum on the topic *"Heritage in the urban context: threats and opportunities"*
- My sincere thanks go to the organizers for their warm welcome to the Belgium's regional administrations of Brussels, Flanders and Wallonia for hosting this event!

CITIES

- I am very grateful that for the opportunity to participate in today's forum event, because **"cities matter to UNESCO"**.
- Rapid and unprecedented urbanization around the world is putting pressure on the availability and use of resources, resulting in overburdened urban landscapes and generating new security issues that are unsustainable in the long run.
- True to its role as a 'laboratory of ideas' addressing emerging social and ethical issues, UNESCO is committed to confronting the challenges posed by the unprecedented urban growth around our planet: from heritage protection and urban policy to migration, social inclusion and water management.
- While the fact that more than half of the human population now lives in urban areas has drawn considerable attention over the last few years, far less has been said about the corollary of this urban transition: the creation of more and larger cities.
- According to recent figures large and intermediate-size cities around the world now number around 1,000 and are projected to grow to 1,200 by the year 2025. These urban centres will play an increasingly important role in climate change, sustainable development, and poverty alleviation.

- At the global level, cities are connecting to form a dense and ever-growing network of relationships that represents an underlying economy of knowledge. It is now widely acknowledged that in order to maintain their economic and social wellbeing, cities need to move towards a carbon-neutral, migration-friendly and culturally rich urban environment to attract not only investments but an increasingly scarce resource: a young, highly educated and innovative workforce.
- It is therefore important that city governments continue to work towards achieving environmental balance by optimizing city systems for efficiency, in particular through the use of information and communications technologies, so-called 'smart cities'. However these efforts need to be complemented by social and cultural policies capable of creating an additional ethical and intellectual knowledge and skills base for technology-driven improvement if we hope to sustain the quality of the urban environment. Cities need to move from smart to sustainable with a focus on creativity and innovation.

CREATIVE CITIES

- UNESCO believes that placing creativity at the heart of urban renewal and planning can lead to more liveable, safer and productive cities offering better quality of life. UNESCO acts to support shared urban public spaces, including museums, where creativity fosters social engagement, inclusion and security. UNESCO supports the model of "creative cities" as laboratories for sustainable development, places where imagination, inspiration and innovation are openly and freely exchanged: platforms for dialogue and ideas, where a diversity of images, text, sounds are conceived, created, produced, exchanged and traded.
- Recognizing the role of cities in strengthening the direct link between culture and development at the local and global levels and in promoting creativity as a driver for socio-economic development, UNESCO established the Creative Cities Network in 2004 to promote sustainable development through international cooperation between cities of developed and developing countries. The Network, comprising 34 members cities recognized for their achievements in the fields of literature, film, music, crafts, design, media art or gastronomy, also serves a forum for exploring the challenges of rapid global urbanization and urban renewal and promoting cities as vanguards of creativity and innovation.

- Developing a more sustainable urban environment implies striving for a harmonious continuum between the past, present and future, where productivity increase and resilience is generated through a harnessing of the population's diversity and creativity, while at the same time preserving the ecological balance and social identity of urban communities, embedded in the natural, cultural and immaterial heritage of the city. Such a holistic approach is likely to improve citizens' welfare and quality of life. Cities must utilize their built and intangible heritage as drivers of cultural creativity, innovation and urban regeneration.

WORLD HERITAGE CITIES

- For this reason UNESCO has focused attention on urbanization, in particular to guide a more sustainable process of urban development by seeking an integration of environmental, social and cultural concerns into the planning, design and implementation phases.
- Cities and urban ensembles in general are today the most represented category of properties on the World Heritage List and concepts such as visual impact and integrity are considered by the World Heritage Committee while addressing the increasing number of conservation issues relating to contemporary urban and architectural interventions in or in the immediate vicinity of urban ensembles of heritage value.
- Historic cities can offer valuable insights into how this process was managed in the past and clues to how this may be achieved today and tomorrow.
- Through the World Heritage Cities Programme, we aim to assist countries in the challenges of protecting and managing their urban heritage. The programme is designed to develop a theoretical framework for urban heritage conservation, and to provide technical assistance to States Parties for the implementation of new approaches and schemes.
- Discussions on specific threats to World Heritage cities led to a new development: The Historic Urban Landscape approach;

HISTORIC URBAN LANDSCAPE APPROACH

- In recent years, UNESCO has engaged in a policy process to elaborate updated international guidelines for urban conservation as part of strategies for urban regeneration and development. This process culminated on 10 November 2011 with the

unanimous adoption by UNESCO Member States of the **Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape**, a non-binding international 'soft-law'.

- This normative instrument does not aim at replacing existing doctrines or conservation approaches; rather, it is an additional tool to integrate policies and practices of conservation of the built environment into the wider goals of urban development policies in respect of the inherited values and traditions of different cultural contexts.
- The Historic Urban Landscape approach is an attempt to refocus urban development into a more inclusive process and to increase the long-term sustainability of planning and design interventions by taking into account the existing built environment, intangible heritage, cultural diversity, socio-economic and environmental factors and local community values. We consider these aspects the “software of urban development”, while the productive support for infrastructure, with attention to mobility, water and energy supply, and waste treatment, would constitute the hardware. Both are critical to sustainable urban and national development.
- The Historic Urban Landscape approach invites decision and development policy makers, concerned institutions, experts, the civil society and cities actors in general to look at the city from a different perspective than the one usually adopted. This implies the adaptation of this new instrument to the countries' specific contexts, its dissemination widely across their national territories, facilitating its implementation through formulation and the adoption of supporting policies and monitoring its impact on the conservation and management of historic urban ensembles.
- This is why the World Heritage Committee decided, in 2012, to integrate the methodological approach of the Recommendation in the Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. An international expert meeting was held in Rio de Janeiro in September 2013 as a follow-up to this decision. The participants of this meeting acknowledged the critical role played by historic cities and their urban heritage as drivers for the improvement of local living standards, adaptation to changing environmental and socio-economic conditions and wider processes of sustainable development. To ensure continuity of identity, the management of change is essential.
- The meeting also acknowledged that the conservation of urban heritage is an integral part of contemporary urban development and modernization processes. To create synergies, reduce conflicts and foster opportunities, urban heritage conservation should be integrated into national and local planning frameworks. The participants underlined

that the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape was developed and adopted by UNESCO's General Conference to support these aims.

- It is our hope that the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape will become one of the tools for urban policy development. Its holistic approach would bring decision makers to a “territorial reading” of their cities to identify the physical and historical connectivity defining them and the different “zones of influence” surrounding them.
- The Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape is a policy guideline for national and local authorities; however in order for it to be effectively implemented, it must be adapted to the local context.
- In fall 2015, the General Conference of UNESCO will review the implementation of the Recommendation at global level. It is therefore essential that, by then, substantial progress be achieved in the utilization of this normative instrument. The support of the **European countries** would be highly valued, notably to develop reference examples of application of the Historic Urban Landscape approach and to support UNESCO's action worldwide to promote the Recommendation as key tool for sustainable urban development, in the framework of the post-2015 development agenda.

CLOSURE: UNESCO's far-reaching Culture work

- In connecting and implementing in an integrated manner UNESCO's three principal Culture Conventions: the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention and the 2005 Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, UNESCO draws upon a unique set of competences and networks to provide a global platform of exchange and support, to communicate and collaborate on interrelated issues of global urbanization and environmental sustainability, cultural diversity and the safeguarding of the identity of historic cities.
- In closing I would like to ensure you of UNESCO's commitment to the cooperation with many different actors on cities: which include other United Nations bodies, such as UN-HABITAT, the European Union and Council of Europe on historic city centres and on creative cities, all States Parties to the 1972 World Heritage Convention and other legal instruments on any urban issues; NGOs such as the World Heritage Cities Organization (OVPM), Europa Nostra, IFLA and others, and last but not least, local actors, ranging from local authorities to diverse communities living in the urban context.

- We are convinced that only through concerted joint cooperation with all stakeholders concerned can we hope to meet our common objective of promoting sustainable urban development for future generations.
- I thank you for your attention.