



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
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Towns and human habitats

Almost 50% of the world's population or some 3 billion people now live in towns and cities. Apart from being places of urban poverty, cities are also considered as engines of development, principal sources of social change and communication, centres of cultural expression, innovation and inter-cultural exchange.

In order to optimise the use of cities' resources, it is important that careful consideration is given to **urban management**. Good urban management is concerned with efficiency and effectiveness in the use of human, financial and material resources to meet clearly defined goals. Partnerships are crucial to bring together the skills and the experience of the public and private sectors with those of communities and NGOs. In this framework UNESCO promotes the concept of the sustainable and **inclusive city**.

UN Programme Focus on Cities

Major UN organisations addressing cities and urban issues include UN-HABITAT, UNDP, UNICEF, UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development) and UNESCO. The Second UN-Conference on Cities and Human Settlements, *HABITAT II, Istanbul 1996*, was the culmination of a series of UN conferences that were held in the last decade of the 20th century. It resulted in a forward-looking and proactive declaration. UNESCO's work on cities builds upon the spirit of this declaration within its specific mandate.

In June 2006, UNESCO is one of the main participating international organizations at UN-HABITAT's World Urban Forum III in Vancouver, Canada.

Balancing urban growth and the environment

As cities grow in population and sprawl in size, water is becoming an increasingly fragile resource. UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme (IHP) seeks to improve knowledge of hydrological processes and to develop approaches for the assessment and sound management of water resources. A particularly novel project deals with "Urban Water Conflicts" which seeks to characterize water-related conflicts in cities.

UNESCO also promotes projects as the prevention of earthquakes in 'City at Risk'. Activities related to



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natural disaster reduction in cities at risk promote a better understanding of natural hazards and enhance preparedness and public awareness through education, capacity-building and community participation.

Urban sprawl and pollution very often adversely affect the natural environment and biodiversity both inside and outside cities. To minimize their effects, UNESCO's Division of Ecological Sciences (ECO), within the framework of its Man and the Biosphere programme (MAB), upholds the integrated ecosystem approach to urban management, applying the biosphere reserve concept to the city and its hinterland. Cities working along the lines include Cape Town, Chicago, Rome, Seoul, Sao Paulo and Stockholm.

Towns and human habitats

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Facts and Figures

- Projections anticipate that by 2015, there are likely to be 360 cities with populations greater than a million, 150 of them in Asia and some 30 mega-cities, of which half are also likely to be in Asia.
- In Asia and Africa, which are currently less than 40 % urban, the population is likely to grow to 50% in the next two decades, creating an increase of more than 1 billion citizens in Asia and of some 440 million in Africa.
- In North and South America the population is already more than 75% urban. This is in line with Europe, which is already over 80% urban.
- Up to 2030, virtually all global population growth will take place in urban slums. Some 650 million urban dwellers live in life-threatening conditions of poverty and environmental degradation and this number is expected to more than double by 2025.

Source : UN-HABITAT Global Reports

As lead agency for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), UNESCO views cities as the chief centres of thought and action when it comes to education and learning about sustainable development. The UNESCO Chair 'Growing up in Cities' at Cornell University (NYC) opened a platform for children and city professionals in view of increasing the empowerment of children in reshaping their urban existence and to improve city mayors' awareness on children's participation to urban management in e.g. Bangalore, Johannesburg, Trondheim, etc.).

The city as the centre of democracy

The city is an essential link between individual and state, between citizenship and democracy. UNESCO' Social and human sciences programmes promote projects like the "International Coalition of Cities Against Racism", "Working together with Migrants" and research projects about cities and social transformations, urban policies and democracy, renewal of historical cities or the training of city professionals. In March 2005, UN-HABITAT and UNESCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen their cooperation.

The Sector is the focal point for the cooperation between UN-HABITAT and UNESCO, and develops a specific cooperation with UN-HABITAT on "Urban Policies and the Right to the City" or "Social Sustainability of Historical Districts". The Sector is also coordinating UNESCO's participation to the bi-annual UN-HABITAT World Urban Forum.

UNESCO accords high priority to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized groups through actions

that enable local communities to voice their needs and empower their participation in decision making. Wide ranging support to media and communication development projects is provided through the International Programme of the Development of Communication (IPDC).

Making the city a living and liveable cultural heritage and a laboratory for intercultural dialogue

Throughout history, cities have been cradles of civilisation and living laboratories for intercultural dialogue. Initiatives such as the 'Creative Cities', 'Cities for Peace database' or 'Culture in the Neighbourhoods' illustrate UNESCO's attempt to promote pluralistic policies supportive of the rich diversity of cultural identities and expressions at the local level.

UNESCO also supports urban tourism that respects the cultural identity and ecology of cities while creating jobs and improved economic development, e.g. in the framework of "*La route des Ksour*" in the Algerian Sahara.

In the framework of UNESCO's World Heritage Convention, the World Heritage Cities Programme was established and the formation of several cities networks encouraged, such as the creation of the Organisation of World Heritage Cities aiming at enhancing the exchange of experience on the international level. The Vienna Memorandum on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture as well as the Declaration on the Conservation of Historic Urban Landscapes have been drawn up recently and since then serve as guiding tools for integrated management and planning of historic urban areas.

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To Find Out More

UNESCO Urban Development:
www.unesco.org/shs/urban

World Heritage Cities:
www.ovpm.org

UN-HABITAT :
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