



UN HABITAT
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Rethinking the city: how mayors respond to the needs of a post-COVID city



Webinar co-hosted by
UN-Habitat and the Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM)

12 and 19 November 2020

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1. Introduction

COVID-19 has hit our cities at different speeds. Over the past months, mayors and city leaders have been faced with unprecedented challenges. We have had to adjust and reframe our knowledge and experience in response to the worldwide pandemic. If anything, this pandemic has been a wakeup call, showing us that cities are at the front lines of the COVID-19 response and that the virus has the power to reconfigure urban spaces and human interactions. Moreover, COVID has been an advertisement for the fundamental problems that face our cities. It has sharpened the focus of citizens and mayors while, at the same time, deepening inequalities.

It is in this light that the Global Parliament of Mayors (GPM) has organised a series of webinars. The first session, held in May 2020 and co-hosted by UN-Habitat, offered a forum to build on the discussion of the impact of COVID-19 on urban security and connect this to the pre-COVID process of implementing the United Nations System-wide Guidelines on Safer Cities and Human Settlement. In June 2020, this was followed by a webinar on housing, co-hosted with the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing. This session called on city leadership to collaborate locally, regionally, and nationally in order to take decisive action to ensure cities deliver on their responsibility to provide housing for the poor and the most vulnerable.

Building on these webinars, the GPM and UN-Habitat have organised four thematic sessions under the umbrella of “Rethinking the city – how mayors respond to the needs of a post-COVID city”. The 2-day webinar, hosted on 12 and 19 November, made room to debate on public health, urban sustainability, culture and education, and governance and democracy.

1. Programme

Each of the sessions commences with framing presentations from esteemed experts aimed to provoke thought, discussion, and debate. This is followed by mayoral responses and sharing of insights on the various topics. During the sessions, mayors, city leaders, and well-respected experts¹ debate and share, first hand, how they have reframed their knowledge and experience in light of the shifts caused by COVID-19. We also look ahead, discussing how we can improve our post-COVID city, the urban agenda, and create a vision for resilient cities.

Dr. Shipra Narang Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch at UN-Habitat moderated and led each of the sessions.

¹ See Annex for full list of registered mayors and participating experts

1.1. Public Health

The rapid spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus has prompted a collective, global response to the resulting COVID-19 pandemic. In 2018, the GPM took up the cause of pandemic preparedness and prioritised it as a key component of urban health planning and committed to developing an intra-city mechanism to share information and experiences during an emergency response.

In the midst of the pandemic, mayors from the GPM share their experiences in responding to the public health crisis and discuss their vision for an improved post-COVID city and urban agenda. By rethinking the city, how will priorities change and how long will public health remain prioritised post-pandemic?

Experts

1. Matthew Boyce, Research Fellow representing Professor Rebecca Katz of the Center for Global Health Science and Security at Georgetown University Medical Center
2. Dr. Etienne Krug, Director of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Department for Social Determinants of Health

Mayoral panel

1. Mayor Peter Kurz of Mannheim, Germany, GPM Chair
2. Mayor Óscar Escobar of Palmira, Colombia
3. Mayor Bryan Barnett of Rochester Hills, USA, GPM member

Mayors in open debate

1. Lord Mayor Graig Simmons of Oxford, UK
2. Mayor Landing B. Sanneh of Soma Town, the Gambia, GPM member, President of the GALGA, Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities
3. Deputy Mayor Jakub Mazur of Wroclaw, Poland, GPM member

1.1.1. Framing presentations

Matthew Boyce of the Georgetown Center for Global Health Science and Security

Mayors hold a wide range of responsibilities in outbreak response activities, all while witnessing increases in population mobility, globalisation, and increases in emerging and re-emerging infectious outbreaks. The Center for Global Health Science and Security at Georgetown University has developed a tool called the Rapid Urban Health Security Assessment (RUHSA) Tool². Drawing from assessments and guidance from organisations such as the WHO and various United Nations Offices, the tool is a resource designed for local government leaders and policymakers to support public policy, decision-making, and organisations as they prioritise, build, and implement capacities to improve local-level preparedness and health security.

While COVID-19 has certainly not left us yet, we are presented with an opportunity to focus on the longer-term visions and informing capacity development initiatives for the future. Beyond the pandemic, it will be crucial for mayors to have a vision for how to improve public health and pandemic preparedness. Aided by resources such as the RUHSA Tool, mayors are now able to reflect on their experiences and identify best practices on an individual and collective level through the GPM. Beyond that, there is a compelling opportunity to identify pragmatic ways to make meaningful change, build back better, and leave a legacy of health.

² [Urban Pandemic Preparedness | Center for Global Health Science and Security | Georgetown University](#)

Dr. Etienne Krug of the World Health Organisation

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the strength and fragility of our urban environment. The complexity of cities in terms of size, mix of population, high density, discrepancies between rich and poor, and interconnectedness has reminded us of the central role cities play in today's world. As we talk about preparedness it is important to discuss what we now know through examples from what cities are doing around the world. Through learning from each other, we can make our urban environment stronger (see WHO's checklist for practical actions³).

The WHO and UN-Habitat have recently released a new joint guidance on health and urban and territorial planning⁴. While this is broader than the pandemic itself, it brings the social determinants of health to light. By focusing on the most vulnerable such as those living, working and commuting in poverty, we can better understand which areas need increased support. The city of Kampala, Uganda, for example, has implemented a vulnerability index, turning data into action against COVID-19 inequalities. By taking a data-based and equity-oriented approach to the COVID-19 response, city authorities have been assessing the susceptibility of local communities to the impact of the virus and using the data to guide decision-making.

In the face of this pandemic we have established a heightened awareness of the importance of how we plan our cities. Cities have proven to be well situated to work together and learn from each other throughout the pandemic and must continue to do so as we think about building back better. We have been presented with an opportunity to re-frame the issue from one of a negative discourse about density, for example, and seeing the pandemic as an opportunity to delve further into well-planned, well-managed urbanisation, giving room for response, recovery, and long-term sustainability. By using their size, proximity, and particularly the single leadership from the mayor to their advantage, cities can create an environment where sectors such as health care, education, law enforcement, and business work together to plan our future⁵.

1.1.2. Mayoral panel

Mayor Peter Kurz of Mannheim, Germany

Mayor Kurz speaks to strengthening existing multi-lateral systems by including cities and local government in the discussion and decision-making process. It is evident that mayors are at the forefront of developing, applying, and rethinking appropriate measures to manage this crisis on a daily basis. With that in mind, Mayor Kurz observes:

- A governance issue: Germany initially witnessed a central orientation and discussion mixed with decentralised, agile, and modified implementation. This proved to be quite successful. However, over time, the national government reverted back to a top-down approach characterised by strict centralised guidelines. This approach was less successful than the mixed top-down and bottom-up approach and left cities with a decreased mandate.
- Underequipped public health services: as all cities are grappling with the challenges COVID-19 has presented us, it has become especially apparent that cities are still investing too much time in processing and using the data that is being collected. Digitalisation is key to be able to communicate precisely and clearly in such a complex situation. Communication is on the top

³ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-ActionsforPreparedness-Checklist-2020.1>

⁴ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240003170>

⁵ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/strengthening-preparedness-for-covid-19-in-cities-and-urban-settings>

of the agenda and can only be carried out effectively if and when supported by the necessary digital processes.

- Trust: local mayors play a deciding role. Policies and measures will only be successful when mayors are seen as legitimate and credible leaders. A centralised, top-down approach will be counterproductive to the legitimacy and trust in public administration and policies.

Concluding, Mayor Kurz emphasises the need for a holistic approach wherein cities are recognised as a decisive level of government and not just a stakeholder. The local ground, characterised by trust, communication, and using data, will allow us to create sufficient and sustainable impact.

Mayor Óscar Escobar of Palmira, Colombia

Focusing on economic reactivation, the city of Palmira, finds itself in a situation where over 70% of households have an income stemming from the informal economy. A lockdown would be detrimental to the city, which has led to an approach characterised by a) focus on controlling the amount of cases and b) (re)building the economy through a set of pillars:

- Collection and organisation of data and information: bringing business into the formal economy by ensuring they register, thereby also creating more trust in the local government.
- Inter-sector articulation and participatory management: creating participatory democracy and incorporating the community is dispersing the measures.
- Support businesses and entrepreneurships in adapting and strengthening: through offering courses and local assistance.
- Innovation: using public space for small businesses.
- Access to credit and capital: providing funds for businesses to be able to open.
- Investment attraction and promotion of job creation: to ensure long-term growth and stability for the city and its citizens.
- Incentives and tax benefits.

Mayor Escobar states: “local government is where the rubber meet the road”, emphasising that mayors at the local level are the ones that have to make things happen. The city of Palmira, through its economic reactivation approach, is building trust by ensuring that data is organised, sorted, processed, and shared.

Mayor Bryan Barnett of Rochester Hills, USA

The City of Rochester Hills took on a learning approach, aiming to improve the response in preparation for the second wave and potential other pandemics by conducting “after action” reports. These reports focus on reviewing emergency responses and allowed the city to reflect and implement changes in preparation for the second wave. The biggest lessons:

- Cities and states were competing against each other in terms of personal protective equipment such as masks. This did not only drive up costs, but it also made delivery times longer. Collaboration and coordination with local cities, fellow mayoral colleagues, and engaging the business community is crucial.
- Communication is key: over communicating is better than a perceived lack of communication. By making public health information, data, and dashboards available you can harness trust.
- Lesson learned: as we head toward a vaccine, we can use the knowledge we have now to better approach this next hurdle. By working together with businesses and establishing partnerships we can be better prepared to deliver a vaccine to our citizens.

As mayors and those closest to the action, Mayor Barnett calls on his colleagues to lead with strategy, integrity, and empathy as we continue to drive through finding solutions in this pandemic and preparing for the future.

1.1.3. Open debate

Lord Mayor Graig Simmons of Oxford, UK

Faced with a 2nd national lockdown and a heavily fragmented, centralised approach to the pandemic, Lord Mayor Simmons outlines crucial lessons learned in Oxford:

- Testing and tracing: a mobile app was introduced recently, with levels of contact tracing being around 60%. Oxford is supporting national test and trace with local efforts by using volunteers.
- Oxford has the additional challenge of having a significant student body. Students are supplied with additional information on how to behave in these precarious times.
- Supporting vulnerable people in their homes through a register, information hubs, and volunteers to aid those unable to leave their home.
- Capitalising on public communications.

Mayor Landing B. Sanneh of Soma Town, the Gambia

Mayor Sanneh highlights the early steps Soma Town took to be prepared for the pandemic. A COVID taskforce was established when there was not yet a registered case in the town. Early action included:

- Cross-border sensitisation: engaging on the border of the city to inform people about COVID.
- Partnering with civil society organisations in border communities to establish a support base.
- Engaging the local community to inform citizens of measures to be taken.
- Where crucial activities such as the market were unavoidable, the local government provided PPE's and hand wash stations.

Soma Town has demonstrated that they were able to create understanding and a support base through early thinking, rapid action, and putting people at the centre of their approach.

Deputy Mayor Mazur of Wroclaw, Poland

With a national healthcare system in Poland, the mayor's role in this pandemic is to create and implement paths that complement the national approach. Focusing on avoiding exclusion of economic and social groups, Wroclaw has targeted:

- Working across sectors.
- Harbouring trust through communication: through transparent communication and information, the city appealed to citizens' responsibility to follow the behavioural aspect to the guidelines in order to guarantee the safety of the city.
- Collectivity: focusing on the involvement of people through using volunteers and offering support to the vulnerable through social centres.
- Accelerating the implementation and use of technological solutions: fast tracking and implementing processes connected to testing and dispersion of information and data.

Deputy Mayor Mazur underscores the importance of the citizen in Wroclaw's COVID response. Through focusing on trust, collectivity and communication, the city has put mechanisms in place that augment the national approach.

1.1.4. Reflection

COVID is a global disaster but also a huge opportunity to advocate a trans-local political agenda. What do you think would be the smartest strategic choice to connect on in the coming months?

Mayoral responses

Mayor Kurz advocates for seeing the bigger picture and connecting all the holistic approaches. In speaking about health, we are not just limited to the health care system itself. Instead, we must focus on transportation, resilience, sustainability, the economy, climate change, and post-COVID recovery. The interconnectedness of these matters is evident. Through utilising the networks and institutions we have at our fingertips we can raise these governance issues. We must choose our actions wisely and select those that bring us multiple co-benefits. It is the time for cities, the networks, and institutions to connect and collaborate across thematic areas.

Mayor Escobar brings forward that the pandemic has highlighted inequalities, making the digital divide more apparent. The pandemic is an opportunity to offer a forum to talk about the internet as a human right, allowing our kids, and thereby our future, to educate themselves in a time where going to school may not always be possible.

Expert responses

Dr. Krug concludes that this discussion demonstrates the richness of responses at the city-level. In a time where we are still waiting for the scientific data to support our approaches, it is crucial to take time to learn, adapt, and implement from each other.

Mr. Boyce reflects on how clear it is that mayors have a role in pandemic preparedness and response. In order to be able to act, you need capacity and capability to lead. The innovative strategies and solutions discussed show that these mayors have taken on their role and demonstrated their leadership capabilities throughout this global crises.

1.1.5. Conclusion

As cities are starting to recover from the initial wave of COVID-19 and are preparing for a potential second wave it is important that key actors continue to collaborate in looking forward. Health emergencies have been occurring in cyclical processes, leaving it up to our cities to respond and to think about how to build resilience in cities for future crises. The pandemic has reminded us that public health is a product of the way human settlements are built, managed, planned, and governed. UN-Habitat's work on enhancing access to basic services, public space, urban planning, advancing human rights, and social inclusion all contribute to the agenda of public health. Mayors have demonstrated the ability to adapt, learn from each other, and have shown great leadership. Now is the time for local leaders to not only share their practices, but take action and be given a platform in which this is possible.

1.2. Urban Sustainability

The COVID-19 pandemic is generating far-reaching changes in how cities operate. Cities are re-imagining city living, urged on by citizens who do not want a return to the “old normal”. In a period of falling revenues and tax shortfalls, city leaders worldwide are debating how best to recover and rebuild sustainably, greener, more inclusive, and resilient than before.

Experts

1. David Miller, Director International Diplomacy, C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and Former Mayor of Toronto
2. Dr. Robert Muggah, CEO Igarapé Institute Brazil and Co-Chair GPM Advisory Committee

Mayoral panel

1. Mayor Manuel de Araujo of Quelimane, Mozambique
2. Mayor Mohamed Sadiki of Rabat, Morocco, GPM member
3. Mayor Leoluca Orlando of Palermo, Italy, GPM Executive Committee member and host of the GPM Summit 2021

Mayors in open debate

1. Deputy Mayor Craig Cheney of Bristol, UK, GPM member
2. Eveline Jonkhoff, Advisor Sustainability and Circular Economy representing Deputy Mayor Marieke van Doorninck of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, GPM member
3. Mayor Baikuntha Nath Neupane of Vyas, Nepal, GPM Executive Committee member
4. Mayor Emil Boc of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

1.2.1. Framing presentations

David Miller of C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group

In speaking of a green and just recovery, the focus should be on three themes: jobs and inclusive economy, resilience and equity, and health and well-being. By supporting essential workers, delivering public services such as mass transit that reaches everyone, building with nature, and giving streets back to people, cities can ensure sustainability and equity are at the heart of the economic recovery of COVID-19. The C40 Global Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Taskforce⁶, initiated in March 2020 by Mayor Giuseppe Sala of Milan, Italy, has prioritised these issues in order to contain and better prepare for future pandemics, address systemic injustices, and keep global heating down.

Demonstrating bold and ambitious leadership, mayors have stepped up in moments of crisis to work internationally and collaboratively. In leading this recovery mayors need partners in national governments and international bodies to ensure programmes and philosophies are adequately and properly implemented. Now is time for these bodies to come together and act to create a future defined by equity, good jobs, clean air, and a greener future for our cities.

Dr. Robert Muggah of Igarapé Institute, Co-Chair GPM Advisory Committee (in writing)

As a profoundly urban crisis, COVID-19 is testing every city system to their breaking point. In the short term, it is disrupting basic services- from health and education to public transport and water and sanitation. In the longer term, it is exacerbating existing challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and inequality. The spread of the virus and government lockdowns are deepening social and economic fissures that strafe cities, with news reporting being predominantly negative. However, COVID does

⁶ <https://www.c40.org/other/covid-task-force>

not spell the end of cities. Contagious diseases have savaged cities, but they have also historically led to improvements in urban living. Here lies a window of opportunity.

City leaders looking forward understand that they need to accelerate the transition to sustainability, focusing on innovative financing. They know that the most liveable cities of the future will be carbon neutral, walkable, and cyclable. Investments in green jobs, a cleaner energy matrix, more efficient and multi-purpose buildings, and parks not only reduces pollution, but they can also diminish congestion, increase public safety, and reduce ill health, including vulnerability to COVID-19. The pragmatic and data-driven responses of city leaders, the expressions of solidarity and support within hard-hit communities, and the ingenuity of its residents remind us that cities are centres of creativity, innovation, and dynamism. This opportunity for city leaders to take advantage of the shift in public mood and genuinely build back better is small and must be utilised.

1.2.2. Mayoral panel

Mayor Manuel de Araujo of Quelimane, Mozambique

As a port city with ambitions to lead in sustainable transport, the city of Quelimane has concentrated their transportation around bicycles. Focusing on urban transport sustainability the city has:

- Engaged with national authorities to signal the importance of biking in Quelimane. This led to a local easing of national measures.
- Implement local safety measures such as wearing masks and gloves to protect citizens.
- Mayor de Araujo himself took the lead and stepped towards his people to explain the importance of the local measures, giving the municipality leverage and creating understanding and awareness.
- Launched a campaign across the media, radio, and with police to announce the measures.

Mayor Mohamed Sadiki of Rabat, Morocco

Cities, as places of social interaction built for its citizens, are limitless and becoming increasingly spread out. This has caused challenges for health, education, and transportation. The way we manage these elements will allow us to overcome the vulnerabilities of being a city. Mayor Sadiki focuses on:

- Urban planning as the linking pin to fighting poverty and epidemics. Taking into account development, resilience, crisis planning, climate change, and environmental and economic challenges when planning a city.
- Digitalisation as a means to pull cities out of the crisis and boost them into a more resilient and sustainable future by using e-services and e-commerce.

Mayor Sadiki sees this crisis as an opportunity to adapt, respond, and transform quickly, all while presenting a united front together with mayoral colleagues by sharing knowledge.

Mayor Leoluca Orlando of Palermo, Italy

This period characterised by interdependence and innovation has led to great digitalisation. In Palermo, specifically, it has been important to:

- Promote cooperation among the public and private sector, among cities and mayors, and among national governments and international institutions. Solutions can only be introduced and implemented sustainably by putting our heads together.
- Ensure that the citizens and their rights are at the core of urban sustainability solutions.

1.2.3. Open debate

Deputy Mayor Craig Cheney of Bristol, UK

Focusing on a one city approach, the City of Bristol has sought out collaboration with the private sector, faith groups, volunteers, the health sector, etc. to develop their Bristol One City Plan⁷ for 2050. Using the pandemic as a pause in the status quo, Bristol is trying to understand how to rebuild sustainably without exacerbating existing inequalities. The cornerstones of this plan are:

- People and labour markets: understanding necessary skills, retraining citizens, and addressing the digital divide.
- Business and investment: reopening businesses safely.
- Bristol's places: reimagining the city of the future and the needs of the citizens.

Concluding, COVID-19 has, once again, made apparent that spatial inequality exists everywhere and must be addressed fundamentally to be able to move forward in a sustainable manner.

Eveline Jonkhoff representing Deputy Mayor Marieke van Doorninck of Amsterdam, the Netherlands

In addressing urban sustainability, the City of Amsterdam has applied the 'doughnut model'⁸. This is a holistic approach that embraces social and ecological perspectives while plotting them on local aspirations- to be thriving people in a thriving place- and a global responsibility to live in ways that respect the planetary boundaries. The approach is premised on a green and just recovery:

- An integrated approach, using the SDGs and linking into the experiences of cities around the world to map the interconnectedness of sustainable growth.
- Examining the way we currently produce and consume.
- Understanding the importance of proximity and equity with sustainability.

Mayor Baikuntha Nath Neupane of Vyas, Nepal

Mayor Neupane observes that the expectations from the local government do not change while revenues are sharply decreasing. The pandemic has made it even more difficult to meet the needs of the citizens while keeping sustainability in mind.

Mayor Emil Boc of Cluj-Napoca, Romania

As nobody is safe from the pandemic, Mayor Emil Boc shares the following insights:

- We need to learn from this crisis and prepare for the future by working together locally, nationally, and internationally.
- Mayors need to think in a green, digital, and resilient manner. This is an opportunity for new jobs, innovation, health and a greener city. In that light, Cluj-Napoca has aimed to:
 - Digitalise all municipal-related procedures such as paying taxes.
 - Have zero-emission/electrical public transport by 2028.
 - Become a climate neutral city by 2050.

⁷ <https://news.bristol.gov.uk/news/strategy-to-support-bristols-economy-launched#:~:text=As%20such%2C%20many%20organisations%20across,social%20wellbeing%20of%20every%20community>

⁸ <https://www.amsterdam.nl/en/policy/sustainability/circular-economy/>

1.2.4. Reflection

Given revenue shortfalls and the matter of recovery and building back, how do we address the foundational issue of sustainable urbanisation? How do we build back greener, more inclusive, and more resilient cities? How do we introduce measures with multiple co-benefits?

Expert responses

Dr. Robert Muggah sees that, amidst all of the challenges of COVID-19, we have been presented with a tremendous opportunity of space to think differently, re-imagine public spaces in new and compelling ways, and draw ideas from each other. However, this window will not last long. Cities have proven to respond to crises such as the plague, malaria, and tuberculosis in exciting ways. The movement of cities and mayors towards thinking about greener, healthier, and digital cities is exemplified by approaches such as sharing economies, doughnut economies, 15-minute cities, and regenerative cities. This is an opportunity for cities to experiment and act as a lab to be at the forefront of innovation towards a greater future.

David Miller underscores that there is clear evidence of cities taking action and responding to the underlying issues of social injustice, the environment, and the investments needed to secure a green and healthy future. As mayors and international institutions, we are much more powerful as collaborative actors when we speak from a place of bold, decisive and innovative action. Now the challenge lies in triggering national governments and institutions to invest in our cities and a greener future for our world.

1.2.5. Conclusion

In tackling urban sustainability, mayors are met with the challenge of reimagining their cities while facing limited financial resources. As cities rebuild and are working towards a green and just recovery, it is evident that they aim to ensure that sustainability and equity are at the heart of the post-COVID city. Advocacy is fundamental and only effective when grounded in lessons and experience. The more we share, document, and introduce measures with multiple co-benefits, the stronger we stand.

1.3. Culture and Education

The pandemic has focused us all on what really matters and the need to rethink, reassess, and re-evaluate. Culture and education are often forgotten in this transformation. Transformations are inherently cultural and educational as they are about values, mindset, attitudes, hearts, skills, and our education systems. How can cities incorporate these two elements as they are rebuilding?

Experts

1. Charles Landry, International advisor on the future of cities and the creative city, GPM Advisory Committee member
2. Professor Pier Luigi Sacco of Cultural Economics, University of Milan; Senior researcher, metaLAB at Harvard and visiting scholar at Harvard University
3. Dr. Ege Yildirim, International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Focal Point for the SDG's, Istanbul, Turkey

Mayoral panel

1. Mayor Ricardo Rio of Braga, Portugal, GPM Executive Committee member
2. Mayor Leoluca Orlando of Palermo, Italy, GPM Executive Committee member and host of the GPM Summit 2021
3. Mayor Tunç Soyer of Izmir, Turkey

Mayors in open debate

1. Mayor Pedro Palacios of Cuenca, Ecuador
2. Mayor Xosé Antonio Sánchez Bugallo of Santiago de Compostela, Spain
3. Mayor Grace Mary Mugasa of Hoima, Uganda, GPM Executive Committee member
4. Former Mayor Ed Johnson of Asbury Park, USA, GPM honorary member
5. Mayor Landing B. Sanneh of Soma Town, the Gambia, GPM member, President of the GALGA, Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities
6. Deputy Mayor Annekatrin Klepsch of Dresden, Germany

1.3.1. Framing presentations

Charles Landry, International Advisor on the Creative City, GPM Advisory Committee member

Culture is who we are. Creativity is who and what we can become. These two cross-cutting elements create the mindset of a city. Beyond its instrumental value such as regeneration and job creation, the impact of culture is magnified when participation occurs. This is where dramatic effects and impressions are felt, allowing the activities to have an impact on well-being, loneliness, dealing with mental distress, etc. Through the provocative nature of the arts, we are forced to think about what really matters. Where culture is often an afterthought, Charles highlights that culture is not a luxury or the 4th pillar of sustainability. Rather, thinking, planning, and acting culturally is a superior form of thinking. We are left with a thought-provoking question: it is not 'what is the value of culture', but rather 'what is the cost of not valuing culture?'

Professor Pier Luigi Sacco of the University of Milan and Researcher at Harvard University

COVID-19 has caused a disruption of social relationships, creating great distress. The question remains: how do we reconstruct our social fabric and public space where social interaction can happen? In rebuilding common belonging, the role of culture is to help us take on the social challenges

that lie ahead in a completely different way⁹. Culture is more than a community builder. It is a playful way to explore meaning and cross-fertilised with education that prompts intrinsic motivation, there is great potential for social innovation. By combining these dimensions innovatively, mayors can promote the joint development of sectors, reconfigure the geography of cities through the renewal of the use of cultural and educational spaces, and combat the mental health legacy. This can solely be achieved by strategically thinking ahead in terms of investment.

1.3.2. Mayoral panel

Mayor Ricardo Rio of Braga, Portugal

As integral pillars of the development plan of his city, Mayor Braga explains:

- Education is used as a pillar for attracting and building talent in the city. Being largely connected with the economic development and future of the city, investments are crucial.
- Culture as a proxy for the quality of life in the city. A cultured city is one with diversity and informed, creative, and open people.
- Finding a balance between social connections, physical presence, and community experience by using digitalisation as a way to enhance access even if we are not allowing people to physically meet each other.
 - Using technology as a means to bring culture to the entire population.
- The major challenge is tackling inequality in terms of access.

Mayor Leoluca Orlando of Palermo, Italy

The pandemic has made the interconnectedness of various sectors very clear by putting care, prevention, and education at its centre. Palermo focusses on:

- Bringing education and culture to its people as part of the identity of the citizens.
- Creating a sense of community, even when not being able to go outside.
- Making the invisible visible through digitalisation.

Mayor Tunç Soyer of Izmir, Turkey

As a city where eastern and western cultures mingle and live together in harmony, Izmir is an open city that focuses on culture and education as the building block of its society. Having the capacity to enable the establishment of strong ties between people, beyond politics and economics, culture is used as part of the strategic growth plan of the city.

- Creating a support fund of culture and arts to allow those who earn their living through arts and culture to continue to do so during the pandemic.
- A wide culture and arts agenda: ensuring all corners of the cities and all citizens can live a life intertwined with culture and arts.
- Host various events, such as the UCLG Culture Summit and International Mayors Summit on Living Together to bring awareness on an international level and share knowledge.

⁹ <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/culture-shock-covid-19-and-the-cultural-and-creative-sectors-08da9e0e/>

1.3.3. Open debate

Mayor Pedro Palacios of Cuenca, Ecuador

Mayor Palacios focusses on the cultural rights of the citizens of Cuenca. The city has framed their regional plan and vision with cultural rights at the heart of it, focusing on:

- Outlining 23 objectives and 100+ city-wide activities for citizens to partake in.
- Working regionally and using networking to spread the cultural agenda beyond city limits.
- Closing gaps so culture can be enjoyed by everyone.

Mayor Xosé Antonio Sánchez Bugallo of Santiago de Compostela, Spain

In a world where we are constantly having to adapt, culture is a fundamental value so we do not lose ourselves. Education is the tool to make that happen. Mayor Sánchez Bugallo reflects:

- The crisis is an extraordinary impulse for societal change, showing us we cannot go back to the way things were pre-COVID. The crisis will allow us to come out of it a different society.
- The economic value of culture: it has a capacity to create jobs, professional alternatives, and provides growth potential for all.
- Education is a form of capital. Education can be applied as a tool to prepare for change, make change happen, and face the future. An educated society is a prepared society.

Mayor Grace Mary Mugasa of Hoima, Uganda

In the context of Hoima, there is a serious crisis of education. With limited accessibility young students have lost almost a year of their education. Therefore, the city must:

- Find ways of bridging those gaps for a whole generation of learners.
- Using the common goal of culture and education to improve and/or modify behaviour and make the life of individuals better and more fulfilled.

Former Mayor Ed Johnson of Asbury Park, USA

COVID-19 has helped us see the gaps in relationships between cities, resources and opportunities to be taken advantage of. Focusing on education, former Mayor Ed Johnson reflects:

- Education builds healthy, strong lives while also solidifying the economic strength of the city.
- The digital divide also exists in developed countries. We lifted our education to a digital platform only to find that a majority of our students do not have access to the digital means necessary to be able to follow these classes.
- The UNESCO reports that 1.5 billion students have been displaced from universities because of COVID-19¹⁰. Problems such as the digital divide, food and security, child care availability, health and safety concerns, employment security, and mental health have all been exacerbated by the pandemic. It shows that this is not only a health crisis, but also an educational crisis.

Concluding, Mr. Johnson reminds us that institutions of higher education have the resources, means, opportunities, and capabilities to assist cities in combatting the crisis and repairing existing gaps.

¹⁰ <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/globalcoalition>

Mayor Landing B. Sanneh of Soma Town, the Gambia

While developed countries were able to make use of digitalisation, Soma Town still faces limited technological opportunities. COVID-19 has:

- Taken away opportunities to learn in the traditional way. Faced with low availability of equipment, materials, and connectivity there are few opportunities to learn digitally from home.
- Forced the ministry to think of plans and strategies on how digitalisation can be achieved.

1.3.4. Reflection

Expert responses

Dr. Ege Yildirim observes that mayors stand close the lives and realities of their citizens. Being a soft issue, culture is not as visible on the national level, providing a real opportunity for local governments. Despite the diverse manifestations of culture and education, it is clear that culture matters for quality of life in terms of memory, meaning, knowledge, and experience. As connectors of people and issues, culture and education have the capacity to act as a repository of solutions to deal with crises such as COVID-19. Furthermore, cultural assets can be used to capitalise on own strengths and address weaknesses within cities. Education is a way to harness this potential and vice versa. It is important to mobilise ourselves in supporting cultural sectors and actors through, for example, support funds.

Concluding, Dr. Yildirim recommends mayors make use of resources and peer learning. This includes the Culture 2030 goal¹¹ campaign to ensure culture fulfils its potential, PAX¹² on participatory arts and culture indicators for safer cities, and the Climate Heritage Network¹³.

1.3.5. Conclusion

The discussion has shown us that culture and education are transversal; they can be a brace, glue, connector or an enabler. It is evident that culture and education are engrained in the DNA of citizens and cannot be forgotten in thinking about rebuilding and regrowth. As mayors and cities are transforming and moving towards their post-COVID city, there lies great potential in bringing culture and education closer to the citizens to foster social innovation and growth.

¹¹ <http://culture2030goal.net/>

¹² Working group: Rainer Kern, Mannheim UNESCO Creative City for Music; Dr. Doris Sommer, Harvard University; Professor Pier Luigi Sacco IULM University of Milan; Dr. Ege Yildirim, ICMOS; Diana Raiselis, Vibelab; Dr. Barbara Holtmann, Fixed Africa

¹³ <http://climateheritage.org/>

1.4. Governance and Democracy

Cities have long been at the front lines of global challenges—addressing everything from poverty to climate change—but they have been left out of the decision-making process at both the national and international levels. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the weakness of this system and demonstrated the importance of the active participation of cities and local governments in shaping global policy. How can mayors around the world help the United Nations move forward with the UN75 initiative to make real change? How can the UN better meet its goals by including mayors from the beginning in the decision-making process?

Experts

1. Professor Eric Corijn, Free University of Brussels, GPM Advisory Committee member
2. Gianluca Crispi, Legal Specialist Policy and Legislation Governance Section, UN-Habitat
3. Juma Assiago, Specialist Safer Cities, HR&SIU/Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat

Mayoral panel

1. Mayor Peter Kurz of Mannheim, Germany, GPM Chair
2. Mayor Rohey Malick Lowe of Banjul, the Gambia, GPM Executive Committee member, President of African Capital Cities Sustainability Forum (ACCSF)

Mayors in open debate

1. Eric Apelgren, Head of International Relations, representing Mayor Mxolisi Kaunda of eThekweni/Durban, South Africa, GPM member, Chair of the African Forum on Urban Safety (AFUS)
2. Mayor David Balaba of Iganga, Uganda
3. Mayor Landing B. Sanneh of Soma Town, the Gambia, GPM member, President of the GALGA, Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities
4. Deputy Mayor Jakub Mazur of Wroclaw Poland, GPM member
4. Mayor Leoluca Orlando of Palermo, Italy, GPM Executive Committee member and host of the GPM Summit 2021

Experts in roundtable

1. Aziza Akhmouch, OECD Head of Division Cities, Urban Policies and Sustainable Development Centre for Entrepreneurship
2. Kobie Brand, Deputy Secretary General ICLEI, Executive Director ICLEI Africa
3. Wolfgang Teubner, Regional Director for ICLEI Europe
4. Ian Klaus, Senior Fellow Chicago Council on Global Affairs
5. Dr. Rachel Locke, Director, Impact: Peace, University of San Diego and co-facilitator of Peace in Our Cities Initiative
6. Thomas George, Senior Advisor and Chief of Urban UNICEF

1.4.1. Framing presentations

Professor Eric Corijn of the Free University of Brussels, GPM Advisory Committee member

There was a great absence of global governance and institutions leading national authorities in making policies on their territory in the response to the pandemic. Cities themselves do not have the tools and means to tackle such a global pandemic alone. We are also witnessing a slowdown in globalisation and a shift in focus on the local urban ecosystem. Equality and inclusion are at the top of the program

as the urban agenda is moving towards an emphasis on local resources, circularity, resilience, and new forms of cities. This is captured by empowering cities and their citizens.

Cities need more competencies and can be empowered by changing the power relations on three levels: global, continental, and national. The first can be achieved by giving cities and mayors a say in multi-level governance at the UN, for example. Where city networks exist, there is a lack of an institutions to bring this together at the continental level. Nationally speaking, cities need to be seen as more than just local authorities. Furthermore, empowering cities goes beyond mayors. It means empowering citizens by moving towards a participatory democracy where there is transparency and room for opening up policies to citizens. People are mobilised through creating a form of participation and coproduction from the neighbourhood to district to city level. Supplemented by development coalitions that go beyond the traditional public-private partnerships and extend toward the own hinterland, we can move towards a new way of thinking about governance and democracy.

Gianluca Crispi of UN-Habitat

Urban areas have been the epicentre of the pandemic, giving cities a fundamental role in determining the success of collective recovery efforts. Meanwhile, the capacities and capabilities of cities to introduce and implement measures to combat COVID-19 vary greatly. At large, the pandemic has brought to the attention that multi-level coordination and stakeholder engagement is crucial for effective response and inclusive and sustainable recovery. Trust in institutions, transparency and communication are key in enhancing citizen engagement and compliance. COVID-19 represents a unique opportunity to rethink and reimagine urban governance, considering territorial approach, collaboration, and collective action.

There are several policy considerations cities can make in responding to the pandemic. This is exemplified by the UN Secretary General's policy brief on COVID-19 in the urban world¹⁴. For cities, there is an opportunity to respond effectively to the virus while simultaneously working toward the realisation of the SDGs. If cities can address critical concerns at the heart of the pandemic, they will be able to address several SDG targets. Supplemented by local reviews, local governments can evaluate their strategic alignment and impact towards the SDGs locally. It is important to strengthen local governance to be able to deliver adequate responses to complex global problems.

1.4.2. Mayoral panel

Mayor Peter Kurz of Mannheim, Germany

The pandemic has made clear that existing governance structures need to change; the world is evolving and the problems we face today require a different approach. Cities are still seen as stakeholders, not a level of governance, and mayors must demand the change they need through:

- Appealing for one framework to monitor urban development. Today's global governance arena is scattered with a vast array of frameworks. Many frameworks are a contradiction in itself.
- Calling for formalised co-decision by local authorities. The UN is a political institution founded by nation states for nation states. If we want to change structures, member states must share and delegate power with cities.
- Collaborating with international networks as a means to have our voices heard and achieve goals.

¹⁴ https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_covid_urban_world_july_2020.pdf

- Utilising institutions to share the responsibility for cooperation and alignment.

Concluding, Mayor Kurz states that local and regional governments are more than a competent and responsible political level. They are closest to the citizens and, above all, the most trusted political level. By strengthening cities we not only increase problem-solving capacity, but also the quality of political decisions, therefore increasing political legitimacy.

Mayor Rohey Malick Lowe of Banjul, the Gambia

In the African context, COVID-19 is challenging national government to change their perspective on local governments and power sharing. Mayor Lowe shares:

- With the pandemic, the citizens turned to their local government for guidance, not the central government. Whereas the central government used to seize all power from the local level, it has become apparent that mayors have the trust and understanding of their people.
- Respect for local government is becoming a must. They must be armed and supported.
- Encouraging female leadership and empowerment is a means to further the country.

1.4.3. [Open debate](#)

Eric Apelgren representing Mayor Mxolisi Kaunda of eThekweni/Durban, South Africa

In facing challenges of transition, transformation, and urban safety, the city of Durban has engaged with civil society and taken people along on critical issues. This not only does this strengthen the voice of the people, but also lends credibility to cities and mayors. Durban has:

- Mobilised mayors from across the continent to come together to share knowledge, models of good practice, and linked this to other forums.
- Recognised civil society as a critical component by engaging and including citizens in the debate.
- Championed cross-sectoral collaboration and collaboration and alignment by the different spheres of government.
- Shared resources and ideals, not only within the city, but also across the cities and continent.

Mayor David Balaba of Iganga, Uganda

Beyond the health, economic, and social impacts, COVID-19 has taught the city:

- Local governments are not recognised as legitimate forms of power. With nationally imposed sanctions still in full effect despite low infection rates locally, there is little the city can do.
- There is a serious need for partnerships and collaboration in combating the virus.
- Sharing knowledge, lessons, and best practices is a crucial way for African mayors and leaders to help their cities.

Mayor Landing B. Sanneh of Soma Town, the Gambia

Through early collaborative action Soma Town:

- Allowed local government authorities to take their position at the right time, emphasising the strength of and need for local governments.
- Harnessed the power of local action, aided by citizen information and participation.
- Ensured partnerships were established to make sure bordering cities work together.

Deputy Mayor Jakub Mazur of Wroclow, Poland

As a network society, we need to change our point of view on municipalities in relation to national governments. Cities ought to:

- Strategically select tools to empower the city and its citizens.
- Co-create to generate comparable diagnosis across the board.
- Share knowledge.

1.4.4. Expert roundtable

What is your recommendation for mayors in order to strengthen international collaboration and partnerships? How do we reinforce the position and voice of mayors in international institutions? What needs to be set up to enable the transition of power from the local to global level?

Aziza Akhmouch reflects on the various responses of cities to COVID-19. This has been mapped by de OECD¹⁵. She provides 3 recommendations for mayors and cities:

- The SDGs should be used as a policy tool, not a compliance agenda. The concrete issues mayors work on on a daily basis can be used as a means for cities to rethink how they are planning, investing, budgeting, strategizing, and prioritising. These are behind the UN agenda.
- Mayors must be supported by partnering cities, regions, and national governments in their efforts. There is a disconnect between national measures and the bottom-up initiatives that have been scaled up locally.
- Digitalisation is the new normal and it makes coordination and cooperation possible. Although it still has a number of divides, digitalisation provides a great opportunity to rethink cities from the ground up and renew the social contract with citizens.

Kobie Brand emphasises the need to ensure what is decided globally is practically possible to achieve on the ground, in our streets, and in and with our communities. Bargaining power is directly linked to how cities commit, measure, and report on collective local actions. We therefore need to:

- Improve collecting and communication benefits of action.
- Employ sharper instruments to measure impact.
- Ensure that transparency, accountability, and performance-based governance are the key pillars of our governance model.
- Act collectively and locally.
- Let our actions speak louder than our words: city leaders do what is needed day after day and must continue to do so to be recognised.

Wolfgang Teubner states that we have to accept that fact that we see diversity in structures when it comes to multi-level governance. There is an opportunity to take a significant step in governance for immediate relief as well as on the long term. This can be done by:

- Granting fast are more direct access to funds spent nationally to local governments so the funds are used efficiently.
- Involving local levels in the decision-making and distribution of funds.
- Clearly aligning in a continuous and consistent manner in terms of messaging towards actors.

¹⁵ <http://oe.cd/covid-cities-en>

- Continuously raising awareness of local government as a competent and responsible level of government.

Ian Klaus builds on the innate qualities of cities, focusing on their ability to combine power and pace. Cities are powerful in what they can deliver in a quick pace as well as the responsiveness with which they can do so. As the discussion moves towards one of flexibility of networks versus the strength of hierarchy, cities can capitalise on responsiveness and power. International organisations and national governments will depend more and more on the responsiveness of cities. In addition to that, cities will have to build up power. The latter is built up over time and takes a great deal of training. Connectivity, narratives, and evidence are accumulated over time and shared so that cities build up power through systems, collaborations, and networks.

Dr. Rachel Locke speaks on violence as a concrete manifestation of the inequalities that COVID-19 has brought to our attention. While violence may play out locally and requires context-specific solutions, the challenge is a global one. She recommends:

- As violence typically does not undermine state power, cities must take action by addressing violence through city-led efforts.¹⁶
- Mayors actively and practically translate policy prescriptions such as police reform or how to increase transparency and participation at the local level.
- Consider the impact of urban planning on violence through promoting people-centred, harm reducing environments for all.

Thomas George brings children's issues centre stage. With children and young people being the greatest agents of change in today's world, Thomas George calls for the following tools:

- Using data and evidence accompanied by risk analysis to allow adequate response. As COVID-19 has unmasked great disparities and inequalities, it is crucial that all cities work with one framework that can also be boiled down to the neighbourhood level.
- Coordination, both horizontally and vertically, between departments. City mayors are able to take the lead to coordinate between the different actors, levels of government, and organisations that are responsible for municipal services.
- Participation of communities to ensure that no pockets of populations are being left out and all voices are heard.

1.4.5. Conclusion

Juma Assiago summarises the key takeaways of the discussion around governance and democracy as being one of empowering cities and empowering citizens. These elements deepen democracy through looking at new forms of engaging citizens, governments, international institutions, and city networks.

On the mayoral level, we see power sharing as a key dimension. Cities are more than a stakeholder and should be recognised as a level of government in the global conversation. This can be done by inspecting the relationship between the UN and cities, recognising that cities are the closest level of government to the citizenry, allow active transparency, and foster civic engagement. The various activities presented by mayors display great local action and multi-stakeholder engagement, allowing cities to participate in building back better.

¹⁶ <https://globalparliamentofmayors.org/representatives-of-hundreds-of-cities-call-for-halving-violence-by-2030/>

Beyond that, COVID-19 is an opportunity to look for inclusive recovery aligned to the 2030 agenda. Through utilising the SDGs as a unique framework to help guide city vision and help target realistic solutions of governance, mayors are able to build back more resilient and seize their role on the international stage. There is an opportunity to capitalise on the digital revolution, coordinate better, and focus on collecting, measuring, and monitoring the impact of cities.

Concluding, governance is inextricably linked to the citizenry. The debate on governance needs to focus on the sources of internationally relevant norms as outlined by legal instruments, commitments of nation states at the UN, and operational experiences of cities. Urban governance has the ability to provide citizens of both genders with a platform to be the agent of change. This starts with cross-horizontal thinking, recognising local and regional governments as more than a competent and responsible political level.

2. Annexes

Annex 1

Registered Mayors (alphabetically by city)

1. Deputy Mayor Marieke van Doorninck Amsterdam, the Netherlands
(rep. by Eveline Jonkhoff)
2. Former Mayor Ed Johnson Asbury Park, USA
3. Mayor Rohey Malick Lowe Banjul, the Gambia
4. Chairman Foday Danjo Basse Area Council, the Gambia
5. Mayor Ricardo Rio Braga, Portugal
6. Mayor Paul Depla Breda, the Netherlands
7. Deputy Mayor Craig Cheney Bristol, UK
8. Mayor Hayet Bayoudh Carthage, Tunisia
9. Mayor Emil Boc Cluj-Napoca, Romania
10. Mayor Pedro Palacios Cuenca, Ecuador
11. Deputy Mayor Annekatrin Klepsch Dresden, Germany
12. Mayor Mxolisi Kaunda Durban, South Africa
(rep. by Eric Apelgren)
13. Mayor Taysir Taha Hebron, Palestine
14. Mayor Grace Mary Mugasa Hoima, Uganda
15. Mayor David Balaba Iganga, Uganda
16. Mayor Tunç Soyer Izmir, Turkey
17. Mayor Peter Kurz Mannheim, Germany
18. Mayor Esther Ndyanabo Mityana, Uganda
19. Mayor Geoffrey Ngiriker Nebbi, Uganda
20. Lord Mayor Craig Simmons Oxford, UK
21. Mayor Leoluca Orlando Palermo, Italy
22. Mayor Óscar Escobar Palmira, Colombia
23. Mayor Nomusa Mqwebu Port Shepstone, South Africa
24. Mayor Manuel de Araujo Quelimane, Mozambique
25. Mayor Mohamed Sadiki Rabat, Morocco
26. Mayor Bryan Barnett Rochester Hills, USA
27. Mayor Xosé Antonio Sánchez Bugallo Santiago de Compostela, Spain
28. Mayor Landing B. Sanneh Soma Town/Mansakonko Area Council, the Gambia
29. Mayor Baikuntha Nath Neupane Vyas, Nepal
30. Deputy Mayor Jakub Mazur Wroclaw, Poland

Annex 2

Participating experts (alphabetically by name)

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| 1. Aziza Akhmouch | OECD |
| 2. Charles Landry | Future of Cities and the Creative City |
| 3. David Miller | C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group |
| 4. Dr. Ege Yildrim | International Council on Monuments and Sites |
| 5. Professor Eric Corijn | Free University of Brussels |
| 6. Dr. Etienne Krug | World Health Organisation |
| 7. Gianluca Crispi | UN-Habitat |
| 8. Ian Klaus | Chicago Council on Global Affairs |
| 9. Juma Assiago | UN-Habitat |
| 10. Kobie Brand | ICLEI |
| 11. Matthew Boyce | Georgetown Center for Global Health Science and Security |
| 12. Professor Pier Luigi Sacco | University of Milan, Harvard University |
| 13. Dr. Rachel Locke | Peace in Our Cities, University of San Diego |
| 14. Dr. Robbert Muggah | Igarapé Institute |
| 15. Dr. Shipra Narang Suri | UN-Habitat |
| 16. Thomas George | UNICEF |
| 17. Wolfgang Teubner | ICLEI |

Annex 3

Biography Dr. Shipra Narang Suri, moderator, Chief, Urban Practices Branch at UN-Habitat

Dr. Shipra Narang Suri is an urban planner with a PhD in Post-War Recovery Studies from the University of York, UK. She leads UN-Habitat's Urban Practices Branch, which is the hub for UN-Habitat's normative work and the home of its portfolio of global programmes. The work of the Branch covers all major areas of UN-Habitat's work such as national urban policies; policy, legislation and governance; urban planning and design; public space; urban regeneration; land, housing and shelter; urban economy and finance; urban basic services; safer cities; human rights and social inclusion, with extensive normative work and operational activities in nearly 80 countries. Shipra is also the senior advisor within UN-Habitat for local governments and their networks.