



Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape

23-24 June 2021

Concept note

Context

Cities are growing exponentially. Today, more than half of humanity lives in urban areas, and the number is projected to rise to nearly 70% by 2050¹. The pressure to meet the increasing needs of their residents have led to rapid development, often at the sacrifice of urban heritage. While interventions appear to focus on the protection and conservation of monuments and iconic sites, more ordinary fabric of historic areas such as houses and public spaces tend to be left aside. Local communities find themselves disconnected from their local areas, where they had transmitted their traditions over generations. The know-how required for conservation or repairs of such places are also in peril. These losses jeopardize the world's cultural diversity as well as the identity of our cities.

For decades, UNESCO has upheld the importance of cities as rich repositories of history, heritage and identity accumulated over centuries. Recognized for their Outstanding Universal Value not only to the residents but to all of humanity, more than 300 cities are currently inscribed on the World Heritage List². These historic cities work to protect unique local features, so future generations may enjoy the authenticity and integrity of these diverse settlements around the world.³

At the same time, the need for conservation and human-centred urban planning extends well beyond World Heritage Cities. In this spirit, the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) was adopted as an inclusive heritage-management approach open to all⁴. In order to reconcile heritage conservation and sustainable development, cities look to HUL as the necessary framework for sustainable, liveable cities.⁵ The pandemic has further revealed the downside of rapid urbanization, as cities account for over 90% of the COVID-19 cases. Urban areas also have the responsibility to mitigate crises, including those related to climate change impacts, as researches suggest that 70% of the world's green-house gases are emitted in cities.

The 10th anniversary of HUL comes at an opportune moment. The HUL approach proposes the World-Heritage Listed as well as non-Listed cities a new paradigm to achieve a more sustainable, human-centred urban future. Throughout 2021, efforts will be made to raise awareness and mainstream this underutilized UNESCO Recommendation among the World Heritage Cities and beyond.

¹ Learn more about the global urbanization trends and figures in UN report World Urbanization Prospects (2018): <https://population.un.org/wup/Publications/Files/WUP2018-Report.pdf>

² The UNESCO World Heritage Centre is the Secretariat of the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage governed by the intergovernmental World Heritage Committee. The World Heritage Cities Programme, of which the 313 cities are part, is one of the six thematic programmes monitored by the World Heritage Committee as of 2001.

³ Learn more about the Fukuoka Outcomes at https://whc.unesco.org/en/events/1516/?utm_source=CLT-WHC&utm_medium=email&utm_term=whc&utm_content=whc-information&utm_campaign=whc-information-jan-en-20210128

⁴ General Conference of UNESCO adopted the Recommendation on 10 November 2011. Read the texts in full: <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-638-98.pdf>

⁵ See the result of the 2019 HUL survey: <https://whc.unesco.org/document/172639>

Objectives

The HUL Anniversary Event (23-24 June) not only marks the start of the 2021 celebration but serves as a catalyst for greater adoptions of the HUL approach. At the same time, the event serves as a platform to share lessons learned from COVID-19 and to resume discussions on the future of urban management. Topics such as public space, renovations, tourism, infrastructure and livelihoods will be explored. The Recommendation will provide an overall framework, while local needs and resources determine the implementation form.

On 23 June, the HUL Call for Action will be launched. The Call breaks the Recommendation down into concrete “Three Actions” (see “Call for Action”), in order to promote the HUL implementation for cities. The main participants will be Mayors, partners and high-level representatives from World Heritage and non-World Heritage cities, as they have the capacity to champion and mainstream the approach in their urban planning. Following the launch, panel discussions will explore the role of the Recommendation within the post-COVID-19 urban setting. Thematic lenses such as crisis response and recovery and local-actor empowerment will closely reflect the Call.

The 24 June session will focus on the application of the HUL approach to the World Heritage cities. Challenges triggered by the pandemic such as the drop in tourism and restricted urban-based activities will be discussed, with HUL serving as a potential mitigation framework. The invitees will consist of site managers, national focal points, city planning departments and experts, devising in-depth, practical conversations. Case studies collected, analyzed and developed during preparatory technical meetings will also be presented.

The tailored approach, which considers the differing needs of the World Heritage and non-World Heritage cities, as well as roles played by high-level participants and technical actors, allow for targeted advocacy, effective knowledge exchange, and attainment of commitment at multiple levels. Together, the HUL Anniversary will advocate for a sustainable and local-led urban recovery and relaunch the HUL Recommendation towards global implementation.

Call for Action

1. Sensitize local and national actors about the HUL approach and encourage its implementation

Based on the key principles of HUL

2. Promote a local urban consultation process to empower stakeholders including NGOs, public and private stakeholders to support a HUL-driven urban development

By joining the UNESCO network and exchanging on good practices*

3. Develop local heritage management actions based on the HUL approach

By joining the UNESCO network and exchanging on good practices*

[Join the Call online](#)

For any inquiries contact Heritage4Cities@unesco.org

*Any group or individual joining the Call can fill out the online form above. Further exchanges for collaboration will follow.

Outcomes and sustainability

Following the Anniversary event, the summary of the rapporteurs, case studies, participants in the Call for Action and panel discussions will be compiled and widely diffused among the World Heritage and non-World Heritage Cities to raise awareness about HUL.

In addition, cities and towns who join the Call for Action will be documented by UNESCO for future follow-up. A few cities will be further selected to develop in-depth case studies on their implementation of the Three Actions, to be developed into a report in 2022.

Partnerships

The Anniversary event has been collaboratively developed with the support of:

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