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## WUF10 Highlights

### Dialogues

#### DIALOGUE 1: Urbanization, Culture and Innovation:

Opening the dialogue, moderator Jason Pomeroy, Pomeroy Studio/Pomeroy Academy, reflected on the juxtaposition of culture and innovation, noting that culture tends to be formed by the past and innovation is influenced by the future.

During introductory remarks, Ernesto Ottone Ramírez, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), questioned why young and poor people do not feel incorporated into city planning processes, and posited that unless lasting values about heritage and culture are instilled into young people, a generation of urban dwellers could lose their identity.

Using Abu Dhabi as example, Noura Al Kaabi, Minister of Culture and Knowledge Development, United Arab Emirates (UAE), emphasized the relationship between residents and their past, and integrating diversity into urban processes. Saskia Sassen, Columbia University, warned about the tendencies of land grabbing by the wealthy and feeling uncomfortable with the complexities of informal settlements.

Luis Monreal, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, suggested that market forces often prevail in urban spaces to the detriment of culture and heritage. Beth Chitekwe-Biti, Slum Dwellers International (SDI), described informal communities as counter-cultural forces formed through exclusion, and said city planners mostly create urban areas for those with resources, to the exclusion of poor and young people.



Noura Al Kaabi, Minister of Culture and Knowledge Development, UAE

Tim Stonor, architect and planner, said when cities are planned, streets are often ignored as sources of social life and culture, as are technology and inclusivity.

During the first half of the dialogue, Ramírez emphasized cities should be planned with the lasting qualities of life in mind, including family life and recreation. Monreal suggested communal areas act as a space for rebuilding the morale of the community, and coming to terms with grief and loss after disasters. Sassen described cities as complex spaces where, counterintuitively, it is those without power that often drive economic growth. Al Kaabi stressed including diverse cultural elements such as street food and beautiful walkways, and documenting oral histories to capture cultural identities from the past. Chitekwe-Biti noted that local authorities struggle to allow informality because they consider it an obstruction to mobility.



The panel (L-R) Moderator **Jason Pomeroy**, **Ernesto Ottone Ramírez**, UNESCO, **Noura Al Kaabi**, Minister of Culture and Knowledge Development, UAE, **Saskia Sassen**, Columbia University, **Luis Monreal**, Aga Khan Trust for Culture, **Beth Chitekwe-Biti**, SDI, **Tim Stonor**, Space Syntax



**Maimunah Mohd Sharif**, Executive Director, UN-Habitat

On how cultural diversity can enrich cities, Ottone Ramírez pointed to the unique outlook of indigenous knowledge, which sees cultural heritage as part of an indivisible whole. Stonor noted the importance of “spatial culture,” suggesting that street networks can either divide or connect the city. Monreal responded that culture emerges informally regardless of the built environment. Sassen warned against the ability of the financial sector to speculate on real estate in global cities. Chitekwe-Biti spoke of the democratizing power of technology, noting that slum dwellers use smart phones to collect data that can inform policy making, but also to connect with each other.

In response to questions from the audience, Monreal said politicians should be educated on the long-term requirements of creating culture, and Chitekwe-Biti said cultural policies can be elitist, often disregarding the culture created in “spaces of exclusion.” In closing remarks, UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif said that it is important to reflect and transform other dimensions of culture, such as the culture of “managing the global and the environment,” as we embark on the last decade to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**DIALOGUE 2: Implementing the New Urban Agenda to Drive Sustainable Change:** Jasmine Pang, Branding Shanghai, moderated the session and introduced Sharif, who called on all stakeholders to build a global coalition for fairer globalization,



**Mariana Mazzucato**, University College London

stressed the importance of a One-UN approach, and encouraged participants to share experiences to develop a concrete action framework focused on areas with the largest possible impact.

In a keynote speech, Mariana Mazzucato, University College London, suggested there is a need to reshape governance mechanisms and implement a mission-oriented approach that “brings purpose back to the center of how we do economics” and “tilts the playing field” to reward behavior that supports the SDGs.

Martha Delgado, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexico, noted: the challenge of applying urban policy lessons in cities of different scales; the importance of correct pilot project sizing; and the necessity of effectively communicating with communities.

Khadija Ahmadi, Mayor of Nili, shared her city’s successes in empowering women and ensuring local infrastructure projects are co-implemented with communities.

Sergey Levkin, Department of Urban Development Policy of Moscow, stressed that successful city projects are not possible without community participation, drawing on examples of metro construction, housing renovation, and street pedestrianization in Moscow.

Sameh Wahba, World Bank, underscored three priorities for effective urban development: helping municipalities generate their own revenues; avoiding spatial inequalities and land value capturing; and finding innovative ways to attract private sector finance.

Noting that 30-70% of migrants into urban areas live in illegal settlements, Sheela Patel, SDI, asked how cities will deal with rapidly growing populations over the next decade.

Marjeta Jager, European Commission, highlighted the European Green Deal’s and the Commission’s areas of emphasis for implementing the New Urban Agenda (NUA), including participatory management approaches, city twinning, innovative financing, and employing culture as an enabler for cooperation.

On practical experiences with ‘leaving no-one behind,’ panelists identified: fostering a sense of solidarity among cities for redistributing financing; including internally displaced persons in city decision making; and including participatory processes in criteria for financial support.

Frank Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji, said the “future of cities is not set in stone” and that, through the NUA, cities can uplift people today while safeguarding future generations. He stressed that climate impacts entrench inequality and are drivers of urbanization by pushing vulnerable rural communities to the perceived safety of cities.

Ricky Burdett, London School of Economics, highlighted that many cities are growing well beyond their administrative boundaries, meaning municipal authorities must work with regional and national governments to address their challenges. He noted the example of London’s Green Belt as a mechanism for limiting urban sprawl.

Wendy Pullan, University of Cambridge, said excessive private development often destroys public spaces by favoring certain sectors of society and called for public spaces to be prioritized alongside housing and infrastructure in city planning.



Joyce Msuya, UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

Cyrille Pierre, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, France, stressed: the importance of preserving social linkages; promoting capacities of local governments; and creating mechanisms to collaborate with local communities.

Joyce Msuya, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), said UNEP looks at urbanization as a way to work with member states along systems, including for waste, energy, food, and sustainable consumption and production as an opportunity to achieve change at scale.

Mounir Tabet, UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia, said crises in the region have also brought an opportunity to build back better, both for infrastructures and social fabrics.

Mami Mizutori, Head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, explained her agency's work in the past decade to raise awareness about the need for a paradigm shift in disaster risk reduction in cities, from "reaction to prevention."

In the discussion, panelists addressed issues including: the need to avoid working in silos; communicating with communities using language they understand; dignity as a core consideration in development efforts in the Arab region; and the benefits of preparations for one type of disaster for responding to others.

### Roundtables

**One UN Roundtable:** Opening the roundtable, Chris Williams, UN-Habitat, highlighted UN-Habitat's work with other UN agencies on a system-wide strategy for urban development that provides a framework for increasing the UN's country-level effectiveness.

UN-Habitat Executive Director Sharif reflected on her experience working with UN agencies as the Mayor of Penang, Malaysia, highlighting the role of Resident Coordinators (RCs) as focal points integrating different levels to achieve impact.

Elkin Velasquez, UN-Habitat, moderated a panel with UN RCs focused on their experiences with: coordinating with UN country teams; promoting urban development; and engaging other stakeholders.

Comoros RC highlighted lack of strategic urban planning documents, but said having only four UN agencies on the ground has enabled more direct interaction. The UAE RC said that the government is looking for innovations in urban governance and youth engagement. Kuwait RC identified lack

of urban planning university degrees and limited dialogue with government as challenges. Montenegro RC suggested the UN can work on advocating priority issues to high-level stakeholders, supporting vertical stakeholder dialogues and financing frameworks, and engaging people who are being left behind.

Iran RC described the urban context as a practical organizing framework for the 20 UN agencies operating in Iran. Fiji RC identified challenges with citizen empowerment, political accountability, institutional capacity building and data. Belarus RC identified a gap in financing for energy efficiency in buildings. Azerbaijan RC called for "a new narrative" to include multidimensional issues, such as disaster risk reduction. Bahrain RC highlighted a multi-ministry coordination mechanism that has facilitated access to decision making.

A second panel, moderated by Laila Baker, UN Population Fund, heard interventions by UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UN-Habitat, UNEP, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and UN Development Programme on the synergies needed at global and regional levels. Speakers highlighted, *inter alia*: issue-based policy approaches, such as around air pollution; Memoranda of Understanding among UN agencies that identify intended impacts; global agencies defining their "menus of services" for country-level agents to champion; filling data gaps to unlock sustainable and private sector financing; and collaborating instead of competing with each other.

The World Bank suggested collaboration with the UN in analytical work, technical assistance, and partnerships outside the UN. The Huairou Commission said the UN-Habitat model of constituency partnerships can inform other agencies. Marc Collins, Oceanix, suggested a role for RCs mediating between what host countries need and what the private sector can provide. United Cities and Local Governments described the multilateral governance system as outdated and lacking "the right partners around the table in the right conditions," calling for co-creation and discussions to be less technocratic and more focused on governance and policy.

### Special Sessions

**Migration and the Open City: the role of culture in enabling inclusive societies:** Ottavia Spaggiari, Columbia Journalism School, moderated the session. In the first panel, Richard Sennett, London School of Economics, expressed



Ottavia Spaggiari, Columbia Journalism School

his worry about potential backlash to mass climate-induced migration. Mpho Moruakgomo, Botswana Association of Local Authorities, noted that migration is not new and exposes us to new ways of living. Bart Somers, Flemish Minister of Integration and Interior and Mayor of Mechele, shared three pillars of Mechele's approach to receiving migrants: making it a story of success and progress; encouraging multi-layered "lasagna identities" that make finding commonalities with others easier; and promoting interactions through mixed schools and neighborhoods. Renate Held, International Organization for Migration, stressed the importance of including culture in urban planning. In discussion, panelists considered how "integration" is often interpreted in terms of loss, and promoted "inclusion" and "participation" as more empowering alternatives.

Between panels, Spaggiari held a dialogue with Emmanuel Jal, a refugee-artist-activist-musician-entrepreneur from South Sudan. Jal highlighted how we quickly develop perceptions, often inaccurately, and encouraged participants to understand others more holistically.

In the second panel, Nasser Yassin, American University of Beirut, encouraged seeing refugees as having agency, rather than as helpless or risks to stability. Jonathan Malagón González, Minister of Housing, City, and Territory, Colombia, highlighted four dimensions of Colombia's response to migration from Venezuela: free education; free healthcare; legal residency; and labor market inclusion. Nadia Jbour, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, said supporting smaller towns that receive refugees is critical. Khadijah Ahmadi, Mayor of Nili, warned against settling migrants on urban peripheries due to the challenge of providing services to these areas. Carola Gunnarsson, Mayor of Sala, highlighted how migration can help relieve gaps in the labor market. Souad Abderrahim, Mayor of Tunis, emphasized strong social bonds as key to Tunisia effectively receiving Libyan migrants. In discussion, panelists stressed that a shift in mindsets and a whole-of-society approach can make migration an opportunity. They also called for building humane cities, not just smart ones.

**Culture, the creative industry and their impact on reconstruction and resilience:** Moderator Ottavia Spaggiari, Columbia Journalism School, asked panelists to address both tangible culture, which refers to the built environment, and intangible culture, which includes norms and practices.

Hodan Ali, Municipality of Mogadishu, described a programme aimed at introducing the country's youth to Somalia's pre-conflict history, and added that, to fight "idle minds" that could be radicalized, the municipality offers many activities.

Noting that sport is a critical space for "meeting and resocialization," Sergio Roldán, Urbano Medellín, said the city of Medellín succeeded in decreasing drug trafficking and use by engaging communities in sports.

Ernesto Ottone Ramírez, UNESCO, in a joint presentation with Sameh Wahba, World Bank, saluted Medellín's success in leveraging sports in the war against drugs. Wahba suggested three focus areas: urban regeneration and historical urban landscapes; cultural and creative industries; and resilience and disaster risk reduction.

Sabri Abdulla, Municipality of Mosul, described challenges faced in the reconstruction of the Old City of Mosul and its historical landmarks following destruction by Daesh in recent years, including a lack of skilled contractors to reconstruct historical buildings, and weak regulatory frameworks.

Sushil Gyawali, National Reconstruction Authority, Nepal, explained the 'building back better' vision behind the reconstruction efforts that followed a 2015 earthquake. Citing the reconstruction of the Dharahara tower in Kathmandu, he said the surrounding public space was increased sevenfold to boost community exchange and resilience.

Alexandre Caldas, UNEP, reminded that many reconstruction efforts still assume unlimited planetary resources: "There's the people, there's places, but there's also the planet. We need to bring environmental culture into the resilience discourse."



The room during the special session on 'Migration and the Open City: The Role of Culture in Enabling Inclusive Societies'