

## ACCELERATING LOCAL ACTION

BRUSSELS EMBRACES THE POWER OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE



This week the Brussels Urban Summit provided a unique space for local and regional government associations to organize their constituencies and set the priorities and work plans for the next months. The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Executive Bureau is being held from 12 to 15 June along with the Metropolis General Assembly and the Eurocities General Assembly.

After the approval of the UCLG's Pact for the Future of Humanity at its World Congress in Daejeon in October 2022, and the Annual Retreat of the organization in Barcelona in

February 2023, UCLG is focusing its Executive Bureau on how to drive high-impact actions to accelerate common goals.

In parallel, the Brussels Urban Summit also brings together three international city conferences: the 14th Metropolis World Congress, the Eurocities Annual Conference and the sixth OECD Champion Mayors Summit for Inclusive Growth Initiative. Representatives from 600 cities and experts and representatives of civil society have been exchanging ideas since the opening of the Summit on Tuesday, 13 June.

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## THE ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATIONS IN RESTORING TRUST AND REBUILDING THE GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE

BY **CAROLINA COSSE**, PRESIDENT OF UCLG,  
MAYOR OF MONTEVIDEO

The current polycrisis situation we are experiencing has contributed to the lack of trust, which resulted in a situation of “populations versus institutions”, expressed in growing mistrust. It threatens to become a political, social and emotional rupture that impacts the social contract and even affects the understanding of what is true and what is not. If there is no trust in our daily realities, exacerbated by the rapid spread of fake news and conspiracy theories, which in turn create confusion and uncertainty, sows fear and pave the way for manipulation and hate. These factors, as we are unfortunately seeing in many cities around the world, can (and do) lead to violence.

The United Nations Secretary-General’s Common Agenda calls for extraordinary mobilisation to build trust, renew our governance to break this negative spiral and build a world that works for our communities.

Our community of local and regional governments shares this desire to renew trust at the global level and understands that this cannot be achieved without clearly addressing the challenge of renewal of the multilateral system, which should be based on local realities. We must change the modes of government and access to politics. Local and regional governments and their networks are committed to transforming ideas, such as multi-level government and cooperative governance, into tangible realities around the world. We are willing to redefine leadership and change the rules of the game so that our citizens are reflected in them.

Local and regional government associations are, and will continue to be, key players in positioning human rights as a central element. We are key in providing spaces for the participation of those non-state actors who raise the voices of our communities. In this way, we will be able to strengthen ties and ensure that the issues that matter are at the centre of the discussions, building bridges between local realities and global trends.

Among these efforts are also the opposition to extremist speeches that threaten the physical integrity of elected leaders. It is necessary to promote the democratic culture

of citizenship to be able to protect their representatives. This urges us to value local democracy again and to place the institutions at the service of our populations. It is the only way to build and sustain peace within our communities.

Transforming the current governance structure entails expanding the agenda of the international governance system. We need concrete reforms that reflect local realities, with human rights at the centre, and with all non-state actors as allies at the decision-making table. We endorse the conclusions of the High-Level Panel on Effective Multilateralism, which advocates the importance of granting formal status to cities in multilateral processes, promoting gender equality and the participation of young people, and the transformation of institutions to represent current and future generations.

We can and must reform the institutions to be able to represent the 50% of the population that is systematically ignored. Transforming governance to restore trust implies bringing feminism closer to international governance structures to transform power relations and the design of legal instruments. It is important that feminist movements stop being an instrument of resistance and become an active part of the construction of international legislation. The international municipalism feminist movement, represented by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), works on the demands of women to be systematized and their rights to be guaranteed, including in terms of representation in institutions.

The next United Nations Summit for the Future, which will be held in 2024, is an opportunity to boost governance renewal and trust. Through our Pact for the Future, local and regional governments propose a world to restore the relationship between communities, the planet and government, and our strategy to deploy it over the coming years is crucial to achieving a fairer world for all people.

# IS GREENING CITIES A PATHWAY TO SOCIAL INCLUSION?



The Brussels City Hall set the stage for an engaging and thought-provoking closed debate organized by Metropolis, marking the beginning of the “urban week” with the Brussels Urban Summit. The event delved into the pivotal role of public spaces, greenery, and nature in our cities.

The Mayor of Brussels, Philippe Close, in his opening speech, highlighted the special role cities play in combatting climate change. He stressed the importance of cities adapting to the impacts of climate change while actively mitigating its consequences. “We are facing constraints, but we are going beyond them to explore the resources we have,” Mayor Close asserted.

Cities have long been hotbeds of innovation and catalysts for change. The Mayor of Bogotá, Claudia López, echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the central role that cities hold as leaders of change. She urged a paradigm shift, advocating for cities to be purposely designed as places built for people rather than merely serving as gathering centres out of necessity. She reinforced that “taking care of people is an essential condition to be sustainable in this century.”

The Secretary General of Metropolis, Mr. Jordi Vaquer, underscored the urgent need for high-quality urban

spaces for citizens. He highlighted how the success of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) hinges on the progress made by cities.

The debate featured presentations from Oana Bogdan, architect and the President of the Good Living Committee, and Pascal Smet, Brussels State Secretary for Urbanism and European & International Relations. Representing different facets of the city, Bogdan and Smet provided valuable insights into the convergence of technical expertise and political power within the context of the new Brussels Building Code.

Brussels is on the verge of a transition, introducing groundbreaking reforms, including a reduction in building demolitions. Instead, the emphasis will be placed on renovating existing structures whenever possible, with demolition serving as a last resort.

Bogdan aptly captured the power of urban development, stating, “you have a lot more power than you can imagine. Urban development is a political act. You are all aligned despite all the differences.” Her words resonated with the audience, highlighting the potential for collective action and collaboration in shaping urban landscapes. Smet also stressed that “we are evolving now to a city for people. City life is all about people.”

The debate also delved into the concept of regenerative development, which goes beyond mere sustainability by restoring the relationship between humans and nature. The forthcoming Brussels Building Code will incorporate regenerative principles, with any project requiring a building permit viewed as a regenerative action from the outset.

Mayors from various regions worldwide emphasized the pressing need for resilient, green, and people-centric cities. The vulnerability of cities, particularly those in the Global South, to diverse hazards, both natural and man-induced, was a focal point. The mayors called for enhanced mechanisms to share experiences and innovative solutions, fostering a global network of urban resilience.

## CITIES AS CATALYSTS FOR INTEGRATION AND SOLIDARITY

According to the United Nations, over 108 million people worldwide have been compelled to relocate due to conflict, persecution, violence, or human rights violations. Among them, 62.5 million are considered internal migrants who seek new opportunities in cities, thereby placing pressure on public services and impacting social cohesion.

As major recipients of migration, cities find themselves at the forefront of caring for these individuals, witnessing transformations in the urban landscape and an increase in cultural diversity. Consequently, cities must acknowledge their shortcomings to continually learn and effectively manage the phenomenon of migration.

Over the past two decades, the settlement of migrants on the outskirts of cities has risen. Concentrated migration in specific areas can lead to unsustainable patterns, burdening the peripheries and fostering competition with local residents, resulting in serious conflicts. Moreover, it exacerbates inequalities, strains basic services, hampers access to housing, and jeopardizes social cohesion.

In this context, the plenary session held on 14 June 2023 emphasized the imperative of collaborative efforts to facilitate the welcoming and integration of migrants, fostering solidarity among citizens to achieve shared goals. Ayşe Çağlar, professor of social and cultural anthropology at the University of Vienna, underscored the importance of understanding that cities have always been shaped by migrants, necessitating an empirical approach to finding the most effective solutions.

The Mayor of Bogotá, Claudia López, highlighted that “the best investment for national and local governments is to support people so that they can live their best lives in countries.” She showcased the programs that Bogotá has initiated to integrate migrants and mentioned the cooperation between the city and the national government. Bogotá has embraced over 625,000 migrants from Venezuela, considered “the new Bogotanos,” who would not have been accommodated without the changes in national policies.

Mayor Adama Sangaré of Bamako emphasized the need for collaboration, stating, “No city alone can control migration. We have to work together tactically, beyond theory.” He highlighted the challenges his city faces due to migration caused by terrorism and armed conflicts, with rural communities relocating to urban areas.

The second part of the session delved into how diversity shapes cities and explored strategies that local governments can employ to transform social, cultural, and economic challenges into opportunities. Eric Corijn, a professor at the University of Brussels, stressed that migration is not just an urban issue but a national one. Failure to integrate migration can become problematic for the state.

Mayor Nathalie Appéré of Rennes underscored the historical relationship with migration and emphasized the importance of providing welcoming conditions. She stressed the need to eliminate camps, ensure the preservation of rights, and guarantee access to education to truly value diversity.

The South African Minister for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Thembu Nkandimeng, emphasized the importance of legislation in fostering social cohesion. Systems and processes should be inclusive to enable productivity and improved quality of life for all.

The session highlighted the complex nature of migration and underscored the significance of comprehensive and collaborative approaches to address the challenges and opportunities it presents.



## WHERE THE RUBBER HITS THE ROAD: PUTTING URBAN JOURNALISM INTO PRACTICE



Urban journalism tells stories that are relevant to city dwellers, focusing on topics such as transportation, housing, infrastructure, politics, and safety. Many actions towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) take place in urban environments – after all, OECD estimated that 65% of the 169 targets underlying the 17 SDGs would not be reached without proper engagement of and coordination with local and regional governments. However, too often, local actions do not get the attention they deserve. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) knows better than most that mayors and municipal officers are the ones implementing international sustainability goals into practice, but their stories do not get a lot of attention in mainstream media. This is where urban journalism comes in.

What similar challenges do the mayors of Buenos Aires in Argentina and Chefchaouen in Morocco face regarding the global commons? What does Lampedusa in Italy have in common with Tijuana in Mexico? And why should every city have a story about green infrastructure? At the Urban Journalism Academy, organised by the Urban Journalism Institute in collaboration with UCLG and with the support of Cities Alliance and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions on 13 June 2023, a diverse group of journalists, media professionals, communications officers, mayors, and representatives local and regional governments learned about the importance of urban journalism, which can answer precisely this kind of question. By showcasing challenges and solutions from cities all over the world, this particular kind of journalism focuses on the local while having a global impact. It is a way of getting out of local and topical silos, of bridging agendas with stories, and of giving

a voice to local governments. When reading the Municipal Times, you are holding a piece of urban journalism in your hands.

Participants agreed that urban journalists care about cities, and they care about the future. In a series of engaging workshops, the Academy trained journalists on how to tell the story of the commons, how to unpack the SDG agenda and the UCLG Pact for the Future of Humanity, and how to involve municipalities in journalism while meeting their needs. As Greg Munro, the Director of the Cities Alliance explained: “When we put local government and responsible journalism together, we get an incredibly powerful tool for change.”

Urban journalism is fact-based, relevant, and inspiring. Discussions during the Urban Journalism Academy focused on ways to tell positive stories that still catch attention. Rather than reporting on depressing and scary stories, urban journalists emphasize the countless solutions that inspire hope. They aim to change the narrative through passionate and accessible language, creating positive change, and sharing impactful solutions that can be applied and adapted to different contexts. Emilia Sáiz, UCLG’s secretary general, pointed out that the local perspective is based on the ambitions and dreams of individual people. “With urban journalism, we can develop a healthy relationship and a sound understanding of the true agenda of cities and work on the perception of local governments. Local governments and journalists share a responsibility.”

The Urban Journalism Institute will organise more Urban Journalism Academies in the future – stay in touch!



## HOW SCIENCE IS TRANSFORMING METROPOLISES



Cities around the world are embracing the transformative power of science and technology to shape the urban landscapes of the future. In a session jointly organized by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Metropolis, city leaders and scientific experts converged to explore how scientific advancements, including artificial intelligence and cutting-edge technologies, will impact the trajectory of metropolises. This gathering shed light on the pressing issues of climate change, social inequalities, and inclusivity, emphasizing the need for visionary leadership and innovative solutions to build sustainable cities for generations to come.

As vibrant hubs of innovation and opportunities, cities play a pivotal role in shaping the lives of their residents. Recognizing the imperative to enhance the quality of urban living, cities have already embarked on transformative initiatives, such as revolutionizing sewage systems, establishing eco-friendly zones, and constructing energy-efficient homes. However, the future of urban development remains an ongoing process, prompting the scientific and urban leadership communities to engage in forward-

thinking discussions envisioning the cityscapes of the next three decades. While predicting the exact form cities will take in the future is challenging, the exercise proved invaluable in helping policymakers and citizens understand and identify emerging trends.

During the session, participants dived further into the role of science in policymaking and explored the practical applications of cutting-edge technology and testing innovative solutions in cities. This visionary exercise sparked excitement about the possibilities that lie ahead. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the future of urban environments is shaped by the actions we take today. Both politicians and citizens bear the responsibility of fortifying cities and ensuring their improvement and safety. Urgent challenges demand immediate attention, and the actions we implement in the next five to seven years will serve as the bedrock for the cities of tomorrow.

To see what was expected for 2023, including the urban trends listed by ChatGPT, please refer to the Municipal Forecast published by the Urban Journalism Institute.

## REVITALIZING CITY CENTRES: EMPOWERING SMES FOR A THRIVING FUTURE

The desertification of city centres is not a new phenomenon. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, experts started exploring possibilities to revitalize city centres and encourage service providers to return to the heart of cities. The workshop organized by the OECD, titled “Brick and mortar or click to order? The future of SMEs in city centres”, included panellists representing experts from different levels, including the European Commission (EC), chambers of commerce, city management associations, and local authorities.

The workshop provided participants with an understanding of the work carried out by the EC to support the revitalization of city centres. Joanna Zawistowska, policy officer for the retail ecosystem of the European Commission, highlighted the actions which were taken at the regional level, such as the ongoing adoption of the petition to establish the European Capital of Small Retail. This initiative aims to raise awareness about the challenges faced by retailers and showcase best practices. Zawistowska also mentioned the lack of appropriate skills, particularly among small retailers, including the need for digital skills to adapt to new realities.

Claire Albaret, Chief Operating Officer at AMCV (City Centre Management Association), echoed the need for retailers to adapt and acquire digital skills. The COVID-19 pandemic and other recent crises have led to changes in spending habits and consumption patterns, as well as a reduction in the

consumer base. However, the post-COVID reality has shown a decrease in vacancy rates in city centres. The appearance of new retailers seems to be the reason behind this change. These retailers have a fresh vision and are often actively involved in the local community. They are aware of global trends and priorities and are highly educated experts in the field, bringing a new approach to small retail and making a significant impact.

The participants of the session also learned about the developments in the Ruhr Metropole. Julia Frohne, the Chairwoman of the Management Board of Business Metropole Ruhr, showcased the organization’s activities to support local businesses and promote mixed-use services. One of the challenges they face is the abundance of strict regulations in cities.

Hedda Jakobsson, the policy strategist of the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce, presented the success story of the summer street initiative in Stockholm. This initiative, first implemented in 2015, transformed two streets into pedestrian zones during the summer, providing businesses with more space to conduct activities.

Luan Baptista Ribeiro, the Climate Partnership Manager from the London Borough of Sutton, explained the Green Enterprise Partnership initiated by the London Borough of Sutton. This partnership allows businesses to save up to 70% on taxes.

Bringing SMEs back to city centres is closely linked to the revitalization of these areas. While SMEs face numerous challenges, including e-commerce, a shrinking customer base, labour shortages, and inflation, local authorities and supporting entities can create a more appealing environment in city centres to attract citizens.



## IN BRUSSELS ▶▶▶

### URBAN WALK IN THE CANAL AREA

Embarking on a journey from Brussels city centre to the lively Dansaert area, and then following the Brussels canal up to the new KANAL building is one of the nicest walks you can take in the Belgian capital on a warm summer evening. Dividing trendy Dansaert from the notoriously dangerous Molenbeek neighbourhood, the Brussels canal was dug in the 19th century and served as an important waterway. In recent years, the European Regional Development Fund has supported the redevelopment of the area, which is now a place of experimentation and innovation aiming at reshaping the inner city.

A combination of a pedestrian bath and a cycle lane runs along the canal, making for a pleasant stroll or ride by the water. Colourful windmills, street art, some benches and trees, and renovated buildings along the path show the extent of urban development that is taking place here. Posters inform passers-by about the efforts of cleaning up the canal, for example through litter shields. And a bike-counting sensor shows that on this day alone, almost 6,000 bikes had passed by. For the first months of 2023, this number is at 710,900. Speaking to a local resident confirms what is visible: The part of Molenbeek opposite Dansaert is now being upgraded, becoming a much safer area.

However, after the KANAL Centre Pompidou building, which is currently under construction and will offer a place of culture and exchange that is open to all, the canal walk suddenly changes. There are men taking drugs, construction sites, overflowing dust bins, and very narrow paths that make you realise exactly where the attempts at urban revitalisation have stopped. Once the KANAL building opens in 2024, this might change, and the northern part of the Brussels canal could become equally attractive. But there is a long way to go.

This project of the revitalisation of blue space and the surrounding urban environment holds important lessons: By providing an accessible, safe, and beautiful way of strolling or cycling by the water, you can attract residents and visitors, slowly turning a



former industrial area into a cultural hub. People from both neighbourhoods, the more affluent Dansaert and the infamous Molenbeek, are using the new walkway for leisure. Similarly, there is a mix of attendees at the different nightlife venues, from bistros to clubs, some of which overlook the canal. Flemish music meets Moroccan beats, and the Millennium Iconoclast Museum of Art, opposite KANAL, shows temporary exhibitions of young, revolutionary artists.

A former industrial site on the bank of the canal, Tour & Taxis shows how to transform a warehouse and maritime terminal into an exhibition space with a large food court. A farm for oyster mushrooms, an environment museum, and a sustainable village called BE-HERE showcase ecological initiatives and future solutions for how to live in a city. Almost every week, a new project pops up in this vibrant neighbourhood. Hotels, co-working spaces, and new housing projects round out the picture.

The Brussels canal holds several important lessons. It shows that by investing in a neighbourhood through sustainable development, innovative and cultural projects, housing interventions, and cleaning up the canal, an attractive new neighbourhood can be created. The former industrial wasteland is experiencing a true renaissance – but only up to a certain point. Overall, the canal is 14 kilometres long. Extending the revitalisation project further will be the next challenge to ensure that all neighbouring areas can benefit from sustainable, and equitable urban development.



## BREAKING NEWS

### PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITIONS IN METROPOLIS AND EUROCITIES

The Metropolis General Assembly elected Barthelemy Dias, the mayor of Dakar, as its new president starting from January 2024. Dias will succeed Claudia López, the current Metropolis president and mayor of Bogotá.

Eurocities also welcomed Burkhard Jung, the mayor of Leipzig, as its newly elected president. Jung takes over the position formerly held by Dario Nardella, the mayor of Florence.

### ISTANBUL TO HOST THE WORLD METROPOLITAN DAY 2023

The Marmara Municipalities Union announced that Istanbul will host the World Metropolitan Day on 7 October 2023. The event is scheduled within the framework of the Marmara Urban Forum, which will take place from 4 to 7 October 2023. More at <https://www.marmaraurbanforum.org/>

### EUROCITIES AWARDS 2023 ANNOUNCED

Projects from Hamburg, Bilbao, and London have been declared as the winners of the Eurocities Awards 2023 during the Brussels Urban Summit.

“My Smart Life”, a foundation established by the city of Hamburg for an innovative urban transformation strategy to get rid of fossil fuels, has won the category of “Managing the energy crisis sustainably”.

The winner in the category “From human global mobility to local community cohesion” is the project DIVERSITOURS, an intercultural community project aimed at highlighting the contribution of migrants to the development of the city of Bilbao through on-site and immersive virtual reality guided tours in three neighbourhoods: Bilbao la Vieja, San Francisco and Zabala.

The research and engagement project, “Seen and Heard”, designed to give young people a voice in the management of their local public spaces in northwest London, won the award in the category of “Young people co-creating public spaces”.

## #BUS2023 PLENARIES SURVEYS

*During the plenary sessions on 13 and 14 June, participants at the Brussels Urban Summit were asked survey questions related to the main topics of tackling inequalities and migration. Here are the results:*

#### **Which aspect(s) of inclusive growth would you like your mayor to prioritise?**

62 % of attendees said housing  
42 % said infrastructure and public services  
36 % said climate resiliency

#### **What are the primary benefits of social diversity to a city?**

Participants highlighted the following points:

1. Cosmopolitanism and global reach
2. Cultural experiences
3. Labour force
4. Entrepreneurialism
5. Trade and investment

## WHAT'S ON TODAY?

Today, the Brussels Urban Summit will conclude with an interesting session on "City leadership in a global climate crisis" at 10:00 h in Room 204. This session will highlight the dramatic impact of climate change on cities and emphasize the urgent need for accelerated climate action on all fronts.

Following this session, the Summit's conclusions session will take place at 11:30 h in the Gold Hall Room.

In the afternoon, starting at 12:30 h, the session "After the Earthquake: A Conversation with Mayors" will be held in the Panoramic room. This session will bring together Turkish mayors who will share their experiences of leading their cities in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake that struck Turkey and Northwest Syria on 6 February this year.

After lunch, at 14:00 h in Hall 400, the Executive Bureau of UCLG will present the key outcomes of the Future Envisioning Exercises. This session will also include a new Media for Cities debate on the theme of "Unleashing the Media's Role in Envisioning a Sustainable Local Future." Local and regional authorities, as well as media experts, will engage in an interesting discussion on how they envision and respond to challenges as urban actors.

## TOMORROW IN-FOCUS SECTION

Yesterday, on 14 June 2023, UCLG and Cities Alliance co-organized an open debate entitled "Addressing Inequalities and Informalities: Rethinking Financing and the Role of Local and Regional Governments." The event took place in the afternoon as part of UCLG's Executive Bureau and within the framework of the Brussels Urban Summit.

The discussion focused on tackling the root causes of inequalities and their relationship with the economic system, governance models, territorial and urban development. Additionally, there was an emphasis on restructuring global financial systems to better meet the needs of local communities.

Join us tomorrow for our In-Focus feature, where we will provide a detailed account of the discussion and share the perspectives of the local leaders who participated.

## TWITTER SAYS!

**#BUS2023 #CitiesforPeople  
#OurCitiesOurFuture #UCLGMeets**

@BUS\_2023 has opened its doors and more than 600 representatives from different cities have come to discuss major societal challenges, enjoy the (not so usual) good weather in Brussels and propose urban solutions. To put it in numbers: 2,600 politicians, academics and civil society representatives, among them more than 160 mayors. Quite a variety, but that's not a deterrent. As @SmetPascal, Secretary of State of the Brussels-Capital Region says: "Cities are different, but we share the same challenges. At this summit we are going to find the answers together." Brussels is buzzing: "Brussels is not only a political and diplomatic capital. We are a real city. A city that is correcting mistakes of the past today by giving the city back to the people."

From June 12 to 15, democracy, climate change, migration, feminism, inequalities, the power of care or the role of the media, among others, will be the topic of conversation. And at the center, cities, the space where it all happens because, as @GregClarkCities says: "cities are places of concentration and provide superpowers. They have the power of networking and the power of scale. When cities work together, they can multiply solutions."

Although not only cities, mayors and local governments, urban journalism also cares about the future. With the hashtag #MediaforCities we tweet about responsible journalism, a tool to drive change in cities towards a more affordable, inclusive and sustainable urban future. Because cities lead the transformation of challenges into opportunities and, as @vonderleyen, President of the @EU\_Commission says, "they are the closest to people and their dreams for the future".

We have gathered once again and, what unites us all here are common goals and tackling inequalities because as @OECD\_local @lamia\_k\_c stresses: "poverty cannot be the new normal. Inequalities jeopardize growth and recovery. Mayors are at the front line to take action. We stand by you, Mayors!"