

Briefing note

A NEW URBAN PROJECT FOR THE HABITABILITY OF
HISTORIC CENTERS

13.11.2025



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
THE OWHC'S NEW URBAN PROJECT	3
1. A SOLIDIFYING REFERENCE FRAMEWORK.....	3
1.1 OBJECTIVE OF THE NEW URBAN PROJECT	3
1.2 A POLITICAL VISION	3
1.3 A HERITAGE-LED APPROACH.....	4
1.4 STRONG VALUES	4
2. AN OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK THAT IS TAKING SHAPE.....	5
2.1 SUCCESS FACTORS.....	5
2.2 ROBUST PRINCIPLES	6
2.3 AMBITIOUS OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES	6
2.4 A GLOBAL STRATEGY THAT SUPPORTS STRUCTURING PROJECTS.....	6
APPENDIX 1: THEMATICS AND PROBLEMATICS	8
APPENDIX 2: STRATEGIC AXES	14
APPENDIX 3: STATEMENTS	16
APPENDIX 4: OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES	18

INTRODUCTION

This note presents a summary of the results obtained since the 16th *World congress in Quebec City*, their validation at the 17th *World congress in Cordoba*, and the development of activities until October 15, 2025, within the framework of the *Québec Roadmap* and the *Cordoba Path*. It summarizes what can be said today about the *New Urban Project* as well as the status of the process to date.

The proposed structure does not yet presume the final form of the document that will be the subject of **the Marrakech Symposium** (18th World Congress, Marrakech, October 26-29, 2026). There is already consensus on the general political vision of the *New Urban Project*, but several operational aspects still need further work. Member cities therefore have the opportunity to contribute to the final stages of the process. The urban transformation model promoted by the *New Urban Project* is becoming clearer: concrete, rigorous, participatory, measurable, and scalable. Regenerating the *habitability* of historic centers is not a utopia, but an ideal to strive for. The tools exist, the methods are becoming clearer, and the will is converging. Cities want to learn from each other, explore possibilities, and take bold action.

The meetings and workshops that are organized as part of Regional Meetings, Collaborative Networks, CityLabs, and Communities of practice will enable the results to be completed (the appendixes detail the main achievements of the initiative) and the *New Urban Project* to be finalized by spring 2026.

THE OWHC'S NEW URBAN PROJECT

1. A SOLIDIFYING REFERENCE FRAMEWORK

1.1 OBJECTIVE OF THE NEW URBAN PROJECT

The *New Urban Project* is a program that aims to regenerate historic centers through urban strategies focused on *habitability*.

Societal and economic crises, exacerbated by climate change, are putting increasing pressure on cities, particularly World Heritage cities. These pressures require strong and effective action to address the many challenges they pose. The aim is to initiate and accelerate urban transformation processes so that we no longer simply endure and manage pressures, but anticipate them in order to choose the desired paths of development.

The *New Urban Project* proposes that member cities commit to responding to the emergency by **doing more, doing better, and doing faster**:

- Do more, with a critical mass of interventions generating investments that impact and transform historic centers.
- Do better, with projects that develop habitability in historic centers by triggering ambitious urban dynamics.
- Do faster, by ensuring a sustained pace of interventions so that urban strategies have a visible and rapid impact on the living environment and well-being of residents.

The *New Urban Project* provides participating cities with a common reference framework enabling them to act as a network, and an operational framework providing them with the tools and partnerships necessary to design their local strategies and implement the resulting projects.

1.2 A POLITICAL VISION

The *New Urban Project* is an initiative of the mayors of the OWHC, who consider heritage to be a living resource capable of transforming cities and responding to the major challenges of our time. For them, it is no longer just a question of preservation, but of turning historic centers into laboratories of urban innovation.

The *New Urban Project* will promote the implementation of operational dynamics in historic centers, motivated by *habitability*, which will respond concretely to the common *Issues at stake* identified by the OWHC cities:

1. Adapting cities to climate change and reducing its impact
2. Capitalizing on the ability of historic districts to reinvent themselves
3. Enhancing the features that underpin the habitability of the heritage city
4. Promoting heritage as an irreplaceable resource for sustainable development



1.3 A HERITAGE-LED APPROACH

Habitability is at the heart of the heritage approach of the *New Urban Project*. It outlines the contours of an original urban approach. It brings together the past and the future, heritage and everyday life, memory and becoming. Living in an old town center means being part of a continuum of actions, knowledge, and relationships that form the basis of urban identity. From this perspective, heritage (both tangible and intangible) is considered an irreplaceable lever for innovation and urban regeneration.

The *New Urban Project* strategy is based on values, solidarity, and the intelligence of territories brought together in order to reconcile “the human, the urban, and the environment” in historic centers. *Habitability* places quality of life and the needs of residents at the center of all decisions concerning the urban development of historic centers through the interaction of four *Strategic Axes*:

1. **Requalify the Habitat:** The evolution of historic centers in modern times must respect the idea that the city is made for living in.
2. **Refresh the city:** Integrate more nature into the city and improve its quality of life.
3. **Transform Mobility:** Adopting sustainable transport solutions and improving accessibility to historic centers.
4. **Regenerate the Urban Environment:** Establishing synergies between heritage preservation, adaptation to new urban uses, and revitalizing all the functions that coexist in historic centers, enabling them to be attractive living environments.

1.4 STRONG VALUES

Habitability is not just a physical condition of the living environment. It is a system of values, acquired by cities over the centuries, which determines the urban character of each city. The *New Urban Project* aims to generate concrete actions to strengthen or preserve these essential values that are important to the member cities of the OWHC:

- **Dignified housing** is a requirement for a habitable city that ensures the right to live in decent conditions, in healthy, accessible, and suitable housing that allows everyone to live fully in the city, regardless of their resources, age, or origin.
- **Justice and equity** extend this requirement by strengthening the city's capacity to accommodate all needs and expectations. A habitable and vibrant city is a shared city, where resources, services, and opportunities are distributed equitably, without segregation or exclusion, for social, functional, and generational diversity.
- **Frugality and adaptation** ensure that future generations will have the promise of an adaptable, transferable, and vibrant living environment. Living now also means being able to continue living tomorrow. This requires preserving cultural, natural, and social resources, adapting buildings and public spaces to climate change, and reinvesting in existing heritage rather than consuming it.
- **Belonging and identity** remind us that *habitability* is not just a question of comfort, but of meaning. We truly inhabit a place when we recognize ourselves in it, when it reflects a shared memory and offers symbolic landmarks. Heritage nourishes cultural continuity and inspires innovation.



- **Benevolence and togetherness** make *habitability* a value of living together. A caring city promotes encounters, closeness, and trust. It recognizes vulnerability as a component of social cohesion and creates the conditions for mutual care between residents, generations, and neighborhoods. In its welcoming public spaces, places of sharing, and human atmospheres, community life can flourish in an atmosphere of respect and solidarity.
- Finally, **participation and responsibility** give *habitability* its political dimension. A city is only habitable if it is governed with those who live there. Dialogue then becomes the foundation of shared governance, where everyone becomes involved in caring for the city and takes part in creating the place we share and for which we feel responsible.

2. AN OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORK THAT IS TAKING SHAPE

2.1 SUCCESS FACTORS

Member cities are committed to creating the conditions necessary to realize the full potential of the *New Urban Project*:

- i. In a context of profound urban change, the success of the *New Urban Project* depends above all on **political will**. Decision-makers must be determined to bring about the cultural change that the concept of *habitability* developed by the OWHC brings to the debate on the city of tomorrow. It is elected officials, assisted by technical services, who must remove obstacles to break down traditional barriers, allow practices to evolve, and make planning processes and procedures more effective.
- ii. Improved governance and the transformation of operational frameworks will create a "**culture of cooperation**" conducive to new dynamics. All stakeholders will gain confidence to engage in the process and develop a diverse and creative community of interests, conducive to ongoing dialogue between stakeholders, decision-makers, developers, and users of the city.
- iii. Thus, in the service of a political vision, the urban planning process aimed at *habitability* will be based on a **holistic view** of the city and its future. It will ensure the transversal nature of objectives and synergies between existing planning tools, improving them and making them more effective.
- iv. Local projects will stimulate investment, supported by a **dynamic financial model** aimed at greater social, environmental, cultural, and economic impact. Structural interventions will concentrate public investment in order to trigger committed and responsible dynamics.
- v. Cross-sector collaboration, transparent use of resources, and monitoring of implementation based on performance indicators will make it possible to measure **the impact of the changes** brought about by the projects. Their evaluation will guide the types of regulations to be put in place to sustain the positive effects.

2.2 ROBUST PRINCIPLES

The principles of *habitability* determine the operational dimension of the *New Urban Project*:

- **Promoting heritage as a driver of innovation:** Considering the adaptability of built and intangible heritage as an essential resource for imagining the urban uses and forms of tomorrow.
- **Designing the city in an integrated manner:** Promoting transversal projects that bring together the heritage, social, ecological, economic, and cultural dimensions included in the Strategic Axes.
- **Making the city a place to live above all else:** Preserving and strengthening the residential function as the primary purpose of historic centers, while ensuring social and generational diversity.
- **Making public space a common good:** Providing high-quality, accessible, comfortable, and inclusive public spaces that foster social ties, meet contemporary needs, and respect urban heritage.
- **Strengthen environmental sustainability:** Integrate nature, manage resources sustainably, and strengthen climate adaptation.
- **Promoting participatory governance:** Encouraging the active participation of residents, local stakeholders, and institutions in order to strengthen the sense of belonging and the legitimacy of decisions.
- **Stimulate an economy that benefits local life:** Create economic attractiveness based on respect for the area, enhancing local expertise, and creating tangible benefits for the local community.

2.3 AMBITIOUS OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Actions designed as part of the *New Urban Project* in accordance with the *Principles* will be implemented through *Operational Objectives* defined by the interaction between the four *Strategic Axes*. The *New Urban Project* clearly states that housing, public space, mobility, and heritage must be considered together. Requalify the Habitat without greening the city would be to ignore climate issues. Refreshing without transforming mobility would be tantamount to maintaining an outdated city model. Transforming without regenerating would leave technology without meaning. Regenerating without inhabiting would be an abstraction.

These objectives, which are currently being revised, will take into account the interrelationships, synergies, and economies of scale to be established so that they fit into an global strategy.

2.4 A GLOBAL STRATEGY THAT SUPPORTS STRUCTURING PROJECTS

Taking *Operational Objectives* into account when devising *Global Strategies* and developing indicators for monitoring *habitability* reinforces the appeal of the *New Urban Project*.



For successful implementation of an ambitious urban *Global Strategy*, each city must rely on a clear legal framework or, failing that, a strong political and social consensus. This common mandate guides public action and ensures the stability of decisions while bringing stakeholders together in a common purpose and coordinated action.

Because a city is a living system, the *Global Strategy* must embrace the diversity of issues and act on several scales, from the building to the metropolis, to spread the benefits throughout the territory. It must also clearly define its scope and time frame, combining immediate actions with a long-term vision. At the heart of this process, citizen participation must be active, inclusive, and nourished by collective and cultural moments.

Finally, to transform historic centers in a sustainable way, planning is not enough: it is also necessary to measure, learn, and adjust continuously. Monitoring the implementation of projects is therefore an essential pillar of responsible governance. Evaluating the impact of actions ensures that the strategy remains consistent in the face of changing contexts, while maintaining social support. Rigorous monitoring of actions, supported by measurable indicators, guarantees transparency and the ability to adjust. Combined with a culture of innovation and experimentation, this approach allows us to learn as we go and make historic centers exemplary, vibrant, resilient, and inclusive places.

APPENDIX 1: THEMATICS AND PROBLEMATICS

THEMATICS

The 12 *thematics* resulting from the collaborative work of the OWHC have given a unique direction to collective thinking and reflect a common ambition: to make historic centers sustainable living environments, capable of combining memory and modernity, heritage and innovation. They are organized around the four structural *Issues* that define the future framework for action for World Heritage cities.

1. Adapting cities to climate change and reducing its impact

Historic centers, which are often fragile and densely populated, are also places of innovation in the face of climate challenges. Thematic aspects related to climate, nature in the city, water management, and environmental resilience emphasize the need to rethink the relationship between heritage and urban ecology. Refreshing the historic city means restoring its natural balance: reintroducing vegetation, removing impervious surfaces, strengthening green and blue infrastructure, and enhancing what is already there—waterways, gardens, topography, and vernacular materials. These actions aim to reduce the carbon footprint while improving thermal, acoustic, and visual comfort, transforming old town centers into models of soft adaptation to climate change. The challenge is to make the ecological transition not a technical constraint, but an opportunity to reconcile nature, culture, and quality of life.

2. Capitalizing on the ability of historic districts to reinvent themselves

The thematics of housing, social diversity, the local economy, and the revitalization of the built environment express the ability of historic centers to transform themselves without losing their identity. The rehabilitation of existing buildings, the fight against vacancy, and public land management make it possible to maintain an active and diverse residential function. Heritage neighborhoods are laboratories for urban renewal: by reusing built heritage, they demonstrate that it is possible to invent new developments and change the city without denying its identity. Cities are constantly changing; the contribution of our era aspires to a more sober and humane city. Revitalizing historic centers involves taking action on local services, public facilities, and neighborhood shops in order to create a virtuous economy between housing, attractiveness, and local life. These dynamics of transformation are reinforced by citizen participation and collaborative governance, which ensure that the reinvention of the historic center remains rooted in the needs of those who live there.

3. Enhancing the features that underpin the habitability of the heritage city

The quality of life in historic centers depends on a subtle combination of public space, mobility, conviviality, and beauty. Thematics related to sustainable mobility, public spaces, city of proximities, and urban comfort focus on recreating environments that are conducive to walking, meeting people, and contemplation, as well as creativity and innovation. Reducing the space allocated to cars, calming traffic, and encouraging active and collective mobility frees up public space for new uses and improves urban health. The "15-minute city" becomes an ideal of proximity and equity, guaranteeing access to essential services for all. In this vein, pedestrianization, greening, and the redevelopment of shared spaces restore historic centers to their role as complete, inclusive, and aesthetic living environments, where people live, work, and meet in a meaningful and inspiring setting.

4. Promoting heritage as an irreplaceable resource for sustainable development

Thematics of tangible and intangible heritage, governance, culture, tourism, and collective identity remind us that heritage is not only to be protected, but also to be mobilized. Heritage is a resource—cultural, economic, social, and symbolic—that fuels innovation, structures collective memory, and strengthens community cohesion. Restoring a building, passing on know-how, promoting a narrative—these are not ways of preserving the past, but of creating meaning for the future. Cities must therefore adopt integrated frameworks for action in which heritage becomes a driver of sustainability, supporting training, local employment, responsible tourism, and cultural mediation. By bringing together heritage communities, experts, and institutions, this approach strengthens shared governance based on dialogue, cooperation, and diversity of knowledge. In this way, heritage, in its living and inclusive dimension, becomes an irreplaceable resource for building sustainable and inhabited cities.

LIST OF THEMATICS AND PROBLEMATICS DISCUSSED

1. Greening and space planning for urban refreshment

Problematics discussed

- The importance of existing green spaces in listed sites, given their historical, quantitative, qualitative or typological dimension. The memorial value of the tree, which goes beyond the coherence of the historic garden.
- The need to win public support for greening strategies.
- Evolving frameworks for interpreting the place of nature in the city: nature's complementarity with other urban functions, its usefulness for certain uses and its impact on lifestyles.
- The evaluation of renaturation opportunities according to the combined criteria of authenticity, contemporary lifestyles and appropriation through use. The old town doesn't always offer the ideal conditions for vegetation to flourish, given the needs of traffic, the demands of supplying shops, narrow streets, their slopes, numerous crossroads, networks and fire access.
- Arguing for choices: Take into account the variety of constraints (opinions of those responsible for heritage, archaeological remains, compliance with fire regulations, relocation of electricity or telephone networks, etc.) to properly justify the decision to plant; rediscover the spirit of an old place by reinterpreting it according to the needs of the 21st century (urban conservation does not necessarily mean mimicking the inherited form).
- The search for solutions and their implementation by organizing the monitoring and evaluation of actions: the vulnerability of certain tree species and the need to replace them to take account of tomorrow's climate; the effort to make vehicle accessibility and planting compatible; the renewal of fertile soils conducive to planting.

2. Intangible heritage as a resource for urban rehabilitation

Problematics discussed

- The definition of intangible heritage: The identification of elements deemed important to safeguard and reinterpret from a contemporary perspective, in relation to the tangible and intangible elements of the OUV. The soul of the place to be integrated into world heritage knowledge and management.



- The relationship between intangible heritage and the communities involved: the role of heritage in the construction of local identity, management of heritage by the local community, neighborhoods bordering the site, etc.
- The potential of intangible heritage to generate structuring projects: Participatory approaches, adapting the site's traditional functions and characteristics in the light of changing values and needs, the place of tourism, decompartmentalization, opening up to surrounding neighborhoods, etc.

3. Protecting and strengthening the residential function of the city's historic centers

Problematics discussed

- Rehabilitation of vacant or dilapidated housing: Prioritize housing and businesses that serve the public, develop uses and encourage social diversity, limit the importance of tourist rentals.
- The role of public authorities in bringing vacant housing back onto the market and supporting owners through awareness-raising, technical support and incentives to encourage them to keep or convert their property into housing for permanent residents.
- Innovative architectural interventions and urban approaches, such as re-establishing frontage accesses, arranging joint accesses and services from block interiors, reconfiguring blocks, or improving energy performance.
- The development and improvement of facilities and services (amenities) for the population in areas to be rehabilitated, in particular education (schools) and food (grocery stores), which contribute to complete living environments and meet the needs of young families.

4. Raising awareness and disseminating heritage information to the local community

Problematics discussed

- The purpose of heritage awareness: it can inspire respect for built heritage, be instrumental to the construction of a collective identity, or facilitate active public involvement in heritage management.
- The heterogeneity of the target audience: Identifying the audiences to whom information is to be disseminated will impact the preferred formats and contents of dissemination. Once the audiences have been identified, along with their needs and the objectives for disseminating the information, other factors need to inform the pedagogical approach, narrative frameworks, etc., that will be most appropriate for the target audience.
- Synergy between physical and virtual media: for richer, more immersive on-site experiences.

5. Greening public spaces

Problematics discussed

- Invention of a new identity and development of new uses: implementation of acceptable layouts in relation to heritage authenticity, identification of how each era has shaped public space according to its needs, definition of criteria for balancing aesthetics and function, transformation of sacralized spaces, preservation of cultural and imaginary referents.
- The potential for architectural and technical innovation in terms of underground infrastructure management, increasing the size of planting pits, etc.
- Intervention in restricted or hostile spaces such as public transport stops.



- Preserving existing planted spaces as an alternative to new urban development. Consider greening projects in such a way as to reduce maintenance costs and watering requirements by using plants adapted to drought, pollution and salt, or by creating water basins that interact with the green grid.
- Cross-disciplinary, integrated management of municipal services.
- Citizen involvement and shared responsibility, in terms of creating opportunities for citizen greening, setting up a participatory budget, allocating space for urban vegetable gardens, etc.

6. Irregular architectural interventions that diminish heritage values

Problematics discussed

- Assessment of the value of the built heritage, conservation needs and the criteria and limits of interventions: define what constitutes an irregularity from the point of view of authenticity values and its attributes identified at the site, the safety and well-being of the population, as well as its current needs.
- The framework for managing and safeguarding the historic center: what tools, what control bodies, under what vision, what principles, by whom?
- The role of public authorities in understanding and changing behavior, orienting the population towards heritage conservation through appropriate interventions by means of incentives, definition and application of norms and collaborations.

7. Regulation of traffic within the buffer zone of the World Heritage site

Problematics discussed

- Sharing of scarce and highly demanded public spaces: Public spaces which are often coveted by various profiles of users throughout the day. How to find the best way to ensure fair and efficient sharing of these spaces, between the different users including deciding which should be given priority.
- Reorganization of modes of transport: How to respond to the contemporary urban priorities of reducing the footprint of motorized transport in the historic center and its buffer zone, while meeting the needs of different users. Coordination between efficient public transport, the use of private or shared vehicles by residents and visitors, as well as service vehicles (ambulances, fire trucks, suppliers, taxis, etc). Managing and controlling access to the historic center: How to ensure the monitoring and regulation of the city's access according to the different modes of transport used and the trajectory taken by the various users (residential, transit, service or commercial traffic, areas for drop-off, delivery or parking, etc.).
- The promotion of alternative forms of mobility: A means of reducing the attractiveness of using individual motor vehicles.
- Residential requalification of the city center: Bringing citizen services from the outskirts back into the center to increase attractiveness and reduce car dependency.



8. Regeneration of the historic core through the preservation, valorization and awareness of heritage

Problematics discussed

- Interpretation of heritage: taking into account the original function, the value of this heritage, what it represents, and how to restore it, in order to influence the rehabilitation program
- Social value of heritage: the rehabilitation program vs. restoration of historic buildings, social and economic uses to be prioritized for socioeconomic and cultural cohesion.
- Shared governance between municipal managers and actors involved in the socioeconomic and cultural dynamics of the historic center: potential partnerships and their relevance in thinking about the future of the restored building and their place in its administration and ensuring its sustainability.
- Intervention on historic buildings according to different land situations: The mechanisms and procedures available to cities for intervening on buildings differ depending on whether they are public or private property, jointly owned or ownerless, but also depending on the type of occupancy—owners, tenants.

9. Protected buildings in a state of abandonment

Problematics discussed

- Impact of abandoned buildings on neighborhood vitality: economic impact (tourism), demographic impact (loss of attractiveness to new residents and exodus of existing residents), impact on civil security, loss of cachet, etc.
- Understanding the reasons for abandonment: immediate causes (death of occupants, disputes among the estate, restoration costs too high, gradual wear and tear of the building, environmental damage - flora, rain, wind, earthquake) vs. systemic causes (land speculation, demographic decline, indifference to heritage conservation, lack of title deeds)
- Preferred approaches depending on the nature and extent of the phenomenon: abandonment as a localized or endemic phenomenon, visible or invisible (from the street), cyclical or long-standing. Preventive (acting on risk factors), corrective (acting on affected buildings) and structuring (acting on affected neighborhoods) approaches.

10. Regeneration of the historic center through a model of active mobility

Problematics discussed

- Active mobility: The transformation of a street, a section of a street or the intervention of a public space can stimulate the debate on a series of accessibility issues and provide elements for a structuring approach to pedestrianization: urban infrastructure that facilitates or secures the experience of pedestrians, universal accessibility, the incorporation of new geometries that help the functioning of roads, the integration of furniture, and the planting of endemic species in mixed spaces in pedestrian areas or streets with low road speed.
- Hierarchization of arterial routes: To implement an effective mobility plan, we need to understand how the transport system works, i.e. who the users are and what their motives are, which modes of transport work and which ones bring negative externalities or can be subject to improvement. In this way we can think about changes in habits and the development of active and motorized



mobility alternatives and intermodality, i.e. generating efficient connections between different modes of transport.

- Social acceptability: The support of neighbors and merchants affected by the remodeling of their street makes pedestrianization be seen as a project that favors the attractiveness and dynamism of a neighborhood.

11. Pacified mobility: Street planning and sharing between different users and mobility modes

Problematics discussed

- Citizen participation in the definition of the urban project: methodological and strategic aspects (consultation and co-construction tools used according to the type of input and purpose sought).
- Changing user behavior: Encourage change through facilities, awareness-raising or educational methods.
- Integrating mobility into structuring projects: Prioritizing modes of transport, requalifying public spaces freed up by alternative modes of transport, reflecting on the purpose of travel.
- Public transit governance: some cities have municipal or metropolitan bodies empowered to authorize companies to serve given routes (concession system), for others this power is a higher authority. Differences when public transport is provided by a public or parapublic company (individual routes are not tied to particular interests).

12. Crafts and traditional know-how for the preservation of heritage

Problematics discussed

- Enhancing heritage authenticity, in the sense of the value that the population and municipal authorities give to the application of traditional construction techniques, the use of original materials in renovation as opposed to industrial practices and cheap materials, and to the definition of "authentic".
- Market and economic conditions of crafts and know-how: the supply of skills depends to a large extent on the training leading to the accreditation of specialized professionals and the interest new generations have for them, while demand depends on a series of factors ranging from the value that individuals place on the use of original materials, construction methods, aesthetic concepts and ways of using space, and the administrative processes, regulations and laws in effect.
- Regulations governing the work of specialized companies and craftsmen. Disparity between national legislation on the management of classified heritage and municipal regulations, which lack formal requirements on the hiring of qualified individuals or companies to restore heritage buildings, making it difficult to hire competent professionals.
- Quality of architectural work (restoration or rehabilitation): This requires investment in research, innovation, followed by inspection and supervision of these interventions, while ensuring the skills and integrity of administrative staff.

APPENDIX 2: STRATEGIC AXES

Four *Strategic Axes* aim to make historic centers vibrant, resilient, and sustainable places. By combining heritage preservation, housing improvement, adaptation to environmental challenges, and the transformation of mobilities, the city can enhance its attractiveness while respecting its history and residents:

- **Requalify the Habitat**

The revitalization of historic centers begins with maintaining or bringing back residents. Requalify the habitat means restoring the residential function threatened by speculation, vacancy, or museumification. It means supporting the rehabilitation of old housing, the transmission of know-how, and the maintenance of a diverse and active population.

But requalify the habitat, also means taking action in the rest of the city. By consolidating the residential fabric, we promote local mobility, reduce dependence on cars, and make a "walkable" city possible. Reinvested housing supports functional diversity, stimulates neighborhood businesses, and restores meaning to public spaces. It is the anchor of a policy of habitability, which makes heritage not just a backdrop, but a living environment.

- **Refresh the city**

In this era of climate change, refreshing the city is a vital imperative. Introducing nature into the urban fabric, removing impervious surfaces, providing shade, and greening are all actions that regenerate the historic fabric without betraying its spirit. Trees, green courtyards, and green roofs are becoming the new monuments of a city that is adapting.

But refreshing doesn't stop at the environment: it also transforms uses. By creating spaces for coolness and breathing, we stimulate encounters, calm traffic, and we facilitate slow mobility. Greening becomes a social as well as an ecological infrastructure—a link between housing, mobility, and heritage.

- **Transform Mobility**

Rethinking mobility means giving the city back to its inhabitants. By reducing the space given over to cars and developing walking, cycling, and public transport, we create a safer, more fluid, and more inclusive city. Public space is reinventing itself: fewer motorized flows, more places to stay, socialize, and share.

This transformation in turn enhances the residential function. Quieter neighborhoods become more desirable, homes open onto lively, breathable streets, and children can play outside again. By freeing up space, sustainable mobility also paves the way for greening and rediscovering heritage. Each redesigned street becomes a laboratory of urbanity: a space where ecology, culture, and citizenship come together.

- **Regenerate the Urban Environment**

Regeneration goes beyond simply restoring buildings: it means giving the city a new collective meaning. This involves mobilizing residents, craftsmen, researchers, and artists to work together to invent new uses for heritage. It means considering the historical fabric as a resource, a field for social, ecological, and cultural experimentation.



Regeneration connects the other three axis: it provides direction and a shared vision. It turns housing rehabilitation into a cultural act, greening into a collective project, and soft mobility into a lived heritage experience. It transforms the past into a resource for facing the challenges of the present.

Requalify, refresh, transform, regenerate: these four verbs trace the trajectory of a single ambition—to breathe new life and meaning into the historic city. Each of these axes is a gateway to profound transformation, but it is in their articulation that the true political project is built: a living, inclusive, and resilient city, faithful to its memory while looking to the future.

APPENDIX 3: STATEMENTS

The member cities that participated in the meetings and workshops organized as part of the *Québec Roadmap* and the *Cordoba Path* produced 54 *Statements* that shed light on the concrete direction that member cities wish to see the *New Urban Project* take. They affirm the need to put people back at the center of urban concerns and future projects: a city that is inhabited, vibrant, and socially diverse, where the quality of housing, the rewilding of public spaces, and accessibility support the vitality of the historic center and affirm it as the heart of the city. Heritage becomes the driving force behind an ecological, social, and cultural transformation that restores meaning to the city and the desire to live there.

The 54 *statements* have been summarized and grouped into 25 *Integrative Statements* relating to the *Strategic Axes*:

Requalify the Habitat

1. The rehabilitation of existing buildings is the preferred option: combating vacancy and reusing unoccupied housing take precedence over new construction.
2. Public land control is an essential lever for regulating residential use, limiting speculation, and ensuring affordable housing supply.
3. Speculation and touristification directly threaten residents' quality of life: housing offered to visitors must be regulated to preserve the residential function.
4. Incentive and enforcement policies must be combined: support rehabilitation when it maintains the residential function, and penalize speculative or negligent owners.
5. The repopulation of the historic center requires joint action on housing, local services, and public facilities, creating a virtuous circle between urban vitality and residential attractiveness.
6. A comprehensive regulatory framework must enable effective intervention in the built heritage while reconciling preservation and improvement of housing conditions.
7. Maintaining the built heritage is a matter of quality of life and well-being as much as it is of safety: cities must strengthen their capacity to take action on degraded or abandoned properties.

Refresh the city

8. Greening must be integrated into a comprehensive strategy of green and blue infrastructure that is consistent with water management, taking advantage of what is already there and the historical topography.
9. Planting is not an end in itself: interventions must aim for diversity of use, thermal, visual, acoustic, and social comfort, and avoid the effects of ecological gentrification.
10. Public spaces must be designed as places for living and socializing, ensuring a balance between nature, minerality, and social ties.
11. The creation of spaces for calm and contemplation strengthens attachment to the place and quality of life in historic centers.
12. Interdisciplinarity between urban services and the development of technical skills are necessary to deploy coherent and sustainable cooling strategies.
13. Political courage and citizen involvement are essential to the success of rewilding and reclaiming public spaces.



Transform Mobility

14. Reducing car traffic in historic centers requires rethinking access, parking, and the distribution of different types of mobility across the entire city.
15. Active mobility (walking, cycling) is a key lever for quality of life, improving air quality, public health, and urban conviviality.
16. Sustainable mobility policies must be integrated into overall urban strategies: they concern not only transportation, but also the coherence between housing, employment, and services.
17. The city of proximity—or 15-minute city—is key to reducing dependence on motorized transport and ensuring equitable access to essential services.
18. Pedestrianization must be seen as a tool for economic and social dynamism, developed in collaboration with residents and businesses and accompanied by transparent communication.
19. Transformations must be gradual and subject to evaluation in order to maintain citizen support and adjust policies according to the results observed.
20. Data collection and analysis (particularly through new technologies and artificial intelligence) must guide the planning and monitoring of mobility impacts.

Regenerate the Urban Environment

21. Built and intangible heritage must be exploited as a strategic resource for revitalization: it embodies the values, narratives, and know-how that form the basis of urban identity.
22. Heritage rehabilitation must combine authenticity, innovation, and educational value: the transmission of traditional knowledge and occupations is essential to its sustainability.
23. Heritage communities must be recognized and involved in governance: their symbolic and emotional attachment to the place fosters cohesion and the legitimacy of projects.
24. Urban policies must be transversal, linking housing, culture, the environment, the economy, and governance in an integrated approach driven by heritage.
25. Regenerating habitability requires overcoming institutional and budgetary fragmentation: cooperation between public actors, citizens, and international partners is the key to sustainable transformation.

APPENDIX 4: OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

The Community of Practice (Évora, March 2025) proposed an initial set of provisional *Operational Objectives*, which will be supplemented and revised until spring 2026:

1. **Transforming historic centers into laboratories for urban innovation** to design living spaces for experimentation and collective learning, where heritage, sustainability, and innovation interact. The material and immaterial wealth of old centers is a resource for testing new urban practices—in terms of mobility, building rehabilitation, ecological management, and quality of life—in a progressive, measurable, and reproducible manner. Contemporary solutions (soft mobility, artificial intelligence, renaturation, new social functions for buildings) are rooted in the existing fabric, while promoting traditional knowledge and skills. Their role is no longer just to preserve, but also to generate adaptive urban models capable of inspiring the entire city.
2. **Establish permanent transversal governance** to set up a city organization capable of overcoming administrative and sectoral divisions in order to ensure the consistency of urban strategies in historic centers. This involves creating a continuous "culture of coordination" between the various municipal departments—urban planning, mobility, environment, housing, culture—but also with private operators, academic institutions, and citizens. Such governance is based on the sharing of common skills and languages, the harmonization of regulatory frameworks, and the existence of multidisciplinary structures capable of managing complex projects. By simplifying procedures, supporting residents, and implementing observation and evaluation systems, this governance becomes a tool for efficiency, transparency, and trust. It transforms the historic center into a space managed as a common good, where each intervention is part of a shared and sustainable vision.
3. **Involve residents in the co-construction of urban projects** to recognize that they are essential actors in the transformation of historic centers. This approach gives projects greater legitimacy and sustainability by anchoring them in the needs, knowledge, and values of local communities. It is based on clear and transparent communication, permanent mechanisms for dialogue, and accessible and interactive mediation tools. By integrating the multiple narratives of intangible heritage, the memory of places, and traditional know-how, co-construction makes it possible to develop projects that reflect collective identity while responding to contemporary challenges. It promotes the appropriation of public spaces, heritage education, and intergenerational transmission, thus transforming citizen participation into a continuous process of shared urban creation.
4. **Maintain populations and attracting new residents in the historic center** in order to affirm its residential function as the primary condition for its vitality. This objective requires the rehabilitation of vacant housing rather than new construction, land control to curb speculation, and a balance of uses in the face of tourist pressure. The aim is to guarantee access to housing and local services, preserve social and generational diversity, and promote innovative forms of affordable and inclusive housing. The attractiveness of the historic center depends on the quality of life it offers: mobility adapted to residents, accessible shops and services, welcoming public spaces, and heritage buildings used in a way that meets the real needs of local communities. By consolidating an active residential fabric, the historic center becomes not only a place of memory and heritage, but also an equitable, inclusive, and sustainable living environment, capable of resisting speculative logic and welcoming new generations of residents.



5. **Rethinking public rights-of-way and developing existing public spaces** to transform the urban space into a medium for quality of life, equity, and sustainability. This involves gradually reducing the place of the automobile in favor of active mobility, conviviality, and biodiversity, while ensuring the coherence of flows across the entire city. Public space then becomes a multifunctional place: a space for circulation, but also for shade, coolness, rest, meeting, and contemplation. Integrating greening and water management into an ecological framework, ensuring thermal, acoustic, and visual comfort, and guaranteeing universal accessibility are priorities. Pedestrianization, conceived not as an end in itself but as a lever for social and economic dynamism, must be experimented with, adjusted, and designed to enhance the inclusiveness of uses. Through this rebalancing, the public domain is no longer a simple technical support for mobility, but a shared and heritage space, the driving force behind a new urbanity.