

Together towards the New Urban Project

Community of Practice

Report on the Évora meeting (March 13-14, 2025)



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INTRODUCTION

The *Report of the Cordoba Symposium* (September 2024) sets out the objectives of two programs specifically dedicated to the adoption of the *New Urban Project*: the *Québec Roadmap* and the *Cordoba Path*. These programs serve to initiate closely interrelated activities that will ensure the collective drafting of the *New Urban Project*.

In particular, the *Community of Practice* activity creates a specific framework for developing a process of reflection that is no longer thematic-based, but rather transversal. The thematic-based reflections carried out within the framework of the *Collaborative Networks* have so far mainly produced *Statements*¹ which establish shared positions on the subjects addressed, as well as *Courses of Action* which give a more concrete direction for the implementation of the four *Strategic Axes*² chosen by the OWHC to achieve the "Regeneration of Habitability in Historic Centers." The application of intersecting logic is an essential step in developing the concrete, operational proposals that will be included in the *New Urban Project*.

The *Évora Report*, summarized by the Advisory Group,³ represents a new stage in the process and a benchmark for the work that will subsequently be carried out within the framework of the *Collaborative Networks*, *CityLabs*, and *Focus Groups*. The next meeting of the *Community of Practice* will deal with the new results obtained, taking into account the evolving consensus among the participating cities.

ÉVORA MEETING

The *Community of Practice* in Évora⁴ has transformed the Cordoba *Statements* into five *Objectives* that target the challenges raised by the four *Issues*⁵ and all the *Strategic Axes*. The operational guidelines suggested by the *Objectives* were discussed with elected officials⁶ (virtual responses), who confirmed their relevance to the political vision reinforced in Cordoba. Each *Objective* focuses on a particular angle, which implies cross-fertilizations and overlaps that are useful when considering their application in the specific contexts of each member city.

The *Community of Practice* in Évora then proposed a first series of *Solutions* that could be developed in relation to the *Objectives*, in order to respond concretely to local challenges. In the current state of reflection, these *Solutions* clarify the scope and intention expressed by each *Objective*.

All the *Objectives* form a system. They make an essential contribution to defining the common "reference framework" that will be proposed by the *New Urban Project*. The aim is therefore to ensure that all mayors identify these *Objectives*, bearing in mind that local situations differ and that the projects derived from the *Objectives* will vary from one city to another.

¹ See Appendix for basic terminology.

² Requalify the Habitat, Refresh the City, Transform Mobility, Regenerate the Urban Environment.

³ Yves Gendron, Deputy Managing Director, Strasbourg and Upper Rhine Superior Urban Planning Agency (ADEUS) and Luc Gagnon, Consulting and Strategy Services - Urban Planning and Mobility.

⁴ Participants: Anne-Laure Moniot (Bordeaux), Paula Cordeiro (Brussels), Miheala Skuric (Dubrovnik), Chantale Émond (Québec City), as well as from the host city (Évora): Miguel Pedro, Paula Santos, Débora Fortunato, and Ricardo de Moraes Sarmento.

⁵ See Appendix for references.

⁶ MéliSSa Coulombe-Leduc (Québec City), Ivana Brnin (Dubrovnik), Didier Jeanjean (Bordeaux), Ivan Abril (Cuenca).



OBJECTIVES AND SOLUTIONS

1. Transforming historic city centers into laboratories for urban innovation

By definition, historic city centers are the quintessence of continuous transformation over the centuries, and as such, they possess the physical resources (morphology, urban fabric, plots of land, streets and squares, inner blocks, buildings that have been redeveloped many times, and the like) and intangible resources (including identity, territorial intelligence, traditions, know-how, and local cultures, among others) to offer alternatives according to need. The city's heritage approach and the fundamental objective of regenerating habitability in historic city centers must inspire new strategies and projects, focusing in particular on public rights-of-way, which are easier to develop because possible actions depend more directly on public authorities.

Solutions

- 1.1 Resource libraries and data basis on existing assessment and intervention methodologies and on traditional materials and techniques to highlight the potential for adapting historic buildings
- 1.2 Intervention guidelines for heritage buildings and spaces
- 1.3 Exemplary / ephemeral or transitional pilot projects for the development of public spaces (ecological rehabilitation, etc.) with ongoing evaluation of their appropriation by users
- 1.4 Qualitative inventories of green spaces (existing or potential) / unbuilt spaces to provide food for thought on the subject of revegetation / renaturation
- 1.5 Partnerships with the academic world (universities, research centers) to develop innovative solutions (technology, materials, and the like)
- 1.6 Integration of apprenticeships for heritage building trades and certification of companies



2. Establishing permanent transversal governance

The scale of the response required to adapt historic city centers to today's climatic, social, and economic challenges calls for upstream action on governance, to bring about changes in political, legislative, and operational frameworks. The OWHC member cities have noted that this "good governance" to be invented or implemented involves adapting structures that help forge a stronger link between elected officials and the service departments concerned, decompartmentalizing departments (those in charge of heritage, urban planning, the environment, mobility, and the like). They would also ensure better representation of all stakeholders (including elected officials, civil servants, experts, residents, users, and civil society, among others.), and give all stakeholders a greater role in the choices to be made and the monitoring of projects. The measures and their implementation should serve to establish a system of governance that can, as far as possible, transcend electoral cycles.

Solutions

- 2.1 Coordination mechanisms to link different decision-making levels (consistency, congruity, coordination, and complementarity of interventions and responses)
- 2.2 Heritage skills invested and shared at the heart of urban planning, mobility, environment, and engineering service departments
- 2.3 Multidisciplinary structure specially dedicated to urban strategies in the historic center to design, implement, and manage interventions and responses
- 2.4 System for continuous observation and evaluation of urban policies
- 2.5 A municipal information and expertise service department to support residents and owners of housing or commercial premises and services
- 2.6 Municipal one-window approach for all services related to the historic center, simplifying administrative procedures and access to programs for residents and professionals alike

3. Involving residents in the co-construction of urban projects

Communities are bearers of the different narratives that tell the narrative of the city, that help construct and define the urban fabric. Heritage is composed of these narratives and gives them voice, opening up a broad dialogue and establishing bridges between diverse interests. It reconciles the residents and users of historic city centers by way of a shared will and perspective. Through heritage, the historic city creates committed and responsible residents, capable of working with other stakeholders (elected officials, specialists, experts, and the like). Stories galvanize communities, providing the energy and inspiration to move forward in an ever-changing world.

Solutions

- 3.1 Ongoing residents' assemblies at a neighborhood level (expression of needs)
- 3.2 Assignment of objectives and tools to promote resident participation (participatory budget, consultation, and other strategies)
- 3.3 Educational and pedagogical programs to raise awareness of the rules and procedures linked to heritage and to enhance the skills of communities and residents to make them more responsible and able to play their part in defining projects
- 3.4 Multi-story heritage discovery circuits run by the communities concerned for purposes of information gathering or for visitors



- 3.5 Community spaces and associated programs dedicated to heritage mediation (strengthening communities, gathering heritage narratives) and to identifying and interpreting intangible heritage for its contribution to contemporary needs (heritagization: plantations, landscapes, empty spaces, traditions, gathering and memory places, and the sharing of memories, stories, traditional know-how, and the like)

4. Maintaining populations and attracting new residents

Member cities have rallied around the key idea that "cities are first and foremost meant to be habitable." Indeed, in many cities, the challenge is to maintain or bring back residents and attract new ones. Only residents can keep a city alive, and only a living city can plan to evolve and develop naturally. Ensuring a good quality of life and well-being for residents is the main argument for convincing them to stay or come to the historic center. This means above all providing a sufficient supply of suitable housing, supporting local markets, managing population density, and offering local services and urban amenities tailored to the needs of current and future residents.

Solutions

- 4.1 Surveys and analyses to identify the factors that attract and repel people with regards to living in the historic center, supported by a communication plan highlighting the advantages and innovative initiatives underway or planned
- 4.2 Demographic, social, and other analyses to guide/adapt housing policies that take into account generational, social, and economic diversity (success and monitoring indicators)
- 4.3 Rehabilitation programs to maintain and develop services and shops for residents, including technical assistance, incentives for owners/entrepreneurs), and alternative economic and management models (in partnership with NGOs), as well as a fund dedicated to strategic acquisitions (housing, shops, services)
- 4.4 Right of first refusal on assets offered for sale
- 4.5 Technical and financial assistance for the adaptation of heritage buildings to encourage the emergence of new forms of affordable housing (collective, cooperative, shared housing, and the like).
- 4.6 Creation of specific services for vulnerable segments of the population (the elderly and families, among others).
- 4.7 Fare mechanisms (free of charge) to encourage the use of public transport

5. Rethinking public rights-of-way and developing existing public spaces

Historic city centers have always been affected by changing lifestyles and mobility patterns. The new needs of each era have had a particular impact on the occupation of undeveloped space. Habitability, today's rallying cry for OWHC member cities, expresses the aspirations and expectations of our time, defined by other priorities linked in particular to climate change. This evolution creates opportunities for transformation, primarily concerning our modes of transport and therefore the role of the private car. The choices to be made must become significant markers on questions of public health, overcrowding of streets and squares, and so on. The reclamation of public spaces and their redevelopment to make them multifunctional places in harmony with the heritage context must integrate calming mobility, varied uses in order to serve residents, and the welcoming of nature and biodiversity.



Solutions

- 5.1 Identification of strategic areas of the public domain to be reclaimed as a priority, and reallocation of space dedicated to cars so as to create public spaces, biodiversity, and public amenities
- 5.2 Surveys on travel behavior and needs
- 5.3 Tactical urban planning strategy enabling temporary testing of mobility transformations and fostering their social acceptability before final implementation
- 5.4 Pricing mechanisms (free, social) to encourage the use of public transport
- 5.5 Surveys of residents' and users' shopping habits and commercial needs to guide the strategic location of shops and services
- 5.6 Unit or manager in charge of commercial activity, tasked with identifying vacant premises and facilitating the installation of shops and services that meet needs



APPENDIX - SUMMARY OF REFERENCES AND BASIC TERMINOLOGY

COLLABORATIVE NETWORKS PROGRESS REPORTS

Progress reports, by each Collaborative Network, are available via the following link:
["COLLABORATIVE NETWORK WEBPAGE"](#)

ISSUES

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

STRATEGIC AXES

1. Requalify the Habitat
2. Refresh the City
3. Transform Mobility
4. Regenerate the Urban Environment

CONCEPT DEFINITIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

	Definition	Example
<i>Statements</i>	Shared positions, underlining the scope of the challenges linked to one of the <i>Strategic Axes</i> , on which cities agree to act	<u>Example taken from the Progress Reports:</u> "Land control is a city's main asset for controlling the supply and type of housing."
<i>Courses of action</i>	Guidelines that suggest the measures and means to be implemented to meet the challenges linked to one of the <i>Strategic Axes</i>	<u>Example taken from the 38 proposed in Cordoba:</u> "Support, advise, and encourage homeowners to renovate their property."
<i>Objectives</i>	Targets to be achieved (formulated on the basis of a <i>Statement</i>) in order to realize the potentials contained in all the <i>Strategic Axes</i>	<u>Example:</u> "Implement regulatory tools and incentives that increase the city's role and means of response to encourage and support the development of a diversified, accessible, and heritage-friendly housing supply."
<i>Solutions</i>	Specific actions to be implemented in order to concretely achieve the <i>Objectives</i>	<u>Examples:</u> "Setting up a municipal fund dedicated to rehabilitating historic buildings, transformed into accessible housing." or "Making it compulsory to use traditional techniques and materials."