

# Cordoba Path

## CityLab on Housing in Historic Centers

### 3rd Regional Meeting: Latin America towards the New Urban Project

Cuenca, November 26-28, 2025



OVPM . OWHC . OCPM

## CONTEXT

The CityLab on "Housing in Historic Centers" was held as part of the 3rd Latin American Regional Meeting in Cuenca, Ecuador, on November 26, 27, and 28, 2025.

The Cuenca CityLab contributes to the development of the *New Urban Project*, which will be officially adopted at the 18<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the OWHC in Marrakech, Morocco (October 26-29, 2026).

At the 16<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the OWHC (Quebec City, Canada, September 2022), mayors agreed to develop a *New Urban Project* to regenerate historic centers through urban strategies focused on habitability. This program will provide tools and support to World Heritage cities to address the increasingly complex challenges posed by climate change, economic pressures, and social crises.

## INTRODUCTION

Since 2022, Latin American cities have participated actively in the various activities of the two programs dedicated to the development of the *New Urban Project*: the Québec Roadmap and the Cordoba Path. The Regional Meeting in Cuenca, with the participation of the cities of Colonia del Sacramento, Cuenca, Guanajuato, Havana, Mexico City, Morelia, Puebla, and Querétaro (see Annex 1 for the complete list of participants), focused on **housing in historic centers** as the main topic of discussion.

Latin American cities, like all OWHC member cities, face similar challenges: inappropriate interventions, neglect, pressure on the residential market, and regulatory frameworks that are not always understandable or favorable. Housing issues also affect matters relating to the preservation of neighborhood life and the diversity of uses and services (shops, public services), which are essential to historic centers that are inhabited, vibrant, and accessible.

The CityLab has made it possible to formulate strategic and operational proposals based on the Latin American experience.

## METHODOLOGY

The CityLab took place in two stages:

- First, a brief period of reflection (opening round table) and field observation (thematic visit), which made it possible to establish a common frame of reference and identify, through concrete examples, the main challenges related to housing and habitability in historic centers. The discussion highlighted that maintaining the residential function in historic centers depends on a combination of institutional conditions (governance, regulation, capacities), intervention tools (incentives, support, use management), and a cultural and educational foundation that supports common criteria.
- This was followed by a workshop organized into three working groups to discuss three specific problematics in order to address the question of housing from complementary angles, without fragmenting the analysis. These problematics are recurrent in previous regional work and in

experiences already developed (they may have been the subject of work within the framework of the Roadmap's Collaborative Networks):

- a. Unauthorized and non-compliant interventions
- b. Buildings classified, unoccupied and/or abandoned
- c. Fragmented governance and lack of land tenure security

## RESULTS OF DISCUSSIONS BY GROUP

Each problematic issue was addressed separately in order to better understand the factors that influence the ability of Latin American cities to retain and attract residents to their historic centers. The groups sought to formulate statements, courses of action, and possible solutions that could strengthen the residential function of historic centers.

### Group 1 — Unauthorized and non-compliant interventions

#### Statements

- Irregular interventions are associated with a lack of understanding of heritage value (among citizens and professionals) and a disconnect between the government and the reality of local communities (residents and local stakeholders): unclear rules, lengthy procedures, and limited support, which undermines trust and encourages people to circumvent procedures.
- The slowness of administrative processes tends to encourage spontaneous, parallel, or unauthorized initiatives.
- Additional tensions can be observed: an imbalance between the use and promotion of heritage and the need for contemporary adaptation (e.g., accessibility or environmental requirements) without compromising heritage criteria.

#### Courses of action

- Move towards integrated, collaborative, and flexible urban and heritage management by coordinating between institutions, owners, and citizens.
- Make awareness raising for heritage values a permanent part of urban policies to strengthen criteria for intervention on old buildings and facilitate compliant interventions. Strengthen relationships, dialogue, and communication:
  - With more "user-friendly" collaboration mechanisms between public authorities and owners
  - By disseminating clear information on heritage value and intervention rules/procedures to citizens, civil servants, and visitors.
- Revise frameworks and procedures to allow for relevant adaptations of heritage buildings to current needs (habitability, accessibility, safety, environmental requirements), with clear and predictable rules.

#### Solutions

- Implement an educational program on heritage for children and young people, supplemented by campaigns, workshops for professionals, and citizen guides.
- Develop operational measures in priority areas:

- Technical advice and co-responsibility processes
- Simplification of procedures and technical and legal training for public officials
- Guidance for interventions
- Recover and disseminate traditional know-how, techniques, and materials related to conservation and rehabilitation.
- At the OWHC level: strengthen exchanges between cities and produce comparative references on heritage financing and common tools for communicating the value of heritage.

### Group 2 — Listed buildings that are unoccupied and/or abandoned

#### Statements

- The abandonment of heritage buildings is multidimensional (not only physical, but also social) and weakens community life and local economic activity.
- This situation of abandonment is exacerbated by pressures related to gentrification and touristification, which accelerate the loss of the resident population.
- Vacancy and abandonment create a deficit in everyday habitability and lead to a loss of local services.
- Vacancy and abandonment can be caused by public policies that do not give sufficient priority to housing. This weakens residential attractiveness and the retention of a resident population.

#### Courses of action

- Promote comprehensive policies and strategic plans that link housing and heritage preservation with economic and urban management tools.
- Integrate key elements in a coordinated manner:
  - Affordable housing, incentives, urban services, local economy
  - Participatory governance, sustainable tourism, and heritage education
- Integrate greening and public space strategies, particularly through the redevelopment of underused or degraded spaces—to improve habitability and support housing in historic centers.
- Strengthening regulatory and management criteria that enable the recovery of residential functions as the basis for a comprehensive revitalization.

#### Solutions

- Implement a municipal program of incentives for housing rehabilitation (tax benefits, financing, and technical support).
- Supplement with planning and protection instruments:
  - Clear definitions of residential uses in protected areas
  - Measures to promote social and affordable housing
- Apply measures to contain pressure on the residential market (including regulation of platforms).
- Develop concrete urban actions to improve the quality of life like strengthening green spaces and public wooded areas.

## Group 3 — Fragmented governance and lack of land tenure security

### Statements

- Land tenure security is a prerequisite: it defines obligations, guarantees rights, and facilitates access to public housing and rehabilitation programs.
- The lack of clear information and institutional support increases uncertainty and makes it difficult to take responsible action.
- While recognizing the commercial vocation of historic centers, it is considered essential to give priority to residential areas and to strengthen coordination between the public and private sectors—including notaries and legal actors—to secure land and rehabilitation processes (rights, obligations, procedures, access to programs), with citizen participation in decision-making.

### Courses of action

- Strengthening the management body of the historic center through technical and legal support and a clear legal focus in management plans.
- Unify and systematize applicable regulations to make them accessible and consistent.
- Consolidate coordination mechanisms with real decision-making power:
  - Governance council with binding powers
  - Heritage management administrative units with multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches
- Promote conditions of shared responsibility through understandable information and stable guidance channels for owners and professionals.

### Solutions

- Develop a normative compendium on heritage in accessible language, accompanied by technical and legal advice and digital tools (authorized interventions, obligations, benefits, and procedures).
- Integrate more robust institutional frameworks:
  - Rights-based governance models
  - Administrative units with greater operational autonomy
  - Comprehensive evaluation of the governance structure to improve its effectiveness
- Define and communicate territorial and operational criteria (e.g., priority areas for housing) that guide decisions and reduce uncertainty.

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the work carried out in Cuenca confirmed a central idea: **housing management (maintenance and development) in historic centers is a system of interrelated factors**. Maintaining the residential function depends on the balance between:

- Shared criteria for building interventions (what is allowed, under what conditions, and according to what standards) in order to prevent irregular interventions,
- Concrete tools that make housing rehabilitation truly possible, and

- Land tenure security accompanied by institutional support that promotes trust and shared responsibility among public, private, and community actors.

By consolidating the work of the three working groups, the discussions made it possible to **link heritage culture, institutional capacity, and operational instruments for the maintenance and rehabilitation of housing** in an approach useful for the development of the NUP. It also highlighted several key conditions for implementation: **inter-institutional coordination**, more predictable procedures, access to technical and legal advice, and **governance mechanisms with effective decision-making capacity**. These elements provide useful benchmarks for other member cities facing similar challenges, offering levers for action that can be adapted to different contexts.

In this context, the **Cuenca Charter** formalizes common commitments (see Appendix 2). It establishes a shared basis of principles and lines of work to support and improve the residential function and strengthen urban and heritage management. It **embodies Latin America's contribution to the development of the New Urban Project for Marrakech 2026**.

## APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANTS

MEMBER CITY	PARTICIPANT
<b>Mexico</b>	Anabelí Contreras
<b>Colonia del Sacramento</b>	Walter Debenedetti
<b>Cuenca</b>	Caridad Amoroso Rafael Alvarez Xavier Aguirre Nohra Del Río Enciso Nohra Alexandra Del Río Enciso Paul Homero Espinoza José Medina Lasso Ana María Malo Jacqueline del Pilar Olmedo Vanessa Orellana Pablo Palacio Polo Sandra Pacheco Pablo Sigüenza María Tómmerbakk Juan Fernando Zea
<b>Guanajuato</b>	Angel Araujo Fernanda Arellano Luis Carlos Salinas
<b>Havana</b>	Anselmo Breto Patricia Rodríguez
<b>Morelia</b>	Juan Carlos Martínez María Fernanda Núñez Sergio Tirado
<b>Puebla</b>	Andrea Diaz
<b>Querétaro</b>	Antonio Torres

## APPENDIX 2: CUENCA CHARTER



### Carta de Cuenca

América Latina hacia el Nuevo Proyecto Urbano  
Cuenca (Ecuador), 28 de noviembre de 2025

Las ciudades participantes del III Encuentro Regional de la Organización de las Ciudades del Patrimonio Mundial (OCPM), reunidas en Cuenca, Ecuador, los días 27 y 28 de noviembre de 2025, expresamos nuestro compromiso común con la regeneración de los centros históricos mediante la habitabilidad, reconociendo que el patrimonio —material e inmaterial— constituye un recurso esencial para construir ciudades más resilientes, sostenibles y vivas.

#### 1. PRINCIPIOS COMPARTIDOS

Reafirmamos los valores que inspiran el Nuevo Proyecto Urbano de la OCPM:

- Colocar a las personas en el centro de las transformaciones urbanas.
- Reconocer el patrimonio como un activo vivo para el desarrollo sostenible.
- Promover una gobernanza participativa, transversal y permanente, capaz de integrar a los ciudadanos, los gobiernos locales, los sectores técnicos y las comunidades.
- Asegurar la equidad territorial y social en el acceso a la vivienda, los servicios, la movilidad y los espacios públicos.
- Reforzar el papel de los centros históricos como laboratorios de innovación urbana donde se ensayan soluciones replicables y sostenibles.

#### 2. COMPROMISOS DE LAS CIUDADES FIRMANTES

Con vistas al Nuevo Proyecto Urbano, pero también como prioridad en nuestras ciudades, nos comprometemos a:

1. Integrar en nuestra gestión de los centros históricos los cuatro *Ejes Estratégicos* de manera transversal, mediante el concepto de habitabilidad tal como propuesto por la OCPM.
2. Recuperar la función habitacional y revitalizar la vida urbana en los Centros Históricos, a través de la implementación de políticas públicas integradas que incluyan la preservación y restauración del patrimonio, vivienda asequible y accesible, infraestructura y servicios básicos, fomento del comercio local y la economía, participación ciudadana y gobernanza, turismo sostenible, educación y conciencia sobre la importancia del patrimonio cultural.
3. Fortalecer una gestión urbana y patrimonial integrada, colaborativa y flexible, que articule a las instituciones, propietarios y ciudadanía para mejorar la habitabilidad, la imagen urbana y la sostenibilidad de nuestros centros históricos, mediante una articulación institucional eficaz, programas y herramientas colaborativas con propietarios y ciudadanía y flexibilización normativa e incentivos para la acción.
4. Mirar hacia el reforzamiento de su ente gestor a través de un acompañamiento técnico-jurídico a la ciudadanía respecto a las intervenciones que generen en sus bienes inmuebles; la inclusión en los Planes de Gestión de un eje jurídico que indique las obligaciones, beneficios y corresponsabilidades patrimoniales y la elaboración y difusión de una normativa clara —sobre conservación, derechos,

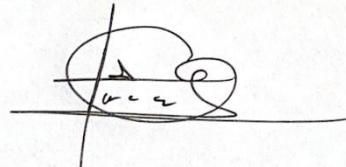
obligaciones y beneficios— para brindar certeza a la ciudadanía sobre las intervenciones posibles en su patrimonio.

### 3. HACIA EL NUEVO PROYECTO URBANO

Las ciudades firmantes de la Carta de Cuenca manifestamos nuestra voluntad de contribuir activamente a la elaboración y adopción del Nuevo Proyecto Urbano de la OCPM que será presentado en Marrakech en 2026.

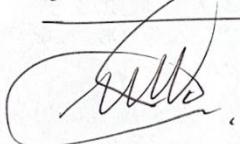
Nos comprometemos a transformar los principios aquí enunciados en acciones concretas, medibles y sostenibles, a fortalecer las alianzas regionales y a compartir nuestras experiencias y aprendizajes para avanzar colectivamente hacia un futuro urbano más habitable.

Guanajuato



Querétaro 

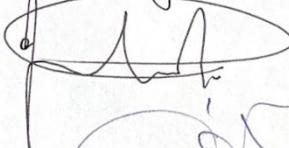
La Habana



Ciudad de México



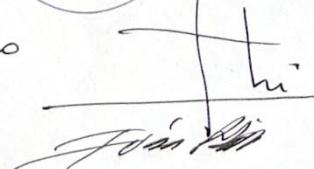
Morelia



Puebla



Colonia del Sacramento



28.11.2025