



Virtual CityLabs

Concept note

INTRODUCTION

Since 2025, *CityLabs* have been developing specific topics necessary to inform the collective drafting of the *New Urban Project* (NUP). They help to ensure that all themes that are important or essential to member cities are included in the NUP, and that the resulting *Statements* and *Operational Objectives*, validated by member cities, give the future OWHC programme an ambition and position that complements other international programmes.

The NPU is currently being finalised with a view to its adoption at the OWHC 18th World Congress (Marrakech, 26-29 October 2026). In order to collect the latest contributions, the *CityLabs* format has been adapted to *virtual CityLabs*. During the first half of 2026, they will supplement topics that have not been sufficiently addressed so far but which must be mentioned in the NUP.

DESCRIPTION

A virtual CityLab is an online workshop focusing on one or more specific issues. CityLabs are focused and scripted with a view to achieving specific expected results. They are coordinated by a member city, which is responsible for their preparation and facilitation. The main objective is:

- To reach a consensus on *statements* (situation, problems, challenges, vulnerabilities, etc.) related to the issues discussed
- To identify proposals from which *operational principles* or *objectives* can emerge.

The workshops (maximum 90 minutes, with simultaneous interpretation in French, English and Spanish)¹ will be organised between 1 and 9 April 2026 so that their results can be incorporated into the NUP. All OWHC member cities can register for CityLabs (see "Conditions of Participation" below). Applicants must commit to actively participating in the workshops and preparing adequately.

Following the workshop, a *CityLab* report will be prepared by the General Secretariat and the coordinating city, then sent to participants for validation.

2026 VIRTUAL CITYLABS PROGRAMME

In consultation with member cities and the Advisory Group, the General Secretariat proposes *at least* three CityLabs focusing on the following topics (see full descriptions below):

1. **Culture of cooperation**, coordinated by Bordeaux – 1 April – 8:30–10:00 (EST) | 14:30–16:00 (CET)
2. **Managing Tourism in Historic City Centers: Balancing Habitability, Heritage and Economy** - coordinated by Amsterdam – 2 April – 9:30–11:00 (EST) | 15:30–17:00 (CET)
3. **Energy efficiency**, coordinated by Luxembourg – 9 April – 9:00–10:30 (EST) | 15:00–16:30 (CET)

¹ Please note that the CityLab coordinated by Amsterdam will only be offered in English.



DURATION AND FORMAT

- Total duration: 1 hour 30 minutes (90 min)
- Format: 100% virtual (Zoom)
- Languages: English, Spanish and French (simultaneous interpretation) - except Amsterdam's CityLab, which will be in English only
- Use of collaborative tools (PPT, Miro or other visual aids)

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- Participating cities must be members in good standing.
- Cities wishing to participate must complete the **registration form**:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdZX8_dras8lVCfXhUmqz9v4nNS1BquwdHuXO5CbPFUWRpV_A/viewform?usp=header
- In this form, cities must indicate their interest in participating and share relevant approaches or experiences in their city related to the CityLab topic.
- Selected candidates will receive a working document on the basis of which they will be required to send contributions prior to the CityLab.
- Selected participants must commit to actively contributing to the discussions during the CityLab.
- One representative per city will be accepted (if a city wishes to send two people, please provide a detailed justification in the registration form).
- Maximum number of participants accepted: 10-15 (decision of the coordinating city).

TIMETABLE

1. **12 February**: Registration opens with concept note and registration form: candidates are invited to complete the online form, justifying their interest in the CityLab topic.
2. **27 February**: Registration closes and applications are reviewed by the General Secretariat and the CityLab coordinating city.
3. **6 March**: Confirmation of registered candidates and transmission of the working document by the General Secretariat.
4. **Two weeks before the workshop date**: Each candidate submits their contribution to the CityLab (based on the working document) to the General Secretariat and the coordinating city.
5. **Three days before the CityLab date**: Zoom link sent to confirmed participants.
6. **Mid-April**: Drafting and approval of reports.
7. **May**: Announcement of results and publication of reports.

CITYLAB DESCRIPTIONS

Culture of cooperation

The implementation of the OWHC's *New Urban Project* is based on the development of structuring projects capable of strengthening territorial cohesion and mobilising local actors in a sustainable manner. These projects must encourage



action to ensure that cities are liveable for both those who live there and those who visit them. In this context, a culture of cooperation appears to be an essential lever: why is it necessary for designing and implementing these structural projects?

This workshop starts from a simple observation: in all eras and in all contexts, the conservation and enhancement of heritage give rise to debates, questions and sometimes conflicts of interest or vision. What does conservation mean? How can we transform without distorting? How can we adapt to better transmit? These are all questions to which the answers vary depending on diverse points of view. In the absence of dialogue and constructive confrontation of perspectives, decisions risk being imposed by rigid regulatory frameworks that are disconnected from the local reality to the detriment of the relevance of projects, their appropriation by users and their long-term viability.

The discussions proposed during this CityLab aim to collectively build a shared understanding of what a culture of cooperation is: its foundations, its benefits, and the conditions and mechanisms necessary for its development. Through the analysis of two examples from the Bordeaux context - the former *La Benauges fire station* and *Le Garage Moderne* - participants will be invited to identify the key factors for successful cooperation capable of conceiving and completing structuring projects. The aim of the workshop is therefore to draw operational lessons on the conditions, benefits and dynamics of cooperation, to make it a real lever for the OWHC's *New Urban Project*.

Managing Tourism in Historic City Centers: Balancing Habitability, Heritage and Economy

This CityLab explores balanced tourism as a key approach for cities facing increasing pressures from the growing influx of visitors to historic centres. We will explore how tourism can be reshaped by rethinking the hospitality relationship between residents and visitors. Building on this, the session discusses the role of Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) in governing tourism. By connecting social relations and governance structures, this CityLab aims to contribute to a more balanced sustainable tourism and to improve the habitability of heritage cities.

Energy efficiency

To go or not to go solar on World Heritage, and how to tackle the issue

As World Heritage cities, we have a common commitment to enhance harmonious coexistence for all citizens, for today, tomorrow and in the days to come that we cannot yet see, but which we vow to anticipate with all the resources at our disposal and by drawing on an urban fabric of Outstanding Universal Value.

In addition to the challenges, this has meant ever since our respective recognition, pressure on World Heritage cities is growing alike world population growth in cities, geopolitical instabilities, climate-related pressures are high along with the need for energy, increasingly electric energy.

We have become reliant on electric energy for all-embracing needs: communication, socialization, mobility and transport, work, leisure, education, service, care, medicine, hospitality, industry, science, emergency, defence and more. For this very reason, electric energy has become an issue at stake and a target because we are more and more dependent on it, therefore we are more and more vulnerable.

There's one other thing we all have in common: we all have access to the sun: the sun is free, the sun is dependable and generous, and the sun is likely to be around for longer than the planet we live on, talk about renewable,



talk about independence, autarky, sovereignty, sobriety,
talk about getting fit for the future and thriving while doing so,
talk about enabling every fellow citizen to be part of it.

So, we need to find out how we can tackle the question: to go or not to go solar on World Heritage?

The CityLab coordinated by Luxembourg is about setting up a comprehensive methodology of approach towards these questions. We will be aiming at bridging the preservation of the Outstanding Universal Value and co-visibility with new or future technologies. We will check balances between acceptability and authenticity. We will seek to measure heritage and security-related risks (structural, fire...) as much as financial (invest and return on investing) and circularity proofness, keeping in mind grey energy and efficiency. To be able to find out which impact is significant, relevant and meaningful within World Heritage environment.

Our understanding of such a methodology of approach is that each World Heritage city ought to be able to apply it, in their own speed and readiness, gaining agency while in doing so.