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ANNUAL ACTIVITY REPORT 2025

OF THE ORGANIZATION OF WORLD HERITAGE CITIES



Table of Contents

A word from the President	-----	3
A word from the Secretary General	-----	4
The year in review	-----	5
Finance and Administration	-----	14
OWHC members	-----	16
Board of Directors	-----	17
Partners	-----	18



A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT

The year 2025 confirmed that the Organisation of World Heritage Cities (OWHC) is entering a decisive phase in its development. Member cities have responded with seriousness and commitment to the call made in recent years to reflect together on the future of their historic centres and gradually take action.

The New Urban Project has been stated this year as a shared frame of reference. Drawing on the experiences and concerns of cities, it has now become a reliable collective approach to addressing the challenges of habitability, preservation and resilience. The Board of Directors has supported this dynamic and accompanied the General Secretariat to ensure the necessary coherence and momentum.



The mobilisation observed in 2025, extended to all regions of the network, demonstrates that the challenges facing our World Heritage cities are largely shared. Everywhere, the same desire is being expressed: to preserve the exceptional heritage value of our historic centres, while tangibly improving the quality of life of citizens.

An important step has been taken towards a more concrete and operational approach. The partnerships established this year unlock new perspectives, particularly in terms of project financing and implementation, and strengthen the role of the OWHC as a space for cooperation and a lever for action in the service of local realities.

In this perspective, the partnership with CHiFA (Cultural Heritage Finance Alliance) and the launch of the Accelerator for Urban Heritage Regeneration are a strong signal of our willingness to act. By exploring new financing models with several member cities, the OWHC is taking a decisive step towards the concrete implementation of the New Urban Project and the opening of structural collaborations with major international partners.

With the 18th OWHC World Congress approaching, to be held in Marrakech in 2026, the collective responsibility of cities is more important than ever. This event should enable us to transform the work accomplished into concrete proposals that are useful and adapted to the needs of member cities.

I would like to thank the Secretary General and his team for their ongoing commitment, as well as the members of the Board of Directors, member cities, our partners and the Government of Quebec for their trust and support. The foundations are solid. It is now up to us, together, to make the New Urban Project a real tool at the service of our cities and their populations.

Bruno Marchand

Mayor of Quebec City

A WORD FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL

Throughout 2025, activities increased to speed up the development of the New Urban Project. Cities and the General Secretariat invested considerable effort, time and resources. The results obtained are proportionally significant. Cities that actively participated in activities under the Quebec Roadmap or the Cordoba Path helped strengthen our network. Most importantly, they strengthened their cooperation and brought about significant change. By sharing their situations, challenges and needs, they revealed statements and possible solutions, feeding into the New Urban Project and shaping the ambitions of this program in the making.



Ahead of the 18th OWHC World Congress in Marrakech in 2026, the General Secretariat has created more opportunities to inform and mobilise an increasing number of cities. Both NUP-Connect and NUP-Flash have disseminated information widely, encouraged contributions, and motivated cities to participate. Thanks to CityLabs and meetings organised with Regional Secretariats, the debate and ongoing work have extended to over fifty cities in Africa, Latin America, Asia, the Caribbean and Europe. These exchanges, some of which are unprecedented, have helped to build a consensus around the relevance of the New Urban Project as a means of collective action to ensure the habitability of historic centres. The same challenges are being faced everywhere, and the same desire exists to learn from others, share experiences, and above all act effectively and quickly in the face of the threats looming over World Heritage cities.

As we move forward with formulating of our objectives, our partnership with CHiFA (Cultural Heritage Finance Alliance) is opening new concrete possibilities. The five cities participating in the “Accelerator for Urban Heritage Regeneration” are exploring new financing models for the projects to be developed under the New Urban Project. Contacts with UNESCO, UN-Habitat, the European Investment Bank, and the World Monuments Fund have undoubtedly given our initiative concrete impetus and augur well for future collaborations.

The Board of Directors, elected in Cordoba in 2024, provides the General Secretariat with active, committed and ongoing support, guiding it towards achieving the common goal.

Although the focus has been on the New Urban Project, it is worth highlighting the first workshop organised in Warsaw as part of the Assistance Program in Case of Emergencies. Initial diagnostic reports confirm the relevance of the methodology and suggest how this new program might develop.

The OWHC has embarked on a journey of change, evolution and innovation. The year 2025 has confirmed our intuitions and given shape to cities’ desire to work together. In 2026, we must turn this into concrete proposals to support cities in their conservation and development efforts.

Mikhaël De Thyse
Secretary General

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

1. Quebec Roadmap

1.1. Collaborative Networks

Three Collaborative Networks (Dubrovnik, Regulation of traffic within the buffer zone of the World Heritage Site; Brussels, Protecting and strengthening the residential function of the city's historic centers; Bruges, Intangible heritage as a resource for urban rehabilitation) completed their work (eleven other Collaborative Networks were closed in 2024).

Two new Collaborative Networks opened for discussion new thematic: Warsaw on Adaptation of Heritage Buildings to Climate Change and Quebec City on Management of Tourist Bus Traffic in Historic Centers.

The results of the work, which involved a total of 32 cities in five webinars, made substantial contributions to the development of the New Urban Project.



1.2. Community of practice

The Community of Practice aimed in particular to create a specific working framework to develop a non-thematic approach, but rather to apply transversal logic to develop concrete and operational proposals to be included in the New Urban Project.

Its first meeting was held in Evora (13–14 March) with the participation of representatives from 6 cities (Bordeaux, Brussels, Cuenca, Dubrovnik, Evora, and Quebec City). The Evora Report formalised five transversal objectives and around thirty solutions that notably advanced the work of other activities.

The 'Community of Practice' activity was not the subject of any further meetings. Transversal reflection was developed within the framework of the CityLabs (see 2.1 below).



Community of Practice in Evora

1.3. Good Practices

The initiative launched on 4 June 2025, inspired by the Collaborative Networks and the Community of Practice, aimed to build a database based on the experiences of member cities and local successes in regenerating habitability in historic centres. Initially aligned with the objectives identified in the Evora Report, the collection of good practices has become an activity in its own and is continuing.



Pedestrianization of the old town. Source: ©City of Regensburg

2. Cordoba Path

2.1. CityLabs

In 2025, the OWHC organised face-to-face CityLabs, either on a thematic or regional basis, with the aim of developing specific topics raised by the Collaborative Networks or the Community of Practice and necessary to feed into the collective writing of the New Urban Project.

Seven CityLabs enabled around 100 representatives from more than 60 cities to work on additional themes and collect contributions to the definition of habitability in all regions of the world. For three of these CityLabs (in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia), the OWCH was able to reach out to member cities that had previously been less involved in the NUP process. Three CityLabs were made possible thanks to the collaboration of the Regional Secretariats of North-West Europe and North America, Asia-Pacific and Latin America. The Amsterdam CityLab was co-organised with the European Alliance for Balanced Urban Tourism:



CityLab in Havana

- **Córdoba** (9–10 June), Heritage Narratives and Urban Regeneration
- **Havana** (19–20 August), Rethinking Habitability in Caribbean World Heritage Cities
- **Amsterdam** (17–19 September), Rethinking Tourism to Restore Balance in Historic Centres
- **Luxembourg** (22–23 September 2025), Living Heritage: Designing Human-Centred Cities for the Future
- **Hue** (16–17 October 2025), Livability for the Sustainable Development of World Heritage Cities
- **Cuenca** (27–28 November 2025), Latin America towards the New Urban Project
- **Lamu** (1–2 December), The contribution of African World Heritage cities to the habitability of historic centres

All the reports from these meetings can be found on the OWHC website: <https://www.ovpm.org/program/ressources/>



CityLab in Amsterdam

2.2. Focus groups

The Focus Groups contributed to defining the NUP's reference and operational frameworks.

The Focus Group on Strategy, which met in Krakow (11–12 June), involved representatives from the cities of Bordeaux, Colonia del Sacramento, Krakow, Luxembourg and Puebla, with a total of 20 participants. Based on the Wesola case study and the approaches presented by the cities, the group outlined the structure of an overall strategy for the New Urban Project.

The Narrative Focus Group, led by a group of elected officials from the cities most involved in the initiative, met several times online to develop the NUP's political argument and to convince and mobilise cities around it.

2.3. Urban Heritage Regeneration Accelerator

The Accelerator was designed and implemented from 2025 onwards by the Cultural Heritage Finance Alliance (CHiFA). The aim is to experiment with ways of defining and accelerating plans and strategies for enhancing the cultural assets of World Heritage cities for sustainable economic and community development. The Accelerator will establish a tool for developing pilot projects accompanied by a capital/investment strategy. Four member cities have been selected to participate in this activity: Baeza (Spain), Cuenca (Ecuador), Lamu (Kenya) and Tunis (Tunisia).

During phases 1 and 2, completed in 2025, the participating cities carried out diagnostics and aligned their visions for regeneration with concrete objectives. The identification of pilot projects with financial model is currently underway.

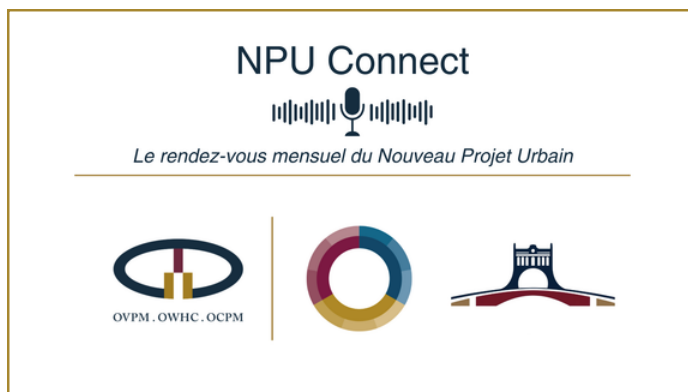


3. Information and mobilisation tools for the New Urban Project

The OWHC has regularly informed member cities to ensure a better understanding of the programs dedicated to the New Urban Project and to mobilise as many cities as possible in the activities.

Two tools were put in place:

- The 10 NPU-Connect sessions, organised as monthly online meetings, provided information to more than 80 city representatives during the meetings and certainly to a larger number thanks to the online recording of the meetings, available on Youtube
- The four NPU-Flash events, organised in person in Zacatecas, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí and Queretaro, enabled meetings with more than 90 participants, city representatives (elected officials and technicians). These meetings generated local synergies and encouraged these cities to get involved in the activities.



NUP Connect



NUP Flash in Zacatecas

4. Regional meetings and other regional activities

Central and Eastern European Regional Secretariat (CEER):

- 15th Regional Meeting, Krakow/Banská Štiavnica (21–24 October 2025) on the theme of World Heritage inscription: impacts on cities and communities.
- 1st Regional Diagnostic Meeting – Emergency Assistance Programme, Warsaw (21-22 May 2025) – See point 5.

Asia-Pacific Regional Secretariat (OWHC-AP):

- 5th Regional Meeting, Hue (16-17 October 2025), Expert Workshop on Liveability for the Sustainable Development of World Heritage Cities and CityLab on Quality of Life for the Sustainable Development of World Heritage Cities (see 2.1.).



5th Regional Meeting, Hué



15th Regional Meeting, Krakow

North-West Europe and North America Regional Secretariat (NWENA):

- Regional Meeting, Luxembourg (21-23 September 2025): Workshop on Guidelines for Renewable Energy in the Context of World Heritage Cities hosted by UNESCO and CityLab Living Heritage: Designing Human-Centred Cities for the Future, Luxembourg (21-23 September 2025) – see 2.1.
- 5th edition of the Young Travelling Scholarship program.

Latin American Regional Secretariat (SRAL):

- Regional Meeting, Cuenca (26-28 November 2025), Latin America towards the New Urban Project (see 2.1).
- Virtual library of World Heritage city resources.



Regional Meeting, Luxembourg



Regional Meeting, Cuenca

5. Other activities

- OWHC Day: celebrated annually on 8 September, the Day mobilised member cities around the common values of World Heritage and international cooperation, inviting them to organise local initiatives to raise awareness, communicate or promote heritage.
- Emergency Assistance Programme: A regional workshop was held in Warsaw. The aim was to assess the state of risk identification and management strategies. Representatives from the cities of Budapest, Chernivtsi, Kotor, Split, Vilnius, Warsaw and Zamosc participated.

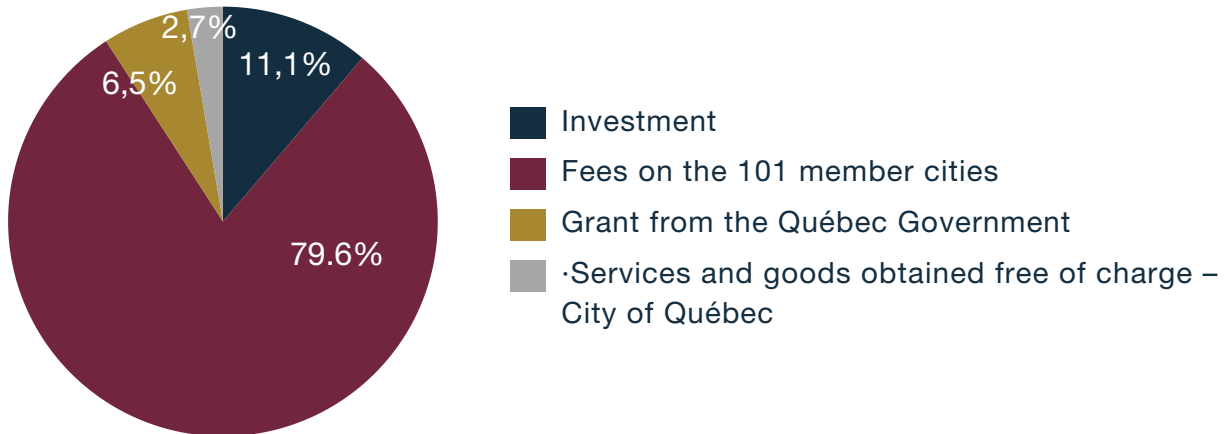


Assistance Program in case of Emergencies: workshop in Warsaw

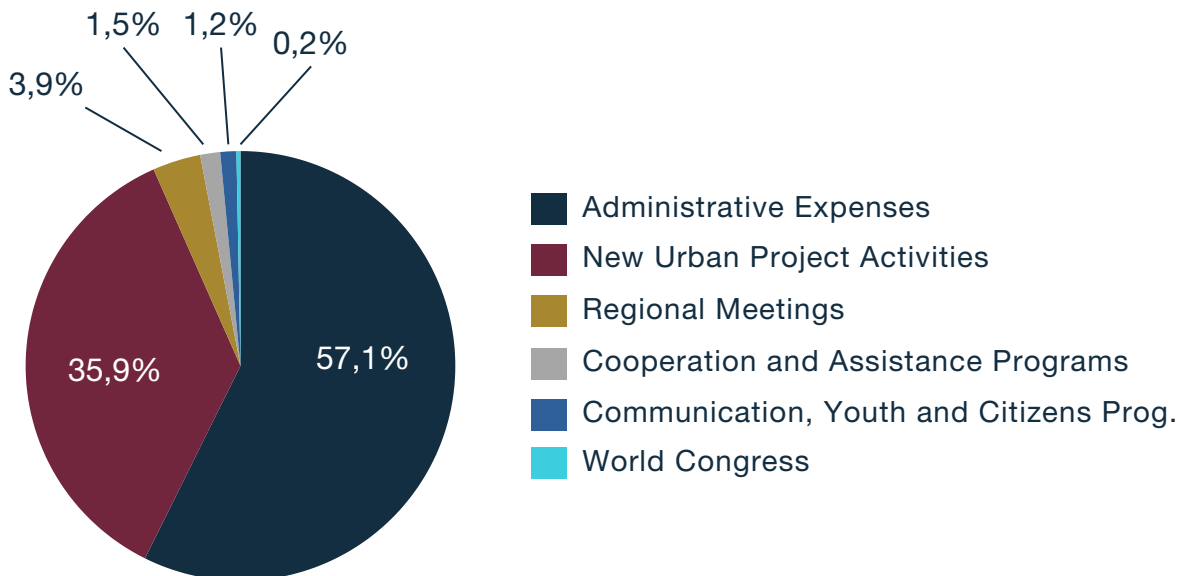
FINANCES AND ADMINISTRATION

1. 2025 Financial report*

Revenus 2025: 873 341 \$ CAD



Expenses 2025: 1 128 694 \$ CAD



External contributions

The OWHC would like to highlight the financial contributions made by the cities that hosted and co-organized the numerous meetings held as part of the statutory activities of the OWHC and the New Urban Project: contributions estimated at over CAD 600,000.

* These figures are based on the financial statements (pending approval by the Board of Directors).

2. Governance and administrative orientation

During 2025, the Board of Directors met in March in San Antonio (United States), then twice virtually (September and December). Among the main resolutions adopted, the following can be highlighted:

- The adoption of a basic principle for allocating financial contributions to member cities participating in OWHC activities.
- The acquisition by OWHC of an insurance policy that meets its needs and covers the actual risks to which its international activities expose it.
- The Board of Directors' support for the continuation of activities related to the development of the New Urban Project.

The Board of Directors also welcomed two new Directors during the year: Ms. Gina Ortiz Jones, Mayor of San Antonio, and Ms. Fatima Amorim, Mayor of Angra do Heroismo.

Following two departures, the General Secretariat also recruited two new professionals: Ms. Berenice Vidal Castelan and Ms. Adriana Huerta-Nuñez, who both took up their positions in August 2025.

Finally, the 28th General Assembly met virtually on December 9, 2025, bringing together 28 member cities in good standing. They gave their support to the outlook for activities in 2026, which will mainly focus on finalizing the New Urban Project and preparing for the 18th World Congress to be held in Marrakech in October. They also gave the green light to the budget that will support the development of these activities.

MEMBERS OF THE OWHC

105

Member cities in good standing within the network

2

New member cities in 2025: **Gimhae** (Republic of Korea) and **Agadez** (Niger)

+60

Cities involved in the activities of the New Urban Project



Gimhae (Republic of Korea)



Agadez (Niger)

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**Mr. Bruno
Marchand**

Mayor of Québec city
(Canada)

President of the OWHC



**Mr. José María
Bellido Roche**

Mayor - Cordoba
(Spain)

Vice-President of the
OWHC



Mr. Dirk De fauw

Mayor - Brugge
(Belgium)

Treasurer of the OWHC



Ms. Fátima Amorim

Mayor - Angra do
Heroísmo (Portugal)

Director of the OWHC



**Mr. Mato
Frankovic**

Mayor - Dubrovnik
(Croatia)

Director of the OWHC



**Mr. Aleksander
Miszalski**

Mayor - Kraków
(Poland)

Director of the OWHC



**Ms. Gina Ortiz
Jones**

Mayor - San Antonio
(United States)

Director of the OWHC



**Mr. Cristian
Zamora Matute**

Mayor - Cuenca
(Ecuador)

Director of the OWHC

PARTNERS

On behalf of the OWHC, the General Secretariat would like to thank the following partners and collaborators:

City of Québec

For its financial, logistical and political contributions to keep strong and visible the OWHC headquarters in Québec.

Ministère des Relations internationales et de la Francophonie du Gouvernement du Québec

For a grant of \$160,000 CAD to implement the Québec Roadmap (2023-2026).

Cultural Heritage Finance Alliance

For the creation and financing of the activity entitled “Urban Heritage Regeneration Accelerator”, as part of the Cordoba Path and in which only members of the OWHC participate.

Université Laval

For the opportunity to be part of the steering committee of Université Laval's Institut du patrimoine culturel (Institute of Cultural Heritage, or IPAC).



Members of the General Secretariat team:

Mr. Mikhaël De Thyse

Secretary General

Ms. Andréanne Charest

Head of Programs and Projects –
Deputy Secretary General

Ms. Berenice Vidal Castelán

Urban Heritage Project Officer

Ms. Adriana Huerta-Nuñez

Urban Heritage Project Officer

Mr Jules Morel

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