

Symposium Workbook

The New Urban Process: Toward Habitability of Historic Centers

18TH WORLD CONGRESS OF THE OWHC, MARRAKECH
(MOROCCO)
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PREAMBLE

This document explains the objectives and schedule of the *Symposium* to help participants prepare.

Part One provides a general overview of the three sessions; Part Two details the content and schedule of the workshops in Session 2.

CONCEPT

The objective of the *Symposium* “*Toward Habitability of Historic Centers*,” a new phase in the process launched in 2022 by the OWHC, is to encourage participants to

- “Coming together” around the results of the collective reflection conducted since 2022 (Session 1, Tuesday, October 27, afternoon).
- “Revealing where each city stands” regarding the concrete prospects offered by the **New Urban Process** (Session 2, Tuesday, October 27, afternoon, and Wednesday, October 28, morning).
- And finally, “Adhering” to the New Urban Process, which will be at the heart of the Organization’s activities starting in 2027 (Session 3, Wednesday, October 28, afternoon).

RESOURCES

Participants are strongly encouraged to read the *New Urban Process* document (<HTTPS://WWW.OVPM.ORG/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2025/02/OVPMDOCLONGNUMANG.PDF>) before the *Symposium*.

On the afternoon of Monday, October 26, a catch-up meeting to explain the **New Urban Process** will be offered to both those who have followed the development of the **New Urban Process** and those who are new to the initiative. The General Secretariat and the Advisory Group will welcome participants at the *Exhibition* created specifically for the Congress (comprising five sections: Introduction to the NUP, Active Cities, Good Practices, and Accelerator for Urban Regeneration and projects nominated for the 2026 Jean-Paul-L’Allier Prize). The discussion will focus on the momentum built since 2022, the contributions of cities, and the collective progress made.

In addition, a simple and dynamic *digital platform*, hosted on a dedicated and secure website, will be made available to participants in French, English, and Spanish. They will be able to access it from their phones or computers without needing to install an app. The six sections will take only a few minutes to complete as the *Symposium* sessions unfold, so that each participant can contribute continuously to the discussions and enrich the *Symposium’s* outcomes and the next steps in the process.



PART ONE: GENERAL OVERVIEW

OPENING OF THE SYMPOSIUM

The Mayor of Marrakech, Fatim Ezzahra El Mansouri, will officially open the *Symposium*.

SESSION 1 - COMING TOGETHER

Recalling the political dimension of the mandate outlined at the 16th World Congress in Québec City (2022) and the guidelines confirmed at the 17th Congress in Córdoba (2024) will bring participants together around the prospects and opportunities offered by the **New Urban Process**. The work carried out over the past four years draws on the activities of 81 member cities, as well as their experiences and expertise. The collaborative process of the *Quebec Roadmap* and the *Cordoba Path* has strengthened the network of World Heritage cities, forged a shared awareness of the urgent need to act to counter the pressures threatening historic centers, and identified the challenges on which to work together.

The **New Urban Process** reflects an ambition shared by more than 110 cities recognized worldwide for the universal values they symbolize. It enables the OWHC to establish itself as a major player in the management, transformation, and regeneration of World Heritage cities to keep them inhabited and vibrant and to pass on their values to future generations. The habitability envisioned by the **New Urban Process** is the OWHC's contribution to the global trend toward urban well-being and ecological transition.



SESSION 2 – REVEALING WHERE EACH CITY STANDS

The three workshops in Session 2 invite participants to explore in greater depth the political, institutional, and professional *conditions for success* mentioned in the **New Urban Process** (see the “Part Two” of this document below):

1. Evolving governance to remove political, administrative, and professional barriers.
2. Implementing overall strategies to translate habitability into concrete commitments.
3. Creating a common framework for investment in heritage.



Depending on the specific circumstances of each city, the **New Urban Process** aims to help OWHC member cities implement **local habitability processes** *that* address the complexity and urgency of current **issues** and enable them to tackle the many **challenges** identified since 2022 in the areas of housing, urban mobility, ecological transition, and quality of life. The discussions will prompt each participant to take a stance on the changes needed in their city. The central questions for the three workshops in Session 2 are as follows: “Given your top priorities, which **conditions for success** must you prioritize to promote habitability in your historic centers?”

During each workshop, in addition to the materials provided at the discussion tables (eight participants per table) to record the main contributions from the discussions, a specific section of the **digital platform** will allow participants to complete their **Passports to Habitability** and share their personal perspectives and examples of use cases related to the topics discussed.

SESSION 3 - ADHERING

After the synthesis of the Session 2 workshops, compiled from the contributions of the working groups and the **Passports to Habitability**, members of each delegation will then have 30 minutes to share their **Passports to Habitability**.

The delegations will finally be invited to present their **Path towards habitability** during brief remarks in the plenary session. The goal is not for them to propose an action plan or a list of recommendations, but to express their intentions for facilitating habitability projects. These presentations will confirm the member cities’ commitment to the **New Urban Process** at the conclusion of the **Symposium**.



PART TWO: WORKSHOP PROCEDURE (SESSION 2)

INTRODUCTION

The three workshops in Session 2 invite participants to explore in greater depth the political, institutional, and professional *conditions for success* outlined in the **New Urban Process**:

1. Evolving governance to remove political, administrative, and professional barriers.
2. Implementing overall strategies to translate habitability into concrete commitments.
3. Creating a common framework for investment in heritage.

Each “condition for success” is explained by three basic *principles*, which are in turn specified by three *criteria*. These descriptions are not intended to be exhaustive or definitive; they reflect the work carried out by cities during the preparatory phase of the **New Urban Process**.

The three workshops, each lasting an hour and a half, will follow the same structure:

- First, *participating cities* will present their experiences with the “condition for success” under discussion: governance, strategy, or financing.
- Participants, divided into tables organized by working language, will then have 45 minutes to discuss the implications of the “condition for success,” drawing on their own case studies and local experiences to contextualize their questions or proposed solutions. Clear guidelines and central facilitation will promote rich and relevant conversations at each table.
- The questions proposed below for each workshop are suggested, not mandatory, and are primarily intended to stimulate discussion and encourage participation. Each participant’s contribution, their understanding of the conditions, and the use cases they reference will enrich everyone’s understanding.
- Each table will be equipped *with posters* on which to record the group’s reflections and proposals.
- Participants will also have access to virtual tools that will allow them to share concrete examples from their cities, further develop the principles, and propose additional criteria.

WORKSHOP CONTENT

Workshop 1: How to Evolve Governance to Overcome Political, Administrative, and Professional Barriers

In the face of habitability challenges, certain governance models are showing their limitations. Responsibilities are often scattered, interventions are fragmented or ad hoc, and decisions are constrained by administrative logic that struggles to address the complexity of today’s challenges.

Historic centers face situations that can no longer be addressed through strictly sector-specific or exclusively heritage-based approaches. To ensure the habitability of historic centers, we must shift from a conservation-focused approach to one of urban transformation.

Governance must adapt accordingly. To a large extent and in many cases, this involves a paradigm shift: fostering a shared vision of the future, building over the long term a collective capacity to act quickly, energetically, and sustainably, and mobilizing all relevant stakeholders.



Governance that promotes habitability is based on three principles:

1.1 A political commitment to habitability.

The habitability of historic centers requires, above all, a political commitment to change approaches, improve practices, and take action amid profound and rapid urban transformations. It is based on a vision for the future of the historic center that provides a common direction for public action. This vision places people at the center of urban concerns and views heritage as a resource.

The criteria that are changing the urban approach to historic centers:

- Habitability recognized politically as a goal in the public interest.
- Consistency between urban decisions and dynamics and the political vision.
- Increased and consolidated human and financial resources for implementing the vision.

1.2 Strengthened institutional capacities

Issues related to habitability transcend conventional administrative boundaries and require greater coordination among municipal departments, across decision-making and implementation levels, and among stakeholders. The organizational structure and institutional procedures established as part of a habitability vision make it possible to move beyond sectoral approaches, integrate new actors into decision-making processes, forge new partnerships, and enhance the effectiveness of public action.

Criteria defining a robust institutional framework:

- Breaking down silos between departments and public policies.
- Cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration across administrative levels.
- Regulatory frameworks tailored to each city's specific circumstances.

1.3 A community of interests fostering a culture of innovation

The stakeholders involved in urban transformation processes—decision-makers, administrators, residents, experts, economic actors, and institutional partners—work together to define and achieve a shared vision. This community, united by shared interests, brings a culture of innovation and experimentation to governance and institutions, contributing to the new paradigm of habitability.

The criteria that form the basis of a community of interests for habitability:

- Emphasis on participation and co-creation.
- Unleashing skills and talents beyond existing mandates to think differently.
- Bold partnerships within the framework of innovative organizational and financial structures.

The central question: How can we bring about the paradigm shift driven by the New Urban Process and create the conditions for comprehensive, continuous, and sustainable action for historic centers?



Examples

Havana (Cuba) – The Office of the City Historian: Mobilizing Sustainable Resources to Regenerate the Historic Center

Social, residential, and economic issues were not sufficiently taken into account in the management of Havana's historic center, which focused primarily on the conservation of historic buildings.

The Cuban Council of State adopted a new legal framework strengthening the role of the "Office of the Historian" (Oficina del Historiador de la ciudad de La Habana). The Office now brings together the agencies responsible for heritage management, urban planning, culture, and social affairs. With a staff of more than 3,000 civil servants, it coordinates a network of local businesses, manages its own financial mechanisms, and organizes international cooperation; the Office has all the tools necessary to ensure the implementation of integrated projects.

Cuenca (Ecuador) – El Barranco Foundation: A Platform for Breaking Down Silos in Public Action

The municipality of Cuenca created the El Barranco Foundation to serve as an interface between the various departments and stakeholders involved in carrying out revitalization projects in the historic center.

Based on multidisciplinary assessments and consultations with residents, property owners, and business owners, the Foundation identifies needs and the necessary interventions within the framework of master plans. It coordinates project implementation with the municipal departments responsible for heritage, urban planning, culture, economic development, green spaces, mobility, and safety.

Gyeongju (Republic of Korea) – Happy Hwangchon: Transforming Participation into Collective Action

The City of Gyeongju has implemented the "Happy Hwangchon" program, which directly involves residents in resolving and managing issues affecting this neighborhood in the historic center.

The program relies on workshops, roundtables, and public meetings to identify the neighborhood's needs, set priorities, and design regeneration projects. Initiatives have primarily focused on housing renovation, improving public spaces, creating community facilities, and developing local economic activities managed by a residents' cooperative.

Discussion

Workshop 1 invites participants to reflect on what habitability entails in terms of governance, the characteristics of governance in their city, and how applying the three principles could make public action aimed at ensuring the habitability of their historic center more effective.

More specifically, participants are invited to initiate or contribute to the discussion by considering one or more of the following questions:

- i. What is the current situation in my city? What does the concept of habitability challenge or disrupt? What are the obstacles, challenges, ongoing initiatives, or progress made, generally speaking, regarding governance?
- ii. What is the main institutional barrier today that prevents my city from taking more effective action regarding its historic center, and what change would have the greatest impact?



- iii. Which stakeholders in your city are currently underutilized, even though they could play a role in promoting habitability?

Workshop 2: How to Implement Overall Strategies to Translate Habitability into Concrete Commitments

The evolution of governance—the first essential condition—enables habitability to be translated into concrete commitments.

Overall strategies are essential. The collection of planning documents and tools applicable to historic centers—regardless of their status, scope, or whether they are sector-specific or cross-cutting—is not sufficient to ensure the realization of the policy vision. “Overall strategies” that promote habitability make it possible to integrate the interdependence of needs and opportunities for synergies related to housing, mobility, the ecological transition, and economic and social development.

Overall strategies that promote habitability are based on three principles:

2.1 A Shared Understanding

Habitability becomes a collective goal when stakeholders share a common understanding of the challenges, aspirations, and desired future for the historic center. This shared understanding transcends individual interests to build a consistent and organized approach to the long-term transformation of the historic center.

The criteria that ensure a shared understanding of habitability:

- Leveraging the area’s unique characteristics.
- Taking into account of both tangible and intangible heritage.
- Renewal of urban visions.

2.2 Flexible and adaptive planning and management approaches

“Overall strategies” give concrete form to a shared direction that stakeholders implement together in accordance with their respective responsibilities. They provide consistency and coordination among existing plans and public policies and combine immediate actions with long-term perspectives.

Criteria that make planning and management flexible, adaptive, and operational:

- Stakeholder participation in the development and monitoring of planning.
- Continuous adaptation and adjustment in response to changing urban needs and challenges.
- Implementation by all departments in accordance with their respective areas of expertise.

2.3 Operational Objectives

A policy vision can only produce concrete results if it is translated into operational objectives. These objectives provide a cross-cutting framework for action that informs decisions, guides trade-offs, and mobilizes the key drivers of urban transformation in a complementary manner.

The criteria that make objectives operational:



- Integration of the NUP's four strategic axes and synergies among them.
- Objectives shared by multiple departments and complementarity among the various levers of urban action.
- Impact on the evolutionary trajectory of historic centers.

Central question: How can we develop strategies for historic centers that are understood and accepted by all local stakeholders, capable of sustainably guiding public decisions and simultaneously mobilizing the main levers of urban transformation?

Examples

Mexico City (Mexico)—An Approach to Facilitating Access to Tangible and Intangible Heritage

The trust responsible for coordinating the restoration, conservation, and promotion of the tangible and intangible heritage of Mexico City's historic center has developed a strategy to involve residents in the protection and enhancement of the historic center. It is also based on three complementary commitments: training residents in civic participation, providing an accessible interpretation of the historic center, and fostering direct experiences of heritage.

Through workshops, heritage walks, cultural activities, and forums for dialogue, the strategy has enriched residents' knowledge and perceptions to inform the "Integrated Management Plan for the Historic Center of Mexico City" (Plan Integral de Manejo del Centro Histórico de la Ciudad de México).

Brussels (Belgium) – A Gradually Adapted Strategy to Combat Residential Vacancies

The City of Brussels is tackling the vacancy of residential units located above commercial spaces with a strategy that combines financial incentives and technical support for property owners. This strategy is part of a broader policy to combat building vacancy in the historic center and regulate non-residential uses.

The strategy relied on strengthening collaboration among various departments and implementing more flexible procedures for assessing project feasibility, engaging stakeholders, and obtaining permits to create independent access to upper floors and rehabilitate affordable housing.

Bordeaux (France) – Beyond the Greening of the Historic Center

The "Bordeaux Grandeur Nature" program, designed to combat urban heat islands, aimed to gradually transform highly mineralized urban spaces predominantly occupied by cars.

Today, the City of Bordeaux wants to go further and multiply strategies to improve the livability of the historic center.

A climate change adaptation strategy has been adopted with the goal of maintaining a welcoming, desirable, and livable city for the coming decades and future generations. This will serve as a shared framework enabling all stakeholders to act in a coordinated manner—a territorial project addressing all issues and targeting all audiences.

Discussion

Workshop 2 invites each participant, based on their responsibilities and expertise, to reflect on the strategies needed to ensure habitability, the specific characteristics of the plans and strategies applicable in their city, and the objectives that would make public policies and mechanisms for action more effective.



More specifically, participants are invited to initiate or contribute to the discussion by considering one or more of the following questions:

- i. What is the current situation in my city? What does the concept of habitability challenge or disrupt? What are the obstacles, challenges, ongoing actions, or progress made, overall, regarding the strategy?
- ii. Do the various stakeholders in my city share the same vision for the historic center?
- iii. If you could change the way the historic center's development is planned, how would you do it?
- iv. Has the city's vision been translated into concrete operational objectives shared across multiple departments and aligned with the priorities of the New Urban Process?

Workshop 3: How to Create a Common Framework for Investment in Heritage

One of the most persistent obstacles to heritage revitalization is the lack of cross-sectoral relationships and financial structures needed to mobilize different categories of capital. This fragmentation affects World Heritage cities—including those with significant public resources and strong heritage institutions—where the stakeholders best positioned to lead revitalization rarely act in a coordinated manner.

Funding habitability in historic centers requires more than just financial instruments: it requires a common framework. This common framework is not an abstract concept, but a concrete and operational reality: a platform, understood as a sustainable and structured environment within which public authorities, nonprofit organizations, local associations, and private investors can communicate, build trust, and act in concert.

Public authorities play an essential role in creating this environment by lowering the risk threshold that prevents non-public capital from investing in heritage, and by determining how the financial resources and incentives made available by public authorities can be mobilized to catalyze private investment. Without this facilitative approach, private and philanthropic capital will continue to seek out less complex opportunities elsewhere.

CHiFA's work, particularly through the Urban Heritage Regeneration Accelerator, highlights several interdependent principles necessary for establishing a common framework for investment in heritage:

3.1 Public authorities should act as facilitators, not as the sole source of funding.

Public agencies cannot finance heritage revitalization on their own, nor should they attempt to do so. Their role should be to create conditions conducive to non-public investment. This involves absorbing the risks associated with the early phases and creating a foundation on which private investment can build.

Criteria that enable public authorities to act as facilitators:

- Guarantees and financing from public authorities on preferential terms.
- A long-term commitment to historic centers as strategic urban assets.
- A capital strategy involving grants, first-loss arrangements, and loan guarantees.

3.2 Structured representation of civil society.

An effective financing platform incorporates civil society participation as a source of local expertise and legitimacy, which strengthens the credibility of projects in the eyes of both investors and donors. Furthermore, it bridges the gap



between different perspectives and interests, while also facilitating the harmonization of terminology regarding the investment terms of their financing, return expectations, and compliance with the quality standards required for heritage properties designated as public assets.

Criteria for creating a structured platform to engage civil society:

- A municipal office that maintains contact and dialogue with potential investors, facilitates the development of the platform, and guides partners toward the goal of habitability.
- An independent financial tool to facilitate transactions involving non-public funding, guide the approval and certification process required for external investors, and serve as a central point of dialogue between the public sector and the community regarding projects in historic centers.
- Sustainable financing ecosystems centered around permanent bodies (revolving funds, community development organizations, or heritage entities) capable of generating a continuous stream of investment opportunities.

3.3 Promotion of Structuring Projects

Structuring projects embody the ambitions set forth in habitability strategies. They contribute to a new generation of heritage projects. By addressing specific spaces, sectors, or strategic challenges, they help bring about lasting transformation in historic centers and improve habitability. Beyond their immediate results, they produce leverage effects that strengthen the coherence of public interventions and foster a broader transformation of the region.

The criteria that enable projects to generate catalytic effects:

- Promoting social, economic, cultural, and environmental co-benefits.
- Financial and operational feasibility of projects.
- Triggering new initiatives, interventions, investments, or forms of collaboration beyond the initial action.

Key question: How can public authorities and civil society actors establish the conditions—including institutional structures, risk-sharing mechanisms, and representative governance—that would make investment in heritage understandable, attractive, and feasible for a broader range of partners?

Examples

Lamu (Kenya) – Creating Economic Activity to Sustainably Support Heritage Restoration

In Lamu, the deterioration of historic buildings is accelerating due to population decline, climate change, and rising costs of restoration materials. A pilot project plans to acquire and convert a Swahili house into a cultural center hosting exhibitions, workshops, craft sales, and training in traditional skills. The financing structure proposes combining philanthropic grants and catalytic capital to create a business model capable of supporting other restoration projects, while building local partnerships, supply chains, and skills essential to the revitalization of the historic center.

Tunis (Tunisia) – Diversifying Funding Sources to Revitalize a Historic Heritage Site

The Hammam Tammarine, the last remaining public bath from the Ottoman period still preserved in the Medina, is currently closed and in need of restoration. The project aims to reopen it by combining a traditional hammam, a wellness center, a café, and a museum, with the goal of stimulating economic activity in the Faubourg Sud and enhancing its



appeal to both residents and visitors. Led by TUNISTORIC, a local group of impact investors, the project combines real estate investment, commercial financing, philanthropic grants, and catalytic capital. This structure makes it possible to finance the restoration, the launch of commercial activities, and cultural programming, while testing a replicable rehabilitation model that could attract further investment.

Discussion

Workshop 3 invites each participant, based on their responsibilities and expertise, to reflect on mechanisms for mobilizing capital to finance habitability projects, and on the specific characteristics of these projects that distinguish them from traditional heritage projects.

More specifically, participants are invited to initiate or contribute to the discussion by considering one or more of the following questions:

- i. What is the current situation in my city? What does the concept of habitability challenge or disrupt? What are the obstacles, challenges, ongoing initiatives, or progress made—overall—regarding funding?
- ii. VISION - What is your city's vision for heritage-based revitalization? Where are you today, and where do you want to go? What impacts do you hope to achieve?
- iii. STAKEHOLDERS - Has your city identified the stakeholders involved in the historic center? Is there a location or organization that already serves as a hub for these stakeholders? If not, what would it take to create one?
- iv. PROJECT PORTFOLIO - Based on your vision, what public initiatives or structuring projects would be transformative enough to attract diverse capital, creating a portfolio of investment opportunities that generate spillover effects (new partnerships and additional investments) beyond their immediate impact?

APPENDIX 1: SYMPOSIUM OWHC TEAM



SYMPOSIUM OWHC TEAM



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