

VII Biennial of Public Space, Rome, Italy, 25-27 May 2023

## **Key messages from the Global City Dialogue on Proximities**

*Under the auspices of the Biennial of Public Space, the cities of Amman, Bologna, Melbourne, Milan, Rome, Santa Fé, Sousse, Turin as well as UCLG, UN-Habitat and C40 representatives, gathered to exchange experiences on proximity proximity and 15-minute city policies. At the end of the session, the participants endorsed “Key Messages from the Global City Dialogue on Proximities” as follows.*

### **Preamble**

In recent years, a triple crisis - climate, conflict and covid - has impacted lives throughout the globe. The world we share is facing multiple and complex global threats stemming from this crisis: the threat of insulation and increased individualism as solidarity and cooperation retract in front of violence, abuse and fear; the threat of distraction as conflicts capture our attention and divert precious resources from working for progress, equality and social justice; and the threat of scarcity which fuels further conflict over natural resources and across communities, uproots individuals and furthers uncertainty.

All these threats are pulling us all apart. Yet, cities still hold the promise of pulling us together, and as they have done for millennia, provide opportunities for safety and progress through togetherness. Over centuries, cities have built ingenious common solutions to the requirements of dense settlement; established shared rules for civil co-existence; provided public spaces for the enjoyment of all and developed urban landscapes inspired by a common quest for beauty and civic pride.

In recent years, more and more cities adopted “15-minute city” policies and embraced “proximity” as an overarching concept to express the need for “drawing together”. Cities have established a dialogue with intergovernmental organisations and have created global and regional associations of local governments. We subscribed to the internationally established goals of the 2030 Agenda - Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - and have committed to localise these global goals through regional and national agendas for sustainability. We are intensifying city-to-city exchanges and co-operation.

Today, we have gathered in Rome to discuss our contribution to global sustainability, with a particular focus on sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11.7) and how proximity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can assist us in that task.

### **Our experiences highlight several key principles that we reaffirm today as follows:**

- 1. ‘Proximity’ should be understood as closeness, particularly but not exclusively, in terms of time and space.** Proximity represents a new way of living, working, supplying, caring, learning and enjoying - the social functions - in an urban context. Thus, proximity underpins a local agenda and urban models which promote sustainable development in cities and settlements of all sizes.
- 2. Our experience in pursuing proximity reveals three main aspects:**
  - a. bringing cities closer to the people, in terms of access to services, urban quality and ease of use;
  - b. creating a closer connection between residents and the democratic institutions of the city and encouraging civic engagement, solidarity and social interaction;
  - c. reducing the distances between different genders, ages, ethnics, incomes, abilities and cultural groups, as well as between central and peripheral neighbourhoods.

3. We support an integrated approach to proximity that envisions the following:

- a. **A polycentric city or territory consisting of multiple “complete neighbourhoods” that are compact, mixed-use and spatially integrated**, limiting land-use specialisation, to enable people to perform all the above social functions close to their homes;
- b. **A prosperous, thriving and vibrant city or territory that provides equal, well-distributed and accessible livelihood opportunities for all**, to promote sustainable lifestyles, green, circular and smart economies, and limits gentrification mechanisms;
- c. **A city or territory made of safe, inclusive green and public space networks, evenly distributed, accessible and well-connected, through an efficient street system**, to promote diversity of use & users, well-being, comfort and safety, while protecting the world’s cultural and natural heritage;
- d. **A city or territory that promotes social mix through safe and affordable housing and evenly distributed and inclusive basic services and amenities**, to boost complete neighbourhoods, enable citizens’ rights to the city and its public services, and address the informal city;
- e. **A highly connected city or territory of people-centred mobility with streets that encourage walking and cycling, well-distributed low-carbon and affordable public transport**, to promote physical activities, health and well-being, social interaction and air quality;
- f. **A resilient and green city or territory that considers access to clean air and water and biodiversity as a common good and promotes mitigation and adaptation measures to climate change**, adopting nature-based solutions, green energy, sustainable building and construction, and limiting the effect of natural disasters;
- g. **A just city or territory built on inclusive local institutions and participatory and accessible governance structures**, that empower communities through multi-stakeholder mechanisms for decision-making in urban planning and design.

We recall our commitments to proximity in the United Nations’ New Urban Agenda in relation to housing and local development and we encourage other cities to promote sustainable urban development based on integrated proximity and sustainability and referring to the above principles in doing so.

As we have gathered under the auspices of the Biennial of Public Space, we reconfirm our commitment to promote proximity by learning from each other’s experiences and making this knowledge available to all, to accelerate the necessary transition to sustainable societies together.

We also express our keen interest for these topics to be further developed, experiences analysed and practices shared, through mechanisms such as the Global Observatory of Sustainable Proximities.

The participants commend the Biennial of Public Space and its partners for the discussion they facilitated and, considering the centrality of public space to any discussion on proximity and liveable cities, we encourage the Biennial to explore proximity issues and to continue providing a space for exchange of experiences and ideas.

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