

IFLA brief on the HABITAT III New Urban Agenda

HABITAT, a platform which gathers every 20 years to shape the future of human settlements, has issued its *Quito Declaration on sustainable cities and human settlements for all – the New Urban Agenda*¹. The Agenda recognises that by 2050:

the world urban population is expected to nearly double, making urbanization one of the 21st century's most transformative trends. As the population, economic activities, social and cultural interactions, as well as environmental and humanitarian impacts, are increasingly concentrated in cities, this poses massive sustainability challenges in terms of housing, infrastructure, basic services, food security, health, education, decent jobs, safety, and natural resources, among others.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) welcomes the *New Urban Agenda* and underlines the need for the library community to step forward to help governments to recognise the potential of libraries in achieving the aims of the Agenda. As IFLA has clearly stated in the Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development (2014)², libraries provide safe spaces, give access to information and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), safeguard cultural heritage, encourage intercultural dialog, and provide support for education, literacy and reading.

IFLA has prepared this background brief to help understand the issues raised in the Quito Declaration, and the areas where libraries can contribute.

Libraries provide safe spaces in cities

The New Urban Agenda states in paragraph 97 that, *We will promote planned urban extensions, infill, prioritizing renewal, regeneration, and retrofitting of urban areas, as appropriate, including upgrading of slums and informal settlements, **providing high-quality buildings and public spaces**, promoting integrated and participatory approaches involving all relevant stakeholders and inhabitants, avoiding spatial and socio-economic segregation and gentrification, while preserving cultural heritage and preventing and containing urban sprawl.*

Libraries, especially public libraries, provide safe public spaces and safe spaces for citizen participation. They are spaces of non-discrimination and promote integrated and participatory approaches involving stakeholders and inhabitants. Examples of open and safe spaces for citizen participation can be seen in many libraries around the world.

Libraries provide safe spaces within cities for everyone with no discrimination. They are publicly funded institutions available for everyone with no exceptions and provide space with no prejudice and judgement.

*New Helsinki City Library (to open in 2018)*³

The concept of the new Helsinki City Library emphasises the need to build a space for citizens, to provide them with information, with space to work and learn and to help them create their

¹ HABITAT III – New Urban Agenda:

<https://www2.habitat3.org/bitcache/97ced11dcecef85d41f74043195e5472836f6291?vid=588897&disposition=inline&op=view>

² Lyon Declaration: <http://www.lyondeclaration.org/>

³ Helsinki City Library: <http://keskustakirjasto.fi/en/key-information/>

own home within the library. It will be located opposite the parliament to encourage civil participation in decision making.

Medellín Library Parks, Columbia⁴

Public libraries are an integral part of the city of Medellín's urban renewal strategy. Strategically located in some of the most disadvantaged communities on the outskirts of Medellín, they have become centres for social development that address an identified need for more cultural and education space. The Library Parks are a series of public libraries that offer educational tools and programmes to benefit the local communities, as well as providing a hub for further urban development and green projects.

IFLA recommends that,

Libraries approach relevant officials in their cities and encourage them to use the safe spaces libraries provide for citizen participation

Policy makers actively incorporate libraries and the facilities they provide when promoting and creating safe spaces, education and access to information, in cities

Libraries provide public access points for information, ICTs and much more

In paragraph 34 The New Urban Agenda states, *We commit to promote equitable and affordable access to sustainable basic physical and social infrastructure for all, without discrimination, including affordable serviced land, housing, modern and renewable energy, safe drinking water and sanitation, safe, nutritious and adequate food, waste disposal, sustainable mobility, healthcare and family planning, education, culture, and **information and communication technologies.***

Libraries not only provide safe spaces for working, learning and social exchange but they are also a crucial provider to guarantee public access to information and to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Libraries across the globe actively engage in providing access to information, access to ICTs and training in information literacy skills.

National Library of Uganda⁵:

The National Library of Uganda has an ICT training program designed for female farmers, providing access in local languages to weather forecasts, crop prices, and support to set up online markets. This programme increases the economic well-being of women through technology skills and provides access to ICT facilities.

The New Urban Agenda also highlights the need for safe and equal access for all:

Paragraph 14 (a): ... **ensuring public participation providing safe and equal access for all; and providing equal access for all to physical and social infrastructure and basic services as well as adequate and affordable housing**

This complements the UN 2030 Agenda target 16.10: *Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.*

⁴ Medellín Library Parks: <http://medellin.ecocitizenworldmap.org/library-parks/>

⁵ ICTs in libraries: http://beyondaccess.net/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Beyond-Access_GirlsandICT-Issue-Brief.pdf

*The World Bank Library*⁶

In line with the World Bank Group's strategy to end extreme poverty by 2030, the World Bank Group Library provides both staff and the global community with access to relevant information and services in order to foster knowledge transfer, good governance and economic development. Highly trained information professionals answer development-related questions, find information from multiple internal and external sources, and familiarise staff with collections, resources and services aligned with the Bank's development priorities. The library also promotes transparency and accountability more broadly by providing capacity building on public access to information to non-staff members around the world. The library's work is integral to global development through public access to information.

Libraries, world-wide provide these services for free to their users and are complimented by highly skilled staff which help users in gaining confidence in using technology and teach them essential literacy skills (including media and information literacy) needed to adequately navigate the information available.

IFLA recommends that,

Libraries ensure that policy makers and city governments are aware of the services libraries provide to users, including access to information, ICTs and information literacy skills

Policy makers utilise the knowledge base librarians provide to ensure that citizens can gain adequate access to information, ICTs and information literacy skills

Libraries encourage cultural dialog and preserve culture for the future

In paragraph 38, the New Urban Agenda highlights that, *we commit to sustainably leverage natural and cultural heritage in cities and human settlements, as appropriate, both tangible and intangible, through integrated urban and territorial policies and adequate investments at the national, sub-national, and local levels, to **safeguard and promote cultural infrastructures** and sites, museums, indigenous cultures and languages, as well as traditional knowledge and the arts, highlighting the role that these play in the rehabilitation and revitalization of urban areas, and as a way to strengthen social participation and the exercise of citizenship.* Libraries are an integral part to fulfilling this commitment.

Libraries are essential partners in preserving cultural heritage. One of the core missions of libraries is to preserve and safeguard cultural heritage for the long term future. This cultural heritage ranges from documents, to oral traditions, indigenous materials and film, to digital content and objects.

IFLA has a network of 16 Preservation and Conservation (PAC) Centres⁷ which are located across the globe and enable communities to preserve and access their heritage for the long term future. IFLA's cultural heritage work focuses on safeguarding documentary heritage world-wide by providing a Risk Register⁸ for documentary heritage which encourages risk mitigation and disaster planning in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction⁹. It also enables UNESCO and IFLA to react with reliable data to occurring disasters.

⁶ World Bank Group Strategy: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/732401468327402395/Final-report>

⁷ IFLA PAC Centres: <http://www.ifla.org/node/1244>

⁸ IFLA Risk Register: www.ifla.org/risk-register

⁹ Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction: http://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf

Libraries safeguarding cultural heritage also supports the *United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*¹⁰ and especially target 11.4: *Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.*

Safeguarding documentary cultural heritage helps in strengthening social participation and builds resilient communities.

*The Libraries of Timbuktu*¹¹

In 2013 armed groups occupied Northern Mali and Timbuktu, a city famous for its cultural heritage and its vast number of public and private libraries with invaluable documentary heritage. To safeguard the manuscripts during the occupation, volunteers smuggled them to safety in Bamako with international support. The manuscripts have since been kept in the capital and are undergoing restoration and digitisation work. Libraries have been at the forefront of rescuing and preserving the unique heritage of Mali.

Libraries will also enable decision makers to fulfil the promises of the Agenda to:

Paragraph 124: ... *include culture as a priority component of urban plans and strategies in the adoption of planning instruments, including master plans, zoning guidelines, building codes, coastal management policies, and **strategic development policies that safeguard a diverse range of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and landscapes, and will protect them from potential disruptive impacts of urban development.***

Preserved and accessible cultural heritage helps build resilient communities, fosters cultural understanding and overcomes cultural difference. Libraries are a corner stone of this intercultural dialog.

IFLA recommends that,

Libraries highlight the need for local governments and policy makers to support their effort in preserving and safeguarding documentary heritage for the future

Policy makers enable libraries to safeguard and provide access to documentary heritage in order to ensure resilient communities

Libraries can help provide solutions to urban problems

The continuous growth of the global urban population poses many problems for city and national governments. IFLA stresses that libraries can be at the forefront in helping cities deal with a large urban population.

Libraries provide safe space for everyone, they provide access to ICTs, to information, to education and learning, they teach literacy skills of any kind, they are unbiased space which support users and communities, they safeguard cultural heritage and they ensure that people are in touch with their culture, actively helping to bridge cultural differences and furthering a mutual understanding for each other.

IFLA now calls to city, local and national governments as well as the international community, to ensure that libraries are included in the planning and implementation of city development strategies and policies. Libraries are crucial to realising the *New Urban Agenda* and the *UN 2030 Agenda*. We call

¹⁰ UN 2030 Agenda:

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>

¹¹ Timbuktu: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/armed-conflict-and-heritage/emergency-actions/mali>

on you to contact your local library association, your public library, and your national library and cooperate to realise the *New Urban Agenda* and the *UN 2030 Agenda* and ensure that no one will be left behind.