

NINTH ISSUE
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BY THE ARAB URBAN DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

GING BRIDGING CITIES, LDING BUILDING FUTURES

OLLABORATION BY CITY TO CITY COOPERATION

THE INTERVIEW
Her Excellency the Mayor of Rabat, Fatiha El Moudni, talks about various International Cooperation Initiatives of the City

URBAN INSIGHTS
Experts' insights on City to City Cooperation

Toolkits on City to City Cooperation

CITIES IN ACTION
Projects and Initiatives conducted in collaboration between cities

MUDUNUNA

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NINTH ISSUE

BRIDGING CITIES, BUILDING FUTURES

ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES COOPERATION

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1

EDITORIAL

6 How do Cities establish Partnerships? Insights from Cities' Cooperation

2

INTERVIEW

9 Mayor of Rabat, Fatiha El Moudni, in dialogue about the city's various international cooperation initiatives

3

URBAN INSIGHTS

19 Mayors and Local Leaders are a force for International Dialogue

21 Building Urban Futures: Tunisia's Municipal Transformation and the Power of Partnership

24 Impact of International Partnership on Moroccan Cities

27 Toolkits on City to City Cooperation

4

CITIES IN ACTION

31 Riyadh and Seoul: Partnership for Urban Innovation and Management

33 Making cities Accessible and Livable: Cooperation between Amman and Barcelona

36 Cooperation through Cultural exchange: Marrakech and Marseille

38 Leading Regional Cooperation: Learning from Tunis and Lisbon

40 Municipal Cooperation for Urban Development: Ramallah, Bordeaux, and Toulouse

42 Public Engagement and Sustainable Development: Cooperation between Kasserine and Munich

44 Municipal Infrastructure and Resource Management: Nouakchott's Partnership with European cities

5

OUR NEWS

48 Guided by His Highness, Mayor of Riyadh Region and AUDI President AUDI Launches Official Website for the Arab European Cities Dialogue Forum 2025 AUDI Launches Official Website for the Arab European Cities Dialogue Forum 2025

50 AUDI delegation meets with Mayors of numerous European Cities to prepare for the Arab European Cities Dialogue 2025

51 AUDI welcomes European Ambassadors to Discuss the Arab European Cities Dialogue 2025

52 AUDI is a Knowledge Partner of Expo City Dubai at the 15th APCS

53 AUDI Launches Publications on Digital Transformation and Urban Heritage Management in Arab Cities

54 AUDI Holds Series of Training Workshops to Strengthen Leadership Skills and Improve Municipal Operations Efficiency

55 AUDI Holds Online Training Workshop on "Project Management Professional"

56 Cities in Action Webinar series

EDITORIAL

HOW DO CITIES ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS?

INSIGHTS FROM CITIES' COOPERATION

By Dr. Ziad Alameddine- Editor in Chief

We are living in an era shaped by a digital revolution that has turned the world into a virtual space, connecting communities like never before. The challenges cities face now go beyond geographical boundaries, rapidly intersecting with global events and developments. From this standpoint, cooperation between cities has become essential, not merely a temporary initiative, a meeting of ideas, or a set of limited partnerships. Despite the differences in urban contexts, cities around the world face shared challenges such as economic pressures, environmental threats, and social concerns. These issues, including global warming driven by carbon dioxide emissions, have become widespread phenomena that increasingly threaten human life on our planet. This highlights the importance of cities establishing long-term global partnerships by fostering cooperation, promoting mutual understanding, and sharing knowledge and expertise to effectively address these challenges and reduce their impact. Collaboration increases the likelihood of finding effective solutions to complex issues that no single city, especially those with limited resources, can tackle alone. In some instances, this may even require institutional reforms to align with evolving global trends.

This issue of MUDUNUNA aims to showcase innovative insights and experiences in partnerships between Arab and global cities, emphasizing the efforts made to enhance cooperation and its crucial role in achieving mutual benefit. In an interview with H.E. Mrs. Fatiha El Moudni, Mayor of Rabat, we learn more about the city's experience in advancing city-to-city cooperation. She outlines Rabat's strategic vision for strengthening partnerships and fostering international collaboration between the Moroccan capital and European cities. The mayor also highlights the city's initiative to solidify its status as a global hub for cultural and knowledge exchange.

The "Urban Insights" section features an engaging discourse, with contributions from experts in the field of Urban Development from across the region. Frédéric Vallier, General Delegate of the International Association of French-Speaking Mayors (AIMF), offers an overview of the strategies employed in international cooperation between cities, emphasizing the role of mayors and local leaders as key drivers of international dialogue. Mr. Ryan Knox, Managing Director of SALAR International, highlights the association's distinctive experience in promoting partnerships between Arab and European cities, particularly through Sweden's support for urban sustainability initiatives in Tunisia. For her part, Mrs. Souad Zaidi, Secretary General of the AMPCC, emphasizes the importance of institutionalizing cooperation as a key mechanism for addressing challenges and advancing sustainable development at the territorial level. She also shares several examples and models of successful partnerships between Moroccan and European cities.

Furthermore, this edition of MUDUNUNA features four toolkits developed by international organizations, each offering insights into different dimensions of cooperation. These toolkits underscore the value of city-to-city partnerships in localizing development goals, outline strategies for building sister city relationships, and highlight the importance of identifying and minimizing risks associated with city diplomacy efforts. They also stress the need for clarity, enhanced transparency, and a strong foundation of accountability throughout the process.

The 'Cities in Action' section showcases a range of experiences that have contributed to strengthening partnerships and deepening relations between cities across various sectors. The visit of His Highness the Mayor of Riyadh to Seoul culminated in strengthening the partnership between the two cities through the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) focused on fostering cooperation in various aspects related to city management and operations, including urban infrastructure management, enhancing digital governance, and improving municipal services. In addition to this, the agreement covers other areas related to developing smart cities and promoting sustainable development practices, as well as exchanging ideas and sharing best practices and experiences in the field of urban development. Another example of successful city-to-city cooperation is the collaboration between Amman and Barcelona that focuses on improving urban livability. The two cities have established partnerships in multiple areas of urban development, including twinning agreements and cultural exchange programs.

In contrast, the partnership between Marrakech and Marseille represents a strategic collaboration formalized through a cooperation agreement. This partnership focuses on exchanging expertise in municipal management, restoring archaeological and historical sites, promoting environmental protection and urban conservation, and enhancing workforce development. The experiences of Tunis and Lisbon underscore the importance of city-to-city partnerships through a friendship and cooperation agreement that promotes tourism, cultural, and scientific exchanges. The agreement also supports the organization of conferences centered on development in the Mediterranean region. Similarly, the diverse forms of collaboration between Kasserine, Tunisia, and Munich highlight the broader potential for Arab European city partnerships. Their joint efforts have focused on fostering urban economic development and strengthening public participation in urban planning and design.

Ramallah, Palestine, has been actively engaged in several partnerships, most notably a twinning agreement with the French city of Bordeaux. These collaborations have resulted in a range of development initiatives, including the improvement of municipal infrastructure and the organization of cultural and artistic activities. Similarly, Nouakchott has participated in multiple cooperation initiatives with European cities and stands out as one of the European Union's largest partners in Africa in terms of funding, collaboration, and mutually beneficial partnerships.

In the AUDI's News section of the MUDUNUNA newsletter, we are pleased to announce the release of a comprehensive report titled 'Municipalities and Digital Transformation in Arab Cities: An Institutional Development Perspective,' launched in February 2025. Additionally, the report 'Urban Heritage Management in Arab Cities: Insights for Municipalities' was published in March 2025. As part of the 'Cities in Action' webinar series, we explore Nouakchott's experience in building a multi-stakeholder partnership through decentralized cooperation, aimed at improving access to water and sanitation in the city's peripheral neighborhoods. AUDI also conducted a training workshop titled 'Certified Associate in Project Management,' as part of an ongoing series designed to strengthen professional capacities in project management across Arab cities.

Finally, it is important to highlight the Arab Urban Development Institute's continued commitment to fostering strategic partnerships, most notably through its organization of the inaugural Arab European Cities Dialogue 2025, set to take place in Riyadh in May 2025. The forum aims to strengthen ties and promote cooperation between Arab and European cities. In preparation for this event, a delegation from AUDI and the Riyadh Region Municipality carried out a series of official visits, meeting with mayors and representatives from various European cities to lay the groundwork for meaningful collaboration. As part of these efforts, the Institute also hosted several European ambassadors and their representatives during a special Ramadan evening, using the occasion to spotlight the upcoming forum and emphasize its significance in advancing cooperation between the Arab and European worlds.

INTERVIEW

MAYOR OF RABAT
FATIHA EL MOUDNI

In dialogue about Rabat's experience with City to City Cooperation

Born in Rabat in 1981 and originally from Tafraout, Fatiha El Moudni grew up in a strict but influential environment. Her father, surrounded by people of different nationalities, backgrounds, and ideologies, inspired her to take an interest in associative, economic, and political life. Her rich and diverse background earned her the current appointment as Honorable Mayor of Rabat, since 25 March 2024.

Starting as the Secretary of the Rabat City Council and a substitute at the UCLG World Council, she has clearly demonstrated her leadership and commitment by chairing numerous commissions and taskforces, and actively participating in various forums. Her roles as Co-Chair of the Strong Cities Network, President of the International Association of Urban Lighting (LUCI), President of Metropolis, and UCLG Treasurer, among others, highlight her dedication to urban development and international collaboration.

Creating the "African League for Leadership" and serving as vice-president of the "Association of Youth People for Social Development in SOUISSI district" are significant contributions. These roles allow her to share her wealth of experience and foster social inclusion and good governance in Morocco.

In recognition of her impressive career, she received the "New Leader for the Future" award at the Crans Montana Forum in 2015, followed by another award " African Young Leader" in 2019.



Photo: Her Excellency Fatiha El Moudni, Mayor of Rabat

Rabat has been actively fostering international partnerships between Arab and European regions. Recently, Rabat's municipality launched various initiatives to strengthen its status as a global cultural and intellectual exchange hub. As one of the key participating cities, Rabat is gearing up to participate in the inaugural Arab European Cities Dialogue Forum 2025, set to take place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in May 2025. In this edition of "Mudununa" newsletter, we highlight Rabat's strategic approach to international partnership and explore with the city's mayor, H.E. Mrs. Fatiha AL Moudni, the prospects for future cooperation and partnerships between Morocco's capital and cities throughout Europe.

As the Mayor of a strategically important city, how do you envision the future development of Rabat?

Thank you for raising this important question, which highlights Rabat's strategic vision as Morocco's political, administrative, and cultural capital. This historic imperial metropolis elegantly integrates authenticity and modernity, playing an important role in fostering collaboration among Arab, European, and African countries.

In terms of Rabat's development vision, the municipality's action plan and roadmap, developed as part of the implementation of national strategies, sectoral programs, and the foundations of the new local development model, are primarily based on four key topics, including culture, sustainability, social integration, and innovation.

These topics constitute the overarching framework for developing Rabat into a major global hub for cultural and information exchange, all while maintaining the city's identity and rich history.

1. Culture serves as a bridge that fosters effective Communication

Rabat aims to solidify its status as a cultural capital, not only within Morocco but also across the Arab world, Africa, and the international stage. This ambition is being realized through several key initiatives inspired by the enlightened vision of His Majesty the King Mohammed VI may God assist him, including the integrated royal program " Rabat City of Light, Moroccan Capital of Culture," which exists alongside many cultural exchange initiatives with European and African cities.

Additionally, Rabat is known as the capital of science and knowledge because it has the greatest universities, educational institutions, including international and national ones, and higher schools, as well as public and private institutes, international cultural centers, and a university city, " Madinat Al Irfane" as well as many scientific research and innovation institutions and a national library.

Rabat is also home to significant cultural infrastructure, including the Grand Theater, the Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, the National Jewelry Museum, and the National Photography Museum, among others. These venues support the organization of major international events such as the International Book Fair and the Mawazine International Festival.

Rabat's capabilities have earned it two renowned titles: the first African Capital of Culture and the Capital of Culture in the Islamic World. The city also holds two international nominations from 2024: the Scroll Honor of UN HABITAT 2024, for its sustainable Urban Planning Strategy, and theMediterranean Prize for Excellence in the fields of social inclusion and culture.

2. Sustainability as the cornerstone of Development

Rabat values sustainable development as a key component of its strategic vision. Several projects have been launched to improve the quality of life and protect natural resources, particularly water. These projects involve the creation of large green spaces, irrigated by using REUZE wastewater recycling technology, as well as a saltwater desalination project that is now underway, in addition to initiatives to improve sustainable transportation, such as boosting tram ridership, electric buses in collaboration with the Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), and pedestrian mobility.

3. Innovation as a key engine of Economic and Social growth

Rabat aspires to be a regional hub for innovation and entrepreneurship. The city hopes to attract investment and generate opportunities by developing R&D centers, supporting startup companies, and encouraging public-private partnerships. Rabat also seeks to improve collaboration with European cities in areas of technology and artificial intelligence, promoting knowledge transfer and peer-to-peer expertise sharing.

4. Partnering globally for impact

Rabat serves as a link between the Arab, European, and African worlds, and through its leadership of various international organizations and global networks, it facilitates the connection and networking of intellectual and economic entities, corporations, and civil society groups. It also encourages various types of partnerships with European cities, creating new opportunities for collaboration in fields such as social and economic development, flexible urban planning, crisis management, renewable energy, sustainable public transportation, waste management, scientific research, and many other critical areas.

Finally, we can confirm that Rabat is steadily progressing toward its development objective, which is built on participatory democracy and good governance, while also protecting tangible and intangible heritage and tackling current difficulties. As previously stated, participating in the Arab European Cities Dialogue Forum 2025 in Riyadh will provide an excellent opportunity to highlight this vision and strengthen collaboration with partner cities, reflecting Rabat's role as a global city that helps to build bridges of understanding and cooperation between peoples.

Thus, Rabat's comprehensive development vision serves as an example for the region, paving the way for a brighter future for both its residents and visitors.

In what ways has your collaboration with international organizations, such as United Cities and Local Governments, the Strong Cities Network, and Metropolis, enhanced municipal governance in Rabat?

I have had the privilege of working with a range of international organizations, including the Strong Cities Network (SCN), which I co-chair alongside The Hague in the Netherlands, and as President of Metropolis. Additionally, I serve as treasurer of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Chair of the International Network of Cities on Urban Lighting (LUCI). Besides, I work as an advisor for the United Nations, serving as a member of the Secretary General's Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments, and a member of the Executive Office of the International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF), Arab Towns Organization, and the Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities.

This comprehensive experience was an effective and strategic tool for developing Rabat City Municipality and strengthening the city's position as an Arab, international, and African leader. So, international cooperation has given us numerous and substantial possibilities to share experience, transfer information, and implement global best practices in territorial and local governance. We did develop many projects of cooperation with cities around the world, we have financed many projects in African cities (FACDI), promoting south-south cooperation, and we have collaborated with many development agencies and organizations to enhance multilateral cooperation around the world.

The following are the key areas in which these initiatives have made significant contributions:

1. Improving Sustainable Urban Planning

Organizations such as Metropolis, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Strong Cities Network, LUCI and the International Association of Francophone Mayors (AIMF)—which brings together major cities from around the world—have provided us with a valuable platform to share experiences and best practices in sustainable urban planning.

2. Strengthening Security and promoting Community Stability

In this regard, the Kingdom of Morocco, particularly Rabat, is well-known for its security, stability, tolerance, and peace. Throughout history, it has served as a seat and cradle for several civilizations. It is a safe and quiet city that provides a comfortable living to its diverse population of residents and visitors.

As a result, Rabat joined the United Nations Safe Cities Program 2015 as part of the groundbreaking effort " Rabat, A safe city free of violence for women and girls".

Rabat also takes part in the Pan-African inititiatve "Rabat is Safeguarding its Children" program, which is run by the Moroccan National Observatory for Children's Rights, in collaboration with UCLG Africa.

3. Promoting Transparency and Strengthening Local governance

Collaboration with these leading international territorial governance organizations has equipped Rabat's local officials with valuable and high-level expertise in promoting transparency and good governance. This has led to the development of innovative mechanisms for enhancing citizen participation in decision-making processes.

In this context, it is important to highlight that the decentralization framework established by the Kingdom's 2011 Constitution serves as a fundamental pillar in strengthening effective local governance and ensuring it responds to citizens' needs and expectations.

4. Leveraging International Financial and Technical support

These international partnerships have opened up valuable opportunities for cities to access substantial funding from global institutions and development agencies, enabling the implementation of key development projects supported by technical and logistical assistance.

For instance, the city of Rabat has taken part in internationally funded initiatives in areas such as social development, renewable energy, and sustainable transportation.

Additionally, Rabat is engaged in the Performance Efficiency Program, funded by the International Monetary Fund and the Ministry of the Interior.

5. Strengthening the capacities of Local actors:

These networks and international organizations have provided workshops, training sessions, and courses

designed to enhance the capacities of local actors across various areas, including crisis management, disaster response, health emergencies, and environmental crises. Additionally, several practical training programs have been established to improve crisis response and preparedness for potential catastrophes.

6. Fostering cultural and knowledge-sharing opportunities

This active participation and effective engagement have provided us with valuable opportunities to showcase Rabat's rich cultural heritage on the global stage, while also enhancing the city's branding as a dynamic capital that blends authenticity with modernity. Moreover, it has allowed Rabat, along with other member cities, to learn from the experiences of peers in fostering cultural exchange. It is important to note that Rabat was named the first African Capital of Culture and the Capital of Culture of the Islamic World for 2022-2023, and it has also been named the World Book Capital by UNESCO for 2026.

7. Advancing city-to-city collaboration

"These networks have opened up valuable opportunities for establishing both bilateral and multilateral partnerships with other cities. For instance, cooperation agreements have been signed with several European cities in areas such as heritage preservation, cultural development, green space management, and technological innovation. These collaborations have facilitated knowledge transfer and the adoption of best practices in urban governance and city management.

Rabat partners with several European cities on joint initiatives aimed at enhancing inclusiveness and improving the quality of life for its residents. Could you highlight some of the key collaborative initiatives and projects that have emerged from these partnerships?

Indeed, the city of Rabat is actively working to strengthen its cooperation with European cities through joint initiatives and projects that promote inclusiveness and enhance the quality of life for its residents. These partnerships span a wide range of sectors, including sustainable development, culture, technological innovation, social development, and urban transportation. Below are some of the most notable collaborative initiatives and projects:

1. "Rabat: The Green City" Project

In collaboration with European cities such as Barcelona and Paris, Rabat has launched initiatives aimed at expanding green spaces, including the development of public parks and the enhancement of waste management. These projects draw on the successful experiences of European counterparts to advance environmental sustainability and improve urban living conditions.

2. Renewable energy

Rabat is collaborating with partners from Europe and Asia to develop solar and wind energy projects. As part of these efforts, solar panels will be installed on several public buildings, helping to reduce carbon emissions and promote the city's shift toward clean, renewable energy sources.

3. Rabat, Capital of African Culture and Culture in the Islamic World

In partnership with African cities through the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLGA), as well as several European cities, Rabat has organized joint cultural events that bring together artists and intellectuals from the Arab, Islamic, European, and African worlds. These initiatives play a vital role in fostering cultural dialogue and showcasing Morocco's rich heritage on the international stage.

4. Fostering academic and artistic exchange between cities

Agreements have been signed with several international cities, including European partners, to establish student and artistic exchange programs that aim to foster mutual understanding and cultural exchange among young people from diverse backgrounds.

5. Rabat, the smart city project

Rabat has actively collaborated with cities like Vienna, Austria, Angers, France, and Astana, Kazakhstan, on projects aimed at transforming the city into a smart city. These projects involve the use of contemporary technology to improve transportation management, provide municipal e-services, and improve urban security.

6. Rabat Tramway project

In collaboration with primarily European partners, significant work has been done to develop and expand the tramway network in Rabat. These partnerships have become a successful model for sustainable urban transportation. The expertise of various cities, particularly Lyon, France, has been instrumental in the design and implementation of these projects.

7. International Academic Exchange Programs

In partnership with European and Asian universities, such as those in Paris, France, and through twinning agreements with cities like Jinan, China, Rabat has launched student and academic exchange programs aimed at strengthening collaboration in scientific research and innovation.

8. Programs Supporting Youth and Women Empowerment

Entrepreneurial projects have been developed in partnership with European cities to support youth entrepreneurship and women's empowerment, including training programs for submitting small business funding applications.

9. Sharing Best Practices in Crisis Management

In collaboration with cities across Europe, the Americas, and Asia, Rabat has organized workshops to facilitate the exchange of experiences in crisis management, focusing on responses to floods, earthquakes, and health and environmental emergencies.

In conclusion, these collaborative initiatives and projects underscore Rabat's commitment to fostering strong partnerships with European cities to advance sustainable development, enhance quality of life, and reduce social disparities. Through these strategic partnerships, Rabat has successfully leveraged international expertise and implemented the best practices across various sectors, positioning itself as a leading model of decentralized cooperation.

In 2024, Rabat received two prestigious international awards: the 2024 UN-Habitat Scroll of Honor Award for achievements in sustainable and inclusive urban planning and the Mediterranean Excellence Prize in the field of social integration and culture. What key measures and initiatives did the city undertake to earn these distinguished recognitions?

Rabat's two international awards in 2024—the UN-Habitat Award of Honour for Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Planning and the Mediterranean Cities Excellence Award for Social and Cultural Integration—highlight the city's strong commitment to sustainable growth, inclusive development, and the promotion of social and cultural diversity. These achievements have been made possible under the wise leadership of His Majesty the King Mohammed VI may God assist him, with the support and coordination of key ministerial sectors, provincial departments in the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region, civil society organizations, and the private sector—including local development companies, research centers, and universities. The awards represent the result of collaborative and comprehensive efforts, reinforcing Rabat's status as a leading city in the Arab world and internationally in integrated urban planning and sustainable, resilient social integration.

Several key measures and initiatives played a role in Rabat earning these two prestigious awards, along with standout projects that helped secure this recognition:

1. **The expansion of the tramway network and the introduction of electric buses and dedicated bicycle lanes have helped ease traffic congestion, lower carbon emissions, and enhance air quality.**

- Waste management was improved through the launch of recycling programs at landfills and the establishment of the " Tawafuq Association " for waste recycling. Additionally, public awareness and education campaigns were implemented to promote environmental preservation, water conservation, and reduced plastic use.
- The waste management sector was delegated to the private sector (national companies) to enhance efficiency and service quality.

2. Green spaces enhancement

- Rabat, recognized as a Green City with distinction in 2010, has significantly expanded its green spaces through the development of numerous public parks and gardens, including a greenbelt the "Bou Regreg" Gardens and Al-Hassan II Park. The renovation of the Botanical Garden and the creation of community parks across all districts have promoted spatial equity, improved air quality, and provided residents with accessible recreational areas. The city also boasts the "Ibn Sina Forest" as an urban forest in the center of the city and a green belt. Currently, the average green space per inhabitant stands at 75 square meters, with a total green area covering 4,800 hectares.
- All of Rabat's green spaces are irrigated using treated wastewater, which helps reduce costs and supports sustainable water resource management.

3. Renewable Energy

- As part of the Rabat Community Action Program, a project was launched to install solar panels on public buildings, promoting the use of clean, renewable energy and encouraging its adoption in houses and businesses.

4. Smart Cities

- Modern technology has been leveraged to enhance community services, including the implementation of smart water and energy management systems, which have improved resource efficiency.
- Additionally, the digitalization of public administration—through the development of electronic platforms—has facilitated greater citizen participation in decision-making processes and strengthened transparency.

5. Programs for supporting Marginalized Groups

- Programs have been launched to support youth, women, and the elderly by offering training opportunities and enhancing the capabilities of local actors.
- Social and sociocultural centers have been established in low-income neighborhoods, providing free educational and recreational services.
- Local playgrounds, youth centers, and community theaters have been developed.
- Limited-income groups were given access to local playgrounds, theaters, municipal swimming pools, and other local swimming facilities at affordable rates.

6. Community participation enhancement

- The Rabat City Council established the Equality, Equal Opportunities, and Gender Approach Authority as an advisory body to support participatory democracy, promote an inclusive approach, and encourage civil society involvement in local governance.
- Electronic consultation platforms have been launched to allow citizens to take part in decision-making, fostering greater transparency and building trust between local authorities and the community.
- An additional digital platform was introduced to uphold the right to access information, aligning with the national strategy on transparency and open governance.

7. International cultural festivals

- International cultural festivals such as the festival of books and edition SIEL, Rabat Festival of World Cultures, Mawazine, the Chellah Jazz Festival, the Madih Festival, the Author's Film Festival, the Women's Book Festival, and the Film Festival, among others, are regularly organized. These events gather artists and intellectuals from around the world, celebrating cultural diversity and fostering intercultural exchange.

8. Supporting local artists

- Grants and dedicated spaces are provided to support and showcase the work of local artists, helping to promote cultural diversity, creativity, and artistic innovation within the community.

9. Enhancing intercultural dialogue

- Rabat is actively promoting mutual understanding between cultures by launching cultural exchange programs with cities in Europe, the Arab world, and Africa. The city also hosts international cultural days and organizes workshops and dialogues on integration, in collaboration with international organizations and global cities. It is also worth

noting that Rabat is a member of the International Observatory of Living Together.

10. Local and International partnerships

In collaboration with the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat), several meetings were held and specific projects were planned. National strategies and sectoral programs related to housing were implemented locally, while Morocco also adopted sustainable housing policies developed at the national level to enhance urban management.

Local development companies were established, and partnerships were reinforced across various sectors, including public and semi-public institutions.

11. Environmental sustainability

- Renewable energy projects: The installation of solar panels on public buildings and the promotion of clean energy are key components of the Rabat Community Action Plan.

12. Water management

- Modern water management techniques have been established, including the utilization of treated wastewater to irrigate green spaces.

13. Awareness Programs

- Awareness campaigns have been conducted to highlight the importance of localizing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and promoting social inclusion, helping to strengthen community awareness and citizenship.
- The mandate for the management of the sanitation sector emphasizes the necessity of promoting environmental awareness.

14. Education and Training

- Training programs have been introduced for youth in sustainable and cultural development, in collaboration with local universities, international institutions, cultural centers, local partners, and civil society organizations, within an efficient participatory approach.

In addition to these comprehensive efforts, the city of Rabat has been actively engaged in the global agenda, including the 2030 Agenda, the New Urban Agenda, the Paris Climate Agreement, and more. This is part of the integrated royal program, " Rabat City of Light, Moroccan Capital of Culture," aimed at accelerating the achievement of sustainable development goals.

Rabat was recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2012. What steps has the city taken to enhance its status as a global cultural hub?

Rabat's recognition as a "World Heritage Site" by UNESCO in 2012 highlighted its cultural wealth and historical significance on the global stage. Since then, the city has implemented a range of initiatives, guided by the royal directives of His Majesty the King Mohammed VI may God assist him. These efforts have been carried out in collaboration with various governmental departments, the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region, civil society organizations, the private sector—especially local development companies—cultural centers, universities, and all local stakeholders engaged in cultural and heritage preservation, all aimed at reinforcing its status as a global cultural capital. These initiatives cover areas such as cultural heritage, arts, education, and cultural exchange. As a result of these efforts, the esteemed capital earned two prestigious titles in 2022-2023: the first African Capital of Culture and the Capital of Culture of the Islamic World. Some of the key arrangements and measures include:

1. World Heritage Site Inscription

Several locations in Rabat, including the modern city and the historic capital, have been added to UNESCO's World Heritage List. This shared heritage has played a significant role in enhancing the city's cultural prominence on the global stage.

2. Preservation of Architectural, Cultural, and Historical Heritage

Numerous historical sites and monuments in Rabat have been restored, including the Hassan Tower, the Mausoleum of Mohammed V, the Chellah archaeological site, and the historic Kasbah of the Udayas, along with the revitalization of the old city and its ancient walls. These efforts highlight Rabat's authenticity, transforming it into an open museum of human heritage, which enhances its appeal to both residents and visitors.

3. Enhancing Cultural Infrastructure

The city has developed cultural centers, a large

theater, and world-class museums, including the Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, the Jewelry Museum, and the Photography Museum, among others. These additions have positioned Rabat as a leading hub and a shining example of arts and culture on the global stage.

4. Promoting Cultural Events and Art Exhibitions

Rabat regularly hosts a variety of international festivals and conferences. Every year, the city organizes prominent cultural events such as the Book Fair, the Mawazine Festival, the Rabat Festival of World Cultures, the Chellah Jazz Festival, the Madih Festival, the International Film Festival, the Women's Book Festival, and more. Additionally, several major events are partially held in Rabat. These festivals draw artists and intellectuals from across the globe. Several art spaces have been established and developed in Rabat, including the Mohammed VI Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, the Villa des Arts, and exhibition halls like Bab Rouah Hall, Allal El Fassi Hall, and Bahnini Hall. These venues host international exhibitions and display artworks by artists from around the world. Additionally, cultural facilities such as the Mehdi Ben Barka Cultural Complex have been renovated to further enhance the city's cultural offerings.

5. Partnership agreements

A partnership agreement was established with the Ministry of Youth, Culture, and Communication to create and manage shared cultural facilities, including the Mansour Theater, the Agdal Cultural Institute, the Music Institute, and venues like the Mehdi Ben Barka and Nahda Theaters. Additionally, community theaters are being established in all districts to further expand cultural access.

6. Encouraging Artistic and Literary Creativity

Local talents have been supported through workshops and cultural hackathon competitions, which have helped to highlight Moroccan cultural identity within a global context and to strengthen both tangible and intangible heritage. Additionally, the traditional craftsmanship area in the old city has been renovated to preserve and promote artisanal traditions.

7. Enhancing International Cooperation

Rabat has forged partnerships with international cultural organizations, fostering the exchange of knowledge and expertise. These collaborations have strengthened the city's global cultural presence and helped establish it as a prominent destination on the international cultural stage.

Under the principles of good governance, a regional development company called "Rabat Region for Historical Heritage" was established to oversee the management of historical monuments.

These initiatives demonstrate the city's dedication to safeguarding both its tangible and intangible cultural heritage, encouraging local artistic expression, and fostering cross-cultural dialogue. As a result, Rabat stands not only as a "City of Light," but also as a shining symbol of culture and creativity.

As a main member of the trustees' board for the upcoming Arab European Cities Dialogue Forum 2025 in Riyadh, scheduled for May 2025, what key ideas and visions do you aim to propose to strengthen and sustain collaboration between Arab and European cities?

As part of Rabat's participation as a member of the Board of Trustees for the upcoming Arab European Cities Dialogue Forum 2025 in Riyadh, I intend to present a set of forward-looking ideas and visions aimed at fostering sustainable cooperation between Arab and European cities. These proposals are grounded in the principles of sustainable development, cultural exchange, technological innovation, smart land management, and social inclusion. I will also advocate for comprehensive programs designed to ensure that no one is left behind. Below are the key ideas I plan to put forward:

1. Creating an Arab European platform for cultural exchange

- Proposing the creation of a permanent platform that would allow Arab and European cities to collaborate on organizing joint cultural events, such as art festivals, exhibitions, workshops, and training programs.
- Promoting student and artistic exchange programs between cities to enhance mutual understanding and strengthen ties among young people.

2. Protecting shared cultural heritage

- Strengthening cooperation in cultural heritage

preservation by facilitating the exchange of expertise in the restoration and management of historical sites.

- Establishing joint committees to collaborate on documenting and preserving intangible cultural heritage, including traditional music, crafts, and cuisine.

3. Renewable energy projects

Encouraging cooperation between Arab and European cities to develop projects harnessing solar, wind, and renewable energy, with an emphasis on technology transfer, capacity building for local actors, and exploring innovative funding solutions.

4. Waste and water management

Facilitating the exchange of expertise in waste management, recycling, and energy valuation, while developing advanced water management systems, including the reuse of treated wastewater and seawater desalination.

5. Smart cities

Improve cooperation in the development of smart city technical infrastructure, such as intelligent transportation systems, energy management, electronic archiving, geographic information systems, and other related training courses, and plan training sessions on this issue.

6. Programs for supporting Marginalized Groups

Proposing the creation of joint programs to support youth, women, and the elderly by offering training opportunities in collaboration with civil society associations.

7. Joint innovation centers

Proposing the establishment of innovation centers in Arab and European cities to support startups and foster innovation in fields such as green technology and artificial intelligence, while pursuing joint funding opportunities.

8. Facilitating the exchange of technological expertise

Organizing workshops and training courses to facilitate the exchange of expertise in local financing mechanisms, modern technology, and local governance.

9. Academic exchange programs

Enhancing student and academic exchange programs between Arab and European universities, with a particular emphasis on scientific research and innovation.

10. Research and development centers

Creating collaborative research centers focused on crucial issues such as renewable energy, innovation, and artificial intelligence.

11. Facilitating the exchange of expertise in crisis management

Organizing training sessions on crisis management, such as responding to natural disasters and health related preventive measures in emergency situations.

12. Creating an Arab-European network for Crisis management

Proposing the establishment of a coordinating network between Arab and European cities to boost crisis response and disaster recovery.

13. Digital consultation platforms

Encouraging cities to build digital consultation platforms so that citizens can participate in decision-making processes.

14. Awareness programs

Organizing awareness campaigns and programs, with capacity building for local actors, about the importance of sustainable development and social inclusion in collaboration with international organizations and civil society.

15. Developing Cultural Tourism

Encouraging Arab and European cities to develop tourism programs that emphasize cultural and historical heritage.

16. Ecotourism

Enhancing ecotourism collaboration by creating projects that meet environmental sustainability and resilience requirements.

URBAN INSIGHTS

External Article

MAYORS AND LOCAL LEADERS ARE A FORCE FOR INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE



Frédéric Vallier

General Delegate of the AIMF since June 1, 2024, Frédéric Vallier has been active for many years in the field of global networks of local authorities. A former local authority executive with over 30 years' experience in organizational management and public affairs, his expertise is recognized in local governance and influence strategies.

Because they have built up a sincere, lasting and balanced dialogue over the years, mayors today play an essential role in supporting international cooperation and building bridges between local communities and global issues. A contribution that is even more necessary in an increasingly fractured world, which needs to draw on all available forces to maintain exchange and mutual understanding.

"City diplomacy" has never been more essential than it is today, as a complement to the diplomatic action of Nation States.

The International Association of Francophone Mayors – AIMF, as other networks of local leaders such as the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, United Cities and Local Governments or the Arab Town Organization, is fully committed to this approach: it offers a space where the diversity of viewpoints can be freely expressed, while respecting the differences and histories of each of our territories. City to city cooperation is built on a human scale, to provide answers to populations even when they are bearing the full brunt of the consequences of global crises.

The international meeting organized in January 2025 in Nouakchott on the theme "Supporting local authorities committed to peace, security and development in the Sahel", is one of the outstanding examples of this dynamic. Based on activities carried out since 2023 with local authorities from Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Togo, this conference highlighted the priorities for action to support economic development and peace in the Sahel region, through proposals for interventions that are not exclusively security related.

A formal financial instrument has been set up to mobilize international funding for action. Backed by initial AIMF funding of 1 million euros over 3 years, it will be open to other donors and should help catalyze support for local authorities and their umbrella organizations.

Sustainable Regional Cooperation between Local Authorities

The Assembly of South Easten Asian Nations, the African Union, the Union of Arabic Maghreb, the European Union, the Economic Market Union of West Africa of the Arab league... All over the world, countries are choosing to strengthen their regional integration to prevent conflict, reinforce stability and promote shared socio-economic development. Dialogue between local authorities in the same regions helps energize the closer ties sought by National governments, by building them as close as possible to local populations. These ties can be built between national associations of local governments or directly through thematic networks of cities. In this context, cross border dialogue is essential to sustain economic development, peace building and understanding. In the recent years, with the support of the European Union, AIMF has helped creating 6 regional platforms (Maghreb, West Africa, Central Africa, Great Lakes, Indian Ocean and South Eastern Asia) which mayor's and leaders develop specific activities in domains of concern in their regions, from economic development to social activities for their population, cultural exchanges and more.

Inclusive Multilateralism

The involvement of local and regional authorities is now recognized as a decisive lever for the Global Development Agenda and the territorialization of the SDGs. More broadly, it is an essential contribution to keeping multilateralism alive at a time when it appears increasingly fragile.

The AIMF bears this preoccupation in the French-speaking world, where its status as an Operator of the Francophone International Strategy, gives the opportunity to bring the voice of Mayors to the attention of other authorities, and to establish concrete and very rich cooperation with national governments, parliamentarians, academics, the media.

Through the Global Task Force set up in 2008, or via the Strategic Partnership established with the European Union, worldwide networks of local and regional authorities have also structured themselves to bring their voice to the international stage.

The Advisory Group of Local and Regional Authorities to the UN Secretary General formalized their contribution to the Summit of the Future in 2024.

Similarly, the Commission on Sustainable City Financing, under the auspices of the United Nations and co-chaired by Jeffrey Sachs, Special Envoy to the UN Secretary-General, and Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris and President of the AIMF, is proposing innovative solutions for financing local and regional authorities in connection with the ecological transition and sustainable development.

"Mayors today play an essential role in supporting international cooperation and building bridges between local communities and global issues"

Inventing the World of the Next Century

Over 70% of the world population will live in urban areas in 2050. With this in mind, leaders from around the world need to cooperate through diverse mechanisms to include the priorities express by the urban population in their strategies. To build on the ground set by the SDGs and the 2030's agenda, they need to invent new ways of cooperating between different levels of responsibility and consider city leaders as part of the global and national governance. This is the concept of "governing in partnership" that city networks are calling for since some years. Be it climate change, peace building, food production and self-sufficiency, all present and coming challenges will only find solutions by working together and cooperating.

That is the message we convey by bringing together local and international experts, city and national leaders, academics, young people, women groups and civil society organizations.

External Article

BUILDING URBAN FUTURES: TUNISIA'S MUNICIPAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIP



Ryan Knox

Managing Director of SALAR International, Ryan Knox holds a Bachelor's degree in Geography from the University of Birmingham and a Master's degree in Development Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He has 25 years' experience of international development cooperation and has lived and worked in numerous countries in Europe, the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Across the Middle East and North Africa, cities are passing through a time of rapid transformation. Urbanisation, migration, climate change, socio-economic and governance challenges are becoming increasingly complex, and overlapping. But solutions, processes and mechanisms exist that can help to build urban resilience. These solutions are not just about the physical design of urban services and infrastructure, but more fundamentally about the redefinition of how cities govern, plan, and engage their communities.

During 2018 - 20, two municipalities in Tunisia (Mahdia and El Mourouj) embraced a new way of thinking about urban development, emphasizing sustainability, integrated planning, and participatory governance, under the SymbioCity programme.

Implemented by SALAR International with support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), SymbioCity draws from the extensive experiences and approaches of Swedish cities to urban sustainability and green transformation. It has served as a framework to support cities all over the world to plan and realise sustainable urban futures, including in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.

Although originally developed within the Swedish municipal system, SymbioCity is less a template and more a philosophy: it sees the city as an ecosystem — where environment, mobility, infrastructure, and social well-being must be understood as interconnected and co-dependent. When introduced to Tunisia, this methodology was not simply transferred

from one context to another. Instead, it was adapted and reinterpreted to Tunisian needs, norms and institutional realities. In this way, it offered not just tools, but also a shared space for experimentation and reflection.

Rethinking Governance from the Ground Up

In Mahdia, a coastal city with a deep historic legacy, and El Mourouj, a rapidly urbanizing suburb of Tunis, SymbioCity-inspired initiatives were piloted to support urban revitalization efforts. Though the physical changes – from upgraded public spaces to safer mobility corridors – were tangible, the real transformation occurred within the municipalities themselves.

Local governments began to experiment with new modes of citizen engagement. They practiced cross-sectoral collaboration. They collected and interpreted urban data in ways they hadn't before. These may sound like technical shifts, but their implications are institutional: they contributed to the development of municipalities that are more resilient, responsive, and capable of leading urban development agendas.

Crucially, these processes reflect SALAR International's broader approach to international cooperation – one rooted in mutual learning, institutional development, and sustainability. Rather than imposing pre-formed solutions, the focus has been on co-creation and capacity strengthening, with an understanding that long-term resilience comes not just from funding projects, but from building the institutions that can sustain them.

Scaling Impact Through Institutional Capacity

One of the most notable outcomes in Tunisia has been the growing confidence of municipalities to manage complexity – be it in planning for growth, responding to climate pressures, or negotiating with stakeholders. As urban governance decentralizes, this shift matters immensely. Local authorities now play a larger role in shaping the economic, environmental and spatial futures of their communities.

Here, the connection to Swedish strategic interests is nuanced but clear. Sweden's development cooperation has long emphasized democratic governance, inclusive service delivery, as well as climate-and gender-responsive planning – values that are increasingly aligned with the region's urban priorities. By focusing on institutional capacity and enabling frameworks, Sweden's engagement supports the kind of systemic change that creates long-term stability, opens space for innovation, and creates platforms for future collaboration – including with the private sector.

For instance, in cities like El Mourouj, where traffic management and access to green space were pressing concerns, integrated planning approaches have made it easier for municipalities to envision solutions that intersect with energy use, air quality, and public health. This creates openings for scalable investment – not only in infrastructure, but in technology, circular economy services, and climate-resilient design – sectors where Swedish companies hold recognized expertise.

"Meaningful urban transformation is possible when local leadership is matched with thoughtful international cooperation – and when that cooperation prioritizes systems, people, and governance over quick fixes."

Beyond Tunisia: A Regional and Global Lens

The significance of these examples extends beyond Tunisia's borders. Across the region, municipalities face the shared imperative of adapting to climate change, responding to urbanization, and meeting citizens' expectations for more inclusive cities. Many are also exploring how to strengthen their institutions in the face of political and fiscal constraints.

In this context, Tunisia's example offers valuable insights. The piloting of SymbioCity suggests that meaningful urban transformation is possible when local leadership is matched with thoughtful international cooperation – and when that cooperation prioritizes systems, people, and governance over quick fixes.

As the European Union and its member states now reflects on wider priorities for international cooperation, the case of SymbioCity in Tunisia offers valuable lessons in how to anchor flagship investment projects in resilient and responsive local governance systems. This includes a practical demonstration of how integrated, participatory urban development can enhance the sustainability and inclusivity of major infrastructure investments. By combining spatial and inclusive planning, service delivery, environmental sustainability and local economic development, the examples demonstrate how key principles that could underpin a '360-degree approach' to the European Union's 'Global Gateway' initiative can lead to territorial coherence, community ownership, and long-term impact.

Towards Shared Urban Futures

As cities continue to experiment with participatory planning, green infrastructure, and institutional innovation, they are laying the foundation for longer-term resilience and sustainable growth. These efforts also create new possibilities for deeper regional cooperation — including among Arab cities facing similar challenges, and between Arab and European municipalities exploring joint climate action, digital governance, and public service innovation.

From a strategic perspective, this also speaks to the value of investing in municipal diplomacy — enabling cities to become not just implementers of national policy, but proactive agents of regional development and cooperation.

In this way, Sweden's support for urban sustainability in Tunisia reflects more than technical assistance. It reflects a shared vision for inclusive, resilient, and future-oriented cities — built through mutual respect, pragmatic cooperation, and a belief in the transformative power of local leadership.

As urban transitions deepen across the Arab region, experiences like those of Tunisia offer both guidance and inspiration. They show that when international strategies are aligned with local aspirations, cities can become drivers of not just recovery, but renewal.

Note:

Website of SALAR International: https://salarinternational.se/

External Article

IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP ON MOROCCAN CITIES



Souad Zaidi

Currently serves as Secretary General of the AMPCC and holds positions as both a municipal and regional advisor. She has a rich background in politics and professional leadership, having previously served as a Member of Parliament, a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Deputy Mayor of Rabat responsible for international cooperation. In the private sector, she worked as a senior executive at Attijariwafa Bank, where she led regional quality and training efforts. Academically, she holds a bachelor's degree in Private Law, a master's in business law, and another master's in management and marketing, reflecting her strong qualifications and multidisciplinary expertise.

The legal framework governing decentralization in the Kingdom of Morocco seeks to promote cooperation as a vital tool for addressing difficulties and ensuring sustainable and integrated territorial development. Alongside constitutional provisions, the regulatory laws for local governments acknowledge the importance of international cooperation by empowering them to build partnerships and sign agreements with foreign entities, in line with specific regulations that reflect national priorities.

Moroccan cities actively participate in partnerships, which aim to build synergy and mobilize resources for shared development and the exchange of new ideas, particularly in sustainable urban development. They accomplish this by forming non-governmental networks of local governments and forging bilateral agreements to carry out collaborative initiatives that improve residents' living conditions.

This article outlines specific steps taken by Moroccan cities to establish partnerships with counterparts in various regions, particularly in Europe, in order to accelerate growth.

1. Collaboration with the European Union's Conference of Regional and Local Authorities

Since being recognized as the conference's first

partner for local democracy in 2019, representatives from seven Moroccan cities—as well as from regions and provinces—have taken part in the conference's plenary sessions and committees. These gatherings focus on enhancing the international engagement of cities and local authorities and sharing expertise in comprehensive governance and development.

2. **Joint Support Fund for Moroccan and French Local Authorities**

This fund serves as a key instrument for enabling cities in Morocco and France to carry out targeted collaborative projects. In its fourth edition (2022–2024), joint initiatives involving local authorities from both countries—such as Taroudant, Champéry/Arnage, and Zarqatn/Commercy/Ait Yahia—were submitted and assessed. A total budget of €700,000 was allocated to support these projects, which span areas including urban development, energy, youth engagement, digitalization, community participation, and others.

3. **Models of Partnerships Between Moroccan Cities and Their European Counterparts**

- Chefchaouen

The city of Chefchaouen actively participates in international platforms and cooperation networks, especially with Spanish local authorities. Recognized as an eco-city, Chefchaouen also holds a prominent role in environmental leadership, with its mayor serving as the president of the Moroccan Association of Eco-Cities (AMEV).

- Marrakech

The city of Marrakech has established numerous twinning and cooperation agreements with cities around the world, with key partnerships formed with European cities such as Angoulême (France), Granada (Spain), and Düsseldorf (Germany). These collaborations span a variety of areas, including urban planning, youth training in the tourism sector, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

- Tangier

Thanks to its geographical location and historical ties with nearby European countries—particularly Spain, Portugal, France, and Belgium—the city is actively involved in implementing a range of important programs based on agreements signed with several cities from these countries. These include Açaca, Barcelona, Alicante, Almeria, and Valencia in Spain; Faro in Portugal; Le Havre and Marseille in France; and San Jose in Belgium. The partnerships focus on key areas such as migration between Mediterranean cities, youth integration, climate action, and territorial governance.

- Taroudant

As part of the cooperation agreement between the city and the French city of Romans-sur-Isère, workshops were organized with their support to promote cultural development through studies and research involving the youth from both cities.

- Laayoune

As part of the development model in the southern regions of the Kingdom, the Laayoune community recently signed a twinning agreement with Arlington, Texas, USA. This agreement aims to strengthen cooperation between the two cities, focusing on areas such as urban development, economic revitalization, and environmental sustainability.

"Moroccan cities actively participate in partnerships, which aim to build synergy and mobilize resources for shared development and the exchange of new ideas"

4. **Moroccan Association of Mayors (AMPCC)**

The association supports cities and communities by encouraging them to strengthen decentralized cooperation and build partnerships with a developmental focus. It works to create opportunities that facilitate the exchange of best practices and promote progress in urban development.

In this context, and alongside its membership in several local authority organizations (CGLU, CGLUA, ARLEM), the association has launched significant initiatives that embrace diverse experiences. It has signed agreements to broaden the scope of decentralized cooperation, including partnerships

with the French Association of Elected Officials, the United Cities Association of France, the Italian Association of European Communities and Regions, and the Strong Cities Network, which focuses on combating extremism and hatred.

5. **The African Fund for Supporting International Decentralized Cooperation of Local Authorities (FACDI): Supporting cooperation**

This fund supports the sustainable and integrated development of beneficiary communities by funding projects that have a direct impact on the residents of African communities.

As of now, 33 Moroccan communities have joined, and 41 projects have been implemented across 26 African countries. These projects cover a wide range of areas, including support for basic services, sustainable development, and capacity building. Additionally, bilateral agreements have been signed, and their implementation is closely monitored during summits organized by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

Morocco's experience in decentralization has attracted the attention of cities worldwide, both at the institutional and legal levels. This recognition is also due to the scale of development projects being implemented on the ground with numerous international partners, all while aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations Human Settlements Program, and the African Agenda 2063.

TOOLKITS ON CITY TO CITY COOPERATION

Cities now, more than ever, play an increasingly strategic role in formulating international agendas. They are no longer entities isolated within a state or region, but rather impact other cities across geographical borders, influencing and shaping global urban development practices. As a result, there is a growing need for discourse and research on tools and processes that can foster effective collaboration between cities, organizations, and other urban development actors.

To facilitate knowledge sharing on this subject, this issue of Mudununa presents four toolkits developed by international organizations that deal with various aspects of city-to-city cooperation. These have been designed specifically to help municipalities better understand the processes required for successful partnerships, collaboration between public and private sector entities, and fostering the establishment of sister cities.

1

Toolkit 1:
City-to-City Partnerships to Localise the Sustainable Development Goals

2

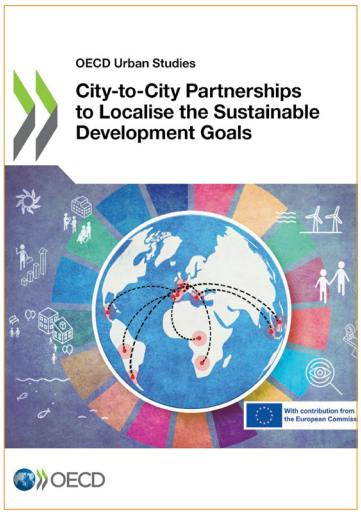
Toolkit 2:
Building Your Sister Cities Program

3

Toolkit 3:
City-to-City Cooperation

4

Toolkit 4:
Cities at the Crossroads: Understanding and Navigating City Diplomacy Risk



Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), ©2023

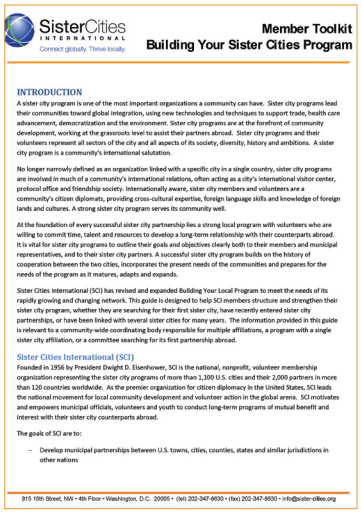
https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/city-to-city-partnerships-to-localise-the-sustainable-development-goals_d2fe7530-en.html

Toolkit 1:
City-to-City Partnerships to Localise the Sustainable Development Goals

This document focuses primarily on city-to-city partnerships and decentralized development cooperation (DDC) that are considered key for the advancement of global agendas. Targeted at various actors working in the development sector, it aims to facilitate local-national dialogue on development cooperation.

The document outlines the framework conditions by which various cities can engage in sustainable partnerships, discussing the phenomenon of city-to-city cooperation as one that has evolved from bilateral twinning to more sophisticated arrangements. Following a discussion on various aspects of city-to-city partnerships, the document proposes a systemic monitoring and evaluation framework to localize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through a pilot program, this framework was tested through a self-assessment conducted by 27 partnerships consisting of both local governments and other public sector entities. The results indicated that majority of the partnerships considered peer-to-peer learning a key component of their activities, and that some of the main areas they focus on through partnerships include addressing concrete local challenges such as urban mobility, affordable housing, and gender equality.

The document also highlights the policy implications and the way forward for the monitoring and evaluation framework, particularly its role in facilitating more robust evidence-based policy development processes.



Sister Cities International, ©2018

https://sistercities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Building-Your-Local-Program.pdf

Toolkit 2:
Building Your Sister Cities Program

This toolkit is designed to facilitate the establishment of successful sister city partnerships. It provides insights to municipal entities, helping them structure a new sister city program or strengthen their existing networks. It defines a successful sister city program as one that builds on the history of cooperation between the two, incorporates the present needs of the communities and prepares for the needs of the program as it matures, adapts, and expands.

It outlines some of the key steps that need to be taken by organizations to formalize a sister city relationship. These include selection of a city, incorporation of the program, building memberships, forming committees, designing a budget, and generating publicity. It provides a comprehensive list of questions that ought to be considered when a sister city program is being established, such as those concerning the mission, the short and long term goals, the selection criteria, the leadership process and others.

The toolkit also provides a framework, including an organizational structure, for the development of a multiple sister cities program, where more than 2 cities are engaged in a partnership. An essential component of the toolkit is the guidance it gives in incorporating the program into the local regulatory framework to ensure effective implementation and operations. It also contains sample articles of incorporation and sample by laws to facilitate organizations with developing their sister city programs.



Council of Europe, Institute of International Sociology Gorizia, ©2015

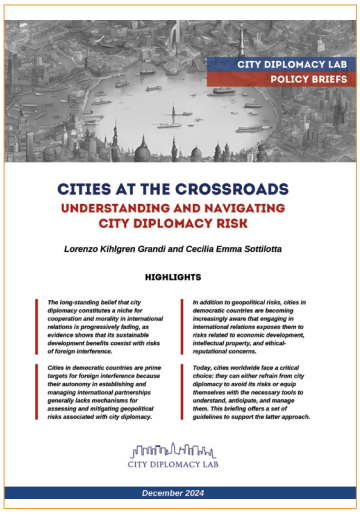
https://rm.coe.int/c2c-city-to-city-cooperation/1680747067

Toolkit 3:
City-to-City Cooperation

This toolkit is third in a series of documents produced by the Council of Europe to propose practical solutions for cooperation between municipalities. While the first two focus on municipalities within the same country and across neighboring countries, this third edition goes beyond national borders and guides municipalities on how they can establish direct and successful cooperation with cities across the world.

The toolkit first gives a comprehensive overview of the reasons and functions of city-to-city cooperation before going into detail on how to initiate, foster, and monitor these partnerships. It outlines the necessary steps for partnerships, the methods by which to define problems and their potential effects, selection of stakeholders, including those from municipalities, the private sector, and civil society, and lists potential obstacles the cooperation process could face.

To support cities that are planning to initiate cooperation, the toolkit also provides a list of Council of Europe Centers and Programmes that are active in the fields relevant to city-to-city cooperation, including youth centers, intercultural city programme, and technical cooperation and consultancy program. To effectively demonstrate the applicability of the toolkit, it presents a case study of a partnership between Dundee in the United Kingdom and Zadar in Croatia.



City Diplomacy Lab ©2024

https://www.citydiplomacylab.net/city-diplomacy-risk/

Toolkit 4:
Cities at the Crossroads: Understanding and Navigating City Diplomacy Risk

Targeted at municipal and sub-national governments, this document serves as a useful guide for cities that are looking to engage in international partnerships and want to gain greater insights on the concrete tools they can adopt to recognize, prevent, and navigate risks associated with city diplomacy efforts.

It discusses these risks through three primary categories, namely, geopolitical risks, economic and intellectual property risks, and ethical reputational risks. These include concerns regarding international political and economic pressures, infringement of sensitive information, and misinformation leading to an impact on the city's reputation.

As a means of anticipating and managing these risks the document provides municipalities with the right tools and recommendations for assessing and addressing them. These are presented in the form of a process framework, as well as recommendations for the engagement of qualified local actors, mechanisms for consultation, monitoring, vetting and reporting, and the importance of dialogue between cities in partner countries.

The document highlights the importance of international engagement for cities, while at the same time being responsive to potential risks, to ensure that city diplomacy efforts serve as a pathway for genuine cooperation and sustained development efforts.

CITIES IN ACTION

Project 1



King Abdullah Financial District Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
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Riyadh and Seoul
Partnership for Urban Innovation and Management

The city of Riyadh in Saudi Arabia is home to a number of pioneering projects, not just in the region but across the world. As a global hub, it has been engaged in partnerships with various international entities and has contributed significantly to city diplomacy efforts. The city of Seoul in South Korea is globally recognized as a leading force for urban innovation and as one of the largest metropolitan economies in the world. This article discusses the importance both cities place on fostering cooperation and working together towards a shared urban future.

In 2024, the two cities took a significant step towards strengthening their partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed between the Riyadh Municipality and Seoul Metropolitan government. This landmark agreement focuses on fostering cooperation in various aspects of city management and operations, reflecting the commitment of both cities towards advancing their urban agendas collectively. The city of Riyadh, which is known for its proactive role in city diplomacy, and Seoul, that is celebrated worldwide for urban innovation, align their development priorities through this agreement to enhance bilateral relations.

This marks a significant step in the domain of city diplomacy as both cities are home to a rapidly growing population and host advanced digital infrastructure to manage their operations. This agreement and its components are aligned with the development priorities of both Riyadh and Seoul, whereby they aim

to expand and strengthen bilateral relations, coordinate efforts to enhance cooperation, as well as foster exchange of expertise across regions. Through this, both cities intend to achieve mutual benefits, advancing their shared urban agendas.

In particular, the partnership focuses on several key areas, including urban infrastructure management, development of parks and gardens, asset and land management, enhancement of digital governance and data management systems, and improvement of municipal services including waste management and recycling. These focus areas cover the primary elements that are of priority to municipalities and require effective and efficient operational systems.

Additionally, the partnership incorporates elements of smart city development while promoting sustainable development practices. It also focuses on nurturing cultural exchange activities to further strengthen mutual exchange and collaboration between the two cities. While working on these areas, the two cities aim to generate discourse, encourage knowledge exchange, and foster greater expertise in the fields of urban management and collaboration.

For the implementation of the MoU, the cities plan to involve industry experts and specialists in the process, inviting them to engage in a dialogue to exchange ideas and best practices. These are to be planned through the formation of specialized working groups, development of comprehensive publications, as well as exchange of documents, studies, and reports prepared by both entities. Another core element of this is the organization of events and conferences by institutions in Riyadh and Seoul, with a thematic focus on the prioritized action areas of the partnership.

The MoU was signed during the Mayor of Riyadh's visit to Seoul, where he also attended the Global Mayors Forum in Smart Life Week and visited an exhibit on digital transformation and smart cities. This collaboration highlights the strategic importance both cities place on working together to address shared challenges, and exemplifies the role played by Riyadh and Seoul in encouraging city to city partnerships across the two regions.



H.H. Prince Dr. Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, Mayor of Riyadh Region fosters Saudi-Korean Cooperation with Mayor of Seoul Oh Se-hoon
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Project 2



Amman, Jordan
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Making cities Accessible and Livable
Cooperation between Amman and Barcelona

The cities of Amman and Barcelona are collaborating on multiple fronts in the domain of urban development. This cooperation has taken the form of twinning and cultural exchange agreements as well as joint project development.

A key initiative taken in Amman through collaboration with Barcelona is to enhance the level of accessibility in the city for people with disabilities. This is part of a broader project titled 'Improving Living Conditions in disadvantaged areas in Amman (ILCA)'. It includes enhancing access to physical urban spaces, activities and services as well as ensuring the inclusion of people with disabilities in decision-making processes for the implementation of program. In light of this a high-level delegation from Barcelona, including experts from the Municipal Institute for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, visited Amman. They also visited the refugee camps of Azraq and Zaatari, and following the request of UNICEF-Spain, prepared a report on the mobility of persons with disabilities. The collaboration is aimed at improving urban planning to better accommodate individuals with disabilities, reflecting both cities' commitment to social inclusion and equitable urban development.

Similarly, in 2020, a field visit was conducted through the ILCA project in collaboration with the German Agency for International Cooperation, where representatives of Greater Amman Municipality visited Barcelona for knowledge exchange, discussions, and



Jordanian delegation of UNRWA on a visit to Barcelona to learn about the services of the Child Development and Early Care Centers of the Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities (IMPD)
©2023 Barcelona City Council

reflections on various themes related to the built environment. The main themes of the tour focused on topics such as participatory neighbourhood in urban rehabilitation projects, integrated public space design including greening, accessibility, social cohesion and sustainable design, and institutional systems including the roles at different municipal levels and the interdisciplinary nature of work for integrated planning practices.

They aimed to identify similar concerns between the two cities and learn from how Barcelona addresses these concerns, rather than reinventing the wheel. Acknowledging that regardless of diversity in context, both cities want the same benefits for their people, the delegation from Amman studied the spatial form of Barcelona, particularly in how it supports sustainable urban mobility. The Executive Director for Environment and Solid Waste from Amman Municipality visited a recently renovated neighborhood in Barcelona that was equipped with parks, playgrounds, and sidewalks, allowing for enhanced social integration and increased citizen well-being. The Director of Participation from the Barcelona City Council stressed the need for an effective engagement framework to invoke a sense of pride within people for their city. Barcelona also presented their Sustainable Urban Drainage System (SUDS) that was implemented through joint efforts by multiple departments in the city.

Building on their established relationship, another delegation from Greater Amman Municipality, led by the Deputy Mayor, visited Barcelona in November 2024 to explore advancements in smart city solutions. The discussions centred on Amman's pilot projects in six central areas, which include electronic street monitoring, smart charging stations, and automated parking systems, with plans for broader implementation across the city. These initiatives align with GAM's strategic vision for 2022-2026, emphasizing digital transformation and sustainable urban services.

Furthering their collaborative efforts, the Jordanian delegation of UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) visited Barcelona in 2023 to learn about the services of the Child Development and Early Care Centers (CDIAP-EIPI) of the Municipal Institute for People with Disabilities (IMPD). The group, made up of health and social staff from Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, was able to visit the CDIAPs in Ciutat Vella and Nou Barris and participate as observers in treatment sessions with different professionals (psychology, physiotherapy, social work, among others) and reflect and debate on the matter. They also visited other childcare spaces such as family spaces, the Guitard Playroom and the Nexe Foundation, which caters to children with multiple disabilities. This visit was part of the Collaboration Agreement between Amman and Barcelona and the 2022 Work Agreement with

UNRWA, and was planned to continue with new training programs aimed at doctors.

The partnership also extends to cultural and educational domains. GAM participated in the annual Al-Salam Camp in Barcelona, a global gathering aimed at empowering youth through workshops and activities focused on development goals and multicultural understanding. The Jordanian delegation showcased the nation's history and culture, fostering cross-cultural dialogue.

In the realm of sports, FC Barcelona expanded its presence in the Middle East by establishing the Barça Academy Jordan in Amman. Launched in September 2019, this academy offers young Jordanian athletes, aged 4 to 18, the opportunity to train under FC Barcelona's renowned methodology, promoting both athletic skills and core values such as respect and teamwork.

This continued cooperation between the two cities exemplifies the benefits of collaboration between cities, particularly when it comes to successful implementation of projects at the urban scale, where each city is able to learn from the experience of the other.



Barcelona, Spain
©2019 Kaspars Upmanis

Project 3



Jardin Majorelle, Marrakech
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Cooperation through Cultural exchange
Marrakech and Marseille

Cultural exchange is one of the most effective ways through which different cities and regions can foster partnership and collaboration. This exchange not only facilitates diplomatic relations but also celebrates local heritage and cultures, and in doing so, invites the community to participate in the process. This article discusses the collaboration between Marrakech in Morocco, and Marseille in France, where the two cities have collaborated for various activities, primarly in the domain of cultural and tourism development.

In 2002, the Urban Community of Marrakech and the city of Marceille signed a cooperation agreement, focusing on exchange of experiences and municipal management. The agreement covers the restoration and conservation of historical monuments, as well as the creation of an association to facilitate the preservation and environmental protection of the Medina of Marrakech, through various interventions in solid waste management, wastewater treatment, and sanitation. Particular focus was given to the field of crafts, whereby the two cities would organize meetings, exhibitions and fairs, and provide training opportunities and internships for the workforce. Other aspects of the partnership included the development of a traffic master plan and better management of sports complexes in both cities.

Following this, in 2004, the two cities strengthened their relationship through a twinning agreement, covering several departments including the two city

halls, the two Chambers of Commerce, the two Chambers of Crafts, the Faculty of Applied Sciences in Marrakech and the University of Marseille, as well as the Ibn Zohr Hospital (La Mamounia) in Marrakech and the Marseille University Hospital. The aim of this agreement was to strengthen ties and bilateral relations in the domains of socio-economic development, cultural development, and sports.

This helped establish their collaboration on cultural exchange and skills development, which was formalized in 2007 through another cooperation agreement where the youth of Marrakech would travel to Marseille to study the city's tourism development strategy, as well as its existing tourism infrastructure.

In 2020, Marseille's Museum of Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean (MuCEM) and the Jardin Majorelle Foundation in Marrakech, along with the Yves Saint Laurent Museum in Paris partnered to celebrate the rich Amazigh (Berber) heritage of Morocco. The Jardin Majorelle Foundation operates Marrakech's famous Majorelle Garden, which was originally designed by French painter Jacques Majorelle whose love for Marrakech made him spend his time perfecting the garden till his death in 1962. In the 1980s, following the garden's disarray, when the land was set to be sold for the development of a hotel, it was bought by Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Berge. The garden was then restored to its originally glory and today it hosts an Amazigh (Berber) museum filled celebrating the city's rich heritage.

The aim of this partnership was to strengthen relations between the different museums for long-term collaboration, and in doing so, facilitate capacity development of museum professionals through knowledge and skills exchange between the partner cities. The partners planned to document the artefacts in their respective collections and share their resource networks with one another. An additional aim of the partnership was to develop and implement joint projects to enhance heritage on both shores of the Mediterranean. In light of this, MuCEM and Yves Saint Laurent Museum led an exhibition exchange on the diversity and richness of heritage in both Marseille and Marrakech.

Similarly, in 2024, the Rencontres de la Photographie de Marrakech festival, that showcases talents of photographers from around the world, also partnered with Centre Photographique Marseille for its fourth edition.

The continued cooperation between the two cities exemplifies the benefits of city-to-city cooperation across various sectors of urban management and development and indicates the potential of cultural exchange in facilitating this cooperation.



High-end Moroccan craftsmanship on display at the Museum of European and Mediterranean Civilizations (MuCEM) and Fort Saint-Jean through the Bessaha concept store
©2022 Bladi.net

Project 4



Tunis, Tunisia
©2024 Mahmoud Yahyaoui | Pexels

Leading regional cooperation
Learning from Tunis and Lisbon

The city of Tunis in Tunisia, due to its strategic location and proactive administration has been part of several cooperation agreements with cities across the world. One of these cities, Lisbon in Portugal, solidified its relationship with Tunis in 1993, through a friendship and cooperation agreement to promote dialogue, trust, and knowledge exchange between the two cities. The key components of the agreement focused on enhancing tourist, cultural, and scientific exchange, along with encouraging the organization of conferences in the domain of development in the Mediterranean region.

Since then, the two cities have engaged in multiple activities in the domains of city diplomacy, governance, and bilateral relations. Both cities are part of the Mediterranean City-to-City Migration (MC2CM) Project which addresses challenges related to the governance of migration activities, by enhancing the level of integration and inclusion of migrants. The project seeks to foster peer-to-peer dialogue and shared-learning on specific urban challenges, while enhancing cities capacities to address migration-related concerns.

As part of this, both cities prepared a comprehensive City Migration Profile that analyzed migration patterns and socio-economic characteristics of migrants. It indicated that both Tunis and Lisbon host the largest share of migrants in their respective countries, with the city of Tunis hosting 40% of all migrants in Tunisia and the Lisbon Metropolitan Area hosting 22% of all

migrants in Portugal. In light of this, both cities contributed to the project by sharing insights on their respective experiences on addressing migration related challenges. In the case of Tunis, the primary case study was of the Oukalas project which aimed at providing adequate housing and access to municipal services for migrants in the city. The case highlighted the positive impact of incorporating the construction of youth and cultural centers for the benefit of all residents, while also stressing on the need for sustained financing to ensure the success of rehabilitation projects such as this one.

The city of the Lisbon, on the other hand, shared insights from its experience with the development of the Refugi.Arte em Marvila, which is an art-based inclusive shelter for refugees. This case study indicated that the long-term involvement and presence of community stakeholders and a diverse multi-disciplinary management team has facilitated the sustainability of the shelter, particularly in light of growing real estate speculation and threats of gentrification.

In addition to this, both Tunis and Lisbon have also actively contributed to the 5+5 Dialogue, a sub-regional forum that was established in 1990 to enhance cooperation between ten Western Mediterranean countries. The dialogue addresses various fields of cooperation such as renewable energy, environment, health, education, culture, tourism, and water. In 2003, Tunis hosted the first 5+5 Summit which received representatives of the government from Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Mauritania, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Malta. This led to the adoption of the Tunis Declaration that focused on the need for regional processes for consultation and information exchange in the domain of migration, and its associated concerns regarding management, public health, integration, and vocational training of migrants.

Similarly in 2024, within the 5+5 Dialogue, Lisbon hosted the Sixth Ministerial Conference on Research, Innovation, and Higher Education, which culminated with the Lisbon Declaration that emphasized the need to strengthen cooperation in these fields, while reinforcing the role of the Dialogue as a regional platform for collaboration.

By actively engaging in and leading regional dialogue, both cities have demonstrated their commitment to enhancing cooperation in the region, and in doing so, have helped create a foundation for strengthened cross-cultural ties, and innovative solutions to shared challenges. Through these efforts, Tunis and Lisbon not only strengthen bilateral ties but also serve as models for other cities in the region, encouraging greater collaboration and knowledge exchange across the Mediterranean.



6th Ministerial Conference of the 5+5 Dialogue hosted by Lisbon
©2024 Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT)

Project 5



Tourist Information Center, Ramallah
©2025 Travel Palestine

Municipal Cooperation for Urban Development
Ramallah, Bordeaux, and Toulouse

The city of Ramallah has been actively engaged in municipal development partnerships with multiple cities across the European region, primarily with those in France. These partnerships have materialized in the form of various projects, in the domains of municipal infrastructure, as well as arts and culture.

In 2007, Ramallah formalized a twinning agreement with the city of Bordeaux in France, following which they have been engaged in multiple initiatives aimed at cultural preservation and knowledge exchange. In 2011, an old traditional villa in Ramallah was fully renovated to create the Ramallah Tourism Information Center in coordination with the Municipality of Bordeaux, where the former also provided training to the executive director of the new center. The center offered multiple services including guided tours, tourist brochures, as well as other publications on the geography, history, heritage, and culture of the city.

In 2023, over 300 representatives of both French and Palestinian local authorities participated in the 5th French-Palestinian Conference on Decentralized Cooperation held in Ramallah. The conference showcased various experiences of cooperation and partnership between Palestinian local authorities and their French counterparts, learning from success stories and providing participants the opportunity to develop future projects. During the conference, Ramallah and Bordeaux led a joint presentation on establishing a department of learning for Ramallah's

heritage. This was part of broader efforts to enhance cultural preservation and education within the city. The conference was organized by the Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA), the Association of French Cities, and the Decentralized Cooperation Network for Palestine, and funded by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the French Consulate General in Jerusalem.

Ramallah has also been engaged with other French cities in the domain of arts and culture. In 2010, the Palestinian Circus School was hosted by the Municipality of Toulouse for their performance at the Centre des arts de Cirque (LIDO), within the framework of the Municipality Cooperation of the two cities. As a result of this, an academic exchange program was developed between Ramallah and Toulouse, where 15 students from Toulouse would work with the most advanced students of the Palestinian Circus School during a summer school in 2011. At the same time, LIDO in Toulouse offered a one-year preparatory training program to the 'Training of Trainers' students from the Palestinian school.

In addition to this, the two cities have also been working together since 2017 to improve the sanitation conditions in Ramallah. This was done in the form of three key interventions. The first focused on upgrading infrastructure and equipment at the Al Tireh Wastewater Treatment Plant. This included the installation of two new centrifuges and an internal laboratory, the objective of which was to enable the reuse of treated water in the city, and the reuse of sludge for agricultural purposes.

The second intervention involved technical training and capacity building for the municipal staff of Ramallah. This training aimed to enhance their expertise in operating and monitoring wastewater treatment systems, managing sludge, and maintaining key infrastructure, while also fostering the exchange of best practices in public sanitation management.

The third intervention was in the form of a feasibility study that was conducted to explore the reuse of treated wastewater in agriculture, promoting a more circular and environmentally sustainable approach to resource use. This study aimed to facilitate the preparation of recommendations regarding the launch of an experiment on the reuse of sludge. Assistance for the project was provided by HAMAP-Humanitaire and IOWater with financial support from the French Development Agency, the Adour Garonne Water Agency, and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

These collaborative efforts underscore the commitment of Ramallah and French municipalities towards fostering international partnerships that enhance the quality of urban development practices in their respective cities.



"Behind the Wall" show by the Palestinian Circus School at the Centre des arts de Cirque (LIDO) in Toulouse
©2010 La Dépêche

Project 6



Kasserine, Tunisia
©2023 6abbo

Public Engagement and Sustainable Development
Cooperation between Kasserine and Munich

Kasserine is a town in western Tunisia and is currently involved in multiple urban development and cooperation initiatives. One of its key partnerships is with the city of Munich in Germany, where the two cities have collaborated on multiple initiatives in the domains of urban economy, and public engagement in urban design.

In 2016, Kasserine partnered with Munich to redesign a public square in the working-class neighborhood of Cité Aouled Nasrallah. The site was facing economic and infrastructural neglect and was in need of revitalization. Carried out between 2017 and 2021, the project was conducted within the City-to-city cooperation program implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and Servicestelle Kommunen in der einen Welt (SKEW), with funding from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

One of the key components of this project, as introduced by the Department of Public Construction in Munich in coordination with the Department of Labour and Economic Development, European and International Affairs, focused on incorporating elements of participatory design in the process. To facilitate this and equip stakeholders with the right tools and skills, citizen participation workshops were conducted in Munich for knowledge exchange and training purposes. In Kasserine, a team from Munich facilitated the organization of workshops with residents of the neighbourhood, which included men, women, and children.

The workshops in Kasserine invited residents to share their aspirations for the public space that was to be converted into a park. Their ideas guided the layout and key features of the park, and in doing so, instilled a sense of ownership and responsibility within the community. Through the shared vision of the residents, as well as of the cities of Kasserine and Munich, the park was developed to include a playground for children, accessibility ramps for the elderly and disabled, shaded seating areas, a water fountain, and 40 new plants. The participants decided to name the park 'Parc de la Cité Olympique'. The maintenance and care of the park was supervised by 'Green Kasserine' a grassroots association, exemplifying the sense of ownership and responsibility instilled in the community during the process of the park's development.

In 2020, the two cities collaborated for another initiative, this time centred on the theme of circular economy. Supported by Munich's Department of Labour and Economic Affairs, this partnership focused on promoting sustainable waste management practices and fostering local entrepreneurship. In 2023, a joint competition was launched in Kasserine to support innovative startups working to address environmental challenges. As a result, three startups were selected by a jury of individuals based in both Kasserine and Munch. The first startup worked on the cultivation of mushrooms using coffee grounds collected from local cafes and eateries. The second focused on the construction of a plant that would press leftover marble from neighbouring quarries to make bricks. The third focused on electronic waste recycling, collecting and reusing electronic components to reduce their environmental impact. Implementation of the startups took place in 2024.

Along the same theme, the two cities launched the 'Recovering Household Waste' project in Kasserine in 2022. Supported by GIZ the project aimed to promote sustainable waste management practices through community engagement and awareness. 21 inhabitants of the Kasserine Olympic city were selected as beneficiaries of the project and were provided with a composting machine to transform biodegradable household waste into good quality bio-rich compost. The transformed waste was to be used for plant nutrition and the fertility of agricultural land in the region.

The local association 'Green Kasserine' was also involved in this project, primarily to conduct training sessions and awareness campaigns on how to produce organic biological materials from household waste. The association also followed up with the 21 inhabitants on the progress of their composting activity.

In 2023, as part of their collaboration on the theme of circular economy, the Central West Development Corporation in Kasserine also hosted an 'Expertise Exchange Workshop' between the two municipalities with the participation of regional administrations, public sector entities, and the private sector. The workshop focused on the theoretical approaches to the circular economy, its importance as an economic path, relevant strategies, and best practices from across the world.

The various forms of cooperation between Kasserine and Munich demonstrate the potential of collaboration between cities in the Arab and European region, fostering long-term partnerships and facilitating sustainable urban development practices in the region.



Workshop with kids for the design of the public space in Kasserine
©2022 Henriette Wägerle | The Urban Activist

Project 7



Nouakchott, Mauritania
©2024 Inside Africa | Facebook

Municipal Infrastructure and Resource Management

Nouakchott's Partnership with European cities

The city of Nouakchott in Mauritania has actively engaged in city-to-city cooperation initiatives with multiple cities in Europe, focusing on various domains including infrastructure, sustainable development and capacity building. It is said to be European Union's largest partner in Africa in terms of funding, diverse areas of intervention, and positive partnerships that benefit both parties.

Since 2009, the city ofNouakchott has been engaged with the city of Lausanne in Switzerland to address the growing needs for drinking water among its population. This partnership was further strengthened in 2015 with the inclusion of sanitation concerns, leading to the Community Water and Sanitation Access Project (PCAEA) that was implemented between 2015 and 2018. In 2019, additional support was provided by the AIMF to deepen and broaden the scope of the work, to pool financial resources, and to ensure greater efficiency in project monitoring. Along with Lausanne, other entities were engaged to support the PCAEA, including the Swiss Solidarity Municipalities, Solidarit'eau Suisse, the City of Bordeaux, the Adour-Garonne Water Agency, the Metz Eurometropolis, Haganis, the Metz Métropole Water Authority, and the Rhine-Meuse Water Agency.

The key components of the project included improving access to water and enhancing its quality for safe drinking, developing an independent

sanitation sector and project management setup in the Nouakchott region, and supporting decentralized cooperation with French-speaking agencies. The project aims to improve access to water for 80,000 people by the year 2025, through the extension of the water network, establishment of a connection between 34 schools and water network, awareness campaigns, and training programs for the use and maintenance of ecological toilets that were built within the framework of the partnership. Sanitation is also a central focus, with actions targeting around 9,000 people. These include the construction of toilets in seven schools and three markets, using models adapted based on feedback from previous project phases. Another key aspect of the project is the capacity-building of the Nouakchott Region, particularly in internal management, activity monitoring, and community-level project ownership, in collaboration with municipalities, the SNDE (National Water Distribution Company), and other local stakeholders.

In the municipality of Toujounine, the PCAEA plans to extend approximately 120 kilometers of water distribution network, subsidize household connections, construct five public standpipes, and connect 18 schools to the network, each with a dedicated water point. Two water tank trucks will also be purchased to supply water to areas not yet connected to the network. This operational deployment is supported by a comprehensive training and awareness program to ensure the sustainability of the installed infrastructure.

Following the final phase of the PCEAE, and as a response to the results, in 2022, Nouakchott signed a cooperation agreement with Metz, a city in France, in alignment with the objectives of the Nouakchott City Development Plan (2020-2040). The primary focus of the agreement was on the supply of drinking water to outlying neighborhoods as well as areas of social, cultural, and environmental development. In 2024, a Swiss delegation visited Nouakchott to observe the operational infrastructure in Nouakchott, and at the same time, to inaugurate a new 21km pipeline network.

Furthermore, in 2022 Nouakchott signed a partnership agreement with the city of Paris, on the sidelines of the General Assembly of the International Association of Francophone Mayors that was held in the ivory coast. The agreement covered the areas of urban agriculture, sustainable food and water, vocational training and higher education, and urban mobility including accessibility and sustainability of public transport.



Inaugration of a new 21km pipeline in Nouakchott during the visit of a Swiss delegation
©2024 Ville de Lausanne

In addition to Switzerland, Nouakchott has also been engaged in multiple activities with Spain through the convention funding between the Nouakchott Region and Spanish Cooperation with support from the European Union for the implementation of activities related to climate change, which led to the development of the Practical Action Plan for Climate Access.

The Nouakchott region has also implemented the project "Support to the Nouakchott Region for Resilient and Fair Sustainable Development" (ARENDDRE), which aims to improve the living conditions of the population and their integration, particularly in peripheral neighborhoods, by working on urban transport and public lighting. This project is funded by the European Union and is in partnership with the Greater Paris South Urban Community, the Global Fund for Cities (FMDV), and CIEDEL. The initial project duration was four years (August 2020 – August 2024). An additional funding from the FFEM has been secured for one more year, extending the project to August 2025.

The active role played by Nouakchott in the fostering city to city cooperation with the European region serves as a model for collaboration, exemplifying the various ways through which cooperation can be implemented towards addressing urban development challenges.

Note:

This article was prepared with insights from His Excellency Mr. Mohamed El Amine El Nahwi, Advisor to the President of the Nouakchott Region in charge of cooperation

OUR NEWS

GUIDED BY HIS HIGHNESS, MAYOR OF RIYADH REGION AND AUDI PRESIDENT

AUDI LAUNCHES OFFICIAL WEBSITE FOR THE ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES DIALOGUE FORUM 2025

The Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), in collaboration with the Riyadh Municipality — host of the forum's inaugural edition in 2025 — has launched the official website for the Arab European Cities Dialogue Forum 2025 (AECD).

The website is designed as an interactive platform to foster dialogue and strengthen city-to-city partnerships across the Arab and European regions. It features a welcoming address by His Highness, in his capacity as Chairman of the AECD Steering Committee, emphasizing the forum's critical role in promoting dialogue, building partnerships, and deepening the historical, cultural, and economic ties between cities.



His Highness Prince Dr. Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, Mayor of Riyadh Region and President of the Arab Urban Development Institute

In addition, the website provides a comprehensive overview of the forum's concept and objectives, highlights key participating cities, international organizations, and development banks, and presents the forum's agenda, including dialogue sessions, workshops, major bilateral initiatives, and success stories of city-to-city partnerships and their implementation strategies. Those interested can explore more details by visiting the official website at: https://aecd2025.org/ar/.

The launch marks a continuation of efforts to promote dialogue, broaden the scope of international cooperation, and support development initiatives intended to build strong city-to-city partnerships for a better future.





Arab European Cities Dialogue Website
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AUDI DELEGATION MEETS WITH MAYORS OF NUMEROUS EUROPEAN CITIES TO PREPARE FOR THE ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES DIALOGUE 2025

As part of the preparations for the inaugural Arab European Cities Dialogue Forum, which will be hosted in Riyadh in May 2025, a delegation from the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) and the Riyadh Region Municipality, including AUDI Director General H.E. Dr. Anas Al-Mughairy, the Mayor's Advisor for International Relations at the Riyadh Region Municipality, H.E. Eng. Mohammed Aba Al-Khail, and the Internationalization and Cities' Relations Manager at AUDI Ms. Alba Fernandez, visited several European cities in March 2025.

During these visits, the delegation met with the Mayor of Bucharest and the Deputy Mayors of Rome, Naples, Budapest, Krakow, Prague, Hamburg, and Nice.

The meetings centered on exploring opportunities to enhance partnerships between Arab and European cities across diverse sectors. Discussions also encompassed coordinating the participation of European mayors in the upcoming forum and pinpointing key areas for collaboration in urban and municipal development.

The visits also featured discussions on the key themes of the upcoming forum and emphasized the importance of fostering constructive dialogue between cities.

Notably, this initiative reflects the Institute's ongoing commitment to building bridges of communication between Arab and European cities, creating an open platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and the sharing of successful practices that support urban and municipal development.



Meeting with the Deputy Mayor of Prague, Czech Republic
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AUDI WELCOMES EUROPEAN AMBASSADORS TO DISCUSS THE ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES DIALOGUE 2025

On Sunday evening, March 17, the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) hosted a Ramadan gathering for several European ambassadors and their representatives. The event focused on discussing the agenda of the Arab European Cities Dialogue 2025, scheduled for May 2025, with the goal of strengthening cooperation and integration in sustainable urban development between Arab and European cities. Attendees included ambassadors from Ireland (Mr. Gerry Cunningham), Italy (Mr. Carlo Baldocci), Poland (Mr. Robert Rostek), Romania (Mr. Sebastian Mitrachi), Serbia (Mr. Dragan Pecnik), Spain (Mr. Jorge Hyypiá), Austria (Dr. Oskar Wüstinger), and Kosovo (Mr. Lulzim Miko).

Over the course of the meeting, Arab European Cities Dialogue Forum was introduced, and participants emphasized the need for collaboration between Arab and European cities to build a shared urban future grounded in partnership and integration. Ambassadors and their representatives also voiced their eagerness to take an active role in the upcoming forum.

The meeting also sought to gather diverse perspectives and promote the exchange of ideas on key issues featured in the Arab European Cities Dialogue Forum's agenda.

For its part, AUDI highlighted the importance of these forums in bridging cities and providing platforms for dialogue, expertise-sharing, and the exchange of best practices.



A number of European Ambassadors and their representatives at AUDI's Ramadan night event
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AUDI IS A KNOWLEDGE PARTNER OF EXPO CITY DUBAI AT THE 15TH APCS

2025 ASIA PACIFIC CITIES SUMMIT & MAYORS' FORUM

Expo City Dubai, UAE 27-29 October

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The Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) is pleased to announce its official partnership with 2025 Asia Pacific Cities Summit (2025APCS) & Mayors' Forum, taking place 27-29 October at Expo City Dubai, the new centre of Dubai's future growth.

APCS is one of the most diverse convenings of mayors, city leaders, business executives and young professionals worldwide. This year's edition marks the first time the event will be held in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia region, bringing together urban leaders, policymakers, and experts from the Asia Pacific, the Arab region, and beyond. It also presents a unique opportunity for delegates to access international markets and unlock new global trade networks.

As a Knowledge Partner, AUDI will play a key role in shaping the 2025APCS agenda, contributing subject matter expertise and supporting the delivery of high-impact discussions that drive meaningful dialogue and thought leadership.

As part of its key contribution to the summit, AUDI will facilitate the City Leader's Forum. This high-level gathering of approximately 400 public-sector executives aims to foster strategic dialogue, promote peer learning and exchange practical experiences on critical urban challenges. It will provide a space for city-led discussions on shaping the future of liveable, inclusive and resilient cities.

This initiative stems from a recently signed partnership between Expo City Dubai and AUDI, reinforcing a shared commitment to advancing actionable knowledge and regional

collaboration in urban development. It further solidifies AUDI's mission to support cities across the Arab world and beyond in shaping sustainable and inclusive urban futures.

We look forward to seeing you at 2025APCS! Secure your place here: https://2025apcs.expocitydubai.com/registrations/early-bird/

AUDI LAUNCHES PUBLICATIONS ON DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND URBAN HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN ARAB CITIES

In February and March 2025, the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) released two comprehensive reports as part of its Urban Policy Reports series. These publications reflect AUDI's continued commitment to strengthening the capacity of municipal institutions to effectively navigate today's complex urban challenges.

The first report, titled "'Municipalities and Digital Transformation in Arab Cities: An Institutional Development Perspective," is positioned within a strategic framework that highlights both the challenges and opportunities Arab cities face on their path to digital transformation.

The second report, titled "Urban Heritage Management in Arab Cities: Municipal Visions and Practices," focuses on the leading methodologies and successful practices employed in the management of urban heritage across Arab cities. It emphasizes the critical importance of balancing preservation with urban change. The report also highlights innovative governance models that adopt flexible, adaptive approaches—enabling municipalities to protect cultural identity while promoting urban growth and strengthening the resilience of cities in the Arab region.

Together, these reports serve as a practical resource for decision-makers and municipal leaders, offering guidance on the adoption of effective and integrated urban policies. Grounded in both knowledge and real-world experiences from Arab cities, the insights presented aim to strengthen the capacity of local governments to adapt to rapid change and advance toward comprehensive and sustainable urban development.

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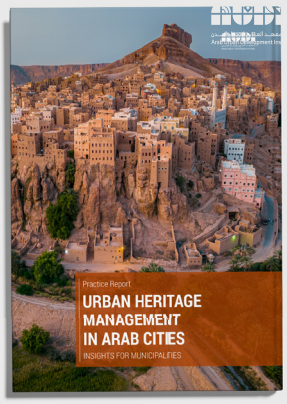

Publications on Digital Transformation and Urban Heritage Management in Arab Cities
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AUDI HOLDS SERIES OF TRAINING WORKSHOPS TO STRENGTHEN LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND IMPROVE MUNICIPAL OPERATIONS EFFICIENCY

As part of its program to strengthen leadership and professional skills within the Jeddah Municipality, the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) organized a tailored series of training workshops. Held from February to April 2025, the series aimed to enhance performance and improve the efficiency of municipal operations. It featured four intensive workshops, attended by 142 members of the municipality's staff, covering a range of topics focused on capacity building and empowering leaders to adopt best administrative and technical practices.

The series began with a workshop titled "Certified Associate in Project Management," which introduced participants to the fundamentals of project management and enhanced their collaboration and teamwork skills. The second workshop, "Municipal Work Development Strategy," focused on strengthening strategic thinking and developing solutions to improve the quality of life in cities. The third workshop, "Asset Management and Privatization of Services," addressed advanced methods for managing municipal assets and encouraging investment partnerships. The program concluded with the fourth workshop, "Preparing Executive Plans and Capital Portfolios," which emphasized capital planning strategies and organizing municipal portfolios to align with strategic priorities.

These workshops underscore the institute's dedication to boosting municipal development and providing personnel with the knowledge and skills needed to manage city transformations.



The Arab Urban Development Institute offered a training course on preparing executive plans and capital portfolios - Jeddah Municipality, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

©2025 Arab Urban Development Institute

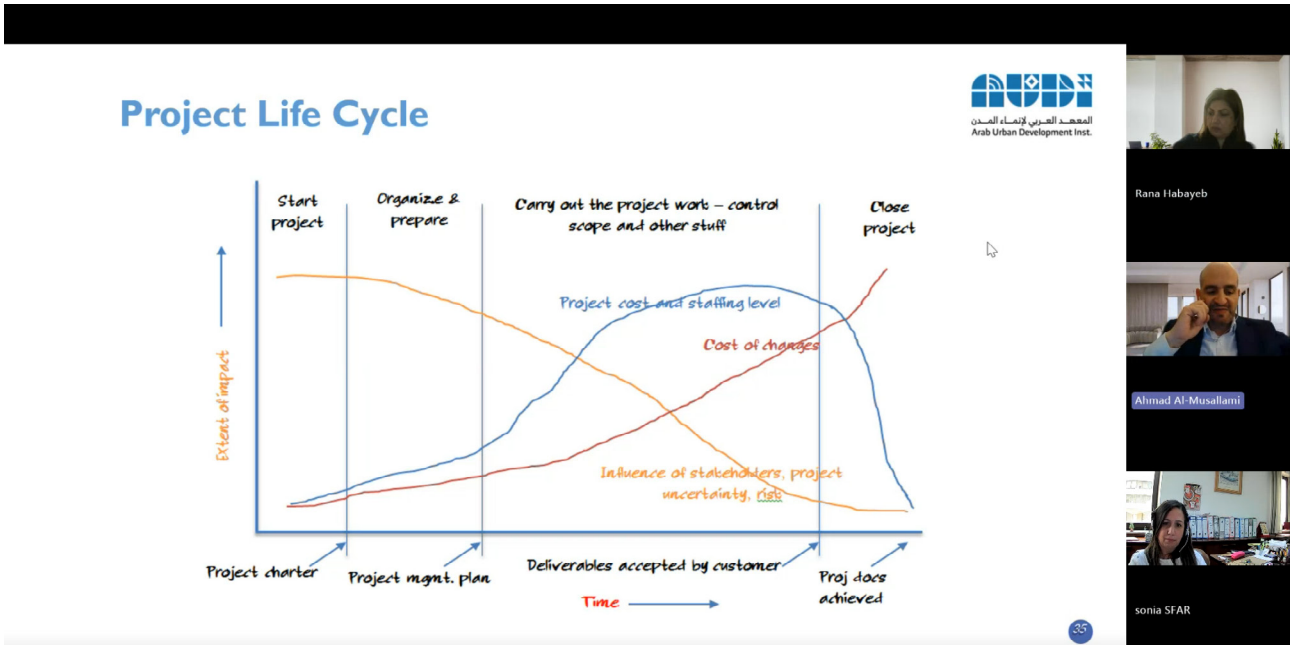
AUDI HOLDS ONLINE TRAINING WORKSHOP ON "PROJECT MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL"

The Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) held, during April 2025, an online training workshop on "Project Management Professional (PMP)," which was attended by over 30 liaison officers representing over 20 Arab cities.

The training Workshop aimed to equip participants with advanced knowledge and practical expertise in professional project management, covering all key aspects to enhance their administrative and leadership skills and capabilities and improve overall project management efficiency.

The workshop also focused on exploring leading strategies and methodologies in project management, emphasizing their effective implementation within organizations to achieve optimal performance and institutional success. Delivered as a comprehensive 10-day online program, the workshop included 30 hours of interactive training, enabling participants to engage, collaborate, and exchange experiences in a dynamic virtual environment.

This workshop is part of AUDI's ongoing efforts to empower liaison officers across Arab cities by providing them with essential tools, knowledge, and access to international best practices that support continuous professional development and improved performance.



The Arab Urban Development Institute offered a distance learning course in Project Management.
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Webinar

CITIES IN ACTION: INVESTMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE TREATMENT SOLUTIONS AND POLLUTION MITIGATION IN SULAYMANIYAH, IRAQ

The Arab Urban Development Institute organized its tenth session of the Cities in Action webinar series on Tuesday evening, 28th January 2025, in the presence of several specialists and professionals of urban development.

Dr. Abdulla Difalla, moderator of the webinar and Professor of Urban Planning, began the session with an overview of the webinar series and highlighted its importance in enriching the discussion on urban development across all Arab cities. He also stressed that the benefit of these sessions lies in identifying pioneering urban development projects and exchanging ideas on mechanisms and the elements of success.

The meeting was initiated with a presentation by Eng. Mohammed Farid Al-Saadi, General Manager of Asia Renewable Energy Company. He has more than 45 years of experience in industrial project management and manages the municipal solid waste treatment project in Sulaymaniyah.



Webinar on Investment for sustainable treatment solutions and pollution mitigation in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq
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He reviewed the challenges and solutions available in treating solid waste in cities of the Arab world, especially in Sulaymaniyah, which suffers from environmental and health issues due to pollution resulting from waste.

Eng. Mohammed clarified that with the urbanization of Sulaymaniyah, landfills that were located 10 to 12 kilometers from the city have become closer to residential areas. This proximity has exacerbated the problem of air and water pollution, negatively affecting citizens' health.

He went on to discuss the importance of adopting new technologies to treat solid waste, such as recycling, energy conversion, or the use of sanitary landfill systems and waste treatment using modern technologies that ensure no harmful effects, as part of the city's future plans to achieve environmental sustainability.

As a result, Farouk Investment Group, led by Eng. Mohammed developed environmental and economic solutions by converting solid waste into alternative fuel used in cement plants. This solution minimizes the amount of buried waste to less than 10%. This approach saves large areas of land and extends the project's lifespan compared to traditional methods.

He noted that this project is a leading example of providing sustainable environmental solutions that contribute to improving the local economy and reducing dependence on conventional fuel. Additionally, he stressed the importance of concerted efforts of all concerned parties to achieve further success in waste management and the use of alternative energy sources.

At the end of the meeting, Dr. Abdulla Difalla thanked the attendees for their interaction and valuable participation, commending the outstanding role of Eng. Mohammed Farid Al-Saadi in leading this exceptional project. He also stressed the importance of continuing these meetings to enhance cooperation and knowledge exchange among urban development specialists.



Webinar on Investment for sustainable treatment solutions and pollution mitigation in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq
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Webinar

CITIES IN ACTION: INNOVATIVE URBAN PARTNERSHIPS: NOUAKCHOTT'S APPROACH IN IMPROVING BASIC SERVICES, MAURITANIA

The Arab Urban Development Institute organized its twelfth session of the Cities in Action webinar series on Wednesday evening, 9th April 2025, in the presence of several specialists and professionals interested in urban development affairs.

Dr. Abdulla Difalla, moderator of the webinar and Professor of Urban Planning, began the session with an overview of the webinar series and highlighted its importance in enriching the discussion on urban development across all Arab cities. He also stressed that the benefit of these sessions lies in identifying pioneering urban development projects and exchanging ideas on mechanisms and the elements of success.

The meeting was initiated with a presentation by Dr. Saleck Moulaye Ahmed, Director of Studies,



ضيف اللقاء

د. السالك مولاي أحمد الشريف

مدير الدراسات والمشاريع والتعاون في جهة نواكشوط، أستاذ محاضر.

لقاء افتراضي بعنوان

شراكات حضرية مبتكرة: تجربة نواكشوط في تحسين الخدمات الأساسية

موريتانيا - نواكشوط أنموذجًا

Webinar on nnovative Urban Partnerships: Nouakchott's Approach in Improving Basic Services, Mauritania
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Programming, and Cooperation for the Nouakchott Region, with over 10 years of experience in urban planning and sustainable development. He has led several mega-development projects and studies in Nouakchott.

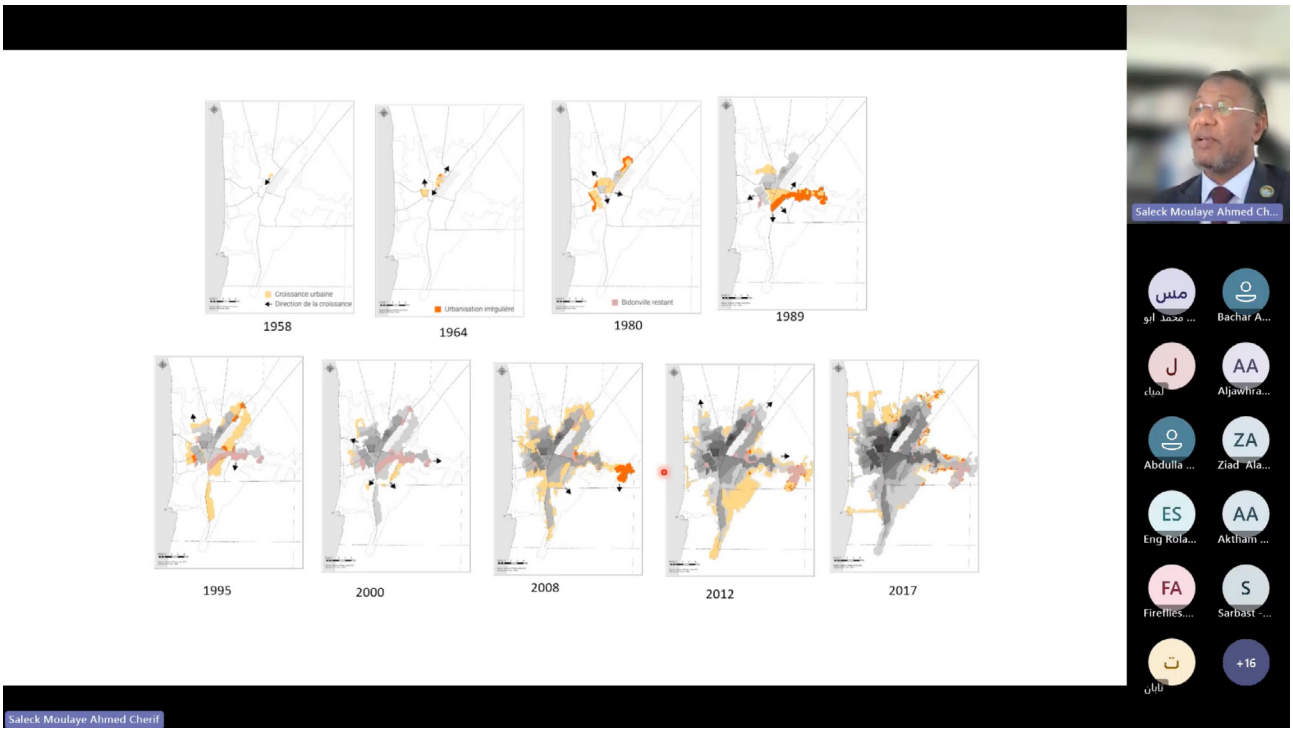
Dr. Saleck presented the innovative partnership approach established with the Swiss City of Lausanne and other French cities, which focused on providing sustainable solutions to the problem of water shortages in previously marginalized neighborhoods. He touched on the challenges Nouakchott faces, such as prioritizing different projects, coordinating between multiple stakeholders, and ensuring the sustainability of projects.

Dr. Salk highlighted the results achieved through this partnership to improve the water and sanitation system in Nouakchott, including the construction of new systems, the establishment of public faucets, and the provision of water tanks.

He emphasized the importance of the multilateral partnerships' role in supporting sustainable urban development, with funding mechanisms that relied on financial contributions from Swiss and French cities. He also stressed the importance of political commitment and coordination between local and international levels to expand such partnerships to other areas such as education and health.

He noted the importance of community interaction and the need to adopt a social approach in line with the specificities of squatter settlements to ensure community acceptance and positive interaction with future projects.

At the end of the meeting, Dr. Abdulla Difalla thanked the attendees for their interaction and valuable participation, commending the outstanding role of Dr. Saleck Moulaye Ahmed, in leading this exceptional project. He also stressed the importance of continuing these meetings to enhance cooperation and knowledge exchange among urban development specialists.



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