LOCAL ACTION

CONCEPT NOTE

VENICE WINTER SCHOOL

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Organized by

UNDP

UCLG United Cities and Local Governments

Contributing institutions

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CSAR Centro Studi sull'Arte Russa, dell'Asia Centrale e del Caucaso

*The **United Nations Development Programme*** and **United Cities and Local Governments** *have a long story of organizing gatherings in Venice. The city of Venice is unique, not only because of its cultural heritage and environment, but also because of the challenges it faces and its remarkable resilience in adapting to them over the centuries.*

Venice stands as a globally recognized city, shaped by its unique position between land and water within a fragile ecosystem: the Venice Lagoon. Today, Venice faces a complex set of interrelated challenges—from climate change and rising sea levels to the pressure of mass tourism, and a progressively ageing population—that require integrated, forward-looking, and inclusive policy responses. Marked by its history and extraordinary architectural and cultural heritage, the city is battling how to maintain its social fabric while facing the future.

In this context, Venice represents a compelling model for local governments worldwide. Its long-standing capacity to govern a unique amphibious urban environment, combined with its legacy as a major center of commerce, diplomacy, and cultural production, offers valuable insights into resilient urban management. The city's continuous efforts to preserve serve its heritage while adapting to environmental and socio-economic transformations demonstrate how tradition and innovation can coexist. Venice's experience provides transferable lessons in sustainable urban planning, climate adaptation, cultural preservation, and community-centered development, positioning it as a reference point for cities seeking to balance global relevance with local identity.

Once again, UNDP, UCLG and its partners want to gather in Venice with a select group of local governments. This year's event follows the "Venice City Solutions" (2018 – 2022) and the UNDP Pavilion "Venice City Care" at the 2023 Biennale.

This first edition of the **Venice Winter School** will focus on how cities are resolving problems to serve their citizens better. The event will select four case studies from four different cities around the world, dedicating a full session to an in-depth analysis of a specific public service developed by the municipality, and exploring what worked, what did not, and why.

Objectives of the event

- To understand, in depth, how cities are solving the problems of its inhabitants by innovating public service delivery.
- To share solutions, approaches and challenges.
- To document local solutions that improve the lives of people.
- To learn about how to improve the quality, accessibility and sustainability of public services.
- To collect case studies that demonstrate how local governments are contributing to Agenda 2030.
- To strengthen the capacity of local and regional governments to communicate, advocate for, and scale their innovative action.

Focus areas

The 2026 Venice Winter School will examine **four concrete public services**. For each service, one city will present their case study, with additional local governments contributing with their own experiences in that particular area, posing questions and explaining how similar challenges have been resolved in their own local contexts.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Waste remains one of the most pressing public service challenges for cities. Rapid growth in demand, insufficient infrastructure, and fragmented institutional responsibility often lead to inadequate collection, disposal, and treatment of solid waste. This can have serious consequences for public health, environmental quality, and social equity. Today, cities are also recognizing the economic and environmental opportunities of new approaches to recycling, waste valorization, composting, and the integration of the informal sector.

The following dimensions will be included in the debate:

1. Organic waste treatment, composting, and linking with urban agriculture.
2. Integrated approaches to solid waste management.
3. Reaching informal and underserved areas of the city.
4. Integration with the informal recycling sector and waste picker organizations.
5. Financing mechanisms, including tariff reform and private sector engagement.
6. Community participation and public awareness in waste reduction.
7. Using digital tools to ensure service and affordability.

Case study: Salvador de Bahia, Brazil

Population: 2.9 million

Mayor: Bruno Reis

Salvador of Bahia is Brazil's third-largest city; it has historically suffered from low recycling rates and has a large informal waste-picker sector that receives little institutional recognition. The Recicla Capital project wants to change all that by introducing selecting waste collection as an integrated public service that combines citizen incentive mechanisms, the formal recognition of waste picker cooperatives as municipal service operators, and real-time digital monitoring.

Data

- **27,000+** registered families participating in the programme.
- **5,000+** tonnes of recyclable materials diverted from landfills.
- **20** voluntary collection stations operating across strategic city territories.
- **7** waste picker cooperatives formally contracted as public service operators.
- BRL **3,000** per managed container per month — fixed municipal remuneration ensuring cooperative income predictability.
- BRL **7 million+** in financial returns generated for cooperatives since programme launch.
- BRL **1.7 million+** in direct and indirect income for the municipality.
- **13+** tons of CO_2 avoided (estimated, programme lifetime to date)
- **307 million** litres of water saved (estimated, programme lifetime to date).

Invited feedback from: Abuja (Nigeria), Čajetina (Serbia), Cape Town (South Africa), Kanifing (The Gambia), San Miguelito (Panama), Usulután Norte (El Salvador)

REACHING THOSE WHO NEED IT THE MOST

Local governments play a central role to reduce inequalities and give opportunities to all. Equal access to public services is key to dismantle structural barriers and give dignity for all residents, regardless of gender, age, disability, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.

The following dimensions will be included in the debate:

1. Universal design and accessibility standards in public infrastructure.
2. Participatory planning processes that engage marginalized and underrepresented communities.
3. Innovative intercultural approaches to include diverse populations.
4. Use of data and data disaggregation to monitor inclusion.

Case study: New York City, United States of America

Population: 9 million

Mayor: Zorhan Mamdani

Invited feedback from: Buenos Aires (Argentina), Cali (Colombia), Ghent (Belgium), Memphis (USA), Mexico City (Mexico), Sarıçam (Türkiye)

CLEAN AND AFFORDABLE WATER

Access to safe water and adequate remains a fundamental development challenge in many cities. Local governments often bear primary responsibility for water service delivery, yet face significant constraints in terms of financing, institutional capacity, and infrastructure coverage and sustainability. But cities are also at the one leading on innovating access to water, inventing new ways to work with communities, lower prices, ensure service and fighting climate change.

The following dimensions will be included in the debate:

1. Decentralized water governance frameworks and inter-municipal coordination.
2. Financing water infrastructure, including public-private partnerships and blended finance.
3. Community-led approaches to water management and last-mile service delivery.
4. Climate resilience and adaptation strategies for water systems in water-scarce or flood-prone contexts.
5. Regulation, tariff design, and cross-subsidization to ensure affordability for low-income households.
6. Monitoring, data management, and accountability mechanisms in water service governance.
7. Digital tools and civic technologies available to increase access to water.

Case study: Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana

Population: 422,000

Mayor: Frederick Faustinus Faidoo

Sekondi-Takoradi is Ghana's oil and gas hub and its third largest city yet is faces a number of challenges due to rapid urbanization. The city has created an accessible digital registry of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) infrastructure that embeds geo-referenced, disaggregated data on household, communal, and institutional facilities directly into municipal planning, budgeting, and SDG 6 monitoring systems — ensuring that informal settlement residents, vulnerable households, and underserved institutions are visible to decision-makers and eligible for targeted public investment.

What distinguishes it is the combination of three features rarely found together at secondary city level: open public accessibility of structured data; vulnerability-based targeting that disaggregates beneficiaries by age, disability, illness, and household headship; and direct integration of SDG 6 indicators into the Assembly's own reporting and resource allocation cycles. The initiative was developed under the Open Government Partnership (OGP) framework — one of few African secondary cities to formally anchor a service delivery reform to OGP commitments — and demonstrates that systems-level governance innovation does not require smart-city technology budgets.

Data

- **500** household toilet facilities provided to vulnerable households in deprived communities by end of 2025.Beneficiary breakdown: **314** elderly persons (65+), **74** with chronic illness, 39 with physical disabilities, **64** widows and female-headed households, 9 households with orphans.
- **3** mechanized boreholes installed at health centers by the end of 2025, providing reliable, uninterrupted water access and strengthening infection prevention and control.
- Measurable reduction in open defecation, with greatest impact in coastal communities

- WASH Registry publicly accessible and live .
- Institutionalized across 7 municipal departments: Environmental Health, Waste Management, Health, Education, Statistics, Management Information Systems, and Development Planning & Budget.
- Co-created with community partners and fully operational since 2024 functioning as a permanent governance instrument, not a time-bound pilot.
- Created employment for youth through community-level data collection and updating.
- Contributed to social reintegration through livelihood opportunities for prison inmates and officers.

Invited feedback from: Bogota (Colombia), Karakalpakstan (Uzbekistan), Lamu (Kenya), Miami-Dade (USA), Windhoek (Namibia)

URBAN MOBILITY

Urban mobility is the base of economic productivity, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. As cities expand, local governments face mounting pressure to design and operate public transport systems that are safe, affordable, low-carbon, and accessible to all. From bus rapid transit corridors to cycling infrastructure, from demand-responsive services to integrated mobility platforms, the landscape of urban transport innovation is evolving rapidly.

The following dimensions will be included in the debate:

1. Integrated multimodal transport planning and governance frameworks.
2. Low-emission and zero-emission vehicle deployment, including electric buses and non-motorized transport.

3. First- and last-mile connectivity in peri-urban and informal settlement contexts.
4. Mobility-as-a-service platforms and the role of digital innovation tools in transport management.
5. Financing public transport systems, including fare integration, subsidies, and infrastructure investment.
6. Gender and social dimensions of urban mobility, including safety and affordability for vulnerable groups.

Case study: Singapore, Republic of Singapore

Invited feedback from: Barcelona (Spain), Beira (Mozambique), Bogotá (Colombia), Guangzhou (China), Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Xianning (China)

Methodology

The Venice Winter School will adopt an immersive, practitioner-centered methodology designed to maximize the depth and quality of peer learning. Rather than a conventional conference format, the event is structured around two complementary learning modalities: an in-depth thematic session per topic area and a rapid-exchange format that broadens the evidence base and amplifies collective learning.

In-depth presentation: full public service showcase

For each of the four public services, one selected local government will deliver an extended, structured presentation of a concrete public service it has developed and implemented. This session is designed to go beyond surface-level description and engage critically with the full lifecycle of the initiative — from political and institutional origins through design, implementation, and evaluation.

Each in-depth presentation will be structured to address the following dimensions:

1. **Context and problem definition:** the urban challenge the service was designed to address, the populations affected, and the political and institutional context at the time of conception.
2. **Design and decision-making:** how the solution was conceived, what alternatives were considered, and what stakeholders were involved in the design process.
3. **Implementation and operational model:** institutional architecture, financing arrangements, human resources, and partnerships underpinning service delivery.
4. **Results and evidence:** quantitative and qualitative outcomes, including changes in service coverage, quality, equity, and user satisfaction.
5. **Challenges and lessons learned:** honest reflection on obstacles encountered, adaptations made, and what the city would do differently.
6. **Transferability and conditions for replication:** the enabling factors and contextual conditions that would be required for other cities to adopt similar approaches.

Each presenting city will be supported in advance to prepare high-quality documentation of its case, including a written case summary and visual materials. A designated UNDP facilitator will moderate each session and guide the discussion with the broader audience.

Zero-line exchange: rapid contributions from peer cities

Complementing the in-depth showcase, each thematic session will include a structured rapid-exchange segment — referred to as the Zero-Line Exchange — in which additional local and regional governments that have submitted relevant initiatives but were not selected as lead presenters are invited to share brief, structured interventions.

The Zero-line format is designed to surface a broader diversity of experiences and to demonstrate that there is no single path to resolving urban challenges. Participating governments will present their initiatives in a condensed format (approximately five to seven minutes), structured around a common template covering: the problem addressed, the approach adopted, a key result, and one critical lesson learned.

This format serves several purposes:

- It creates space for cities that are at earlier stages of implementation or from less-represented geographies to share relevant experiences.
- It enriches the thematic discussion by surfacing complementary, contrasting, or context-specific approaches.
- It positions all participating governments as knowledge contributors.
- It generates a curated, multi-city evidence repository that UNDP can use for ongoing knowledge management and advocacy.

Zero-line contributions will be collected in advance through a structured submission template and will be compiled into a thematic knowledge brief for each session, distributed to all participants.

We are looking forward to welcoming you to Venice!

For more information, please contact us at info@sdglocalaction.org or visit the event's webpage at Venice Winter School.