



## SDGs Learning, Training and Practice 2023

### *Summary of the SDGs Learning Session:*

#### **Session 9: SDG 11: Progress, challenges, lessons learned and tools for sustainable transformation of cities**

14 July 2023, 8:30 am - 10:00 am EDT *Virtual Session*

#### **Background Information**

The SDGs Learning Session on ***SDG 11: Progress, challenges, lessons learned and tools for sustainable transformation of cities*** took place on 14<sup>th</sup> July. The session description can be found [here](#) and the recording can be viewed [here](#).

The main objectives of the session included:

1. Identification of **key themes** (Access, Equality, Innovative Approaches, Knowledge/Education) and reflection on how to connect these to accelerate SDG11 implementation.
2. Sharing of **progress, learnings and examples of good practices** for the sustainable transformation of cities.
3. Strengthening **partnerships between cities, universities, policymakers and urban professionals, civil society** including NGOs and Organisations of Persons with Disabilities.

#### **Main Partners**

The session partners were the [Sustainable Cities Institute](#), the [World Blind Union \(WBU\)](#), [UNIBO](#) and the [University of Paris Saclay](#), and the [International Association of Universities \(IAU\)](#).

#### **Short summary of the session and key topics**

**Urbanisation** is undoubtedly one of the major global trends of this century. How we **govern, plan, and design** our cities and urban communities impacts the realisation of human rights for all and how the **growing urban inequalities** are addressed. This session discussed progress, learnings, and challenges towards achieving SDG 11 and presented innovative tools, data, and initiatives addressing SDG 11 and the urban dimension of the 2030 Agenda from **multi-dimensional perspectives**, specifically from higher education, research, data, and

accessibility angles. This crucial interconnectedness was stressed by Inga Žalėnienė (IAU Vice President and Rector, Mykolas Romeris University) in her opening words to the session. The moderator Isabel Toman (Programme Officer, IAU) then posed the question to the participants: *“How does an ideal city look like?”*

The first presentation by Jorge Abrahão (General Coordinator of the Sustainable Cities Institute), showed how **monitoring SDG progress at the local and regional level** is possible using the tool developed by the Sustainable Cities Institute for Brazilian cities. Following this, Hannes Juhlin Lagrelius (Programme Officer) and Benjamin Dard (Senior Advisor) from the World Blind Union (WBU) presented the publication “The Journal of Public Space: Special Issue on Universally Accessible Public Spaces for All” and illustrated how the articles, case studies, best practices and lessons learnt are exemplary for the **discussion around public spaces from disability inclusion, ageing, and accessibility perspectives**.

Higher Education and research play a catalysing role in transformative activities in and around the city. Therefore, Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania) and Luther College/RCE Saskatchewan (Canada), both members of the International Association of Universities (IAU) presented some examples of good practices for capacity building for SDG 11. In particular, **involving and training students** through ‘living laboratory’ projects such as Environmental Management Laboratory at Mykolas Romeris University, can make a difference, explained Paulo Alexandre da Silva Pereira. Roger Petry (Professor of Philosophy, Luther College) showed with the example of the city of Saskatchewan how the RCE (Regional Centers of Expertise) can **create synergies between municipalities and academia**. Coming back to the question of defining the concept of space and the social contract in the city, Daniela Piana (Chair Political Science and Rituals and Legal Performativity in the Digital Age, UNIBO and Paris Saclay) suggests working with a method and a menu of actions developed by World Educational Heritage and FUTURA, including means of knowledge transfer, connecting people and co-creation, and fighting inequalities through data-driven as well as human-centred tools.

In conclusion, the city is conceived as a space where the social contract is renewed and revitalized. Not only sharing a joint vision and holistic approach but also **Transformative action is needed**. The world is off-track towards achieving SDG 11, calling for accelerated, upscaled, and concerted actions to leave no one and no place behind. On this path, **multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral partnerships** are key enablers towards realising the goal’s targets by 2030.

### **Key recommendations for action**

- People-centred action and discussion are at the outset of the sustainable transformation of cities
- Need for a clear, holistic strategy, and cities leading by example
- Using data, standard measures and monitoring progress are indispensable tools for the sustainable transformation of cities

- Creating spaces of learning and knowledge sharing is crucial to change attitudes, encouraging different behaviours towards sustainable livelihoods, and influencing the development of policies.
- Broadening the academic and civic discourse should find solutions allowing for more inclusion, democratic processes, bridging the digital divide, and changing the current (city) development paradigm
- Need for cities to connect intentionally with their geographic regions enabling new sustainable production and consumption systems customized to local ecosystems, cultures, and livelihoods.