

Speech at the Second Conference of Ministers of Culture in Davos: Common Good – Shared Responsibility

Date: 16 January 2022

Distinguished Ministers, guests, colleagues, ladies, and gentlemen,

I am honoured to address this Second Conference of European Ministries of Culture. The theme of the UN-Habitat’s tenth session of the World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi was Cities of Opportunities: Connecting Culture and Innovation. The focus on the culture of city-making as a key strategy for achieving sustainable development was one of the Abu Dhabi Declared Actions. UN-Habitat is therefore very happy to support this effort in Europe and beyond.

Europe has a long tradition and experience in ensuring high-quality design in the built environment. As a result, European cities demonstrate how well-designed urban landscapes increase the quality of life, accelerate climate action and enhance urban resilience.

But quality in the built environment is relevant and critical also beyond Europe. Design-based processes promote integrated and holistic solutions to complex urban matters. Through good urban design, the path toward urban prosperity, social cohesion, and an improved environment, can be traced.

UN-Habitat’s innovative work on urban design, through the Urban Maestro project, the Public Space Programme, and the integrated urban planning and design experience of our Urban Lab and of our Mobility team, promotes high-quality public spaces, urban projects, and infrastructure investments.

Quality does not happen by accident. It requires decisive action and consensus among stakeholders – communities, public and private sectors – in an open and transparent process. It requires capacity and focus. We congratulate the Baukultur initiative for promoting this debate and the development of the required tools.

Among these, UN-Habitat calls for Member States to expand the use of architectural and urban design competitions as a tool to promote urban quality. These competitions offer an effective way to activate local political discussions, stimulate creativity, help identify the best design solutions, and select the best team to implement them. Fair and transparent competitions also reduce the risk of corruption.

UN-Habitat supports Member States, urban authorities and the private sector in organizing design competitions as well as reviewing their planning and design frameworks and

initiating other innovative design processes that contribute to achieving the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Increasing the design quality in the built environment is a shared responsibility. It requires public and private actors to work and learn together. Already UN-Habitat and the International Union of Architects are promoting the 2030 Award for Architects. We collaborate with the European Commission on the New European Bauhaus initiative. We welcome further collaborations and encourage both national and local governments to continue their efforts for integrated, safe, inclusive, and well-connected cities through design.

As I conclude, this conference is about new and innovative solutions for our common urban future. UN-Habitat stands ready, with its global experience, to support the high-quality urban design and to work with you all for its wider application.

Thank you!