



#CitiesAreListening

# CITIES ARE LISTENING



metropolis ●

UN HABITAT  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



## Access to public space, a key element for the mental health and wellbeing of our communities

**April 7, 2021  
1400-1530**

### **Concept Note: Public Space and Mental Health and Wellbeing**

A collaboration between UCLG, UN-Habitat and Metropolis

Historically cities function as the providers of basic services largely in the form of delivery of infrastructure. A key component of city infrastructure that is often overlooked as part of basic service falls is public space. Public space, such as parks, recreation areas, squares etc., are recognized as important for contributing to children's development, to community life, reducing stress levels, and improving mental health and wellbeing. This interactive learning exchange delves deeper into the interrelatedness of Public Space and Mental Health Wellbeing

The Global impact of the COVID 19 Pandemic has affected all facets of public and private lives in various forms. Some of the key preventative measures include physical distancing, restriction of movement, restriction of access to public spaces and enhanced hygiene protocols to name but a few. Whilst these measures are implemented in the interest of public health and wellbeing, there are often unintended consequences with regards to the limitation of access. The pandemic has demonstrated how unevenly public space is distributed throughout many of our cities and the consequences of this uneven distribution and access related to good mental health of the citizens.

With the perspective of the current global pandemic, lessons can be drawn and applied that well planned and developed public spaces can be a lever for the 'New Normal' for cities to be more liveable and accessible and thereby assist in the implementation and realization of the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals.

Under the banner of **#CitiesAreListening**, local and regional governments and their partners will uncover transversal issues which need to be analysed through multi-sectoral lenses. The Urban Strategic Planning Committee of UCLG, together with the UN-Habitat Planning Finance and Economy Section, Metropolis, Placemaking X and various local governments will host a virtual exchange on the value of Public Space for mental and physical health in cities.

The Exchange aims to highlight key questions relating public space to health, such as: accessibility, flexibility, design, management and maintenance, connectivity and equitable distribution and more importantly as cities start to emerge from lock-down, we need to re-build confidence about being out in public spaces, and enhance the well-being benefits. Public spaces are generators of livelihoods in cities, what role will these key structuring elements play in building city resilience after Covid-19. With majority of the worlds populations living in metropolitan cities, this learning exchange becomes increasing important as it speaks to urban governance and equality of access to services. These are some of the key probing questions that we would like to engage on in the learning exchange.

The impact of limited or inaccessible spaces to human and ecological health, coupled with the recent release of the *“Integrating health in urban and Territorial Planning Sourcebook”*, the proposed exchange will begin to delve deeper into creating closer linkages between the planning and health professionals within the city environment.

There is a need for more holistic planning and implementation across various sectors in city governance, therefore it is critical that the planning and health sectors build closer working relationships moving forward. It is further highlighted in terms of city governance models that these two sectors may not, at all times be situated in the same sphere of government and therefore makes implementation a serious challenge.

The series of #CitiesAreListening sessions will bring to life the **Pact for the Future** of Humanity that UCLG was mandated to develop by its World Council in November 2020, as part of the axis of the **pact for people**. The Pact for the Future will seek to be a renewal of the social contract and bring about the transformation of the world into one that guarantees equitable access to public services through the renewal of the multilateral system.

## **Broad Program Outline; April 7, 1400**

**1. Welcome : UCLG**

**2. Setting the Scene**

- Key Note Addresses by Mental Health and Public Space Specialists

**3. Interactive Mentimeter consultation**

**4. Moderated Panel discussion on practices from local and regional governments**

**5. Introduction to “Integrating Health in Urban and Territorial Planning Sourcebook”,**

**6. Moderated Panel Discussion with representatives from Partners and Experts**

**7. Closing Remarks and Summary: UN Habitat**