



حوار المدن العربية الأوروبية
ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES DIALOGUE
Riyadh 2025

AECD 2025

Bridging Cities, Building Futures



INAUGURAL FORUM REPORT

A COMPREHENSIVE SUMMARY OF DIALOGUES, INSIGHTS, AND OUTCOMES FROM THE INAUGURAL FORUM IN RIYADH



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE AECD STEERING COMMITTEE

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE AECD STEERING COMMITTEE

Arab and European cities share deep-rooted historical ties dating back centuries. These connections have significantly shaped their civilizations, economies, and urban landscapes. Today, these relationships provide a foundation for advancing urban communities and fostering economic and cultural exchange. As a result, cities on both sides have emerged as thriving and resilient global economic hubs, inspiring residents and visitors alike to contribute ideas and initiatives that drive human progress.



The Arab European Cities Dialogue was conceived to strengthen the bonds between city leaders, communities, and institutions through constructive dialogue – a dialogue that embraces diverse values and cultures while facilitating the exchange of insights on pressing urban, economic, social, and environmental challenges.

“

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**conceived to strengthen the bonds
between city leaders, communities, and
institutions** through constructive dialogue

Over the years, cities in both regions have demonstrated a remarkable commitment to urban planning, implementing transformative projects and pioneering initiatives that serve as benchmarks in municipal development. This event provides a premier platform for fostering and sustaining city partnerships, aligning with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which prioritizes meaningful cooperation at national, regional, and global levels while promoting the exchange of best practices in local urban development.

“



The AECD is not merely a one-time gathering of mayors, municipal leaders, and international organizations

The AECD is not merely a one-time gathering of mayors, municipal leaders, and international organizations in Riyadh. Rather, it marks the launch of a sustainable initiative that will be held biennially, alternating between Arab and European cities. This approach ensures continuous follow-up on partnerships, urban initiatives, and municipal development practices. Furthermore, the AECD enables cities to explore common interests and opportunities for collaboration through dynamic discussions and interactions between city officials, organizations, and development funds – both bilaterally and collectively – maximizing its impact and outcomes.

Recognizing the crucial role of non-governmental urban organizations in empowering cities and fostering partnerships, I assure – in my capacity as President of AUDI – that these organizations will play an equally vital role alongside municipalities in shaping the AECD's outcomes. Their active involvement in organizing thematic sessions and workshops on various aspects of urban development will significantly enrich the dialogue.

In conclusion, we extend a warm welcome to all Arab and European cities, their leaders, representatives of international urban organizations, and development funds to Riyadh – the capital of urban transformation. We sincerely appreciate your participation in this Dialogue, which serves as a roadmap toward a better urban future – one built on effective partnerships and the celebration of cultural diversity in vibrant and dynamic communities.

- H.H. Prince Dr. Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf

Mayor of Riyadh Region, President of the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) & Chairman of AECD Steering Committee



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Arab European Cities Dialogue 2025 (AECD 2025), held from 11–13 May in Riyadh, marked the launch of a decade-long initiative to strengthen partnerships between Arab and European cities. Hosted by the Riyadh Region Municipality under the patronage of H.H. Prince Faisal Bin Abdulaziz Bin Ayyaf, Mayor of Riyadh and President of the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), the forum brought together over 120 city leaders, municipal associations, international organizations, and financial institutions.

Organized under the theme “Bridging Cities, Building Futures,” AECD 2025 provided a strategic platform for interregional cooperation focused on four core themes: peer-to-peer municipal partnerships and learning, livable cities and climate action, technology and digital transformation in urban governance, and municipal financial sustainability. Through high-level plenaries, local action workshops, a Cities Leadership Forum, and an Urban Financing Forum, AECD 2025 facilitated knowledge exchange across a dynamic three-day program.

Participants explored practical solutions to shared challenges such as affordable housing, green mobility, and digital innovation, while also forging long-term frameworks for collaboration. A key outcome was the agreement to institutionalize AECD as a biennial event, with Madrid confirmed as the 2027 host city. Recommendations included deepening engagement with youth, strengthening financial resilience, and building on city-led cooperation as a foundation for global urban diplomacy.



AECD OVERVIEW

ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES DIALOGUE (AECD)



حوار المدن العربية الأوروبية
ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES DIALOGUE
Riyadh 2025

Bridging Cities, Building Futures

Overview:

AECD is a regional and global initiative fostering collaboration between Arab and European cities. It offers a structured space for municipalities to share policy innovation, explore joint investment opportunities, and address critical urban issues ranging from climate adaptation to digital governance. Designed to alternate every two years between Arab and European cities, AECD aims to institutionalize city-to-city diplomacy as a catalyst for sustainable urban futures.

The AECD has four key objectives:

- **Enhance Communication** – Facilitate discussions with mayors and experts highlighting good practices and common challenges to address urban challenges
- **Build Partnerships** – Enable meetings between cities to network and explore potential future collaborations
- **Enhance Financing Opportunities** – Host a meeting of Arab and European cities to discuss the governance of the AECD
- **Formulate Frameworks** – Provide a platform for sessions between cities and funding agencies to gain insights from experts on project proposals

AECD 2025

KEY GOALS FOR THE 2025 EDITION:

- Launch a long-term, interregional forum dedicated to city cooperation.
- Strengthen cities' capacity to address pressing urban challenges through knowledge exchange and dialogue.
- Enhance cities' access to sustainable financing via targeted matchmaking with funding institutions.

Showcase transformative urban projects in Riyadh, reinforcing the capital's role as a hub for global collaboration

EVENT DATES:

11TH – 13TH MAY 2025

VENUE:

HILTON RIYADH HOTEL & RESIDENCES, RIYADH



ORGANIZERS:



AUDI:

The forum was organized by the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), a regional, non-governmental, and non-profit organization, established in 1980 by the Permanent Bureau of the Arab Towns Organization, with its headquarters in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. AUDI is the first Arab institution specializing in urban development and municipal support. It has over 650 member cities across 22 countries and focuses on research and studies in urban policies, capacity development and training, and networking in the fields of urban development and municipal affairs.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS:



PLATFORMA:

A pan-European coalition of towns and regions – and their national, European Union (EU) and global associations – active in city-to-city and region-to-region development cooperation, hosted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).



The Center for Innovative Local Governance (VNGI-CILG):

The regional MENA office of VNG International, specialized in governance and local development and technical assistance programs around public reforms on decentralization and the conduct of the processes of exchange and debate on these reforms, among other areas.



Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, stretches across 1,554 km² and has established itself as a hub for pioneering urban, cultural, and entertainment projects. Including the recently launched King Abdulaziz Project for Riyadh Public Transport, aimed at enhancing the quality of life for its residents. In addition, Riyadh is emerging as a global destination for hosting prestigious international events, such as Riyadh Expo 2030 and the FIFA World Cup 2034.

In this context, Riyadh emerges as a dynamic hub for dialogue and collaboration to tackle pressing urban challenges. Undergoing a remarkable transformative journey, the Saudi capital presents unique opportunities and navigates complex challenges, cementing its pivotal role on both regional and global stages. By building bridges, forging partnerships, and fostering cooperation, Riyadh continues to shape the future of urban connectivity and collaboration.

As the first host of this prestigious forum, the Riyadh Municipality is committed to creating a platform for sharing experiences across urban, municipal, and economic domains. This event served as a valuable opportunity for cities and municipalities to explore Riyadh's major urban transformative projects and immerse themselves in the rich historical and cultural journey of the Kingdom's capital.

أمانة منطقة الرياض
RIYADH REGION MUNICIPALITY



The Riyadh Municipality (Amanat Al-Riyadh) was established in 1937 (1356 AH) as a small municipal entity and later evolved into the “Riyadh Municipality” in 1955 (1375 AH). It is responsible for urban development, sustainable growth, and providing municipal services to residents and businesses across the city.

The municipality oversees 16 sub-municipalities, including Namar, Al-Shumaisi, Al-Naseem, and Al-Sulay, among others. Its key functions include urban planning, construction licensing, waste management, public health and safety, park and market development, and food quality control.

With a focus on enhancing quality of life, the Riyadh Municipality strives to implement sustainable urban initiatives and deliver high-quality public services that align with the city's vision for future growth.



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

AECD IN NUMBERS

Unifying Arab and European cities through policy, partnerships, and shared purpose.

3

Days

900+

Attendees

80

Cities incl. Riyadh
(40 Arab + 40 European)

28

Capital Cities

39

Countries across 3
continents

33

International
Organizations + 3 Local
Government Authorities

47

Mayors

19

Deputy Mayors

15

Other High Level City
Officials (Councilors,
Senators, Envoys, etc.)

21

Total Sessions

100+

Speakers
& Moderators

250+

Visitors participated in 3
urban site visits
over 2 days.

100+

Bilateral Meetings

4

Public Announcements
(incl. MoU's)

343M+

Media Impressions

AECD 2025 laid the foundation for sustained municipal dialogue and future collaboration.

AGENDA OVERVIEW

COVERED ACROSS 3 DAYS:

5

Total Sessions

2

Closed Door Head of
Delegation Roundtables

13

Forum for Local Action
Workshops

1

Urban Financing Forum



Day 1 Overview

Sunday, 11 May 2025 | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Day 1 of the Arab European Cities Dialogue 2025 (AECD 2025) set the stage for a transformative exchange between over 115 Arab and European city leaders, urban practitioners, and international organizations. Under the theme “*Bridging Cities, Building Futures*”, the day focused on fostering cross-regional cooperation, showcasing Riyadh’s urban transformation, and exploring innovative approaches to sustainable and inclusive city development. Memoranda of Understanding were signed between AUDI and Metropolis, the global network of major cities and metropolitan areas, and AUDI and Fira de Barcelona, organizer of the Smart City Expo World Congress, to strengthen cooperation and partnerships with leading international organizations in urban governance, innovation and city-to-city knowledge exchange.

Day 1 emphasized the importance of sharing best practices to build resilient cities, with the sessions facilitating meaningful dialogue and partnerships that will shape the future of urban development across Arab and European regions. The agenda included the event’s opening ceremony, two plenary panels, three Forum for Local Action sessions, an exclusive networking session for heads of delegation and 30 bilateral meetings between attendees. The day concluded with an evening program of urban visits to showcase some of Riyadh’s key urban development projects and initiatives: Sports Boulevard, King Abdullah Financial District and Old Riyadh.

Day 2 Overview:

Monday, 12 May 2025 | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

The second day of AECD 2025 considered the pressing themes of climate resilience, digital transformation, and inclusive urban governance. It also saw heads of delegation convene to align on the future governance of the AECD. Participants elected to adopt an agile model for future governance and voted on five thematic priorities to consider going forward (sustainable cities and quality of life, economic growth and city branding, technology and digital transformation, culture and creativity, urban resilience and crisis management).

A forthcoming joint research report on city-to-city cooperation, developed in collaboration with the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), was also announced as a step toward deepening AECD's knowledge-sharing function.

Through two plenary panels, a closed-door forum for delegation heads, and six Local Action Forum sessions, city leaders and experts explored strategies to build sustainable, technologically advanced, and equitable urban environments. The day's discussions encouraged collaboration and the sharing of best practices between Arab and European municipalities. It concluded with a second opportunity to visit some of Riyadh's key urban development projects and initiatives, and a dinner for Heads of Delegation hosted by AUDI in the Diplomatic Quarter.

Day 3 Overview:

Tuesday, 13 May 2025 | Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

The final day of AECD 2025 focused on actionable strategies for sustainable urban growth, with an emphasis on local economic development, investment, and participatory governance. Through one plenary session, four Local Action Forum sessions, and the Urban Financing Forum, participants explored innovative approaches to financing urban projects, strengthening local governance, and enhancing citizen engagement. The sessions equipped city leaders with practical tools and partnerships to implement effective urban strategies. The day concluded with the announcement that the next edition of the AECD Forum will take place in Madrid in 2027.



URBAN VISITS AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENTS

Urban Visits

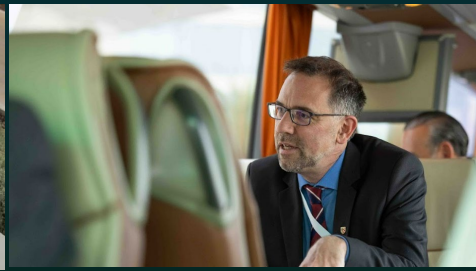
On days one and two, a highlight of the program was guided visits to some of Riyadh's most significant urban development sites, offering delegates a first-hand look at the city's ongoing transformation.

Sport Boulevard

86 participants toured the city's upcoming flagship sports and wellness corridor.



One of Riyadh's major projects, Sports Boulevard is aimed at creating a dynamic sports and wellness environment that inspires residents and visitors. It promotes active lifestyles and enhances the city's quality of life. Over the course of the two days, 86 attendees were able to visit this iconic project.





Metro + KAFD

85 visitors witnessed the city's transit ambitions and financial hub take shape.



King Abdullah Financial District: An iconic destination blending world-class offices, retail, modern residences, and unique entertainment, KAFD offers smart city living and a vibrant community that redefines urban life in Riyadh. Over the course of two days, 85 participants had the opportunity to visit the District, travelling via urban mobility systems including the Riyadh Metro.





Old City Cultural Visit

100 visitors explored the old city cultural sites.



Old City Cultural Visit: The old city area features key landmarks such as Al Masmak Palace, Qasr Al Hokm, and the Grand Mosque, connected by traditional Najdi-style plazas. Redeveloped between 1988 and 2001, the Imam Turki bin Abdullah Mosque won the Aga Khan Award. Architect Rasem Badran was appointed by King Salman to ensure the design reflected local heritage. A total of 100 attendees were able to explore the heart of Old Riyadh during the two urban visits.



AUDI Dinner

A dinner was hosted for the Heads of Delegation, at the Arab Urban Development Institute in the Diplomatic Quarter. Attended by His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the Deputy Governor of Riyadh Region and His Highness Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz Bin Ayyaf, Mayor of Riyadh and President of the Arab Urban Development Institute, this event offered an opportunity to network and reflect on the discussions held during the Forum over the first two days. The event celebrated Saudi traditions and folklore, featuring Arabic calligraphy, palm leaves weaving, traditional dance and falconry.



المعهد العربي لإنماء المدن
Arab Urban Development Inst.

Held at AUDI HQ, Diplomatic Quarter, Riyadh





SESSION SUMMARIES

SESSION SUMMARIES

DAY 1 – SUNDAY 11 MAY 2025

OPENING CEREMONY



The opening ceremony of the Arab European Cities Dialogue 2025 (AECD 2025) launched the forum with a powerful call for renewed city-to-city cooperation, framed by a compelling vision of shared urban futures. With over 80 city leaders and delegates from across the Arab and European regions, the ceremony marked a historic milestone—both as the inaugural edition of a long-term dialogue platform and as a symbol of Riyadh’s transformation into a hub of urban innovation and diplomacy.

His Highness Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, Mayor of Riyadh and President of the Arab Urban Development Institute, opened proceedings with a sweeping narrative of Riyadh’s growth—from a one-square-kilometer desert town to a sprawling metropolis of over 8 million people.

“Riyadh is no longer just a gateway to Saudi Arabia,” he declared. “It is becoming a global crossroads—a place of dialogue, opportunity, and shared destiny.” He emphasized the city’s shift from reactive to proactive development, guided by Vision 2030. “We no longer want growth to lead development,” he said. “We want development to lead growth—and to focus on quality of life.”

H.H. Prince Faisal also highlighted the importance of community-led initiatives alongside flagship projects like King Salman Park and the Sports Boulevard, stating: “A great city is more than a collection of mega-projects—it’s the spirit and energy of its people.”



Dr. Anas Almughairy, Director General of the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), described AECD as the culmination of a years-long effort to connect Arab and European cities in meaningful, sustained partnerships. “This is not a one-time event,” he affirmed. “It is the beginning of a long-term process to build resilient, inclusive cities—together.”

Mr. Fabrizio Rossi, Secretary General of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and Mr. Pieter Jeroense, VNG International Director echoed these sentiments, calling for more investment in youth leadership and city-focused education. “Let’s make working for our cities the dream job of the future,” Rossi urged, announcing plans to launch a joint academic program for local governance and diplomacy.

The ceremony celebrated the deep historical ties between Arab and European cities, from Roman and Nabataean times to contemporary challenges of climate change, digitization, and social inclusion.

“ We believe the future of cities will be written by those who collaborate – not those who compete.”

— H.H. Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf,
Mayor of Riyadh

Across all remarks, speakers reinforced AECD’s mission: to turn centuries of exchange into a structured, forward-looking agenda for urban cooperation.

Keynote Speakers:

- His Highness Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, Mayor of Riyadh and President of the Arab Urban Development Institute
- Dr. Anas Almughairy, Director General of the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI),
- Mr. Fabrizio Rossi, Secretary General of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR),
- Mr. Pieter Jeroense, Director of VNG International

MC:

Fatma Fahad, Journalist and News Anchor, Al Arabiya TV Channel

PLENARY SESSION:

BEYOND BORDERS: TRANSFORMING CITIES THROUGH GLOBAL COOPERATION

Panel Members:

- H.E. Dr. Yousef Shawarbeh, Mayor of Amman.
- H.E. Fathia El Moudni, Mayor of Rabat and President of Metropolis.
- Mr. José Luis Martínez-Almeida, Mayor of Madrid.
- Ms. Emilia Saiz, Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).

Moderator:

Dr. Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi, Director, City Diplomacy Lab, Columbia Global Centers.



This opening plenary session of AECD 2025 set the tone for a landmark forum grounded in partnership, diplomacy, and the transformative power of cities. Moderated by Dr. Lorenzo Grandi, the discussion brought together leading voices from Arab and European municipalities to examine how local cooperation can help cities meet shared global challenges.

H.E. Dr. Yousef Shawarbeh, Mayor of Amman, opened by highlighting the importance of institutionalizing city diplomacy. Drawing on Amman's experience collaborating with over

45 cities worldwide, he emphasized that while urban challenges—such as migration, climate change, and service delivery—are shared, solutions must be tailored to local contexts. “Dialogue is not about copy-paste models,” he explained, “but about learning from principles to build applicable, place-based strategies.” He also stressed that international cooperation should move beyond symbolic gestures and be anchored in clear frameworks and shared responsibility.

H.E. Mayor Fathia El Moudni of Rabat shared an example of effective North–South cooperation through her city's long-standing

partnership with Lyon, France. She detailed how this collaboration supported the development of Rabat's tramway and sustainable mobility master plan, which now informs the city's preparations for global sporting events. "This is more than technical exchange," she said. "It's a partnership rooted in mutual respect, shared values, and measurable outcomes for citizens."

“ Cities must build bridges—across cultures, continents and generations.”

– Mr. José Luis Martínez-Almeida,

Mayor of Madrid

cooperation across borders.



Mr. José Luis Martínez-Almeida, Mayor of Madrid reflected on the role of cities in shaping inclusive growth and innovation. Madrid's success, he argued, lies in its ability to attract talent, offer a high quality of life, and connect meaningfully with Arab and Latin American cities. "Global problems are best solved at the local level," he said, advocating for more decentralized

Ms. Emilia Saiz, Secretary General of UCLG, called for a step-change in how cities engage internationally. She urged

participants to move from experience-sharing to co-creation and strategic alignment. "City diplomacy is not just about relationships," she noted, "but about co-defining the next generation of services around care, sustainability, and equity."

This session powerfully reinforced AECD 2025's core vision—to create a long-term platform for Arab European city collaboration rooted in

shared priorities, lived realities, and the capacity of cities to lead global transformation from the ground up.

Key Takeaways:

- **Tailored Solutions through Dialogue** – Shared urban challenges demand localized responses informed by global collaboration.
- **Institutionalizing City Diplomacy** – Lasting cooperation requires structured frameworks beyond protocol.
- **North–South Partnerships in Action** – Rabat–Lyon collaboration offers a blueprint for mobility and sustainability.
- **Cities as Engines of Innovation** – Urban leadership is essential to inclusive growth and global resilience.
- **From Exchange to Strategy** – AECD 2025 calls for a collective, co-created agenda for future-ready cities.

CITIES NETWORKING: CLOSED SESSION EXCLUSIVELY FOR HEADS OF DELEGATIONS

Moderator:

Ms. Maria Vassilakou, Former Vice Mayor and Vice Governor of Vienna



This high-energy networking session brought together 65 city delegates under the theme “One City, One Image, One Story,” offering a dynamic format for rapid exchange. Each delegate had just one minute to respond to a question of their choice—sharing either a recent success, a current challenge, or a key lesson from their city. The goal: to spark collaboration, strengthen ties, and showcase replicable urban solutions.

Cities highlighted a broad spectrum of innovation—from Amman’s inclusive smart transport to Ajman’s full transition to AI-driven e-services and Vienna’s world-renowned affordable housing model. Many focused on inclusive development, digital transformation, and environmental resilience. Notable examples included Damietta’s coastal protection project, Al Karak’s community-led

solar initiatives, and Riyadh and Baghdad’s focus on citizen engagement and urban regeneration.

Heritage preservation emerged as a shared theme, with Tunis, Granada, Rabat, and Prague demonstrating how cities can honor historical identity while advancing modern digital and environmental goals. Beirut and Marrakesh addressed the urgent need to rebuild in the face of crisis and climate vulnerability, particularly water scarcity.

Lessons from across regions underscored the power of partnerships and trust. Cities like Palermo, Erbil, and Cologne shared community-led development strategies and refugee integration models that are scalable and rooted in local ownership.

This session exemplified AECD 2025’s spirit of city-to-city dialogue—building bridges through shared experiences and practical insight.

SIGNING OF MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING

Under the patronage of Riyadh Mayor and President of the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) HH Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, the institute signed two memoranda of understanding. The first was with Metropolis, the global network of major cities and metropolitan areas, and second with Fira de Barcelona, organizer of the Smart City Expo World Congress. These MoUs aim to strengthen cooperation and partnerships with leading international organizations in urban governance, innovation, and city-to-city knowledge exchange.



FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

MENA CITIES – POWERING PRODUCTIVITY AND JOBS

Organized by the World Bank

Panel Members:

- Ms. Catherine Tovey, Practice Manager for Urban Development, Resilience, and Land in MENA at the World Bank
- Mr. Mohamed Al Gaizouni Al Ghailani, First President of the Municipal Council of Tangiers
- Dr. Ahmad Bashir, Senior Country Officer, International Finance Corporation (IFC)

Moderator:

Rafeef Abdel Razek, Urban Development Specialist

This high-level session started with a presentation by Ms. Catherine Tovey, Practice Manager at the World Bank, who offered a candid and data-rich examination of the role MENA cities play in the region's economic development, and where they fall short. With urban areas globally recognized as engines of growth, the session explored why MENA's cities have not delivered similar gains in productivity, job creation, or competitiveness, despite favorable demographic trends and increasing urbanization. Through a compelling analytical narrative, the presentation framed the region's cities not as neutral spaces, but as underperforming assets whose transformation is vital to addressing the youth unemployment crisis, low female labor force participation, and sluggish private sector growth.

At the heart of the session was a World Bank-



led analysis benchmarking 9,000 cities worldwide. The results were sobering, as MENA cities underperform their global peers by up to 16% in economic activity for cities of comparable size. The region's urban areas generate relatively fewer jobs in the tradable sectors and are less attractive to large firms, foreign investors, and skilled talent.

As Ms. Tovey highlighted, "It is not just about size, it is about function. Urban density in MENA is not translating into productivity the way it does elsewhere."

Three structural gaps were outlined - density, connectivity, and attractiveness - each supported by striking metrics and case examples. For instance, in Amman, only 18% of jobs are reachable within one hour using public transport and walking, reflecting the urban mobility challenge. Meanwhile, lagging infrastructure, lower digital connectivity, and fragmented planning systems have constrained urban competitiveness.

Yet the session was not merely diagnostic: it also offered a roadmap. Drawing lessons from international examples (Medellín, Bilbao, and Kobe), the presentation outlined how targeted investment, institutional coordination, and strategic branding can drive transformative urban growth. Medellín's integration of transport and social infrastructure, Kobe's biomedical innovation cluster, and Bilbao's cultural reinvention provided powerful models for adaptation.

The panel then highlighted Tangiers as a notable example of successful urban transformation in the MENA region, driven by long-term vision and sustained public investment. Mr. Mohamed Al Gaizouni Al Ghailani detailed the city's strategic overhaul over the past two decades, emphasizing how major state-led infrastructure projects such as Tangier Med Port, the Mohammed VI I Tangier Tech City, and the Mohammed VI Foundation for Vocational and Skills Training have catalyzed the economic development and job creation, not just locally but across Morocco.

Dr. Ahmad Bashir brought in the perspective of private sector participation, emphasizing the role of the IFC in enabling cities to access alternative financing for infrastructure. He pointed out that while many MENA cities rely heavily on public funding, they are underutilizing instruments like subnational borrowing and public-private partnerships (PPPs). IFC's toolkit, including guarantees, countercyclical investments, and support for PPP structuring, can help cities improve their financial autonomy and project execution capacity.

The discussion linked squarely to AECD 2025's core themes: inclusive growth, sustainable urbanism, and cross-regional learning. The call to action was clear: if the MENA region is to realize its job and productivity potential, its cities must be positioned not just as population centers but as platforms for economic dynamism.

Key Takeaways:

- **Underperformance Gap** – MENA cities generate up to 16% less economic output than global counterparts of similar size, reflecting inefficiencies in translating urban scale into productivity.
- **Three Drivers of Weakness** – Urban density, connectivity, and attractiveness are not effectively leveraged to boost productivity, with poor job accessibility and fragmented infrastructure as key barriers.
- **Critical Role of Local Context** – Cities like Tangiers show that long-term vision, state-led investment, and strategic planning can drive transformation, underscoring the need for place-based solutions.
- **Potential for Job Creation** – Urban reform and improved city functionality can unlock significant gains in employment, particularly for youth and women, and enhance private sector vitality.
- **Global Models Offer Insights** – Lessons from cities like Medellín, Bilbao, and Kobe highlight the impact of integrated planning, innovation ecosystems, and urban branding in spurring economic renewal.

FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

GLOBAL SPORTS, CULTURAL, AND BUSINESS EVENTS AS DRIVERS OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL IMPACT

Organized by the OECD

Panel Members:

- Ms. Marjan Faraidooni, Chief of Education & Culture and Chief HR Officer, Expo City Dubai
- Mr. Ugo Valenti, Co-Founder & CEO, Smart City Expo World Congress
- Ms. Clare Hart, Vice-President, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole

Moderator:

Ms. Karen Maguire, Head of Division, Local Employment and Economic Development, OECD



What does it mean for a city to host a global event—and what remains after the fanfare fades? This session, organized by the OECD, asked cities to think beyond the stadiums and spectacle, and focus on the true legacy of international gatherings: local impact. From Expo 2020 Dubai to the Smart City Expo in Barcelona, the discussion highlighted how global events can act as catalysts for skills development, civic engagement, and inclusive urban growth.

The session identified several emerging trends shaping today's event strategies. Increasingly, cities are judged not just by what they build, but by how equitably benefits are distributed and how effectively success is measured. Scrutiny around how public money is spent has intensified, and cities are responding with

collaborative hosting models, stronger impact tracking, and more inclusive programming. A key theme was the importance of early and deliberate legacy planning. Cities can use as a framework new guidance from the OECD—endorsed by over 40 countries including several G7 members—to embed long-term outcomes into their event bids from the outset.

Ms. Marjan Faraidooni reflected on Expo 2020 Dubai as a case study in long-term thinking. From the outset, the Expo was designed to leave something lasting: not just in infrastructure, but in human capital, volunteer engagement, and cultural continuity. Expo City Dubai, the site's new urban district, is now home to 5,000 residents, 3,000 workers, and a growing calendar of events—from Winter City festivities to COP28. Even during the

pandemic, Expo delivered over 20 million visits and hosted one million schoolchildren through a nationwide education program.

The session also touched on broader lessons. Global events offer platforms for place-making, business attraction, and innovation ecosystems—but they also carry risks of uneven development. Cities were encouraged to start with clear goals, design measurement tools early, and use global visibility to hardwire equity and sustainability into long-term urban strategies.

For cities across the Arab and European regions, this session reinforced that the true value of global events lies in the lasting networks, skills, and civic pride they generate. Hosting a global event is not just a show of capacity—it’s a chance to hardwire equity, sustainability, and inclusion into urban strategy.

Key Takeaways:

- **Legacy Beyond Infrastructure** – Events must deliver lasting value in skills, inclusion, and economic opportunity.
- **Early, Embedded Planning** – Legacy thinking starts at the bidding stage, with goals and measurement tools built in.
- **Inclusive Development** – Cities must ensure benefits reach all communities, not just central or elite districts.
- **Human Capital Matters** – Training, volunteering, and education can outlast physical investments.
- **Global to Local** – International exposure must translate into local pride, place-making, and policy innovation.
- **OECD Guidance Available** – Cities can use the OECD Recommendation as a framework for planning and evaluation.

FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

EMPOWERING YOUNG LOCAL LEADERS THROUGH INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE AND DECENTRALIZED DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Organized by PLATFORMA

Panel Members:

- Mr. Fabrizio Rossi, Secretary General, Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
- Ms. Sara El-Shqeirat, Director, Sustainable Development Unit, Greater Karak Municipality, Jordan
- Mr. Marek Hudák, Local Councilor, Bardejov and Presov Region, Slovakia
- Ms. Amal Elalfy, Director, Infrastructure and Unplanned Areas Development, Port Said, Egypt
- Mr. João Fortes, Mayor of Mourão, Portugal

Moderator:

Mr. Francesco Pala, Adviser – Young Elected Officials and Partners Engagement, PLATFORMA



Youth leadership isn't a future ambition—it's already reshaping local governance. This session brought together emerging leaders and seasoned practitioners to explore how intergenerational dialogue and decentralized development cooperation (DDC) can empower young voices to lead cities into a more inclusive, sustainable future. The conversation was grounded in real examples of how cities are creating space for youth to not only participate—but to lead.

Ms. Sara El-Shqeirat highlighted how Karak is embedding youth engagement into local development planning, with initiatives such as youth advisory councils and civic mapping that elevate voices often left out of decision-making. "Representation is not enough—we need systems that support agency and accountability," she stressed.

Mr. João Fortes shared Mourão's experience of nurturing young talent through municipal mentorship programs and inclusive cultural spaces. From Slovakia, Marek Hudák spotlighted youth-led data initiatives that are helping shape road safety policy, sports funding, and local governance tools. Ms. Amal Elalfy described how Port Said is leveraging DDC frameworks to give young leaders tangible roles in infrastructure and community development.

From "Mayor for a Day" projects to youth-run cultural hubs, the panel revealed a growing

ecosystem of innovation led by the next generation. Yet barriers remain—particularly for young women—ranging from institutional inertia to limited funding and trust gaps. The message was clear: youth empowerment must be built into the governance system.

This session captured the AECD 2025 mission: building inclusive, resilient cities through genuine partnerships and peer learning. When cities trust and invest in young leaders, they don't just prepare for the future—they shape it.

Key Takeaways:

- **Young leaders are redefining local governance** – From civic mapping to data-led policy, youth are actively reshaping cities.
- **Intergenerational dialogue creates shared ownership** – When generations work together, policy becomes more adaptive and inclusive.
- **DDC is a vehicle for youth innovation** – Cross-regional partnerships give emerging leaders the tools to scale impact.
- **Removing structural barriers is essential** – Gender-responsive policies and inclusive institutions are key to lasting change.
- **This is city diplomacy in action** – AECD 2025's purpose is reflected in the shared solutions and relationships forged across this session.

PLENARY SESSION:

IN CONVERSATION: PERSPECTIVES ON RIYADH'S URBAN LEAP

Panel Members:

- Mr. Jerry Inzerillo, Group Chief Executive Officer of Diriyah Company.
- Ms. Jayne McGivern, Chief Executive Officer of the Sports Boulevard Foundation.
- Mr. George Tanasijevich, Chief Executive Officer of the King Salman Park Foundation.

Moderator:

Ms. Nedaa Al Mubarak, Managing Director of SRMG Think.



Riyadh's transformation isn't just visible—it's lived. This session brought together the CEOs behind three of the capital's most iconic development projects to explore how Riyadh is reshaping itself around people, culture, and sustainability. Moderated by Nedaa Al Mubarak, the conversation revealed how each project contributes a distinct vision, while collectively delivering on the broader ambitions of Vision 2030.

Mr. Jerry Inzerillo described Diriyah as the cultural and diplomatic heart of the Kingdom—a \$64 billion project anchored in Saudi identity and designed to

showcase the legacy of the House of Al Saud. Referred to as the “birthplace of the Kingdom,” Diriyah is more than a development; it is a national statement of heritage, pride, and global engagement. With over 20 million mud bricks crafted using traditional techniques and vast pedestrian infrastructure, the project reflects an uncompromising commitment to authenticity—ensuring that modern urban development honors the roots from which it grows.

Ms. Jayne McGivern presented Sports Boulevard as a bold experiment in climate-conscious urbanism. Originally

envisioned as a single cycling route, it has evolved into a 135 km car-free green spine running across Riyadh, integrated with metro lines and influencing 15% of the city's urban fabric. Ms. Jayne explained how the project trialed different paving materials to reduce heat, landing on a mix of silver nitrate and recycled tires that lowered nighttime temperatures by two degrees. "This is a sustainability lab," she said—one that's already welcomed over a million visitors in its first month.

“ Vision 2030 is not the end—it’s just the beginning.”

– Mr. George Tanasijevich

Mr. George Tanasijevich described King Salman Park as both a “green heart” and an economic catalyst. At 17 square kilometers, with over 800 species of plants (most non-indigenous) and 1.1 million trees, the park is being built with strict environmental standards and co-investment from the private sector. The CEO spoke of the project as a “blank canvas” to create something magical anchored not just in ecology, but in long-term viability and community integration.

Across the conversation, several themes emerged: sustainability not as a buzzword but as engineering reality; public health and active lifestyles as design imperatives; and heritage not as something preserved in museums but embedded in how cities grow. The projects connect physically, but also conceptually—each contributing to a Riyadh that is walkable, welcoming, and aware of its role on the global stage.

The session underscored AECD's purpose: facilitating real dialogue between cities, not as abstract models but as peers with shared challenges and aspirations. As Tanasijevich

put it, “Vision 2030 is not the end—it’s the beginning.” Riyadh's giga-projects offer lessons in authenticity, ambition, and adaptability for any city aiming to grow with purpose.



Key Takeaways:

- **Heritage as Urban Anchor** – Diriyah shows how cultural preservation can drive identity, tourism, and diplomacy.
- **Sustainability by Design** – Flagship projects integrate ESG standards, water reuse, and climate-sensitive materials.
- **Urban Health and Inclusion** – Urban form is being reoriented around wellbeing, accessibility, and social cohesion.
- **Connected, Scalable Planning** – Mega-projects align through shared infrastructure and enforceable design codes.
- **City Diplomacy in Action** – The session embodied AECD's purpose: knowledge exchange to build resilient, people-centered cities.

DAY 2 – MONDAY 12 MAY 2025

PLENARY SESSION:

TOWARDS RESILIENCE: CLIMATE ADAPTATION & MITIGATION IN ARAB AND EUROPEAN CITIES

Panel Members:

- H.E. Eng. Ammar Musa Kazem, Mayor of Baghdad
- Mr. Mounir Limouri, Mayor of Tangier
- Mr. Andreas Wolter, Mayor of Cologne
- Ms. Minna Arve, Mayor of Turku

Moderator:

Dr. Jordi Vaquer, Secretary General of Metropolis



Climate change is no longer a future risk—it is a present reality. This session brought together mayors from four diverse cities at the frontlines of adaptation and mitigation to share how climate resilience is being embedded into policy, planning, and partnerships. Moderated by Dr. Jordi Vaquer, the conversation bridged regional differences to underscore one clear message: cities are not just reactors to the climate crisis—they are drivers of the solutions.

Eng. Ammar Musa Kazem, Mayor of Baghdad began with a stark reflection on the scale of environmental strain facing his city. With 10,000 tons of waste produced daily and limited sanitation infrastructure, Baghdad is turning to renewable energy solutions to convert waste into power. A series of new green belts, afforestation projects, and solar-powered facilities mark a shift towards sustainability in a city under increasing pressure from heat and pollution.

Mayor Mounir Limouri described Tangier's integrated approach to water resilience. With 95% of the city's irrigation now using treated wastewater and new dam infrastructure in place, Tangier is positioning itself as a leader in climate-conscious development. As the city prepares to host major international events, these investments ensure that economic opportunity and environmental responsibility go hand in hand. "We do not separate development from resilience," Limouri said. "They must progress together."

From Germany, Mayor Andreas Wolter of Cologne offered a powerful example of how public mobilization can accelerate climate policy. Following the city's 2019 climate emergency declaration and the catastrophic 2021 floods, a citizen petition triggered the adoption of a 2035 climate neutrality goal. Now, Cologne is rolling out Europe's largest urban heat pump, mandating solar panels on thousands of rooftops each year, and introducing regulations that center sustainability across all city operations.

Mayor Minna Arve of Turku presented Finland's most climate-ambitious city. Already reducing emissions by 70%, Turku is on track to reach carbon neutrality by 2029. "We are doing this together with our people," she said, highlighting over 50 local climate agreements signed with businesses. Arve stressed that cities need not wait for national frameworks—impact can be local, immediate, and deeply collaborative.

From heat stress to flood defense, energy reform to public trust, the panel made one thing clear: resilience is not an isolated policy track—it must infuse every part of the urban system.



Climate change is not the future. It is the present. It's happening. Its effects are already with us. And therefore, there is no alternative to doing both - adapting and mitigating the effects of climate change."

– Dr. Jordi Vaquer, Secretary General of Metropolis

The session embodied AECD 2025's purpose: equipping cities to lead through knowledge exchange, not by copying models, but by shaping locally grounded solutions together.

Key Takeaways:

- **Waste and Water as Assets** – Baghdad and Tangier are rethinking waste and water systems to create circular, climate-ready cities.
- **People Drive Policy** – Citizen-led initiatives in Cologne are reshaping urban climate targets and timelines.
- **Private Sector Partnerships Work** – Turku's climate agreements with local businesses show the power of co-ownership.
- **Resilience Must Be Cross-Cutting** – Climate strategy is no longer separate from economic, health, or infrastructure policy.

PLENARY SESSION:

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IN URBAN GOVERNANCE: INSIGHTS FROM EUROPEAN AND ARAB CITIES

Panel Members:

- H.E. Mr. Mohammed Saad Al-Sahli, Director General of Manama Municipality
- Mr. Issa Kassis, Mayor of Ramallah
- Mr. Stefano Lo Russo, Mayor of Turin
- Mr. Predrag Puharić, Mayor of Sarajevo

Moderator:

Mr. Patrick Penninckx, Former Head of Information Society Department, DGI, Council of Europe



Digital transformation is no longer optional—it is the operating system of modern governance. This session explored how digital tools are enhancing public services, engaging citizens, and redefining the role of urban leadership. Moderated by Mr. Patrick Penninckx, the panel considered how cities are applying digital solutions under vastly different conditions—with a shared emphasis on trust, inclusion, and resilience.

Mayor Issa Kassis of Ramallah described digitization as an act of survival under occupation. With 65% of Palestine's population under 40, Ramallah's focus is on

building digital. Ramallah's focus is on building digital ecosystems that resonate with youth—offering free internet in public parks, AI-enabled municipal services, and a shift to paperless governance. "We don't just use the internet to download apps—we upload our reality," he said, highlighting how digitization in Ramallah is not just technical, but transformational.

Mayor Stefano Lo Russo shared Torino's digital strategy, built on five pillars: digital inclusion, data-driven governance, cybersecurity, paperless transition, and academic collaboration. With physical

access points for seniors and real-time city modelling, Torino is embedding technology into every layer of policy. “Innovation must resonate locally, not just globally,” he noted.

“**Digital transformation is not about technology—it’s about people, trust, and smarter cities.”**

— Mr. Stefano Lo Russo, Mayor of Torino

Mayor Predrag Puharić of Sarajevo highlighted how post-conflict constraints are being overcome through citizen-led innovation. Sarajevo boasts one of the highest senior internet usage rates in the region. From real-time pollution maps to AI-driven pedestrian signals designed by students, the city is using public engagement to drive digital adoption.

H.E. Mr. Mohammed Al-Sahli of Manama presented Bahrain’s AI-driven approach to urban planning. The municipality’s violation detection system has achieved more than 90% accuracy, enabling leaner governance and proactive service delivery. “The limits of AI are only the limits of our imagination,” he noted.

This session embodied AECD 2025’s spirit of practical, peer-led learning. Digital transformation is proving to be a catalyst for inclusion, efficiency, and citizen trust.



Key Takeaways:

- **Digital inclusion is foundational** – Cities are investing in physical access points and youth engagement to close the digital divide.
- **Data must drive policy** – From AI and GIS to pollution tracking, cities are linking data to service quality and trust.
- **Resilience requires innovation** – Ramallah and Sarajevo are examples of cities using digital tools to overcome deep constraints.
- **Cybersecurity and privacy are non-negotiable** – Trust in digital systems hinges on secure and transparent governance.
- **Partnerships unlock scale** – Cooperation with academia and the private sector accelerates smart, people-first innovation.

CITIES LEADERSHIP FORUM: THE FUTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF THE AECD

CLOSED SESSION - EXCLUSIVELY FOR HEADS OF DELEGATIONS

Moderator:

Dr. Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi, Founding Director of the City Diplomacy Lab



The Cities Leadership Forum at AECD 2025 brought together mayors and senior city delegates from across the Arab and European regions to co-design the next chapter of AECD. The closed roundtable served as a strategic pivot—shifting AECD from a successful debut event to a long-term platform for practical, city-led cooperation. The session focused on how AECD can evolve into a lasting mechanism for Arab European cooperation rooted in shared priorities, flexible governance, and city-led ownership.

The session opened with remarks from Dr. Anas Al Mughairy, Director General of the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), who highlighted that AECD originated from the necessity for cities to connect and collaborate. Recognizing the existing partnerships between Arab and European institutions, he emphasized the importance of AECD in carrying forward this cooperation and creating tangible results.

H.H. Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, Mayor of Riyadh and President of AUDI, delivered a keynote speech during which he emphasized the need for a platform where governors, mayors and city leaders can meet and collaborate. He stressed the importance of sustainability and long-term impact in designing the future of the AECD. He confirmed AECD will become a biennial platform, rotating between Arab and European host cities, and announced that Madrid would be the 2027 host.

Mr. José Martínez, Mayor of Madrid, then took the floor and expressed gratitude for Riyadh's hospitality. He emphasized the importance of keeping the momentum alive and said that Madrid aims to be a welcoming space for global dialogue, offering a platform for shaping the future of cities.



Participants were presented with two structural models for AECD's future. The "Agile Approach" emphasized rotating leadership, low overhead, and high flexibility. The "City Network" proposed a more institutionalized approach with a formal membership and governance framework. Cities including Amman, Aswan, and Montpellier supported the Agile model, valuing its scalability and practicality, particularly for cities with limited capacity. Dr. Youssef Shawarbah, Mayor of Amman, proposed building on existing institutions to avoid duplication. Deputy Governor Amr Lasheen of Aswan called for a secretariat focused on knowledge-sharing, not financial burdens.

After an open discussion, delegates endorsed the Agile model for its flexibility, scalability, and low administrative burden. This decision sets the stage for AECD to grow as a responsive, city-driven platform rather than a centralized institution.

Delegates also endorsed five thematic pillars to guide AECD's agenda: sustainable urban development and quality of life; economic growth and city branding; technology and digital transformation; culture and creativity; and urban resilience and crisis management.

This was aided by a poll entitled The Future of AECD, seeking delegate views on two questions. The first addressed thematic priorities:

What topic would you particularly like AECD to focus on in the future?

Of 58 total votes, 34% selected Sustainable Cities and Quality of Life, 22% voted for Technology and Digital Transformation, 21% chose Economic Growth and City Branding, 14% voted for Urban Resilience and Crises Management and 9% selected Culture and Creativity.

The second considered the types of engagement that the AECD should prioritize: *What activities should AECD focus on in the future?*

Of 48 total votes, 40% chose Joint Projects, 29% Knowledge Sharing, 19% Capacity Development, 6% AECD events, 4% Joint Advocacy and 2% voted for Awards.

Mayors and city representatives added further depth. Vienna offered to share outputs from its UN-linked initiatives, while Montpellier pledged continued support through MedCities, reinforcing the forum's multi-level value. Rabat expressed readiness to support knowledge exchange initiatives. The Deputy Mayor of Wroclaw encouraged more European participation. Cordoba emphasized technology and connectivity, while Granada and Alicante underscored the value of civic dialogue and community-led planning. Damascus and Pristina called for flexible engagement tools to support cities facing conflict recovery and institutional rebuilding. Kairouan, Tunisia, urged that cultural diversity be respected as AECD expands.

A joint research report with BCG on city-to-city cooperation was also announced, laying the groundwork for ongoing knowledge generation between forums.

The session closed with a shared commitment: AECD must remain city-led, grounded in local realities, and structured to grow with cities' ambitions—not administrative complexity.

FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

BUILDING RESILIENT AND INCLUSIVE SMART CITIES: ADVANCING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY, INNOVATION, AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Organized by UNESCWA

Panel Members:

- Ms. Marija de Wijn, Global Coordinator, Quality of Life Initiative UN Habitat, Riyadh
- Ms. Rania Hedeya, Regional Representative, UN-Habitat – Regional Office for Arab States
- Mr. Ahmad Abu Laban, City Manager, Ramallah
- Mr. Sultan Al-Kharabsheh, Executive Director of ICT, Greater Amman Municipality
- Mr. Claudius Lieven, Head of Digital-Twin Application Development Hamburg Ministry of Urban Development, Hamburg
- Mr. Faouzi Achbar, Vice-Mayor, Rotterdam

Moderator:

Dr. Sukaina Al-Nasrawi, Lead of the Sustainable Urban Development Portfolio, UNESCWA



This session focused on the growing momentum behind digital transformation in Arab cities—and the urgent need to ensure it delivers on inclusion, quality of life, and local relevance. While cities across the region are actively piloting smart initiatives, from digital citizen engagement in Ramallah to AI planning in Amman, many continue to face foundational gaps in governance, infrastructure, and long-term coordination.

Speakers emphasized that digital transformation must not be an end, but a means to empower people and solve real urban challenges—from mobility and safety to service delivery and accountability. "Smart" must mean inclusive, accessible, and adaptive—not just high-tech.

A central theme was the importance of context-aware innovation. Unlike some European cities with established digital ecosystems, Arab cities often navigate fragmented systems and resource constraints. Tailored roadmaps, early investment, and capacity-building—especially for youth and municipal staff—are critical to progress.

The case of Ramallah illustrated the potential of sustained digital efforts: over four years, the city invested in infrastructure upgrades, digital literacy programs, and public library tech courses. Yet the session also highlighted the need for stronger cross-sector partnerships, ethical data practices, and open-source tools to build trust and resilience.

The Rotterdam and Hamburg case studies presented two distinct but complementary models of people-centered digital transformation in urban governance. Rotterdam, with its population representing around 180 nationalities, emphasized the importance of inclusion and accessibility in its digital strategy. Despite limited resources, the city has leveraged community infrastructure—such as public libraries—to deliver tech literacy training and bridge the digital divide. Its focus on strategic, small-scale interventions earned it the “Seed of Excellence” award, recognizing its commitment to using technology in service of all residents.

Hamburg, by contrast, showcased a more mature digital ecosystem, underpinned by early investments dating back to 2011. The city has embedded digital services into its urban planning processes, supported by robust governance



structures and a commitment to transparency through open data. Hamburg’s model illustrates how long-term planning and data integration can enhance service delivery and public trust.

UN-Habitat’s reflections reinforced these insights, urging cities to prioritize quality of life over technological novelty. True smart city development, the speaker noted, hinges on inclusive design, ethical governance, and the co-creation of solutions with citizens, academia, and the private sector. Complementing this, the Quality of Life discussion stressed the need to address digital skills gaps, infrastructure inequality, and device access while using tools like digital twins to foster trust and engagement.

Across all contributions, the shared message was clear: impact matters more than innovation, and digital transformation must be shaped by local needs and human outcomes. For AECD cities, digital transformation is most powerful when it starts from the ground up and centers on civic trust.

Key Takeaways:

- **People-first digital strategies** – Tech should enhance access, safety, participation, and service delivery.
- **Context matters** – Arab cities face distinct challenges and must design smart roadmaps accordingly.
- **Cross-sector coordination** – Stronger governance, ethical data use, and partnerships build trust and resilience.
- **Digital transformation is not the same as tech for tech’s sake** – It’s about inclusive change that improves quality of life.

FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CITIES UNDER CLIMATE STRESS

Organized by SALAR International

Panel Members:

- Ms. Sofia Avdeitchikova, Board Member, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)
- Mr. Emanuel Toft, Climate Adaptation Strategist, City of Malmö
- Mr. Ryan Knox, Managing Director, SALAR International
- Mr. Alex Cochrane, Technical Director, Sweco International

Moderator:

Björn Kavalkov-Halvarsson, Deputy Head of Mission at the Swedish Embassy in Saudi Arabia.



This session brought to life the AECD 2025 theme of shared tools for shared challenges, offering real-world case studies and policy models that can support cities navigating climate stress. Hosted by SALAR International, the forum drew on Swedish municipal experience and global partnerships to present scalable models for local resilience—especially in the face of extreme heat, water scarcity, and infrastructure vulnerability.

Ms. Sofia Avdeitchikova introduced SALAR’s national role, representing 290 municipalities and 20 regions across Sweden. She highlighted the “Klimatlådan” toolkit—an adaptable, hands-on suite of roadmaps, dashboards, and citizen engagement tools developed to help local governments turn climate goals into actionable

plans. The lesson is clear: effective local climate action begins with hands-on support and empowering those closest to the impacts.

Mr. Emanuel Toft provided a detailed look at Malmö’s data-driven adaptation efforts. The city has developed a heat vulnerability index that combines health, socio-economic, and environmental exposure factors to map risk by neighborhood. This has directly informed Malmö’s green infrastructure strategy, which follows the “3-30-300” rule: every home should have a view of at least three trees, each area should aim for 30% canopy cover, and no resident should live more than 300 meters from a park.

Mr. Ryan Knox framed local resilience as fundamentally a governance challenge. SALAR’s work in Tunisia through the SymbioCity approach—especially in the cities of Mahdia and El Mourouj—illustrated how participatory planning and tactical urbanism can deliver both climate results and community trust. Real transformation was seen when cities let citizens lead—testing ideas in small ways, but with big impact.

Mr. Alex Cochrane of Sweco International brought a development lens, advocating for nature-based solutions, locally driven planning, and value chains that generate green jobs. Presenting case studies from Saudi Arabia and Rwanda, he emphasized the importance of integrating traditional knowledge into modern planning frameworks and aligning resilience with livelihood creation.

Effective adaptation requires more than data and policy—it requires trust, partnerships, and community-led action.

Key Takeaways:

- **Toolkits work when rooted locally** – Sweden’s Klimatlådan is a model for data-driven, citizen-facing climate planning.
- **Green infrastructure must be targeted** – Malmö’s heat vulnerability mapping guides real-time urban greening.
- **Governance is climate’s missing link** – Resilience planning must empower local authorities with institutional flexibility.
- **Tactical urbanism builds legitimacy** – Pilot projects in Tunisia show how small, visible interventions can shift public trust.
- **Inclusive models are scalable** – From Malmö to Mahdia, the SymbioCity approach proves adaptable across regions.

FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

SHAPING SUSTAINABLE, LIVABLE CITIES: ENVIRONMENTAL DIALOGUES

Organized by Quality of Life Program

Panel Members:

- Ms. Maria Vassilakou, Former Deputy Mayor and Deputy Governor of Vienna
- Mr. Florent-Serge Stora, Director of International and Mediterranean Relations, Nice Metropolis
- Dr. Abdulaziz Alzahrani, Advisor to the Mayor of Jeddah

Moderator:

Dr. Alsaleh Sugati, Director of Advanced Analytics and Research, Quality of Life Program

This high-impact session tackled one of the most pressing questions for urban futures: how can cities remain livable as temperatures rise, green space shrinks, and urban form hardens? The panel explored data-driven solutions and human-centered strategies for creating cooler, healthier, and more connected cities.

Dr. Sugati opened by sharing striking satellite

data from Riyadh, Jeddah, and Al Khobar, demonstrating how urban growth patterns between 2016 and 2023 have intensified heat stress. Areas that were once temperature-neutral are now thermal hotspots. The Quality of Life Program aims to place these cities in the world’s top 100 by 2030—an ambition that requires rethinking infrastructure, policy, and public space.



Solutions discussed ranged from compact, shade-producing urban fabric and water features to cool materials and smart tree planting. A standout insight: urban trees in protected zones thrive 10–20 years longer than in exposed ones—demonstrating the need for strategic placement, not just quantity.

Mr. Florent-Serge Stora and Dr. Alzahrani presented complementary approaches: Stora described Nice’s 5 km “green wave” reconnecting the city to its waterfront, while Alzahrani pointed to Riyadh’s Sports Boulevard and Green Riyadh projects as models for integrated greening and cooling.

Ms. Vassilakou highlighted that creating walkable, shaded pathways is essential to improving urban livability—particularly in hot climates where uncovered sidewalks can cause significant discomfort. By improving regulations to activate the often-overlooked spaces between buildings and pavements,



municipalities can transform small land pockets into functional elements of a larger green network. Connecting existing parks to new developments through shaded boulevards not only enhances comfort and accessibility but also defines urban quality at scale.

The conversation underlined that environmental sustainability must also be social—making waterfronts swimmable, parks walkable, and play a core feature of urban design. This session embodied AECD 2025’s core purpose: sharing practical, place-based solutions that link climate resilience with quality of life.

Key Takeaways:

- **Urban heat must be measured and managed** – Satellite data and surface temperature analysis are guiding policy in Gulf cities.
- **Compact, shaded, green infrastructure is essential** – Urban form can either cool or compound the climate crisis.
- **Tree strategy matters more than tree count** – Placement, protection, and care determine long-term cooling impact.
- **Waterfronts must be reimaged for people** – Access, play, and safety make them core to urban wellbeing.
- **Global lessons need local grounding** – From Vienna to Jeddah, climate-sensitive design is a shared imperative.

FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

DIGITALIZATION FOR BETTER URBAN GOVERNANCE

Organized by AMPCC & AUDI

Panel Members:

- Ms. Souad Zaidi, Secretary General of Association Marocaine Des Presidents de Conseils Communaux (AMPCC)
- Mr. Abdessamad, Director General of Services, Rabat Municipality
- Mr. Jordi Cortés Roldan, Barcelona City Council
- Mr. Mohamed El Ghailani, Deputy Mayor of Tangier
- Mr. Patrick Penninckx, former Head of the Information Society Department, Council of Europe

Moderator:

Dr. Montaser Hiyari, Director of Capacity Development and Training, AUDI



Digital transformation is no longer a future aspiration, but a present-day necessity for building cities that are responsive, inclusive, and resilient. This session, organized by the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) and AMPCC, brought together leading voices in municipal innovation to explore how cities are translating digital policy into practical, community-centered governance.

This session featured case studies from Rabat, Barcelona, and Tangier. Each speaker illustrated how digital tools are reshaping city operations, improving service delivery, and engaging residents in governance decisions.

Barcelona's experience stood out as a model of comprehensive urban digitalization. Its strategic pillars, ranging from open-source

software to ethical data governance, have been formalized through initiatives like *Barcelona Fàcil*, a €7.8 million plan to simplify procedures, enhance access, and improve regulatory transparency. As Cortés noted, “We aim for 95% of services to be digitized by 2027, but always with people, not just platforms, in mind.” Digital inclusion and user-centered design are central to the city’s effort to remove bureaucratic barriers while maintaining in-person options for those who need them.

Rabat’s case study demonstrated how Morocco’s capital is leveraging digital governance to accelerate decentralization. Through the creation of a unified digital administrative system and targeted investments in connectivity and open data, Rabat has anchored its transformation in national development goals while customizing them to local needs.

Patrick Penninckx emphasized the importance of community-centric digitalization. He drew lessons from Helsinki, Tallinn, and Barcelona, showing how ethical AI, participatory budgeting platforms, and digital literacy initiatives can enhance public trust.

This session operationalized AECD 2025’s vision of inclusive, future-ready urbanism. It highlighted how cities can navigate digital risks such as the digital divide or over-reliance on automation by grounding innovation in human needs and community values.

Key Takeaways:

- **Digitalization with a Human Lens** – Prioritize accessibility, transparency, and user-centered design in urban digital strategies.
- **Barcelona Fàcil as a Flagship Model** – Simplification of processes and support for hybrid access can enhance citizen satisfaction and administrative efficiency.
- **Community-Centric Transformation** – Civic tech must facilitate feedback loops, allowing cities to respond dynamically to resident needs.
- **Governance Over Infrastructure** – Digital success hinges on ethical data use, inclusive participation, and institutional capacity, not just smart infrastructure.



FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

FROM DATA TO IMPACT: HOW VOLUNTARY LOCAL REVIEWS & SDG LOCALIZATION DRIVE DEVELOPMENT IN CITIES

Organized by UN-Habitat ROAS

Panel Members:

- Eng. Laila Youssef, Director, Directorate of International Programs and Development, Greater Irbid Municipality
- Mr. Daniel Garcia Ibarrola, Deputy Mayor and Delegate for Sustainability and Environment, President of the public company for water management, City of Córdoba
- Eng. Amal El-Alfy, Director, Informal Settlements Development, Urban Development, and Infrastructure Projects, Port Said Governorate
- Mr. Ahmad Soliman, Participatory Governance Expert, VNG International

Moderator:

Ms. Rania Hedeya, Regional Director A.I., UN-Habitat – ROAS



This session spotlighted the transformative role of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and sustainable development goal (SDG) localization in driving accountable, community-focused development across Arab and European cities. Hosted by UN-Habitat ROAS, the conversation underscored how better data, stronger governance, and clearer investment pipelines are essential for cities aiming to accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda.

The SDG Cities Global Initiative, now active in 102 cities across 39 countries, was highlighted as a structured pathway to improve planning, service delivery, and financing. At its core is a three-part process: data, planning, and investment. Participants were invited onboard by forming city task forces, identifying gaps, and linking their VLRs directly to high-impact, fundable projects.

Speakers addressed key structural challenges that continue to hinder local progress—including disconnected national policies, limited access to disaggregated data, and financing barriers. The VLR model was presented as a solution not just for monitoring progress, but for real-time strategic planning grounded in the lived realities of citizens.

The session also showcased the Arab Mayors Academy, a capacity-building initiative developed by UNESCWA and UN-Habitat. Its goal: to equip Arab city leaders with the tools to lead effectively, align global goals with local priorities, and champion people-centered urban diplomacy. With its second cohort launching soon, the Academy exemplifies how peer learning and leadership development can sustain meaningful transformation.

The SDGs won't be achieved globally without local action. For AECD cities, embedding data-driven VLRs into urban planning is no longer optional—it's a powerful tool to secure funding, gain international recognition, and build a more inclusive urban future.

Key Takeaways:

- **VLRs as a strategic tool** – More than a reporting mechanism, VLRs link data to investment-ready, people-first urban strategies.
- **SDG Cities Initiative** – A proven framework for cities to access funding, improve planning, and scale results.
- **Bridging gaps** – Localization helps overcome fragmentation between policy, data, and delivery.
- **Arab Mayors Academy** – Building local leadership capacity to lead sustainable, diplomatic, and resilient cities.
- **Localizing global goals** – The SDGs must be grounded in city realities through inclusive, adaptive, and evidence-based action.

FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

FUTURE-READY CITIES: INSIGHTS FOR IMPACT

Organized by Boston Consulting Group (BCG)

Panel Members:

- Mr. Vladislav Boutenko, Managing Director and Senior Partner, BCG
- Ms. Yvonne Zhou, Managing Director and Senior Partner, BCG
- Dr. Ziad Alameddine, Director of Urban Policy Research Program, AUDI
- Mr. Nikola Barbutov, Deputy Mayor of Sofia
- Mr. Mounir Laymouri, Mayor of Tangier
- Ms. Marifrán Carazo Villalonga, Mayor of Granada
- Mr. Akram Awad, Managing Director and Partner, BCG

Moderator:

Mr. Benjamin Deschietere, Managing Director and Partner, Leader for Cities & Real Estate for Middle East, Europe and South America, BCG



This forward-looking session, hosted by BCG and AUDI, unpacked the major shifts redefining how cities plan, invest, and collaborate. Framed around the joint BCG–AUDI “Bridging Cities: Exploring Solutions for Shared Challenges” report, the discussion traced how digital transformation, climate risk, and fiscal stress are converging—and how Arab and European cities can respond together.

Opening the session, Mr. Benjamin Deschietere delivered a sweeping view of why this dialogue matters. He pointed out that while cities now account for nearly 90% of economic growth, their financial tools and policy frameworks have not kept pace. The report highlights a \$93 trillion urban infrastructure need by 2040, with cities bearing 70% of the cost burden—yet lacking direct financial autonomy. The message was clear: collaboration and innovation must replace isolated reform.

Dr. Alameddine provided a striking diagnosis of climate resilience challenges. While European cities face floods and wildfires, many Arab cities contend with accelerating drought and water stress. In both contexts, the problem is not awareness but coordination, with climate action still siloed across departments. Dr. Alameddine also pointed out that the data cities rely on is outdated or incomplete. He advocated for standardized climate risk assessments and integrating resilience into urban planning by default.

From a financial standpoint, Mr. Nikola Barbutov shared Sofia’s dilemma: the city contributes over 45% to Bulgaria’s GDP but entrepreneurially—monetizing land, developing city ventures, and leveraging public–private partnerships.

Digital transformation emerged as a second pillar. According to survey results presented by Akram Awad, 93% of citizens expect public services to match private-sector standards—but 70% of city leaders feel they are falling behind. The session concluded with a call for scalable, practical strategies co-developed across cities and regions.

This session brought AECD 2025’s objectives to life: deepening Arab European cooperation, bridging digital and climate divides, and positioning cities as co-authors of global transformation.

Key Takeaways:

- **Cities are fiscally constrained but growing in responsibility** – Most bear infrastructure burdens without matching financial power.
- **Climate risk needs systemic integration** – Risk assessments and resilience strategies must be embedded across planning and departments.
- **Digital maturity remains uneven** – Cities must accelerate AI adoption, citizen-centric services, and cross-sector digital governance.
- **C2C collaboration is critical** – Tangier–Seoul, Amman–Barcelona, and other partnerships show how peer learning translates into action.
- **Entrepreneurial city models are emerging** – From monetizing assets to launching innovation hubs, cities are evolving beyond service delivery.

DAY 3 – TUESDAY 13 MAY 2025

PLENARY SESSION:

LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INVESTMENT: STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN GROWTH

Panel Members:

- H.E. Major General Moheb Habashi Khalil, Governor of Port Said
- H.E. Mr. Ahmed Al Humaidi, Mayor of Muscat
- Mr. Charalambos Prountzos, Mayor of Nicosia
- Ms. Anouch Toranian, Councilor of Paris, Metropolitan Councilor and Deputy Mayor of Paris

Moderator:

Ms. Maria Vassilakou, Former Vice Mayor and Vice Governor of Vienna



Cities aren't just adapting to economic change—they're shaping it. This session explored how local governments are repositioning themselves as engines of opportunity, investment, and inclusive growth. The discussion captured the energy of cities taking ownership of their economic futures, using every tool at their disposal to unlock innovation and resilience.

H.E. Mr. Al Humaidi shared how Muscat is driving a new model of development by harnessing public-private partnerships to deliver everything from landscaping to cultural infrastructure. The result? Greater efficiency, better services, and more room for local entrepreneurs to

grow. He pointed to performance-based contracts and local content quotas that are creating jobs and building capacity.

Major General Moheb Habashi Khalil offered a bold vision for Port Said's economic renewal—one that goes beyond logistics to reimagine the city as a center for smart industry, culture, and tourism. Mr. Charalambos Prountzos highlighted Nicosia's transformation through cross-border cooperation, citing knowledge-sharing with Vienna on waste-to-energy systems and inclusive digital strategies. "We're not just importing best practices," he said, "we're co-creating them."

Ms. Anouch Toranian brought Paris into focus

“

We are no longer service providers—we are enablers of opportunity.”

— H.E. Mr. Ahmed Al Humaidi,
Mayor of Muscat

through the lens of the Olympic Games. With over 95% of infrastructure already in place, the Games became a launchpad for long-term change—reclaiming the River Seine for swimming, investing in underserved neighborhoods, and embedding accessibility across the city. “It’s about transformation, not spectacle,” she explained.

This session underscored AECD’s mission: cities as laboratories of change, where economic strategy meets social impact—and where local leadership is the difference between surviving and thriving.

Key Takeaways:

- **Partnerships as Policy** – Muscat’s use of PPPs is creating efficient services and meaningful local employment.
- **Events as Catalysts** – Paris turned the Olympics into a tool for accessibility, regeneration, and green infrastructure.
- **Cities as Investment Hubs** – Port Said and Nicosia are rebranding through innovation, industry, and international cooperation.
- **Knowledge Exchange in Action** – Nicosia’s collaboration with Vienna is accelerating inclusive and sustainable urban strategies.
- **Inclusive Growth by Design** – Each city is building not just for the economy—but for the people who power it.

URBAN FINANCING FORUM

Together with
metropolis ●

SESSION 1: INSIGHTS FROM FUNDING INSTITUTIONS

Opening Remarks:

- Dr. Jordi Vaquer, Secretary General of Metropolis

- Mr. Wola Asase, Deputy Director, Head of Syndications, Africa Finance Corporation (AFC)

Panel Members:

- Ms. Nneka Henry, Head, UN Road Safety Fund Secretariat and Office of the UN Secretary General’s Special Envoy for Road Safety
- Eng. Bandar bin Abdullah Al-Obaid, Director General of MENA Operations, Saudi Fund for Development (SFD)
- Mr. Stefan Atchia, Manager, Urban Development, African Development Bank (AfDB)

Moderator:

Dr. Kyle Farrell, Senior Urban & Regional Economist, UN-Habitat Saudi Arabia Office

Rapidly urbanizing cities face a critical challenge: closing the financing gap needed to keep pace with growing demands for services, maintain existing infrastructure, and expand coverage to reach more residents.

Urban finance is essential to addressing this challenge. Effective governance and sound financial management strengthen transparency, accountability, and the efficient use of limited resources. When well implemented, urban finance fosters economic sustainability and promotes inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban growth.

To accelerate the delivery of infrastructure and municipal services, cities must leverage the full range of available instruments: increasing public funding, adopting appropriate financing mechanisms, and attracting investors to develop new projects.

In this regard, the first Urban Financing Forum, jointly organized by the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) and Metropolis, was held during the AECD on May 13, 2025. The forum brought together Arab and European cities, development finance institutions, and public and private investors to explore opportunities and strategies for financing and investing in urban and municipal projects.

This initiative drew inspiration from the successful *Investment Forum for Sustainable Metropolises* at the Urban Summit in Brussels in 2023. In his opening remarks, Dr. Jordi highlighted the forum's aim to:

- Establish a platform for open dialogue between Arab and European cities and potential financial partners, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration.
- Promote knowledge-sharing and exchange of best practices on urban financing challenges and innovative solutions.
- Link city-led projects to appropriate funding and financing sources, including project preparation facilities, donors, and diverse financial instruments and mechanisms.

Following opening remarks, an insightful session brought together major development finance institutions to explore how cities can position their projects for long-term capital access.

Eng. Bandar bin Abdullah Al-Obaid emphasized the importance of starting with a clear needs assessment to ensure project relevance. He urged local governments to define priorities in alignment with national development plans and SDGs, supported by feasibility studies, dedicated implementation teams, and the use of global indicators. He stressed that the SFD does not fund projects lacking comprehensive documentation or public-sector endorsement, and called for strong governance and technical preparation to reduce implementation risk.

Mr. Stefan Atchia and Mr. Wola Asase echoed the importance of project pipeline quality, noting that well-prepared proposals—especially those with multi-sectoral impact and solid economic justification—are best positioned to attract blended finance.

Ms. Nneka Henry highlighted the UN Road Safety Fund's model of strategic, high-impact investment in urban mobility, emphasizing that road safety should be embedded in urban design—not treated as an afterthought. AFC outlined its investment logic: projects must meet developmental impact criteria while offering returns to attract commercial partners.

A recurring theme was the value of integrated planning—aligning local, national, and global strategies to attract diverse financing sources. Cross-sector collaboration and enabling policy environments were seen as vital to scale up successful models.

Development financiers want to invest in cities—but only if cities bring coherent, impactful, and financially sound proposals to the table. Preparation and alignment are non-negotiable.



Session Key Takeaways:

- Financial institutions prioritize aligned, well-prepared, and scalable urban projects.
- Begin with a thorough **needs assessment** grounded in citizen priorities and service gaps.
- Embedding safety, inclusion, and sustainability early boosts funding prospects.
- Public-private partnerships thrive in environments with clear legal frameworks and fiscal discipline.
- Technical support for feasibility and design is often available. Cities should ask.
- Cities must treat project preparation as an investment, not an administrative step.

URBAN FINANCING FORUM

Together with
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SESSION 2: CITY-LED PROJECT PITCHES

Panel Members:

- Ms. Nneka Henry, Head, UN Road Safety Fund Secretariat and Office of the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for Road Safety
- Eng. Bandar bin Abdullah Al-Obaid, Director General of MENA Operations, Saudi Fund for Development
- Mr. Nasiru Braimah, Associate Vice President of Capital Mobilization and Partnerships, Africa Finance Corporation, African Finance Corporation
- Eng. Neji Larbi, Urban Mobility Specialist, African Development Bank

Moderators:

- Dr. Kyle Farrell, Senior Urban & Regional Economist, UN-Habitat Saudi Arabia Office
- Ms. Karen Maguire, Head of Local Employment and Economic Development Program, OECD

City Presentations:

- Le PROJET DE Ligne DE TRAMWAY T4 – Nice: **Mr. Florent-Serge Stora**, Director of International and Mediterranean Relations, Nice Metropolis
- Zero Waste Project & Beautification of the City of Djibouti: **Ms. Saida Zayn Ahmed**, Deputy Director of Technical Services, Djibouti City
- Municipal Solid Waste Sorting Plant - Ramallah: **Ms. Irene Sade**, Head of Sustainable Development Unit, Municipality of Ramallah, Palestine
- Restoration of the Red Mill – Chişinău: **Mr. Bogdan Kazaku**, Head of Department of Foreign Relations, and **Mr. Victor Buzu**, Project Manager of General Development for Architecture

- Madrid Nuevo Norte - Madrid: **Mr. José Luis Martínez-Almeida Navasqués**, Mayor of Madrid and **Mr. Sergio Criado**, CFO and Head of Investor Relations, Crea Madrid Nuevo Norte
- Humanizing Streets 6 & 8 - Dammam: **Eng. Sarah Ismail Al Jabri**, Architect and Creative Director, Eastern Province Municipality
- Towards a bicycle friendly Erbil City - Erbil: **Dr. Dilzar Bakar Kadir**, Consultant and Civil Engineer, Erbil Bicycle-Friendly City Project
- Implementation of a Regional Climate Adaptation Fund – Nouakchott: **Ms. Khadijetou Hamed**, Head of Division of the Decentralized Cooperation at the Nouakchott Region

The second session of the Urban Financing Forum brought together a diverse group of city leaders to present live investment pitches for urban infrastructure, resilience, and mobility initiatives. Eight cities showcased their projects, ranging from large-scale regeneration to community-driven climate adaptation. The session was attended by institutional representatives from the UN Road Safety Fund, Saudi Fund for Development, African Finance Corporation, and African Development Bank, who provided feedback and recommendations after each presentation.

Nice, France: T4 Tramway Project

Presenter: Mr. Florent-Serge Stora, Director of International and Mediterranean Relations, Nice Metropolis

The City of Nice presented the T4 Tramway Line Project, a large-scale mobility and urban regeneration initiative designed to strengthen regional connectivity and advance sustainable development. Positioned as a strategic infrastructure investment, the line will link the second economic hub of the Nice Côte d'Azur Metropolis with Nice's existing tramway network, international airport, and future high-speed train station.

The project is expected to serve 80,000 residents, support 27,000 jobs, and accommodate 40,000 passengers per day. It includes the redevelopment of 250,000 square meters of urban space, planting of more than 1,200 trees, and installation of 30,000 square meters of green track platform. The initiative also integrates energy recovery systems, renewable energy sources, and sustainable water management, with projected annual emissions savings of 4,500 tons of carbon dioxide. The project aligns with the UN SDGs and has been awarded HQE Infrastructure certification.

Construction is set to begin in 2026, with phased launches planned for 2028 and 2030. Of the €360 million total cost, €44.71 million has been secured from national and regional sources. Additional financing is being sought to close the funding gap.

Feedback: Institutions recommended early resolution of land ownership and planning issues to prevent implementation delays and emphasized the importance of cross-sector coordination among electricity, water, drainage, and municipal authorities. To strengthen bankability, the project team was advised to clearly justify cost drivers behind the €360 million budget, provide a cost breakdown including private sector equity, and include traffic impact metrics such as projected commuter time savings. Reviewers also suggested highlighting the rationale for route selection and demonstrating community-specific benefits. For broader development impact, the project should present a replicable, cost-effective model adaptable to other regions, particularly in the Global South.

Djibouti, Djibouti: Zero Waste and Beautification Project

Presenter: Ms. Saida Zayn Ahmed, Deputy Director of Technical Services

Djibouti City presented a zero waste and city beautification project rooted in a mayoral initiative that incorporated field analysis and citizen feedback.

The project responds to high waste consumption, lack of management infrastructure, and rapid urban growth. It consists of three components: (A) waste collection, recycling, and field cleaning; (B) city beautification including gardens, playgrounds, and roundabouts; and (C) training municipal staff, community engagement, and project impact assessment. The project is estimated to cost \$15 million, with 20% already committed by public and private donors.

Key stakeholders include City Hall, national ministries, and NGOs such as UNICEF and IGAT. A strong focus is placed on youth engagement, particularly among those aged 20–25, to promote project sustainability.

Feedback: Panelists recommended exploring waste-to-biofuel conversion as a potential revenue stream, engaging with UNEP and UN-Habitat for climate-related funding and technical expertise, and examining the introduction of a social environmental tax to support long-term financing.

Ramallah, Palestine: Municipal Solid Waste Sorting Plant

Presenter: Ms. Irene Sade, Head of Sustainable Development Unit

The city of Ramallah presented this project which will serve as a local waste management system, focusing on sorting and processing waste to reduce the volume that must be transferred to distant landfills. By sorting waste, we can optimize recycling efforts, reduce environmental impact, and create economic opportunities for the local community.

The planned development covers a land area of 40 dunums, with a 2,700 m² building footprint. It will include a designated storage area for waste bales, integration of solar energy systems, and MSW sorting lines capable of processing 500 tons per day. The operational area will be equipped with all necessary machinery to ensure efficient waste separation.

The environmental benefits are substantial. Waste reduction measures are expected to cut transportation needs by 70–75% and mitigate 4–5 tons of CO₂ emissions daily. The facility will also reduce dependency on landfills, establish a more sustainable and efficient waste management system, and improve pollution control measures in the region.

Feedback: The panelists highlighted the importance of building a clear governance structure for operational success. The proposal should specify who will own, operate, and maintain the facility, as well as the roles of local municipalities, private operators, and community stakeholders. Outlining staff training plans and quality control procedures would help ensure consistent performance and accountability.

Chişinău, Moldova: Restoration of the Red Mill

Presenters: Mr. Bogdan Kazaku, Head of Department of Foreign Relations, and Mr. Victor Buzu, Project Manager of General Development for Architecture

The project aims to restore heritage buildings, with a focus on including the RED Mill in the "Circuit of the Creative Industries." The restoration will benefit various groups, such as creative communities, small businesses, local neighborhoods, and nearby schools. The process comprises three key components: assessment, design, and implementation. Supported by the INTERREG program, the project began in January 2024 and is scheduled to end in July 2026. Currently, efforts are focused on gathering information and technical specifications about the building's present state.

This initiative is expected to raise awareness of the importance of heritage buildings and revitalize the surrounding neighborhood. Stakeholders will benefit from a vibrant, restored building replacing derelict ruins, with new activities available for nearby school pupils and the addition of an exhibition space. The project is also anticipated to generate municipal revenue, contributing to a circular

fund. Success will be measured by the revenue from a ground floor cafe/restaurant, the number of pupils participating in organized activities, and the volume of co-working space users.

The estimated cost for the project stands at roughly 3 million Euros. Secured funding already covers essential studies, including photogrammetry, topographical, geological, archaeological, and architectural-historical studies, as well as technical expertise and architectural sketches. However, short-term financing is still needed for the restoration project and its associated expenses. Once completed, the site aims to generate ongoing revenue through a cafe or brewery and co-working spaces.

Feedback: The inclusion of comprehensive studies—photogrammetry, topographical, geological, archaeological, and architectural-historical—is commendable and critical for minimizing risks related to structural integrity, historical preservation standards, and regulatory compliance. Panelists suggested ongoing collaboration with these experts throughout the restoration construction phase to promptly address unforeseen technical challenges.

Madrid, Spain: Nuevo Norte

Presenters: Mr. José Luis Martínez-Almeida Navasqués, Mayor of Madrid and Mr. Sergio Criado, CFO and Head of Investor Relations, Crea Madrid Nuevo Norte

As Madrid's largest urban regeneration initiative, Madrid Nuevo Norte is set to transform the city's core high-speed rail hub and surrounding brownfield areas into a vibrant, hyperconnected, dense, and compact mixed-use district. This ambitious redevelopment aims to set a new standard for sustainable central business districts (CBDs) in Europe, integrating social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

The project focuses on repurposing a three-hectare urban barrier consisting of railway and industrial land into a green, livable, walkable,

and cyclable central business district. Positioned at the economic heart of Madrid, this new district will cater to the emerging "new economy" by fostering innovative and diverse business activities within a sustainable urban environment.

Covering an expansive area of 2.3 million square meters (excluding the ring road and rail yard), Madrid Nuevo Norte is designed to maximize synergy between mass public transport and business activities. Its strategic location ensures excellent connectivity: international access with the airport just 15 minutes away, national reach with major Spanish cities within three hours by train, and the ability for five million people to access the district within one hour locally.

The development operates under a robust framework agreement featuring structured legal, technical, and administrative coordination.



حوار المدن العربية الأوروبية
ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES DIALOGUE
Riyadh 2025



أمانة منطقة الرياض
RIYADH REGION MUNICIPALITY



It is promoted through an efficient public-private partnership model that involves collaboration across all government levels, ensuring a cohesive and well-managed delivery process.

Madrid Nuevo Norte is recognized as a flagship project in Madrid’s UN-Habitat Voluntary Local Review and is a partner in European Commission innovation research initiatives. The district has also earned the designation of ‘Low-Carbon Demonstration Zone’ by City Hall, underscoring its commitment to sustainability. These public-private coordination agreements further enhance the project’s integration with broader urban and environmental goals.

Feedback: Experts stated that the project strongly aligned with best practices for sustainable urban regeneration, including social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Its dense, compact, and multimodal transport-connected design fits well with current urban development financing priorities emphasizing reduced carbon footprint and increased accessibility.

Dammam, Saudi Arabia: Humanizing Streets 6 & 8

Presenter: Eng. Sarah Ismail Al Jabri, Architect and Creative Director, Eastern Province Municipality

The Humanizing Streets 6 & 8 initiative in Al Shati Al Sharqi, at the heart of Dammam, seeks to redefine these traditionally vehicle-dominated corridors as inclusive, walkable, and vibrant urban streets prioritizing people instead of cars. Historically designed to serve transit traffic, these streets are now being reimagined as shaded, accessible, and socially active public spaces that foster community life.

The project centers on pedestrian-centric street redesign, introducing green and shaded public areas, applying smart urban solutions, ensuring universal accessibility, and adopting community-centered design principles alongside sustainable construction methods. It aims to address challenges typical of car-centric corridors, such as urban heat islands, pedestrian safety deficits, limited greenery and shade, and underutilization of public spaces.

Its primary objectives include creating a safer and healthier environment for pedestrians, enhancing accessibility to public spaces, promoting social cohesion through inclusive design, and integrating sustainable mobility elements that align with broader urban sustainability goals.

Scheduled over three years, the initiative is currently in the planning and design phase in 2025. Infrastructure and humanization works are planned to commence in 2026,



with project launch and evaluation anticipated in 2027, ensuring a structured and phased approach to implementation.

This project complements Dammam Municipality's human-centered urban design agenda and integrates with ongoing local initiatives. On a national level, it supports Saudi Vision 2030, particularly the Quality of Life Program and the Green Saudi Initiative, contributing to sustainable urban mobility. Internationally, it advances several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): SDG 3 for health and air quality, SDG 11 for inclusive urban infrastructure, SDG 13 for climate-resilient low-carbon practices, and SDG 17 fostering partnerships among public, private, and community sectors.

The initiative employs participatory design through sessions and surveys involving residents and community groups, complemented by inter-agency technical coordination committees. Digital dashboards will facilitate project tracking, and transparent procurement and budget audits will safeguard accountability. Periodic evaluation reports aligned with SDG indicators and stakeholder satisfaction surveys will measure impact, ensuring responsiveness and transparency.

The total estimated budget for the project stands at \$13.2 million. To date, \$2.2 million in funding has been secured, leaving a funding gap of \$11 million. To bridge this, efforts are underway to attract private investments and financial support through potential partnerships with neighborhood stakeholders to ensure project sustainability and successful delivery.

Feedback: Panelists stated that the emphasis on green, shaded spaces and smart urban solutions is critical to mitigating urban heat islands and improving pedestrian safety. Universal accessibility and sustainable construction methods further enhance the project's technical robustness. Validation of these smart solutions' feasibility and long-term maintenance requirements should be ensured through rigorous technical assessments.

Erbil, Iraq: Bicycle-Friendly City Project

Presenter: Dr. Dilzar Bakar Kadir, Consultant and Civil Engineer

Erbil presented a \$7.5 million project to develop 73 kilometers of dedicated bike lanes aimed at reducing air pollution and encouraging active transportation. The project

will begin with a pilot phase connecting key institutions. Anticipated benefits include a reduced carbon footprint, decreased vehicle congestion, and improved public health. The city has already allocated \$200,000 toward planning and design.

Key challenges include high temperatures, cultural barriers to cycling, and potential land-use conflicts related to parking. The project positions itself as part of a broader sustainability agenda for Erbil, combining infrastructure investment with long-term behavioral change.

Feedback: Institutions advised distinguishing between leisure and commuting behavior to refine the project's strategy for user uptake. They recommended introducing a policy framework to encourage modal shift, such as restricting car use in key zones, and suggested developing a bike rental scheme to enhance accessibility and usage. Additional technical guidance was proposed to improve the clarity of the plan and strengthen its case for investment.

Nouakchott, Mauritania: Regional Climate Adaptation Fund

Presenter: Ms. Khadijetou Hamed, Head of Division of the Decentralized Cooperation at the Nouakchott Region

Nouakchott introduced a €10 million climate resilience project supported by the local government and international partners. The initiative aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 15%, green 100 hectares of urban space, and create 10,000 green jobs. Its components include solar lighting, urban greening, expanded water access, and mobility improvements.



The city emphasized its strong partnerships with the European Union, Spanish corporations, and global funding institutions. The project was presented as a model for sustainable urban transformation in arid climates, with a call to action for immediate investment and collaboration to address climate risks.

Feedback: Reviewers encouraged the city to further define its financial return strategy to improve the project's bankability and broaden investor interest. They also advised exploring whether a distributed solar model could yield stronger returns and more flexible implementation than centralized solar farms. Clarifying the financing logic and revenue potential will be essential to attracting blended finance.

The city-led pitch session demonstrated the breadth of urban innovation emerging across the Arab and broader international landscape—from zero-waste systems and heritage restoration to climate resilience and inclusive mobility. Each project reflected local priorities, from addressing air pollution in Erbil to reclaiming walkability in Dammam, while offering scalable models for other cities. Despite varying contexts, a common theme emerged: cities are not only ready to lead on sustainability, but are actively designing

solutions that center community well-being, resilience, and equity. What they need now is targeted support, collaborative financing, and the right partnerships to move from blueprint to reality.

Session Key Takeaways:

- **Contextual relevance matters** – Projects are most impactful when rooted in local needs, from waste systems to mobility gaps.
- **Co-benefits should be foregrounded** – Many proposals offered social, environmental, and economic returns; cities must communicate these clearly.
- **Partnerships strengthen delivery** – Cross-sector collaboration, from youth to NGOs to ministries, increases resilience and investment readiness
- **Technical planning is underway** – Several cities have already secured early-stage funding or land contributions, signaling strong local ownership.
- **Challenges remain** – From cultural norms to climate constraints, cities must continue refining strategies to overcome implementation barriers.

FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

SUCCESSFUL MULTILATERAL GOVERNANCE AND CO-CREATION PROCESSES

Organized by UNDP

Panel Members:

- Hayat Sami, Head of Cooperation and Partnerships Department, Rabat Municipality
- Mr. Luis Jose Barcala Sierra, Mayor of Alicante

Moderator:

- Mr. Carlo Castelli, Chief Technical Adviser
- Ms. Donzilia Batista, Urban Planner, UNDP-Tara Project
- Mr. Abdulrahman Alghamdi, UNDP Portfolio Manager

This session explored how cities can institutionalize co-creation and build successful governance ecosystems through multi-level collaboration, innovation, and inclusive planning. Anchored in case studies from Rabat, Morocco and Alicante, Spain, the session brought together urban leaders, planners, and city officials to reflect on practical strategies for aligning community needs with climate resilience, digital transformation, and infrastructure modernization.

The discussion emphasized the importance of moving from centralized planning models to participatory frameworks. Cities like Rabat are leading this shift by embedding citizen voice and civil society input into the heart of municipal planning through structures like the Equity and Gender Equality Council (IEEAG), thematic consultations, and inclusive planning for public services and urban renewal.

Mayor Luis José Barcala of Alicante highlighted how the city is advancing water resilience through a circular strategy that combines desalination, reclaimed water reuse, and green infrastructure. Flagship initiatives like Alicante's floodable parks and subterranean water reservoirs - some of which are topped with football fields - illustrated how public infrastructure can simultaneously address environmental stressors and enhance public space. "Most of the time, the park remains dry and accessible for all citizens to enjoy," the mayor noted, emphasizing the dual social and environmental benefits of design thinking in

water management.

Following the keynotes, participants engaged in breakout roundtables to co-develop future pathways for Arab European cooperation, focusing on citizen-centered service design, culturally sensitive public space planning, and cross-border policy development. The conversation emphasized the need for shared platforms, transparency in resource allocation, and local expertise to be central to governance reform.

This session exemplified AECD 2025's goals of deepening interregional city collaboration, scaling climate-resilient practices, and ensuring that innovation in governance serves people first. It showed how inclusive planning processes are not only possible, but necessary for creating cities that are more resilient, equitable, and future-ready.





Key Takeaways:

- **Multilevel Governance in Action** – Cities like Rabat and Alicante demonstrated how collaborative models across local, regional, and international actors can deliver inclusive outcomes.
- **Co-creation as Policy** – Rabat’s participatory planning tools ensure citizen input is embedded in city decision-making.
- **Water as a Strategic Asset** – Alicante’s circular water system including reuse, smart metering, and floodable parks, provides a blueprint for climate adaptation.
- **Design for Dual Use** – Integrating community recreation into environmental infrastructure maximizes public value.

FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

THE ROLE OF DECENTRALIZATION IN STRENGTHENING LOCAL GOVERNANCE: INSIGHTS FROM GLOBAL AND REGIONAL PRACTICES

Organized by Center for Local Governance (CLG-KSA)

Panel Members:

- H.E. Dr. Sameeh Alarabi, CEO, Center for Local Governance
- Mr. Mohammad Maaitah, Mayor of Karak City, Jordan
- Mr. Emanuel Toft, Project Research Officer, City of Malmö

Moderator:

Dr. Walaa Bunaiyan, Project Manager, CLG / Prince Sultan University

This session focused on how decentralization—done well—can unlock more efficient, responsive, and accountable local governance. Anchored in both regional realities and global comparisons, the session drew on case studies from Jordan, Sweden, and Saudi Arabia to explore how redistribution of authority, funding, and responsibility can strengthen cities' ability to plan, deliver, and innovate.

Dr. Walaa Bunaiyan opened by framing decentralization not as a loss of power, but as a strategic redistribution of it, that improves flexibility, clarity, and local responsiveness. She outlined the different forms of decentralization—administrative, fiscal, and organizational—and the conditions under which each type can support better service delivery, increased citizen engagement, and long-term financial sustainability.



Dr. Sameeh Alarabi offered a deep dive into Saudi Arabia's experience, underscoring the importance of pairing decentralization with strong institutional design. Drawing on CLG's advisory work for municipal councils and national planning agencies, he highlighted the role of intergovernmental transfers, local tax instruments, and capacity building, and emphasized that local governments need funding mechanisms, training, and clear legal frameworks.

Mayor Mohammad Maaitah brought the conversation to life with on-the-ground insight from Karak City. He noted that decentralization in Jordan had made strides, but that local authorities still faced constraints—particularly in financial decision-making. He highlighted the importance of autonomy to “act faster and budget smarter” to meet community needs, stressing the need for transparent expenditure responsibilities and equitable resource distribution.

From Sweden, Mr. Emanuel Toft described Malmö's approach to local planning, where decentralized responsibilities allow neighborhood teams to implement projects more efficiently and adapt to local conditions. He also noted the importance of data transparency and digital platforms in building trust and accountability.

A consistent message resonated throughout the session: decentralization can only succeed when responsibility, resources, and oversight move together. It also offered a bridge between AECD 2025's core goals—sharing policy innovation, strengthening local leadership, and building institutional frameworks that reflect both regional diversity and common urban challenges.

Key Takeaways:

- **Decentralization is not devolution by default** – It requires strategic redistribution of roles, funding, and oversight.
- **Financial autonomy is essential** – Local governments must have access to own-source revenues and rule-based transfers.
- **Institutional clarity prevents overlap** – Clear definitions of who does what—and who pays—improve efficiency.
- **Capacity must match responsibility** – Decentralized systems only thrive when backed by training and administrative tools.
- **Citizen trust grows with proximity** – When governance is local and accountable, engagement and service outcomes improve.



FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

BUILDING METROPOLITAN GOVERNANCE TO ENHANCE THE PROVISION OF SERVICES WITH A FOCUS ON SUSTAINABLE URBAN MOBILITY

Organized by MedCities

Panel Members:

- Clare Hart, Vice President, Montpellier Méditerranée Métropole
- Francesco Senese, City Representative of Napoli
- Adel Ben Rhouma, Secretary General of Sfax

Moderator:

Mr. Josep Canals-Molina, Secretary General of MedCities

This session explored how Mediterranean cities are forging new models of metropolitan governance to meet the shared urban challenges of our time—from climate pressure to fragmented transport and uneven service delivery. Organized by MedCities, a network of 81 local authorities from 18 Mediterranean countries, the forum emphasized that cross-municipal cooperation is no longer optional—it is essential. The MedCities model comprises a borderless, non-hierarchical map of cooperation that focuses on practical action in areas such as mobility, waste and water management, strategic planning, and social inclusion.

Ms. Clare Hart opened by underlining that “cities are not part of the problem—they are the solution.” She stressed that mobility should be considered a universal right, not a privilege, and shared Montpellier’s pioneering work in offering free public transport to all residents. This policy, Hart explained, was rooted in a simple principle: “Just as education is free, mobility should be too.” Montpellier’s strategy has made transit more accessible, reduced emissions, and sparked civic pride—particularly among young people. Yet implementing such systems, she noted, requires early and inclusive public engagement to overcome disruption and build lasting trust.

The panel explored how different forms of metropolitan governance—from institutionalized structures in Catalonia and Turkey to informal coalitions in North Africa—can strengthen service

delivery and unlock funding. Speakers shared examples of how intermunicipal cooperation enables integrated public transport systems, cohesive urban planning, and more equitable infrastructure development. Case studies from Montpellier and Naples illustrated how inclusive mobility models—such as Montpellier’s free transport and Naples’ high-speed rail access—can reduce inequality and connect fragmented regions.

Mr. Francesco Senese described Naples as a compact, coastal, and university-driven city where public transport plays a vital role, especially for its large student and youth population. The city has invested heavily in improving mobility through expanded funiculars, revitalized tram lines, and an integrated metro system with five lines, some managed jointly with national rail. Students benefit from subsidized or free fares, and tourists are supported with special transport cards. Beyond the city, Naples is developing a regional network connecting 92 surrounding municipalities via coastal rail, inland lines, and a circular route around Mount Vesuvius. A new high-speed station in the metro area has enhanced accessibility for 200,000 residents. These developments, supported by public-private partnerships, reflect Naples’ commitment to inclusive, efficient, and international-standard transport infrastructure.

The importance of aligning stakeholders around a clear purpose from the outset and



investing time in building trust to ensure effective metropolitan collaboration was emphasized, and the discussion closed with a call for long-term thinking and mutual learning.

Adel Ben Rhouma, Secretary General of Sfax, explained how Sfax, a hub of industrial and chemical activity since the 1960s, recognized the urgent need to transition from a heavily polluted industrial city to a smarter, greener, and more livable urban center. This shift includes rethinking its economic model, improving quality of life, and modernizing the transportation system, which itself is a major source of pollution. Strategic studies and the coordination of national and local political visions materialized into concrete initiatives, most notably the “Mobilité Active et Intelligente à Sfax” (Active and Smart Mobility in Sfax) project - an institutional step toward coordinating sustainable transport and reshaping urban mobility in line with ecological and economic goals.

Key Takeaways:

- **Metropolitan governance enhances resilience** – Shared structures improve infrastructure delivery, equity, and service quality.
- **City-to-city cooperation unlocks funding** – Integrated projects are more attractive to international donors and development partners.
- **Mobility is a lever for inclusion** – Free or affordable transport systems expand opportunity and reduce emissions.
- **Youth must be included early** – Cities should design systems with and for younger generations to ensure long-term relevance.
- **Trust is the foundation of progress** – Building regional collaboration takes time, clarity, and shared purpose.

FORUM FOR LOCAL ACTION:

COMMUNITY SCORE CARD: A PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE TOOL FOR ENHANCED SERVICE DELIVERY AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

Organized by VNG International

Panel Members:

- Mr. Amr Lashin – Deputy Governor, Aswan Governorate, Egypt
- Ms. Hend Abdel Halim – Deputy Governor, Giza Governorate, Egypt
- Ms. Souad Abderrahim – Former Mayor, Tunis Municipality, Tunisia

Moderator:

- Ms. Amira El-Serafy –Egypt Branch Manager, ISWS Team Leader, VNG International
- Mr. Ahmad Mehrez – Participatory Governance Expert, VNG International



This session focused on the evolving landscape of participatory local governance and explored the transformative potential of inclusive civic engagement tools, particularly the Community Score Card (CSC) model.

Led by VNG International experts Ms. Amira El-Serafy and Ahmad Mehrez, with contributions from local officials across Egypt and Tunisia, the session advanced AECD 2025's commitment to citizen empowerment, institutional trust-building, and municipal innovation through grounded, replicable practice.

The session opened with the assertion that governance today must go beyond the remit of government alone. Speakers challenged

participants to think about how power, voice, and accountability are distributed in their cities, noting that authorities continue to exercise tasks, but they do so much more in dialogue with others. Inclusive governance was framed as a necessary shift, not just a policy preference.

Through interactive discussion and polling, the session examined the reasons, risks, and realities of civic participation. The panelists reflected on how meaningful public involvement can enhance the legitimacy, effectiveness, and sustainability of local government. Yet, they also warned of the challenges: delayed decision-making,

resource intensiveness, and the risk of participation becoming a “box-ticking” exercise.

The Community Score Card emerged as a standout practice—an evidence-based, participatory tool that strengthens transparency, responsiveness, and service delivery at the local level. Used in sectors like WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene), the CSC enables residents to assess services, provide structured feedback, and engage in joint problem-solving with service providers. Unlike top-down audits, the CSC places communities at the center, using focus groups, facilitated dialogue, and scorecard rankings to foster trust and cooperation.

In Tunis, Ms. Souad Abderrahim emphasized that community engagement is essential to building trust, with CSCs serving as a bridge from consultation to genuine collaboration. Giza is actively piloting digital engagement tools, with Ms. Hend Abdel Halim noting the need for targeted training and digital support to maximize their impact. In Aswan, Mr. Amr Lashin highlighted how community scorecards are particularly valuable in underserved areas—capturing local priorities that may otherwise go

unnoticed and helping to improve the targeting and delivery of services.

The session demonstrated how local innovation can directly translate into better governance outcomes when built on inclusion, dialogue, and accountability.

Key Takeaways:

- **From Government to Governance** – Effective service delivery today depends on open, ongoing dialogue between authorities and communities.
- **Inclusive Tools Empower Citizens** – The Community Score Card is a replicable model for bottom-up accountability and improved municipal services.
- **Participation with Purpose** – Citizen engagement must be designed to inform decisions, not just check procedural boxes.
- **Leadership Matters** – Political and administrative commitment is critical to the success of participatory tools.



CLOSING SESSION:



Madrid 2027

The closing session of AECD 2025 marked the end of three days of dialogue, partnership-building, and shared ambition. Dr. Anas Almughairy, Director General of the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI), reflected on the transformative potential of intercity dialogue and the momentum generated over the three-day forum. He highlighted the launch of AECD's first flagship report on city-to-city cooperation, celebrating it as a symbol of what structured dialogue can yield—knowledge, connection, and practical action. Over 110 bilateral meetings between cities took place during the forum, reinforcing AECD's role as a growing platform for municipal diplomacy. The AECD's newly introduced governance framework was acknowledged as a foundational step towards sustained, long-term collaboration between cities across the Arab and European regions.

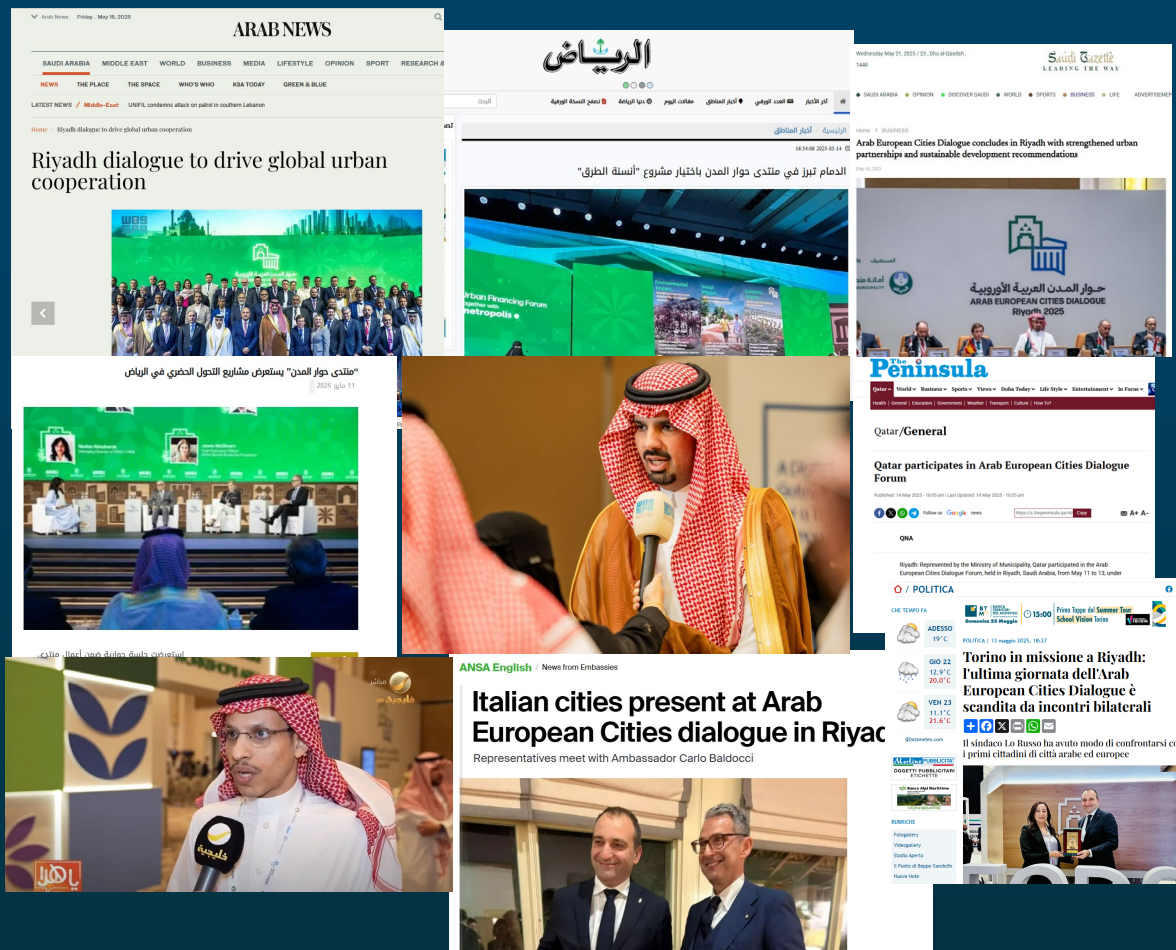
The Mayor of Madrid, announced as host of the 2027 edition, closed the event by expressing excitement and commitment to carrying the

AECD torch forward. Looking ahead, he noted that this is the beginning of a wonderful history. Speakers expressed heartfelt thanks to Riyadh for its hospitality and to His Highness Prince Faisal for his leadership in making AECD's debut a success. The session ended with appreciation for the teams behind the scenes, a celebration of Riyadh's growth and cultural vibrancy, and a renewed commitment to keep the spirit of collaboration alive as delegates return to their home cities.



MEDIA COVERAGE

MEDIA COVERAGE



The Arab European Cities Dialogue (AECD) 2025 received extensive media and digital coverage, underscoring its growing influence as a platform for international urban cooperation.

The campaign generated a remarkable **343 million total media appearances** and a total reach of **88 million**. Coverage spanned **over 34 countries**, and over **50 media outlets** reported on the forum, with radio and TV coverage in multiple regions.

Media coverage of AECD 2025 highlighted themes of intercity cooperation and the participation of 47 city mayors and urban institutions. The forum firmly established itself as a leading platform for international urban diplomacy, with an effective media strategy that delivered broad reach and engagement. Strong branding, impactful hashtags, and strategic regional partnerships shaped a compelling narrative.



CONCLUSION AND LOOKING AHEAD

CONCLUSION AND LOOKING AHEAD

AECD 2025 affirmed what is increasingly clear on the global stage: cities are no longer just implementers of national agendas—they are conveners of influence, incubators of innovation, and catalysts for international cooperation.

As the inaugural host, Riyadh stepped confidently into this new role—bridging regions and shaping conversations that matter. With its bold urban transformation and cultural depth, the city set a new tone for what future-ready cities can achieve when empowered to lead from the front. Across plenary sessions, workshops, bilateral meetings, and immersive urban visits, the Dialogue unlocked cross-continental possibilities and showcased the power of place—from the heritage of the Old City to the ambition of King Abdullah Financial District.

Over the course of three days, the forum fostered direct city-to-city diplomacy as a powerful mechanism for addressing shared urban challenges. City leaders exchanged replicable solutions on climate resilience, inclusive mobility, digital transformation, and urban quality of life. Participants shared governance models, financing strategies, and innovations that can be adapted across diverse local contexts.

Importantly, AECD 2025 was not just a moment for dialogue—it became a launchpad for action. Pilot projects were discussed, cross-regional partnerships were forged, and working groups were established to pursue key priorities such as green infrastructure, urban inclusion, and smart city collaboration. The forum reinforced the centrality of cities in delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda—not in theory, but through practical cooperation.

The Dialogue's momentum was amplified globally, with over 343 million media impressions and coverage from more than 30 regional and international outlets. It elevated Riyadh's leadership in urban diplomacy and showcased how cities can shape narratives, build alliances, and drive meaningful progress.

Looking ahead, AECD will continue as a biennial platform hosted in rotating Arab and European cities, with the next edition set to take place in Madrid in 2027.

The momentum sparked in Riyadh is only the beginning. AECD's future lies in its ability to turn dialogue into impact—and cities into global changemakers.



ANNEX

CITIES PARTICIPATION LIST

HEADS OF DELEGATION

ARAB CITY DELEGATES (BY CITY)

- Ajman: Abdul Rahman Al Nuaimi, Mayor (United Arab Emirates)
- Amman: H.E. Dr. Youssef Al-Shawarbeh, Mayor (Jordan)
- Arafat: Mr. Mohamed Mahmoud Ahmed Jeddo, Mayor (Mauritania)
- Al-Rayyan: Mr. Khalifa Mohammed Al-Khiyarain, Director of the Technical Affairs Department (Qatar)
- Al-Salt: Ghaidaa Al-Kharabsheh, City Representative (Jordan)
- Aswan: Eng. Amr Helmy Lashin, Deputy Mayor (Egypt)
- Baghdad: Eng. Ammar Musa Kazem, Mayor (Iraq)
- Beirut: Abdullah Darwish, Mayor (Lebanon)
- Damascus: Maher Muhammad Marwan, Mayor (Syria)
- Damietta: Prof. Dr. Ayman Elshehaby, Mayor (Egypt)
- Djibouti: Said Daoud Mohamed, Mayor (Djibouti)
- Doha: Turki Fahd Al Turki, Assistant Deputy Minister for Urban Planning Affairs (Qatar)
- Eastern Province: H.E. Eng. Fahd Al-Jubeir, Mayor (Saudi Arabia)
- Erbil: Dr. Raid Yamak, Mayor (Iraq)
- Fez: Yasser Johar, President of the Council of Fès Medina District (Morocco)
- Giza: Eng. Adel Al-Najjar, Mayor (Egypt)
- Irbid: Mohammed Abu Masameh, Deputy Mayor (Jordan)
- Jeddah: H.E. Saleh Al-Turki, Mayor (Saudi Arabia)
- Kairouan: Mohamed Al-Qalai, Mayor (Tunisia)
- Karak: Eng. Mohamed Maayta, Mayor (Jordan)
- Makkah: H.E. Musaed bin Abdulaziz Al-Dawood, Mayor (Saudi Arabia)
- Manama: Eng. Mohamed Alsehali, Mayor (Bahrain)
- Marrakesh: Mohamed Toufla, Deputy Mayor (Morocco)
- Mogadishu: Ahmed Mohamed Amir, Mayor (Somalia)
- Moroni: Abdel-Fattah Sayed Mohamed, Mayor (Comoros)
- Muscat: Eng. Ahmed Al-Hamidi, Mayor (Sultanate of Oman)
- Mosul (Nineveh): Abdul Qader Al-Dakhil, Mayor (Iraq)
- North Al Batinah: Eng. Nasser Al-Hinai, Mayor (Sultanate of Oman)
- Port Said: Maj. Gen. Moheb Habashi, Mayor (Egypt)
- Qalyubia: Eng. Ayman Attiya, Mayor (Egypt)
- Rabat: Fatiha El-Moudni, Mayor (Morocco)
- Ramallah: Issa Kassis, Mayor (Palestine)
- Riyadh: H.H. Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, Mayor (Saudi Arabia)
- Sfax: Adel Ben Rahouma, Mayor (Tunisia)
- Sidon: Dr. Hazem Badie, Mayor (Lebanon)
- South Al Batinah: Yarub Qahtan Al Yahyai, Mayor (Sultanate of Oman)
- Tangier: Mounir Al-Lymouri, Mayor (Morocco)
- Tripoli: Dr. Raid Yamak, Mayor (Lebanon)
- Tunis: Mr. Lotfi Dachraoui, Acting Secretary General (Tunisia)
- Zarqa: Eng. Imad Al-Momani, Mayor (Jordan)

EUROPEAN CITY DELEGATES (BY CITY)

- Alicante: Luis Barcala, Mayor (Spain)
- Athens: Olga Dourou, Deputy Mayor (Greece)
- Barcelona: Javier Rodriguez, City Councilor (Spain)
- Bologna: Francesco Nelli, City Representative (Italy)
- Bucharest: Ciprian Ciucu, Mayor (Romania)
- Chisinau: Olga Ursu, Deputy Mayor (Moldova)
- Cologne: Andreas Wolter, Mayor (Germany)
- Cordoba: Daniel Garcia-Ibarrola, Deputy Mayor (Spain)
- Granada: Vicente Azpitarte, Senator (Spain)
- Granada: Marifran Carazo, Mayor (Spain)
- Hamburg: Claudius Lieven, City Representative (Germany)
- Katowice: Marcin Krupa, Mayor (Poland)
- Krakow: Dominika Walec, City Representative (Poland)
- La Valetta: Raymond Azzopardi, Deputy Mayor (Malta)
- Madrid: José Luis Martínez-Almeida, Mayor (Spain)
- Malaga: Francisco de la Torre, Mayor (Spain)
- Malmo: Emanuel Toft, City Representative (Sweden)
- Marbella: Félix Romero, Deputy Mayor (Spain)
- Montpellier: Clare Hart, Vice President (France)
- Mourão: João Fortes, Mayor (Portugal)
- Nancy: Antoine Lesolleuz, Deputy Mayor (France)
- Napoli: Francesco Senese, City Representative (Italy)
- Nice: Agnes Rampal, Deputy Mayor (France)
- Nicosia: Charalambos Prountzos, Mayor (Cyprus)
- Nuremberg: Daniel F. Ulrich, Deputy Mayor (Germany)
- Ostrava: Richard Vereš, Mayor (Czech Republic)
- Palermo: Maurizio Carta, City Councilor (Italy)
- Paris: Anouch Toranian, Deputy Mayor (France)
- Piraeus: Andriana Zarakeli, Deputy Mayor (Greece)
- Prague: Michal Hroza, Deputy Mayor (Czech Republic)
- Pristina: Përparim Rama, Mayor (Kosovo)
- Riga: Jānis Lange, City Representative (Latvia)
- Rome: Maurizio Veloccia, Deputy Mayor (Italy)
- Rotterdam: Faouzi Achbar, Deputy Mayor (The Netherlands)
- Sarajevo: Predrag Puharić, Mayor (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
- Sofia: Nikola Barbutov, Deputy Mayor (Bulgaria)

- Tallinn: Viljar Jaamu, Deputy Mayor (Estonia)
- Torino: Stefano Lo Russo, Mayor (Italy)
- Turku: Minna Arve, Mayor (Finland)
- Vienna: Omar Al Rawi, City Councilor (Austria)
- Wrocław: Jakub Mazur, Deputy Mayor (Poland)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATIONS

- Association Marocaine des Présidents des Conseils Communaux (AMPCC)
- Association of Palestinian Local Authorities (APLA)
- Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR)
- Associacao Nacional Municipios Portugueses (ANMP)
- Local Councils' Association Malta
- Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces (Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias - FEMP)
- Cites Unies France
- The Central Union of Municipalities of Greece (KEDE)

ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATION LIST

LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS

- African Development Bank (AfDB)
- Arab Smart Cities Forum
- Arab Towns Organization (ATO)
- Association Marocaine des Présidents des Conseils Communaux (AMPCC)
- Association Internationale des Maires Francophones (AIMF)
- AtkinsRealis
- Boston Consulting Group (BCG)
- Center for Local Governance
- City Diplomacy Lab
- Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)
- Expo City Dubai
- European Seniors' Union
- International Finance Corporation (IFC)
- MedCities
- Metropolis - World Association of the Major Metropolises
- Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- PLATFORMA
- Quality of Life Program, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- SALAR International
- Saudi Business Council
- Saudi Fund for Development
- Smart City Expo World Congress
- SWECO
- The International Society of City and Regional Planners (ISOCARP)
- The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)
- The World Bank
- UN-Habitat – Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS)
- UN Road Safety Fund
- UNESCWA
- United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP)
- Vienna-Solutions
- VNG International - The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNGI)

AGENDA

DAY 1

Sunday | 11 May 2025



حوار المدن العربية الأوروبية
ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES DIALOGUE
Riyadh 2025

09:00 - 16:40 Morning Program

09:00 - 10:30 Registration

10:30 - 11:05 Opening Ceremony

11:05 - 12:05 **Plenary Session**
Beyond Borders: Transforming Cities through Global Cooperation

12:05 - 12:15 Mayor's Group Photo

12:15 - 13:10 Lunch

13:10 - 15:50

★
Cities
Networking

13:10 - 14:25 **Forum for Local Action - World Bank**
MENA Cities: Powering Productivity & Jobs

14:35 - 15:50 **Forum for Local Action - OECD**
Global Sports, Cultural & Business Events as a
Driver for Urban Development & Local Impact

14:35 - 15:50 **Forum for Local Action - PLATFORMA**
Empowering Young Local Leaders through
Intergenerational Dialogue & Decentralized
Development Cooperation

15:40 - 16:40 **In Conversation** - Perspectives on Riyadh's Urban Leap

17:30 - 20:30 Evening Program

17:30 - 20:30 Urban Visits

★ *Exclusive to Heads of Delegation*

AGENDA

DAY 2

Monday | 12 May 2025



حوار المدن العربية الأوروبية
ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES DIALOGUE
Riyadh 2025

09:00 - 16:00 Morning Program

09:00 - 10:00 **Plenary Session**
Towards Resilience: Climate Adaptation & Mitigation in Arab and European Cities

10:00 - 11:00 **Plenary Session**
Digital Transformation in Urban Governance: Insights from European and Arab Cities

11:10 - 13:40

★
Cities
Leadership
Forum

11:10 - 12:20

**Forum for Local Action - UNESCWA -
Building Resilient & Inclusive Smart Cities:**
Advancing Digital Transformation for
Sustainability, Innovation & Quality of Life

11:10 - 12:20

Forum for Local Action - SALAR International
Resilient Communities & Cities Under Climate

12:30 - 13:40

**Forum for Local Action - Quality of Life
Program**
Sharing Sustainable, Livable Cities: Environmental
Dialogues

12:30 - 13:40

Forum for Local Action - AMPCC
Digitalization for Better Urban Governance

13:40 - 14:40 Lunch

Forum for Local Action - UN-Habitat ROAS
From Data to Impact: How Voluntary Local Reviews & SDG Localization Drive
Development in Cities

14:40 - 16:00

Forum for Local Action - Boston Consulting Group (BCG)
Future-Ready Cities: Insights for Impact

17:30 - 21:20 Evening Program

17:30 - 20:30 Urban Visits

20:00 - 21:20 ★ AUDI Dinner

★ *Exclusive to Heads of Delegation*

AGENDA

DAY 3

Tuesday | 13 May 2025



حوار المدن العربية الأوروبية
ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES DIALOGUE
Riyadh 2025

09:00 - 15:30 Morning Program

09:00 - 10:00 **Plenary Session**
Local Economic Development and Investment: Strategies for Sustainable Urban Growth

10:00 - 11:00	Urban Financing Forum Insights from Funding Institutions	10:00 - 11:15 Forum for Local Action - UNDP Successful Multi-lateral Governance & Co-creation Processes
		10:00 - 11:15 Forum for Local Action - Center For Local Governance The Role of Decentralization in Strengthening Local Governance: Financial, Administrative, & Legal Insights from Global & Regional Practices
11:00 - 11:30	Urban Financing Forum Technical Introductions	11:30 - 12:45 Forum for Local Action - MedCities Building Metropolitan Governance to Enhance the Provision of Services with a Focus on Sustainable Urban Mobility
		11:30 - 12:45 Forum for Local Action - VNG International Community Score Card: A Participatory Governance Tool for Enhanced Service Delivery & Citizen Engagement
11:30 - 14:00	Urban Financing Forum City-led Project Pitches (8 Cities)	

14:00 - 14:30 Closing Session

14:30 - 15:30 Lunch

★ Exclusive to Heads of Delegation

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ARAB EUROPEAN CITIES DIALOGUE
Riyadh 2025

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