

WUF11 SESSION CONCEPT NOTE

SHAPING EQUITABLE URBAN FUTURES

Transforming cities by investing in public value and public space

1. List of Partners Contributing to the Session:

- Council on Urban Initiatives (UN-Habitat, Institute of Innovation and Public Purpose at University College London, and LSE Cities at the London School of Economics)

2. Key Words:

Green, just, healthy cities, spatial design, built environment, urban governance, public value, new economic thinking, institutional organisation, urban cultures, right to housing

3. Objectives of the Session:

This session is designed to explore narratives underpinning transformative approaches to equitable urban change, making cities more just, green and healthy. It focuses on innovative and experimental approaches to policymaking and spatial design that prioritise public value and the common good. Bringing together pioneering urban leaders from Europe and the global South with experts in new economic thinking, housing, urban design and social cohesion, the session explores what is truly transformative about practices and initiatives 'on the ground' that improve the lives of urban citizens and help meet SDGs.

4. Summary:

Inequity is built into the fabric of cities. Patterns of segregation within the physical environment determine access to social and economic opportunities for different communities, systemically depriving some and rewarding others. Housing in many cities is growing more and more unaffordable for residents, with prices rising due to largely unfettered flows of capital investments. And at the same time, urban systems of governance are often chronically underfunded and can lack responsiveness to local challenges. With cities facing more frequent and severe impacts of climate change in years to come which will likely exacerbate the equity crisis, new narratives on urban futures are urgently needed.

This session will centre on the importance of reshaping narratives and approaches to urban governance and planning for a more equitable, sustainable, and healthy future. Featuring pioneering urban leaders who are structuring their administrations around new narratives and systems of governance such as gender equality and care, the session will explore both the theoretical underpinnings of these approaches and the practical challenges of their implementation.

Discussions will focus on the importance of moving beyond outdated systems of economic thinking, institutional organisation, and planning pedagogies to address the fundamental challenges facing cities today and to achieve a more equitable future.

The experiences of cities that are implementing new and experimental approaches to public value, urban design and governance will be featured, exploring the factors that have enabled them to introduce transformative strategies, and the barriers holding them back from going even further. The session will bring together Mayors at the frontlines of these efforts and activists and practitioners and global experts who have been advocating for these shifts at the international level.

5. Guiding Questions for Discussions:

- How do narratives around city administrations, planning processes, and urban economies need to change to fundamentally shift cities towards a more equitable urban future?
- How can city leaders and practitioners promote systemic change to achieve more equitable cities?
- How can a public value approach be deployed to address systemic issues such as the financialization of housing?
- What are the practical and political barriers cities face when implementing fundamentally transformative agendas? How can these be addressed?
- How can physical planning and the design of the built environment promote equity, inclusion, and social justice?
- How can the role of design in promoting social objectives be strengthened within the urban governance system?

6. Expected Outcomes and Impact:

This session is designed to influence high-level agendas on urban transformation by promoting new narratives and transformative approaches to equitable change, identifying critical barriers to implementation, and analysing key enablers of fundamental reform. Insights and outcomes of this discussion will feed into the Council's wider advocacy strategy for urban change.

7. Session Format:

The session will be opened by Council Co-Chairs, Mariana Mazzucato and Ricky Burdett. It will then proceed with a moderated roundtable discussion. The session will close with an audience Q&A and a summary of key messages from Co-Chairs. The 2-hour session will have two subtopics:

1. Delivering public value
2. Integrating city governance and design