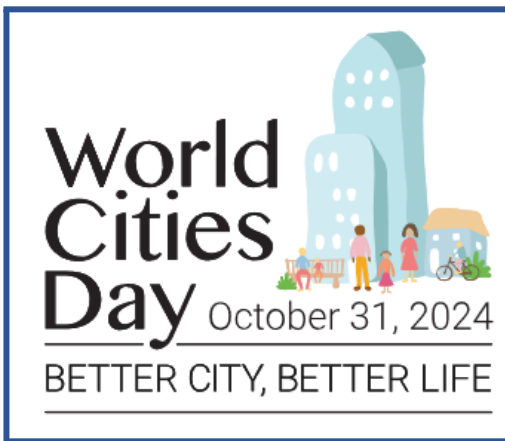




WORLD CITIES DAY 2024: Youth Leading Climate and Local Action for Cities

“By empowering young people, we can accelerate climate action and drive global progress for the Sustainable Development Goals.”

- UN Secretary-General, António Guterres



Introduction

As determined by UN resolution 68/239 of February 5th 2014, World Cities Day occurs on the 31st of October of every year. It marks the final day of “Urban October”, a month dedicated to the global observation of urbanization. Therefore, World Cities days acts as an open invitation for all people and organizations, to not only observe the day, but to also foster global cooperation to address urban challenges.

Each year, a city is chosen to host the global observance, and a theme is picked to best suit the world’s current urban development priorities and challenges. Seeing as the World

Urban Forum 12 will be held in Cairo from the 4th to 8th of November, Alexandria (also in Egypt) was chosen as the 2024 event city, and will highlight the theme: “Youth Leading Climate and Local Action for Cities”.

2024 Theme: Youth Leading Climate and Local Action for Cities

This year’s theme places our youth at center stage, and recognizes that it is them who have a collective and growing pivotal role in driving environmental movements. Thus, it is the youth that has the power to take actions that work towards building sustainable cities for all. The aim with the 2024 theme is to showcase that cooperation between local governments and the youth is vital in order to properly address what can be done in regards to the impact that the climate crisis has on cities(1).

The core question at stake manifests itself in the ways that cities can contribute to climate change and how/why they are central for sustainable development. To contextualize this, it is important to point out that

UN-Habitat has estimated that by 2030, close to 60% of the global population, with that same figure representing the percentage of urban dwellers under the age of 18. In 20 years following this, it is projected that the figure will further grow, whereby urban areas are expected to accommodate up to 70% of the global population **(2)**.

Although there has been progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), the pace at which urbanization is occurring, a large portion of developing urban areas continue to face mass levels of environmental degradation, as well as inequality and poverty. In fact, a 2022 report made by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) **(3)** found that urban activities in cities are a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, accounting for 70% of global CO₂ emissions.

Consequently, the negative effects of rapid development and urbanization are more pronounced in countries within the Global South due to a combination of limited resources and underdeveloped infrastructure. In turn, these conditions allow for a higher degree of vulnerability to be faced in regards to disasters that are related to the climate crisis, access to both sanitation and clean water, and lastly housing markets that often experience severe shortages. These barriers

greatly affect the youth, and exacerbate other major issues such as limited educational opportunities and high levels of unemployment.

It is crucial that cities around the world take this year's World Cities Day theme into account, especially on the local level. This is true not only to adequately address the unique needs of young people around the world, but also to ensure that sustainable urban development practices involve and implement targets that are directly proposed by the youth.

Finally, sustainable urban development and the mitigation of the impacts of climate change will only be successful so long as there is a coordinated approach and action plan. The next section will bring this article's focus back to the local-level to shed light on what can be done and how you can contribute to ensuring the success of the future of our cities.

Youth-Led Climate Action in Barcelona and the Role of the Local Government

As aforementioned, the UN considers international days and observances to be occasions that allow for the amplified education of a topic, and allows for the mobilization of political will. With a greater degree of attention being paid to global issues, a greater allocation of local resources can be attributed to attempting to solve the

problem. In this particular case, it is of the utmost importance that local governments clearly showcase that the voices of the youth are integrated into local climate policies and urban planning. This must be assured through the adequate allocation of financial, educational and technical resources for youth-led projects.

Over the past couple of years, the Ajuntament of Barcelona (the city council) has been very diligent in not only promoting local climate projects and initiatives for the youth, but has also proven through the **Climate Action Plan for 2030** (Made by the Barcelona for Climate initiative), that it is proactively and comprehensively implementing measures that will not only reduce emissions but also generate benefits for people and for socio-economic activity.

The City's Climate action plan has set apart €1M per year in subsidies for citizen projects related to the climate emergency, greatly promoting citizen action **(4)**. As part of the short-term action plan, which consists of actions that must be implemented between 2018 and 2025, the City Council has decided that Action 16.11. is designated for "... incorporat[ing] information and discussion on the climate emergency and future model into the cultural programme, with the involvement of cultural facilities (libraries, museums, community centers, neighborhood center, youth centers) and dedicate international

days and weeks to the climate crisis." **(5)**.

The first youth organization that particularly stands out is **Joves per l'emergència climàtica** (Young people for the climate emergency), which is composed of a micro-network of vocational centers and secondary schools that, with the support of the City Council, carry out scientific research on the habitats of young people and how they are affected by the climate emergency. Topics are presented on an annual basis, and young people are expected to pose questions and investigate them with the help of expert scientists. These questions are then taken through a research process in which participating students propose one or two concrete commitments to address climate change in both their respective schools and in the city of Barcelona. The final commitments must then be presented to the city council in an attempt to implement them into future climate policies **(6)**.

From 2019-2020, catalonian children came together with the local government in order to evaluate and design climate solutions as part of the **Climate Shelters (7)** project. This project was not only successful in converting 11 local schools into a network of climate refuges, open to all city residents during hot periods, but also establishing a further 197 shelters in museums, libraries, sports centers, and parks and gardens. This project was a major success and ensured that each

establishment was distributed in a manner in which approximately 95% of the population is able to reach a climate shelter in under a 10 minute walk. This initiative clearly demonstrates how essential it is to involve citizens, of all ages, in climate related projects.

Lastly, it should be noted that several Youth-led organizations exist and operate in Barcelona. Many of which do not receive direct government funding, however they remain prominent voices in the local community. This includes the Barcelona chapter of Fridays for Another Future, an organization that advocates for climate justice, and the Observatori DESCA, that takes climate action into account on their mission of achieving economic, social, and cultural rights. These groups are still able drive meaningful dialogue on critical issues that impact the city, despite the limited financial support received from the government.

Conclusion

As World Cities Day is celebrated today, it must be used as a vital reminder of the collective responsibility that is shared in building sustainable and resilient urban spaces that ensures a more sustainable future for all.. As the 2024 theme spotlights youth leadership in climate and local action, this year's observance emphasizes the importance of empowering young voices to actively shape the cities they inhabit.

The City of Barcelona is a success story and should be used as an example that proves that sustainable urbanization is achievable through fostering collaboration between governments and youth-led organizations, as well as through the support of community-driven initiatives. Ultimately, the future of sustainable urban development relies on local action that emphasizes the empowerment of young people, to ensure that they are guaranteed a space to lead, innovate, and inspire change in their communities.

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Footnotes and References:

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