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BARCELONA & NEW YORK CITY WORK TOGETHER TO MAKE HOUSING MORE AFFORDABLE

Barcelona and New York City are using the IUC programme to explore measures to make housing in their cities more affordable. While the pairing has put a special focus on affordability, they are also looking at other housing related issues, such as protections afforded to tenants and methods to prevent unjust evictions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In their own words, Barcelona and New York City are facing "housing crises," with the rising cost of rent leading to most housing falling outside of what would be considered affordable for the average household. This increase is pushing low- and medium-income households further from city centres, thereby also exacerbating inequalities. The two cities joined the IUC programme in July 2018 to explore using international cooperation to better address this challenge.

Since then, Barcelona and New York City have had Learning Exchanges in each city and have attended specialist conferences together. This notably included the *Intersections 2018* conference in Pittsburgh (USA) and the *Reclaiming Vacant Property* conference in Atlanta (USA), which focused on gaining more technical knowledge related to Community Land Trusts – Community Land Trusts – one housing model being considered to provide long-term affordability.

Despite their different contexts and cultures, and the differing levels of autonomy to influence the housing and rental market, the two cities have learned a great deal from one another. It has also been possible to involve staff in the housing departments from each city, who are benefiting from the knowledge shared through the IUC programme.

CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

The affordability of housing is the focal point of Barcelona and New York City's IUC collaboration. By the time they joined the programme, both cities understood that the cost of housing had reached untenable levels and were keen to exchange information on existing measures and potential strategies to address this, both from policy and technical perspectives. The cities faced eviction and foreclosure crises as a result of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 and continue to experience a growing homeless population. These challenges encouraged them to exchange experiences around affordability, tenant protections, and ways to serve extremely low-income households.

The partnership officially launched in July 2018 at a joint kick-off meeting in New York City during the UN High-Level Political Forum, in which a delegation from Barcelona participated. Next, in October 2018, one representative from each city participated in the Grounded Solutions Network's *Intersections Conference* in Pittsburgh (USA) on Community Land Trusts – a system whereby a non-profit, community-based organisation owns land and maintains control or oversight of homes located on that land.

While Barcelona and New York City keep in touch remotely on a frequent basis, the Learning Exchanges hosted by each city – which kicked off in 2019 – have proven to be their most fruitful activities. The first exchange saw representatives from New York City travel to Barcelona in January 2019, while representatives from Barcelona went to New York in April 2019. Visits comprised working meetings, presentations and site visits, all of which provided a holistic representation of the challenges faced and solutions pursued in each city.

In April 2019, for example, the delegation from Barcelona spoke directly to staff at New York's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) who are implementing housing affordability policies and programmes. They discussed various strategies being employed in New York, including mandatory inclusionary housing – whereby all new development in "up-zoned" districts must include a minimum percentage of affordable units – as well as using public financing to leverage private investment to support the construction of affordable housing; stabilising rents by law; and turning city properties into housing cooperatives.

In addition to the Learning Exchanges, other technical visits have been held to discuss specific issues in depth, such as tenant protections and the financing of affordable housing. Both cities also participated in the *2nd International Social Housing Festival* (ISHF) in Lyon (France) in June 2019, and the *Reclaiming Vacant Properties Conference* in Atlanta (USA) in October 2019. These conferences allow the cities to gain more knowledge and share their IUC programme experience with others.

Images: Eduard Cabré

Most recently, in March 2020, representatives from Barcelona visited New York City once more to discuss topics such as inclusionary housing, community land trusts, environmental sustainability, and preventing housing evictions. The cities each presented their local contexts as they relate to each topic; this was followed by interactive discussions to dive deeper into strategies and solutions. During the same visit, IUC delegations from the two cities went on tours of mixed-income housing developments, community land trust properties, and a senior housing facility that was built according to passive house design standards.

RESULTS AND IMPACT

Among the many topics discussed related to housing, the partnership has focused on:

- Mandatory Inclusionary Housing
- Tenant Protections
- Modular Housing
- Community Land Trust Model
- Inclusive and Comprehensive Planning and Housing Design
- Serving Extremely Low-Income Populations

This list was later expanded to include other related topics, such as rent regulation. As part of their work, Barcelona and New York City have explored the use of public-community partnerships, as well as incorporating the use of new construction technologies.

Exchanging knowledge and strategies on all of these housing affordability topics will enable both cities to refine their own policies and programmes based on the experiences of their IUC partner.

The ***BCN-NYC Affordable Housing Challenge*** was jointly launched by the cities in November 2018, with a winning proposal identified soon afterwards. This proposal, known as the ***CAH and ATRI joint project*** ('Construction system for affordable housing' and 'Innovation for social inclusion'), was awarded prize money to support turning their proposal into a pilot project. The proposal will use innovative, affordable building techniques to renovate existing buildings and build on top of them without requiring additional land. The goal is therefore to use vacant spaces within the existing urban fabric.

New York City has received $1.65 million USD in grant support from a U.S.-based non-profit organisation, Enterprise Community Partners, to foster a city network of Community Land Trusts that will empower local organisations to maintain oversight over residential buildings on the land. Barcelona is looking at the legal implications of implementing a community land trust model in their city, and how it could complement the existing Cooperative Housing programme, which is also based on the separation of ownership of land (currently held by the city) and ownership of buildings (currently held in lease by housing cooperatives).

Barcelona and New York have found that each city has different levels of autonomy in tackling housing issues – for example, New York City can issue bonds and use other financing tools to facilitate affordable housing development, while Barcelona does not have that authority (at least as of now). New York City also has instruments for regulating rental prices for certain types of affordable housing stock, whereas only the national government has the authority to regulate rental prices in Spain. Despite these differences, both cities are implementing similar strategies, such as the introduction of mandatory inclusionary housing, with a certain percentage of units to be designated as affordable in new developments. In Barcelona, a new mandatory inclusionary housing policy is applied uniformly across the city, while in NYC, a mandatory inclusionary housing policy passed in 2016 applies to new developments within designated rezoning areas.

Both cities are mindful of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with their pairing having been ***profiled by UN-Habitat*** for working towards SDG implementation. The pairing is strongly committed to working towards the goals set in both agendas, seeing the IUC partnership as one way to make a meaningful contribution.

Image: Eduard Cabré

LESSONS LEARNED

Staff are working on programmes with existing priorities and deadlines and may not be keen to join a new collaboration. It's important that the aims, benefits and concrete outcomes of the partnership are clearly explained. Giving staff a sense of the results that the partnership will help to bring about can make them feel more engaged in the process.

It's not enough to simply do the work; you also need to communicate about it. Investing time and energy in sharing information with other local governments helps to engender positive relationships and feelings about the work among staff and brings new insights. It also gives other cities the chance to learn from your work.

Especially when working on housing policies and programmes, it can be difficult to see beyond our own policy/regulatory contexts and related obstacles. Working with other cities helps us to imagine new possibilities and not take for granted features of existing systems.

It is helpful to ensure that visiting delegations can speak directly to the local city staff implementing policies and programmes on-the-ground.

Image: Eduard Cabré

INTERNATIONAL URBAN COOPERATION
European Union

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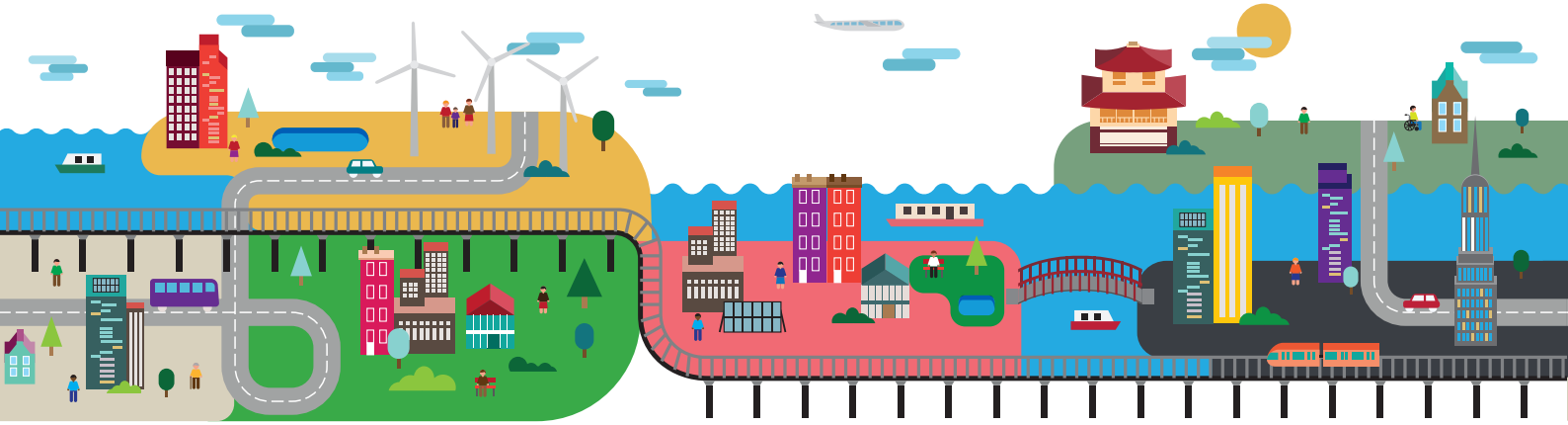
THE IUC PROGRAMME

The International Urban Cooperation (IUC) programme enables cities in different global regions to link up and share solutions to common problems. It is part of a long-term strategy by the European Union to foster sustainable urban development in cooperation with the public and private sectors, as well as representatives of research and innovation, community groups and citizens. Through engaging in the IUC, cities will have the chance to share and exchange knowledge with their international counterparts, building a greener, more prosperous future. The IUC programme is an opportunity for local governments to learn from each other, set ambitious targets, forge lasting partnerships, test new solutions, and boost their city's international profile. Its activities will support the achievement of policy objectives as well as major international agreements on urban development and climate change, such as the EU Urban Agenda, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement.



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