INTERSESSIONAL PANEL OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMISSION ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (CSTD)

Geneva, Switzerland
17-19 November 2021

Contribution by UNWTO

to the CSTD 2021-2022 priority theme on "Science, technology and innovation for sustainable urban development in a post-COVID world"

PRIORITY THEME 2: STI for sustainable urban development in a post-COVID world

United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development (CSTD)

To Whom it May Concern,

The 24th CSTD annual session selected "STI for sustainable urban development in a post-COVID world" as one of the priority themes for its 25th session (2021-22 period). This theme addresses SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities.

Urbanization is a complex megatrend touching on various issues including economic transformation, environmental sustainability, inclusion and poverty eradication, and resilience to natural disasters, climate change, and public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. Cities also play a central role in shaping innovation and technological diffusion. In addition, peri-urban areas present increasing challenges in terms of poverty, sustainability, mobility, and economic performance. The 19th CSTD explored innovation and urban development in 2016. Since then, accelerating technological change and its deep impact on issues such as urban planning and management, critical systems' resilience, and citizen and community involvement make it advisable for the CSTD to update its findings and to examine and share emerging good practices and consider the latest trends in science, technology and innovation that can contribute to greener, more resilient, and more inclusive cities, particularly in light of the knowledge gained in developing innovative responses to the challenge of COVID-19.

The CSTD secretariat is in the process of drafting an issues paper on the theme to be presented at the CSTD inter-sessional panel meeting on 17-19 November 2021. In this context, we would like to solicit inputs from international organizations, UN entities and agencies, and regional commissions on this theme. We would be grateful if you could kindly answer the following questions based on your organization's work at the global, regional, and/or national levels.

1. In your organization's view, how has the Covid-19 pandemic so far impacted on sustainable urban development, and what lessons could we draw from the Covid-19 pandemic on sustainable urban development?

Tourism, the sector with the largest economic value-chain and a unique cross-cutting nature, has reached 1.5 billion international arrivals, 7% of global exports and 10% of the world employment, from which 54% corresponds to women[1]. For these reasons, tourism stands out not only as a lifeline for communities all over the world, but as a driver of sustainable development. For these reasons, tourism is called to lead global recovery as it has demonstrated in previous crisis, such as 2001 and 2008, by pulling other economic activities and putting them into the equation of resilience.

Covid-19 has hit hard tourism worldwide, consequently dropping international arrivals in 74% (from 1.5 billion in 2019 to 381 million in 2020), putting 100-120 million jobs at risk, and setting a loss of 1.3 trillion USD in international receipts, and over 2 trillion USD in global GDP.

In addition to its resulting unprecedented crisis, the pandemic has accelerated challenges that were identified before 2020, such as the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the provision of added value jobs, the development of digital and tech skills, and the promotion of non-traditional and green investments. Furthermore, it is the time to reshape the way we travel to avoid *overtourism*, a common externality that might be at the core of all action to avoid overcrowding and simultaneously amplifying economic and social impact for all.

For these reasons, UNWTO calls for a strong focus on innovation to meet sustainability. It means fostering the flow of knowledge, best practices, technology and investments amongst the global tourism innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem stakeholders, namely Governments, institutions,

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[1] World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). (2020). Tourism Highlights. Retrieved from https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/book/10.18111/9789284422456

corporations, investors, accelerators, education centres and startups, which shorten the time of finding disruptive and forward-thinking solutions.

Furthermore, a more sustainable sector will be based on data-driven decision making and smart destinations. The implementation of Artificial Intelligence, blockchain, Internet of Things, among other technologies, will boost the positive impacts of tourism, alongside with the strengthening of rural, cultural, gastronomy tourism, including new national and international destinations as part of a new age of sustainable tourism.

2. Could you share specific examples, projects or initiatives that have used science, technology, and innovation (STI), including frontier technologies (e.g., AI, drones, blockchain, 3D printing, etc.) or other forms of innovation in general in addressing the above challenges in relation to urban sustainability transition?
3. Can you provide examples of policies/projects/initiatives specifically aimed at strengthening national STI capabilities to promote urban sustainability transition?
4. Can you give examples of projects/policies in your organization helping countries undertake transition towards urban sustainability so that cities are productive, inclusive, and liveable? What are the main challenges confronted while trying to implement these projects/policies?

Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) have been promoted through UNWTO initiatives and used by its participants in order to address the above-mentioned challenges.

- Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, Blockchain and, Augmented and Virtual Reality have been identified as the most common technologies in the **UNWTO Startup Competitions and Innovation Challenges Programmes**. Through calls and selection processes characterized by the participation of both private and public sectors, best startups are awarded, mentored, and connected to the global ecosystem.

  The **UNWTO SDGs Global Startup Competition** received responses from 10,000 participants from 138 countries and all economic sectors. The 25 winning projects entered a curated programme of benefits with the support of 21 partners and collaborators (such as, Globalia, Qatar Airways, Qatar National Tourism Council, Amazon Web Services, Mastercard, Google, Amadeus, IE University, Telefónica, IDB Lab and Plug and Play), including mentorship, access to technological support, connection to Member States, corporates, and investors for opening the doors to funding and pilot projects opportunities. Likewise, **Top 25 Innovators Working for a More Sustainable and Innovative Tourism catalogue** was created to facilitate Member States and private sector access to solutions which cover projects for **decarbonization, monitoring of sustainability indicators, water access, women empowerment, smart mobility,** amongst many others.

  More top startups at the **Finalists and Winners website** and the **Top 100 Innovators Catalogue**.

- **UNWTO Tourism Online Academy:** UNWTO is working closely with top universities to up-skill tourism workforce in destination planning, sustainability, and management.

- **AI powered UNWTO Jobs Factory:** UNWTO joined forces with Hosco, the professional network specially designed for the hospitality industry. A platform that will support and improve your competitiveness regarding job creation and help you leverage human capital development in your country and region, helping the tourism workforce access the best job opportunities.

  The UNWTO Jobs Factory harnesses the power of Hosco's machine learning to match candidates with suitable positions, connecting employers with the very best talent our sector has to offer. It will allow monitoring current and future skills development, facilitating intelligent labour market data collection, insights, and forecasting. In addition, to identifying trends and the shift in occupations due to the digital transformation, ensuring agile response to change in

the educational and training institutions, and helping our Member States make important decisions to support jobs based on the latest, trusted data.

- **UNWTO Investments Programme:** in collaboration with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the programme **Investment Readiness for Green Finance Mechanisms** has been created to train 50,000 companies focused on green business for tourism.

5. Could you share case studies of regional and international cooperation that have strengthened STI capacities of developing countries in dealing with urban sustainability transition?

6. Could you suggest some contact persons responsible for projects/policies, related technologies and international collaboration in this context as well as any experts dealing with projects in this area? We might contact them directly for further inputs or invite some of them as speakers for the CSTD inter-sessional panel and annual session.

UNWTO Key documents

- UNWTO Travel and Tourism Tech Startup Ecosystem and Investment Landscape (2021)
- UNWTO Top 100 Innovators Catalogue (2021)
- Top 25 Innovators Working for a More Sustainable and Innovative Tourism Catalogue (2021)
- UNWTO Recommendations on Urban Tourism (2020)
- Transport-related CO2 Emissions of the Tourism Sector – Modelling Results (2019)
- 'Overtourism'? Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions Volume 2: Case Studies | Executive Summary (2019)
- 'Overtourism'? – Understanding and Managing Urban Tourism Growth beyond Perceptions (2018)

Other initiatives:

- Global Tourism Plastics Initiative
- UNWTO Tourism Data Dashboard

Please send your responses and any further inputs on the theme to the CSTD secretariat (stdev@unctad.org) by 6 September 2021. We look forward to receiving your valuable inputs.

Sincere regards,

CSTD secretariat