



Implementing partners



HANDBOOK ON URBAN GOVERNANCE

Twin-Cities in Sustainable Partnership Project
Palermo - Sekondi-Takoradi

A cura di Susanna Gristina | Kòrai - Territorio, Sviluppo e Cultura - Scarl i.s. ETS

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PREFACE

Cities are increasingly called upon to respond to global challenges with local solutions. The **Twin Cities in Sustainable Partnership Project** has brought together Palermo and Sekondi-Takoradi in a shared commitment to rethinking urban governance through collaboration, innovation, and mutual learning. This Handbook is one of the lasting results of that journey — a tool for policy-makers, practitioners, and citizens working to shape more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban futures.

ISAAC AIDOO

Project Coordinator

The Twin Cities in Sustainable Partnership Project (TCSPP) was conceived by the cities of Sekondi-Takoradi (Ghana) and Palermo (Italy) with the goal of promoting sustainable and integrated urban development through eco-actions, social interventions, and capacity-building for a wide range of urban governance actors – from high-level decision-makers to frontline professionals and community stakeholders. It also aimed to consolidate and sustain the achievements of the city-to-city partnership between the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA) and the Municipality of Palermo. This handbook seeks to contribute to improved urban management in response to persistent challenges, by laying the groundwork for long-term, sustainable, and integrated urban development in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis, in dialogue and cooperation with Palermo – a city that hosts one of the largest Ghanaian diaspora communities in Europe – and in line with the twinning agreement launched in 2019. It is hoped that the approaches, tools, and lessons shared here will inspire further collaboration, mutual learning, and inclusive urban transformation, both within the twin cities and beyond.

FRANCESCO CAMPAGNA

Honorary Consul of the Republic of Ghana in Sicily

The twinning between Palermo and Sekondi-Takoradi – formalised by an official agreement signed in 2021 by both municipalities – exemplifies the overcoming of the limits of traditional diplomacy, historically reserved for states. City diplomacy introduces new actors – local authorities, associations, diaspora communities, universities, businesses – operating in networks to promote practical and concrete cooperation.

In this context, cities act as hubs of social innovation and local development, building transnational alliances that directly respond to people's needs. This approach pluralises the global stage, valuing territorial knowledge, informal relationships, and the ability to drive change from the bottom up, making cooperation more flexible, participatory, and inclusive. I sincerely hope that this handbook will serve as both a testimony to the strength of this partnership and an inspiration for other cities, near and far, to embrace diplomacy from below — one that builds lasting connections through mutual respect, shared knowledge, and a common vision for sustainable urban futures.



EDITOR'S NOTE

by Susanna Gristina

Urban Governance today: rethinking the city through participation, resilience and inclusion

In the contemporary era, the most pressing urban challenges—ranging from the rapid growth of urban populations to the intensification of climate change, social fragmentation, and economic inequality—demand that cities reimagine their governance frameworks. Innovative and inclusive responses are essential to address these increasingly complex issues and to achieve **full sustainability**—environmental, economic, and social.

This approach must acknowledge the **dynamic processes of negotiation** among diverse actors, interests, and visions. It requires **participatory and adaptive governance** mechanisms, capable of translating social demands, cultural dynamics, and territorial complexity into shared strategies for the future—prioritising urban rights, social cohesion, and territorial sustainability.

Urban governance can no longer be confined to service management or regulatory frameworks. Today, it must engage the full spectrum of urban stakeholders—including public institutions, active citizens, civil society organisations, local communities, enterprises, informal networks, and youth—as protagonists of territorial alliances and inclusive, participatory processes of co-design and urban regeneration.

This model of governance moves beyond a strictly top-down and technocratic approach. It embraces horizontal and negotiated processes, grounded in **collective responsibility**. Only through such inclusive and responsive models can we effectively tackle contemporary challenges such as housing marginalisation, ecological transition, the degradation of public space, and climate vulnerability, while affirming the principles of urban resilience, spatial justice, and democratic urban transformation.

Palermo and Sekondi-Takoradi: platforms of urban experimentation

In this framework, **Palermo** in Italy and **Sekondi-Takoradi** in Ghana—two cities with distinct histories and dynamics—emerge as **platforms for experimentation, dialogue, and mutual exchange** in response to contemporary urban challenges. Their shared journey demonstrates how cities with different geographies and socio-political contexts can engage in joint knowledge production to foster more inclusive, democratic, and resilient urban futures.

About this Handbook

Purpose and scope

This **Handbook on Urban Governance** is one of the core outputs of the **Twin Cities in Sustainable Partnership Project** (TCSPP). Rooted in a shared commitment to inclusive and resilient cities, it brings together:

- **Research**
- **Fieldwork**
- **Community experience**

It reflects co-designed tools, governance models, and actionable strategies developed through reciprocal exchange and experimentation.

Case study focus: Palermo as Urban Laboratory

Throughout the volume, **Palermo** serves **as a case study**—an open-air urban laboratory where cultural regeneration, civic participation, and institutional transformation intersect. The city's experience includes both established projects and ongoing initiatives whose impacts are still unfolding, yet already suggest new directions in urban governance.

In parallel, the perspective of **Sekondi-Takoradi** enriches the **comparative lens**, offering critical insight into the challenges faced by fast-growing cities in the Global South, including informal settlements, infrastructure gaps, and social equity.

Structure of the Handbook

Structured around **case studies, theoretical insights, expert contributions**, and **multimedia resources**, the Handbook presents a multidimensional framework for understanding urban governance. It explores **four core thematic areas**:

- a. Heritage enhancement and urban innovation
- b. Social inclusion and citizen participation
- c. Institutional and public-private cooperation
- d. Environmental sustainability and resilience

A contribution to a practical toolkit for urban actors

Designed as both a practical and reflective resource, this Handbook is intended for **urban planners, public officials, researchers, students**, and **civil society actors** engaged in rethinking how cities are governed. It offers both locally grounded insights and transferable knowledge applicable across diverse contexts—ranging from community-led cultural projects to heritage-driven neighbourhood renewals, from maritime reconnection efforts to examples of participatory governance, cultural innovation, and sustainable urban development.

By bridging theory and practice through applied examples accompanied by commentary, the Handbook encourages readers to see urban governance not simply as a technical system of rules and procedures, but as **a living process** — shaped by the aspirations, relationships, and agency of those who inhabit the city.

Within this framework, **Palermo's experience** is illustrated through **nine** of its many **urban regeneration initiatives** — detailed in **Section I** of this Handbook — offering a diversity of approaches and outcomes, each testifying to a unique perspective on inclusive governance and territorial innovation. Their description is enriched by stakeholder mapping, assessments of observed or expected impacts, multimedia materials, and practical tools such as dos and don'ts and lessons learned, providing transferable insights for other cities exploring new directions in urban governance.

This comparative perspective is further explored in **Section II** through a reflection by John Agyei and Edmund Ayesu on the **governance challenges of Sekondi-Takoradi** within a broader analysis of urban governance strategies across Ghana. Their reflection draws on various examples from other Ghanaian cities, illustrating national governance frameworks, development challenges, and innovative interventions that shape local administrations beyond Sekondi-Takoradi. These insights converge in the final reflection, ***Palermo and Sekondi-Takoradi Together for a New Urbanity*** by Maurizio Carta, which envisions future directions for city-making grounded in cooperation and mutual learning.

Final remarks

I would like to thank all contributors and stakeholders who participated in this shared endeavour, and I hope this publication will inspire future partnerships and innovative city-making — paving new pathways towards more democratic and resilient urban futures.

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INTRODUCTION

URBAN TWINNING AND CONTEMPORARY GOVERNANCE.

The Case of Palermo in the Twin-Cities in Sustainable Partnership Project with Sekondi-Takoradi

by Maurizio Carta

Palermo and Sekondi-Takoradi: stories of two cities, one shared vision of the future

In the landscape of international cooperation, cities are playing an increasingly central role in promoting inclusive, sustainable, and resilient development models through proactive networks working in the concrete fields of sustainable development. The Twin-Cities in Sustainable Partnership Project (TCSPP), supported by the European Union, fits squarely within this framework as a strategic initiative connecting two cities that appear different at first glance – Palermo, the regional capital of Sicily, and Sekondi-Takoradi, a coastal hub in Ghana – but are deeply linked not only by diaspora networks but also by a shared commitment to facing contemporary urban challenges together. These cities place their complex histories and current ambitions at the service of their communities' future.

The twinning between Palermo and Sekondi-Takoradi is based on a common vision of cities capable of mutual learning, of valuing their unique characteristics, and of activating urban regeneration processes guided by the principles of social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and cultural innovation. Despite differing historical, political, economic, and administrative contexts, both cities are confronting transformations that demand new instruments of governance and cooperation. As such, they present themselves as laboratories of urban regeneration for their respective Global South regions. Palermo, a millennia-old Mediterranean city, has always been a complex urban laboratory. Its cultural stratifications, migrant communities, tensions between centre and periphery, rich architectural heritage, and economic disparities make it an ideal context for experimenting with integrated urban policies and circular regeneration processes. Following years of mafia-driven exploitation and a prolonged phase of stagnation and marginalisation, Palermo has, over the past two decades, embarked on a path of revival founded on culture, social innovation, and civic participation. This trajectory is steadily generating new urban spaces, rebuilding the relationship between centre and periphery, and reconnecting its plural communities around the shared stewardship of common goods.

Palermo is a sublime city, in the Neoplatonic sense – an entity that evokes awe and mystery, offering an emotional understanding of the infinite and the powerful force of its urban and human nature, albeit imperfect. It is a city in constant oscillation between memory and future, inhabited by a diverse community navigating between crises and opportunities, lament and therapy. It eternally chases a lost happiness, balanced between subdued ambitions and emerging needs.

To me, Palermo is also an idea: the idea of urban innovation, the idea of a permanent laboratory for the paths cities of the Global South might take to alter the course of the present and aspire to a different future – one rooted in the generative value of diversity and creativity, and the responsible value of resilience and inclusion. A city as a possible response to the feared collapse of humanity triggered by a predatory, convulsive, and toxic Anthropocene. A crisis-proof city, one might say, given how many it has endured—and is still enduring.

Sekondi-Takoradi, the Ghanaian twin city and field site for the project, is Ghana's second-largest metropolitan area, home to just over 440,000 residents. Sekondi-Takoradi, the Ghanaian twin city and field site for the project, is Ghana's third-largest metropolitan area, home to just over 1,100,000 residents. It is a sprawling city-region facing numerous global challenges, including the effects of the climate crisis, uncontrolled population growth, imperfect technological transitions, rising urban poverty and exclusion, and the complex management of cultural diversity and migration. Sekondi-Takoradi is a polycentric city formed by the fusion of two urban centres – Takoradi (more affluent) and Sekondi (less so) – along with a patchwork of non-urbanised areas still administratively independent yet linked by a fascinating blend of roads, trails, residential neighbourhoods, and tropical forests. Like Palermo, it aims to construct a collective vision rooted in a shared image of the city and translated into participatory urban development practices.

Some communities in Sekondi-Takoradi are particularly vulnerable. In recent years, the cooperation project has launched effective awareness campaigns to combat gender- and child-based violence, especially in the fishing community of Ngyiresia, which relies on artisanal fishing along the Sekondi coast. These families live in critical economic, social, housing, and educational conditions, and there is an urgent need to ensure universal access to basic education and protect minors – particularly girls – from all forms of violence. In this context, collaboration with Palermo represents an opportunity to strengthen administrative capacities, test inclusive urban planning models, and build economic resilience through North-South cooperation.

The TCSPP was born from the desire to build bridges of mutual learning – not by transferring ready-made models, but through the co-production of knowledge and context-sensitive solutions. The two cities are not merely technical partners; they are active participants in a horizontal relationship centred on urban experience, listening, and the joint experimentation of innovative governance tools and practices. This is a true

sisterhood of cities, committed to acting through three dimensions: civic resonance, common objectives, and converging actions.

Methods and objectives: urban and cultural innovation

The Twin-Cities In Sustainable Partnership adopts a systemic approach to urban governance based on three pillars:

- a. Participatory governance, promoting co-design with citizens, associations, universities, and local governments through tools like neighbourhood labs, civic forums, and collaborative mapping to ensure inclusive decision-making;
- b. Capacity-building and knowledge exchange, in which civil servants, technicians, and researchers from both cities engage in joint training programmes, study visits, and workshops to strengthen administrative and technical skills;
- c. Social and cultural innovation, through the activation of pilot projects in urban regeneration, circular economy, environmental education, and heritage valorisation. Public art, social design, and youth creativity become tools for reimagining urban space and strengthening the bond between citizens and territory.

The project's objectives include: enhancing local capacities for integrated planning; promoting the inclusion of vulnerable communities; mainstreaming environmental sustainability in urban agendas; building cooperative networks among African and European cities; producing shared knowledge and replicable best practices.

This strategic vision thrives on the diversity of Palermo and Sekondi-Takoradi—two cities on different continents but united by a shared challenge: making urbanisation more just, sustainable, and democratic. From this encounter emerge novel forms of urban governance, capable of inspiring cities across the globe.



URBAN REGENERATION CASE STUDIES IN PALERMO

Icon Legend

STAKEHOLDERS



LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND AUTHORITIES

Residents - Local associations and cooperatives - Minority groups - Municipalities
- Regional authorities - Other relevant institutions



TOURISM SERVICES PROVIDERS

Agencies for Tourism Development and Promotion - Tour operators - Tourist guides - Hospitality and accommodation providers - Other tourism service providers



LOCAL PRODUCERS

Local artisans - Local enterprises and SMEs - Food and gastronomy producers
- Agricultural and farming cooperatives - Transportation service providers - Handcraft and traditional product makers



TECHNOLOGY AND RESEARCH

Technology providers and innovators - Apps and Software Developers - Research Institutions - Universities - Schools



ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSERVATION GROUPS

Environmental NGOs, local associations and volunteer groups - Protected areas and national/regional parks management bodies - Nature, biodiversity conservation organisations and authorities - Landscape and heritage preservation organisations and authorities - Biodiversity monitoring groups and eco-certification bodies - Environmental education and awareness groups



JOURNALISTS, MEDIA AND MARKETING AGENCIES

Journalists and freelance reporters - Local and national media outlets - Bloggers/influencers - Digital content creators and social media managers - Marketing and communication agencies

IMPACTS



**POLICY
IMPACTS**



**SOCIAL
IMPACTS**



**ECONOMIC
IMPACTS**



**RESEARCH
IMPACTS**



**CULTURAL
IMPACTS**

Note: The impact of each case study in these five fields has been summarised on a relative scale from 1 to 5 according to its relevance. This is based on self-assessment and on outcomes from the survey conducted by project designers and local stakeholders.



DANISINNI. A model of community regeneration

Danisinni, a historic yet marginalised neighbourhood in Palermo, has become a symbol of community-driven urban regeneration. Characterised by physical isolation and socio-economic challenges, the area has seen significant transformation since 2016, led by the Sant’Agnese Parish and local organisations. Key initiatives include the D.A.R.E. (Danisinni – Art – Regeneration – Eco-Sustainability) project, focusing on inclusion, environmental

sustainability, and cultural identity. Actions encompass public art, urban farming, and repurposing disused spaces. A notable achievement is the reopening of the Galante nursery school in late 2024, after 17 years of closure, now serving as an educational and social hub. These efforts have fostered social cohesion, community engagement, and have drawn institutional and academic attention as a model for grassroots urban renewal.

MAIN STAKEHOLDERS



IMPACTS



RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

Academic publications and studies
Articles, Video, Podcast, and Online Resources

LESSON LEARNED

Community-led regeneration in Danisinni shows that social cohesion, cultural identity, and inclusive reuse of space are key to lasting urban transformation. Collaboration between residents, academia, and institutions proved essential. Long-term support ensures sustainability and impact.

✓ DOS - What Worked

- **Engage Local Communities from the Start**
Include residents in co-design, planning, and management processes.
- **Foster Interdisciplinary Collaboration**
Connect architects, educators, social workers, artists, and local institutions.
- **Use Culture and Education as Regeneration Tools**
Promote public art, theatre, urban farming, and school-based initiatives as anchors of change.
- **Create Multifunctional Public Spaces**
Prioritise spaces that serve both social and educational functions (e.g., Danisinni Garden, open-air museum).
- **Establish Long-Term Governance Structures**
Build networks (e.g., cooperatives, associations) that sustain continuity beyond project funding.

✗ DON'TS - Challenge to Avoid

- **Treat Regeneration as a One-Off Project**
Avoid short-term actions disconnected from community needs or future maintenance.
- **Overlook Informal Networks**
Ignoring local leaders or grassroots groups can weaken trust and legitimacy.
- **Isolate Interventions**
Fragmented or siloed projects lose impact—integrate social, spatial, and cultural actions.
- **Depend Solely on Top-Down Initiatives**
Imposed solutions without local buy-in risk failure and resistance.
- **Underestimate the Role of Narrative and Identity**
Place-based storytelling and shared memory are key to building belonging and pride.

PALAZZO BUTERA.

From restoration to neighbourhood regeneration through heritage

In 2016, Massimo Valsecchi - entrepreneur, philanthropist, and art collector - with his wife Francesca, purchased the 18th-century Palazzo Butera, then in disrepair, in Palermo's historic Kalsa district. They funded its full restoration and a museographic project to open the building to the public. The transformation into a cultural hub, featuring the Valsecchi private contemporary art collection, had a strong impact on the area's regeneration. It helped turn Kalsa into

a cultural district with services and event spaces. The restoration revitalised the district's social fabric, taking on civic as well as aesthetic and architectural value. Local artisans were involved, helping preserve traditional skills and generate new economic opportunities. From this experience, the first Palermo's widespread School of Arts and Crafts was born, to rediscover traditional arts and crafts in an innovative way.

MAIN STAKEHOLDERS



IMPACTS



RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

Academic publications and studies
Articles, Video, Podcast, and Online Resources

LESSON LEARNED

Investing in the restoration of historic buildings as cultural hubs can drive neighbourhood regeneration, preserve heritage, and foster local economies. The transformation of Palazzo Butera in Palermo illustrates how private initiatives rooted in civic responsibility can revitalise social fabric, support craftsmanship, and spark long-term urban change.

✓ DOS - What Worked

- **Leverage Private Investment for Public Benefit**
Use private funding to create accessible cultural spaces with civic value.
- **Engage Local Artisans in Restoration**
Preserve traditional skills and stimulate local employment through hands-on involvement.
- **Anchor Regeneration in Culture**
Use art, exhibitions, and heritage to revitalise urban identity and attract visitors.
- **Integrate Education from the Start**
Support initiatives like the School of Arts and Crafts to ensure long-term social impact.
- **Open Heritage to the Public**
Ensure restored spaces are welcoming, usable, and meaningful for the wider community.

✗ DON'TS - Challenge to Avoid

- **Treat Restoration as a Cultural Showcase Only**
Focusing solely on aesthetics and exhibition risks limiting deeper social and civic engagement.
- **Exclude Local Communities**
Limiting involvement to cultural elites or tourists may alienate local residents weakening social relevance and long-term sustainability.
- **Isolate the Project from its Urban Context**
A landmark building alone cannot regenerate a district - coordination with wider urban efforts is essential.
- **Rely Exclusively on Private Leadership**
Sustainable impact needs shared governance and public participation.



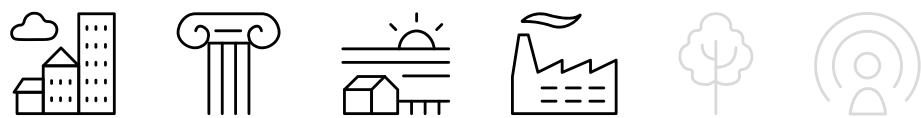
PALERMO MARINA YACHTING.

Reconnecting the city, the port and the sea

Palermo Marina Yachting is a strategic, multifunctional public space reconnecting the port, the city, and the coastal landscape. Developed by the Western Sicily Port Authority under the Port Masterplan, the project — by the Eng. Petralia and Studio Provenzano Architects— has restored the Trapezoidal Pier, a formerly degraded area near the historic Castello a Mare. The demolition of abandoned structures and the creation of a three-hecta-

re coastal park dedicated to yachting, tourism, culture, and leisure have re-defined the site with a new pedestrian waterfront, floating piers, green areas, a congress centre, hospitality facilities, an amphitheatre, and a water basin that reinterprets the former Arab fortress. A key link between past and present, infrastructure and landscape, historical memory and new public uses, it reconnects the port with Palermo's urban fabric.

MAIN STAKEHOLDERS



IMPACTS



RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

Academic publications and studies
Articles, Video, Podcast, and Online Resources

LESSON LEARNED

A strategic port regeneration can serve as a catalyst for reconnecting urban, historical, and coastal dimensions of the city. The integration of public space, tourism, and local enterprise — driven by strong institutional planning — demonstrates how infrastructure can support both economic development and civic accessibility.

✓ DOS - What Worked

- **Leverage Strategic Public Investment**
Use coordinated public initiatives to transform degraded port areas into multifunctional spaces.
- **Reconnect City and Sea**
Restore the historic relationship between urban life and the waterfront through accessible, pedestrian-friendly design.
- **Design for Multifunctionality**
Combine leisure, tourism, culture, and environmental uses to maximise community benefit and urban vibrancy.
- **Value Coastal Heritage**
Integrate archaeological and historical elements into the design to preserve identity and enhance place-making.
- **Promote Inclusive Access**
Ensure that regenerated spaces are open, free, and welcoming to all users, not only visitors or tourists.

✗ DON'TS - Challenge to Avoid

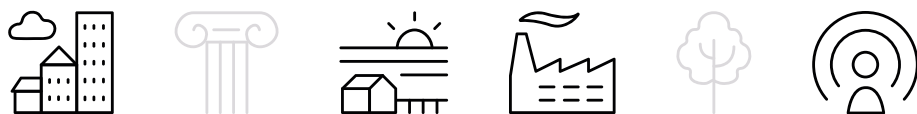
- **Treat the Waterfront as a Tourist Enclave Only**
Prioritising visitors over residents risks creating exclusive spaces with limited community relevance.
- **Overlook Everyday Accessibility**
Designing without considering daily public use can disconnect the project from local needs.
- **Ignore Historical Continuity**
Neglecting heritage integration weakens identity and reduces the area's cultural resonance.
- **Isolate the Project from Urban Life**
Failing to connect the redevelopment to surrounding neighbourhoods limits its regenerative impact.
- **Focus Solely on Infrastructure**
Prioritising physical upgrades without social programming undermines long-term sustainability.

CANTIERI CULTURALI ALLA ZISA. From the recovery of the Ducrot factories to cultural innovation labs

The restoration of the pavilions of the Officine Ducrot – a historic industrial complex for furniture production (late 19th–early 20th century) in the peripheral Zisa district – stands as a key example of urban regeneration. The Municipality promoted both the structural restoration and the adaptive reuse of the site, enhancing its industrial heritage by dedicating it to cultural and educational purposes. Now known as the Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa (Zisa Cul-

tural Worksites), the area has regained urban centrality, as a permanent laboratory for cultural innovation. It hosts 32 active spaces, run by around 38 public and private organisations, educational institutions and cultural production centres including: Cre.Zi.Plus, a hub for social innovation; ZisaLab, dedicated to design and research; and the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, the national film school and archive, focused on documentary filmmaking.

MAIN STAKEHOLDERS



IMPACTS



RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

Academic publications and studies
Articles, Video, Podcast, and Online Resources

LESSON LEARNED

Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa represents a replicable urban model of participatory governance, reactivating a marginal area through the creation of new hubs of active citizenship, blending historical memory, cultural innovation, and public planning. It shows how reusing industrial heritage for cultural purposes can bring new centrality to formerly peripheral urban areas.

✓ DOS - What Worked

- **Promote Adaptive Reuse of Industrial Heritage**
Transform disused spaces into cultural assets while preserving their historical value.
- **Foster Collaborative Governance**
Involve public institutions, private organisations, and civic actors in shared site management.
- **Support Cultural and Educational Innovation**
Host initiatives of educational institutions and cultural production centres to drive knowledge production and skills training.
- **Encourage Local Participation**
Create inclusive programmes and open-access events to engage residents and youth.
- **Anchor Regeneration in Cultural Practice**
Use arts, cinema, design, and performance to revitalise marginal urban areas.

✗ DON'TS - Challenge to Avoid

- **Top-Down Programming**
Excluding local voices in planning risks disconnection from community needs.
- **Overlook Daily Accessibility**
Prioritising large events over everyday use may limit neighbourhood impact.
- **Neglect Maintenance**
Cultural vitality requires ongoing care of both spaces and relationships.
- **Cultural Homogenisation**
Ensure diversity of formats and actors to reflect the city's plural identities.
- **Isolate the Site from the City**
Strengthen links with surrounding neighbourhoods and urban systems to avoid creating an "island."

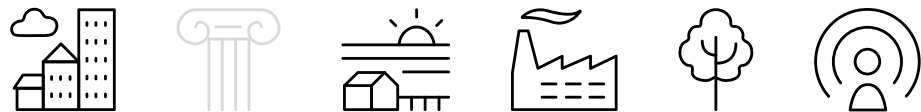


ECOMUSEO "MARE MEMORIA VIVA". From historic train depot to community maritime museum

The Ecomuseo Urbano “Mare Memoria Viva” (“Sea as Living Memory” Urban Ecomuseum) is a space for culture and civic engagement, aimed at exploring the relationship between Palermo and its sea. Located in the former late 19th-century Sant’Erasmo locomotive depot, the museum helps to reconnect the city with its coastal identity through intergenerational memory, collective storytelling, and civic participation. Strengthened by a special pu-

blic-private partnership between the City of Palermo and the CLAC cooperative, it gathers oral histories, photographs, and everyday objects from local fishing communities and families, as a living archive and a dynamic space shaped by local people. The community museum focuses on the relationship between art, education, and territory through thematic exhibitions, educational workshops, neighbourhood walks, and school programmes.

MAIN STAKEHOLDERS



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LESSON LEARNED

The museum shows how a public-private partnership can drive cultural regeneration by transforming local memory into a civic resource. Through community storytelling and a public geo-portal, it promotes inclusive heritage and environmental justice, while offering multifunctional spaces for art, education, and civic life.

✓ DOS - What Worked

- **Activate Civic Memory**
Engage local communities in collecting and preserving oral histories, photographs, and everyday heritage to shape shared urban narratives.
- **Use Culture as a Tool for Regeneration**
Combine art, education, and civic participation to transform marginal spaces into places of active citizenship.
- **Establish Innovative Public-Private Partnerships**
Create special agreements between public institutions and civic organisations to ensure long-term, community-rooted stewardship.
- **Encourage Intergenerational Participation**
Design cultural projects that value and connect the memories of older generations with the creativity of younger ones.
- **Blend Physical and Digital Access**
Expand the museum’s reach through multimedia archives to share local knowledge with broader audiences.

✗ DON'TS - Challenge to Avoid

- **Limit Culture to Traditional Institutions**
Relying solely on formal museums can exclude grassroots narratives and everyday heritage.
- **Separate Regeneration from Social Use**
Restoring a space without embedding it in everyday community life reduces its civic impact.
- **Overlook Informal Knowledge**
Ignoring non-institutional memories and local stories weakens cultural continuity and inclusiveness.
- **Ignore the Role of Education**
Failing to integrate schools, workshops, and young people means missing key opportunities for empowerment and legacy.
- **Underestimate Small-Scale Infrastructure**
Neglecting basic amenities (gardens, kitchens, gathering spaces) can prevent cultural places from becoming truly lived-in community spaces.



STREET ART IN PALERMO.

Art, identity and civic dialogue to reclaim public space

In recent years, street art has become a powerful tool for urban regeneration and social commentary in Palermo. Projects across neighbourhoods such as Albergheria, Ballarò, and Zisa have turned public walls into canvases for dialogue and inclusion. Led by local and international artists — including Igor Scalisi Palminteri, Andrea Buglisi, TVBoy, Rosk & Loste, Camilla Falsini, and Sten & Lex — these interventions aim to reclaim neglected spaces, celebrate community identities,

and challenge dominant narratives. With support from associations, schools, and residents, the murals often depict figures from local culture and global civil rights movements, fostering civic pride and inspiring new urban imaginaries. Palermo's street art goes beyond decoration: it reshapes public space and contributes to the city's identity, transforming its streets into an open-air museum that reflects its history, culture, and social issues.

MAIN STAKEHOLDERS



IMPACTS



RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

Academic publications and studies
Articles, Video, Podcast, and Online Resources

LESSON LEARNED

Street art in Palermo shows how creative expressions in public space can drive community engagement, reclaim neglected areas, and foster shared cultural identity. When rooted in local contexts and supported by networks of artists, residents, and educators, murals become tools for civic dialogue and inclusive regeneration.

✓ DOS - What Worked

- **Foster Community Engagement**
Encourage collaboration between artists and local residents to ensure artworks reflect community identities and values.
- **Highlight Social and Cultural Themes**
Use murals to address social issues, celebrate local heritage, and promote cultural diversity.
- **Utilize Public Spaces Strategically**
Select prominent and accessible locations to maximise visibility and community interaction.
- **Support Local Artists**
Prioritise involvement of local talent to strengthen the city's artistic community and economy.
- **Integrate with Urban Regeneration Efforts**
Align street art projects with broader urban development plans to contribute to neighborhood revitalisation.

✗ DON'TS - Challenge to Avoid

- **Avoid Superficial Aesthetics**
Refrain from creating art that lacks depth or fails to engage with the local context and issues.
- **Exclude Community Input**
Do not implement projects without consulting local residents, which can lead to disconnection and lack of support.
- **Neglect Maintenance and Sustainability**
Failing to plan for the upkeep of artworks can result in deterioration and loss of impact over time.
- **Overlook Legal and Ethical Considerations**
Ensure all projects comply with local regulations and respect property rights to avoid conflicts.
- **Ignore Educational Opportunities**
Missing the chance to involve schools and educational programs can limit the project's reach and influence.

MUDIR | ORATORIO QUARONI. From ruins to a cultural gateway to rosalian heritage

The Oratorio Quaroni Revitalisation Project is transforming a formerly unused baroque oratory in Palermo's historic centre into a multifunctional cultural hub. As the main node of the new MuDiR (Rosalian Urban Distributed Museum), the site will offer an immersive multimedia experience narrating the life and legacy of St Rosalia, Patron Saint of Palermo, and serve as an info point for Palermo's religious and cultural heritage routes, including St Rosalia Route. The project, promoted by the cul-

tural enterprise Kōrai and supported by a special agreement with the Archdiocese, will integrate digital installations, interpretative displays, and innovative tools to enhance access and visitor engagement. It reconnects about 100 Rosalia-related sites across the city, combining history, faith, and identity. The Oratory will host events, educational workshops, and thematic exhibits, contributing to Palermo's cultural regeneration.

MAIN STAKEHOLDERS



EXPECTED IMPACTS



RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

Academic publications and studies
Articles, Video, Podcast, and Online Resources

LESSON LEARNED

Reviving local heritage through digital storytelling and civic reuse creates inclusive cultural spaces linking memory, identity, and tourism. The project demonstrates how adaptive reuse, public-faith collaboration, and multimedia tools can revitalise historic sites, foster city-wide cultural networks, and support social and economic regeneration.

✓ DOS - Recommended practices

- **Foster Community Engagement**
Encourage collaboration between artists and local residents to ensure artworks reflect community identities and values.
- **Highlight Social and Cultural Themes**
Use murals to address social issues, celebrate local heritage, and promote cultural diversity.
- **Utilise Public Spaces Strategically**
Select prominent and accessible locations to maximise visibility and community interaction.
- **Support Local Artists**
Prioritise involvement of local talent to strengthen the city's artistic community and economy.
- **Integrate with Urban Regeneration Efforts**
Align street art projects with broader urban development plans to contribute to neighbourhood revitalisation.

✗ DON'TS - Potential pitfalls to avoid

- **Isolate the Site**
Don't treat the location as a standalone attraction; integrate it within wider cultural and urban contexts.
- **Overlook Stakeholder Input**
Avoid excluding key partners or community voices, which can limit the project's relevance and impact.
- **Neglect Digital Innovation**
Don't rely solely on traditional displays—embrace technology to enrich visitor experiences.
- **Ignore Economic and Social Benefits**
Don't miss opportunities to use heritage projects for broader community development and local economy support.
- **Disregard Maintenance Plans**
Failing to plan for long-term care and updates can jeopardise the project's sustainability and appeal.

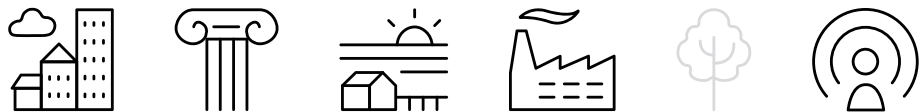


THE WORLD CITIES MUSEUM. Reimagining the Convent of the Crociferi of Santa Ninfa

Farm Cultural Park is an independent Sicilian cultural centre – founded by Andrea Bartoli and Florinda Sajeva – that revitalises urban spaces through culture, education, and community engagement. Thanks to a five-year concession from the State Property Agency, Farm will redevelop the long-abandoned 17th-century Convent of the Crociferi of Santa Ninfa in the historic centre of Palermo. The complex will be turned into a new cul-

tural hub: the World Cities Museum. Inspired by Farm's biennial Countless Cities, the museum will explore global urban narratives through a permanent exhibition, a library dedicated to urban studies, and laboratories for researchers and students. The new space for learning, participation, and innovation in city-making will also host SOU – School of Architecture for Children, and Plurals, a creative workshop for teenagers.

MAIN STAKEHOLDERS



EXPECTED IMPACTS



RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

Academic publications and studies
Articles, Video, Podcast, and Online Resources

LESSON LEARNED

The case study highlights the importance of a creative public-private partnership capable of transforming a long-neglected site into a cultural hub that connects local identity with global urban narratives. Contemporary sustainable cities should promote the reuse of historic buildings as a means of urban regeneration based on education, civic engagement, and international exchange.

✓ DOS - Recommended practices

- **Leverage Cultural Spaces for Civic Innovation**
Use the museum as a living lab for urban futures, connecting policy, design, and public discourse.
- **Blend Global Perspectives with Local Narratives**
Anchor exhibitions and activities in the city's unique identity while fostering international dialogue.
- **Foster Educational Continuity**
Develop inclusive learning programmes to engage children and teens in long-term creative learning.
- **Activate Underused Heritage through Public Access**
Ensure the repurposed spaces remain open, usable, and welcoming for all, not just for curated events.
- **Build Public-Private Synergies**
Use institutional support alongside civic entrepreneurship to sustain the project.

✗ DON'TS - Potential pitfalls to avoid

- **Separate Culture from Daily Life**
Avoid making the museum an isolated showcase — connect it to everyday urban challenges and opportunities.
- **Limit Access to Cultural Elites**
Ensure programming reflects diverse communities and avoids exclusivity.
- **Treat Repurposed Sites as Static**
Regeneration must remain dynamic — allow for evolving uses, feedback, and adaptation over time.
- **Overlook Governance Needs**
Relying only on a charismatic vision without structured governance can risk sustainability.
- **Ignore the Neighbourhood Context**
Cultural investment should benefit and interact with the surrounding neighbourhood, not just the project area.

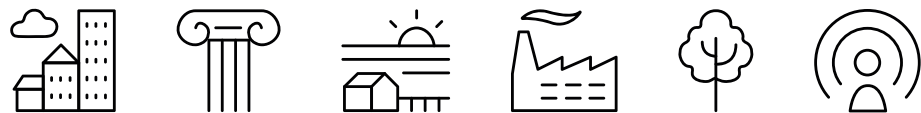


LA FAVORITA ROYAL PARK. A multifunctional green heritage project

The regeneration project of Palermo's Favorita Royal Nature Reserve aims to transform the late 18th-century royal park - a private hunting reserve and agricultural estate - of King Ferdinand III of Bourbon into a multifunctional green space combining environmental conservation, economic activity, sports, and recreation. Covering 400 hectares, the park is a vital natural asset for the city and a unique example of European landscape heritage. The plan aims at restoring key histo-

ric features and infrastructure while creating new cultural hubs and sustainable public facilities. It seeks to foster a collaborative management model involving public authorities, private partners, and local communities to ensure long-term care and vitality. Expected outcomes include enhanced biodiversity, increased tourism, improved quality of life for residents, and the preservation of the park's rich history and natural beauty as a landmark of Palermo's urban identity.

MAIN STAKEHOLDERS



EXPECTED IMPACTS



RESOURCES AND REFERENCE MATERIALS

Academic publications and studies
Articles, Video, Podcast, and Online Resources

LESSON LEARNED

The project highlights the value of integrated planning and strong public-private-community partnerships strengthened by strategic funding and a focus on short-term visible results. By combining cultural heritage, environmental protection, and multifunctional uses - from agriculture to coworking - it aims to create an inclusive green district.

✓ DOS - Recommended practices ✗ DON'TS - Potential pitfalls to avoid

- **Engage local communities**
Include residents in planning, feedback, and stewardship roles.
- **Respect historical identity**
Preserve and interpret the site's royal, agricultural, and cultural heritage.
- **Foster multifunctionality**
Balance recreation, ecology, agriculture, and innovation.
- **Prioritise sustainability**
Use low-impact infrastructure and renewable energy.
- **Coordinate public-private partnerships**
Involve institutions, businesses, and NGOs in shared governance.
- **Ensure accessibility**
Design inclusive spaces for diverse age groups and abilities.
- **Invest in quick wins**
Deliver visible early actions to build momentum and trust.
- **Ignore local context**
Avoid generic designs or uses that overlook the park's identity.
- **Over-commercialise**
Limit profit-driven activities that threaten environmental or cultural value.
- **Delay implementation**
Avoid long gaps between planning and visible results.
- **Fragment management**
Prevent siloed operations by ensuring unified oversight.
- **Neglect maintenance**
Prioritise long-term care alongside initial development.
- **Exclude vulnerable groups**
Avoid barriers—physical, economic, or social—to participation.



Reflection on Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA)

by John Agyei and Edmund Ayesu

Historical evolution of STMA

The development of Sekondi-Takoradi is rooted in early trade relations with Europeans as far back as the 13th century (Lawler, 2002). Its prominence was enhanced by the establishment of Fort Orange by the Dutch in 1642 and a British Fort in 1682. During the British colonial period, Takoradi was developed into a major port in 1928 under Governor Gordon Guggisberg to facilitate the export of primary commodities such as timber, cocoa, and minerals. Sekondi, in turn, evolved as a railway hub, linking the Forest Belt — with Kumasi as a central node — to Accra, the capital. These infrastructural investments catalysed the city's commercial and administrative growth, positioning Sekondi-Takoradi as the capital of Ghana's Western Region.

The strategic location of the Twin City — Sekondi and Takoradi — has been bolstered by its transport infrastructure, which includes a seaport, railway, and major highways connecting it to other key urban centres in Ghana and neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. Administratively, the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA) comprises three sub-metropolitan areas: Sekondi, Takoradi, and Essikado-Ketan. The Metropolis has an estimated population of over 1.1 million, with approximately 96% residing in urban settlements.

Legal framework and governance structure

STMA has operated as a single administrative entity since 1946 and was conferred city status in 1963. It is currently the third-largest metropolitan area in Ghana, with its governance structure underpinned by the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936). This legislation mandates STMA to exercise both political and administrative authority to promote local economic development and supervise all subordinate administrative units. The Act also empowers the Assembly to perform deliberative, legislative, and executive functions in collaboration with relevant stakeholders. Governance in STMA is further guided by the 1992 Constitution of Ghana and supplementary Acts of Parliament. The Assembly is composed of elected representatives from electoral areas, government appointees, and non-elected members from traditional councils, institutions, and relevant bodies. The Presiding Member, elected by Assembly members, oversees its deliberative processes, while the Metropolitan Chief Executive — appointed by the President — serves as the administrative and political head. A cadre of technocrats supports the implementation of policies and operations of the Assembly.

Development challenges

Despite its strategic importance, STMA faces numerous developmental challenges that hamper its ability to fully deliver on its mandate. These include limited human resource capacity (both quality and quantity), inadequate equipment and logistics, and insufficient financial resources. Other challenges include land tenure system, weak cooperation with traditional authorities and political interferences, which undermine control, and enforcement of by-laws. Further to these, the Assembly does not have the legal authority to provide key utility services such as water and electricity which remain under the purview of the central government.

Financially, STMA relies heavily on allocations from the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF), while internally generated revenue from property rate, business operating permits, and market tolls—remained insufficient relative to the city's developmental needs.

Innovations and strategic interventions

In response to these challenges, STMA has embarked on a series of innovative strategies to improve governance, enhance service delivery, and promote sustainable development. One of the most notable initiatives is the Twin Cities in Sustainable Partnership Project (TCSPP), implemented in collaboration with Kumasi Technical University and the Palermo Municipality in Italy. With funding of € 3.0 million from the European Union, TCSPP has contributed significantly to improving infrastructure, sanitation, environmental sustainability, and livelihoods. STMA has also joined international networks such as CoST International and Engineers Against Poverty, leveraging technical expertise and funding opportunities. Other development collaborators of STMA include Ghana Sicily Business Forum, Cooperazione Internazionale Sud Sud (CISS), Open Government Partnership (OGP), Friends of the Nation, CoST Sekondi-Takoradi Foundation, Citywide Settlement Upgrading Fund, Africa Women International, Life Relief Foundation, Hurds Foundation, Berea Social Foundation, Goshen Global Vision and Hen Mpoano. These partnerships have enabled the Assembly to reduce its dependence on central government transfers, with internally generated funds (IGF) and grants now surpassing allocations from the DACF.

It is also worthy-noting that the Assembly has in recent times initiated deliberate programmes that have improved citizens participation in local governance. For instance, through TCSPP, there have been regular engagements between the Assembly, business enterprises and residents including traditional authorities, which have collectively enhanced accountability and civic involvement. Additionally, citizens awareness of the local governance system, people's rights, and responsibilities have significantly improved. Mechanisms to address grievances have also been established, thus reducing conflicts between residents and the Assembly.

The Assembly has instituted innovative mechanisms in revenue mobilisation through the adoption of technology. The implementation of the e-governance platform has streamlined processes of revenue collection, which has ultimately improved convenience and accountability. These efforts have been complemented by routine public education campaigns, which are aimed at improving compliance.

The Assembly is building the capacity of its elected members and technical staff through a deliberate continuous professional development programme. Training and stakeholder engagements have been central to this effort, especially in the area of physical planning and settlement development. The personnel of the Assembly including the elected representatives are equipped with relevant skills to read and interpret maps and settlement planning documents. These documents have been simplified and revised for ease of interpretation by Assembly members and community representatives. Through this initiative, each Assembly member now receives an approved plan of their electoral area to support development monitoring and by-law enforcement.

Recognising the importance of a robust economic base, STMA is also supporting informal sector enterprises, many of whom operate outside the tax system. The Assembly has also organised skills training and business support, for the youth, women, and persons with disabilities, which focused on increasing productivity and revenue mobilisation through effective levy and fee compliance. Through the TCSPP, investments have been made in value-added agricultural activities such as greenhouse farming, poultry, fish farming, rabbit rearing, and improved fish smoking techniques. Additional efforts in tourism, sanitation, and artisanal crafts are also underway, with operators being encouraged to form registered groups for better identification, engagement and support.

Conclusion

In the face of structural and resource limitations, STMA has demonstrated resilience and innovation. Through strategic partnerships, participatory governance, and commitment to local capacity building, the Assembly is making significant strides in urban governance. These efforts underscore the capacity of local governments to drive sustainable development when given the required resources, autonomy, and community trust.

3.1 Best practices in urban regeneration in Ghana

Urban regeneration in Ghana has evolved as a multidimensional response to the spatial, socio-economic, and environmental transformations that characterise rapid urbanisation. With over 58% of the population living in urban areas, the country faces immense challenges, including informal settlements, environmental degradation, and aging infrastructure. In response, various local authorities, supported by development partners, have adopted progressive and context-sensitive regeneration strategies aimed at revitalising decayed urban zones, enhancing inclusivity, and promoting sustainability.

Participatory planning and governance

One of the cornerstones of effective urban regeneration in Ghana has been the commitment to participatory governance approaches. Local governments such as the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly (STMA), and Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) have institutionalised stakeholder consultations in urban redevelopment projects. This participatory ethos is reflected in initiatives such as town hall meetings, local planning committees, and enumeration exercises that involve slum dwellers in designing regeneration solutions. Notably, the implementation of the Community Infrastructure Upgrading Projects (CIUP), supported by the World Bank, exemplifies this best practice. By engaging community members in needs assessment and prioritisation, projects were tailored to local situations thus, increasing legitimacy, ownership, and sustainability.

Integrated infrastructure and livelihood interventions in Ghana

Urban regeneration efforts have increasingly moved beyond physical redevelopment to integrate economic and social upliftment. One successful example is the Greater Accra Resilient and Integrated Development Project (GARID), which focused on flood mitigation while incorporating urban mobility, green public spaces, and informal sector support.

Additionally, regeneration projects in areas such as Old Fadama in Accra and Asafo in Kumasi have combined slum upgrading with market redevelopment, livelihood support programs, and microfinance access. These interventions acknowledged the interdependence between shelter, livelihoods, and dignity—providing a model for holistic regeneration.

Land regularisation and tenure security

Ghana's urban regeneration strategies have increasingly acknowledged the centrality of land tenure security in sustainable redevelopment. The Land Use and Spatial Planning Act, 2016 (Act 925) and the Land Act, 2020 (Act 1036) provide a legal basis for tenure reform and spatial integration. In practice, urban regeneration initiatives in informal settlements such as Sabon Zongo and Nima in Kumasi and Accra respectively, have piloted land use regularisation, which enables residents to access municipal services and participate in planning. Tenure security has proven critical in unlocking local investment in housing upgrades and reducing conflict associated with forced evictions, especially in high-density inner-city areas.

Urban and sustainable redevelopment projects in Ghana

Urban redevelopment in Ghana is increasingly guided by principles of sustainability, climate resilience, and inclusivity. These values are embodied in a growing portfolio of flagship projects across key metropolitan areas including STMA.

Ghana Urban Management Pilot Programme (GUMPP) - 2013-2019

The Ghana Urban Management Pilot Programme (GUMPP) was EUR 40.5 million programme financed by the French Development Agency (AFD) and was implemented in Ho Municipality as well as Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi and Tamale Metropolis. It was intended to finance priority investments projects and support capacity building activities of these Assemblies. GUMPP sought to promote effective urban governance in terms of strategic planning, local management, internal organisation of local administration as well as planning, implementation, operation and maintenance of local public investments. STMA received a total of €2,167,009 from GUMPP Secretariat between January 2012 and December 2019.

Local Government Capacity Support Project (LGCSP)- 2012-2019

As part of the overall efforts toward improving the performance of the Metropolitan and Municipal Assemblies (MMAs) in terms of public financial management, the Government of Ghana (GoG) designed the Local Government Capacity Support Project (LGCSP). A total amount of US\$ 175 million was allocated for LGCSP in the project period (2012-2017). STMA received a total of USD 7,586,447.37 and implemented the project in six sectors namely education, health, waste management, economic, security, roads and transport. The resources were employed to address issues relating to the provision of infrastructural facilities, capacity building and consultancy services.

The Twin Cities in Sustainable Partnership Project (TCSPP)

The TCSPP was implemented in Sekondi-Takoradi, and it exemplified cutting-edge sustainable urban redevelopment. With support from the European Union and partnerships with Kumasi Technical University and Palermo Municipality in Italy, the project targeted spatial transformation through infrastructure upgrades, sanitation improvements, and livelihood creation. Its key innovation lies in the integration of participatory governance, e-governance systems, and green technologies.

TCSPP has revitalised informal settlements by improving drainage systems, initiating sustainable urban agriculture (e.g., greenhouse farming), and creating economic opportunities for youth, women, and persons with disabilities. These interventions align with SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and Ghana's Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies.

Ayawaso Urban Redevelopment (Accra)

In Accra, the Ayawaso Redevelopment Project adopted a mixed-use redevelopment model, combining public housing with commercial and recreational spaces. A key lesson from this initiative was the need for a balance between densification and displacement. The involvement of private sector partners under Public-Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements enabled financing of high-rise developments without compromising social housing commitments.

Crucially, Ayawaso's redevelopment incorporated solar-powered infrastructure, stormwater management systems, and inclusive public spaces—aligning with sustainable urbanism principles.

Circular Economy and Waste-to-Energy in Kumasi

The Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly embarked on a sustainable urban regeneration effort centered on circular economy principles. A pilot waste-to-energy project in Oti landfill, co-funded by UNDP, converted organic waste into biogas and compost. This project addressed multiple urban issues: environmental pollution, unemployment, and unreliable energy access. It also included capacity-building component for informal waste pickers, promoting inclusive green growth.

Conclusion

Ghana's experience with urban regeneration illustrates the value of adaptive, community-driven, and environmentally sustainable strategies. The best practices identified — from participatory planning and tenure security to integrated livelihood support and circular economy models — offer scalable pathways for other African cities grappling with similar urbanisation challenges.

Future regeneration efforts must consolidate gains by strengthening institutional capacities, enhancing municipal financing mechanisms, and embedding climate resilience into urban planning. Ghana's evolving urban landscape reflects not only the urgency of renewal but also the promise of innovation rooted in local contexts.

3.2 Community involvement: local participatory models

Community involvement has emerged as a cornerstone of effective and democratic urban development, particularly within the context of cities in the Global South such as Ghana. In these places, rapid urbanisation co-exists with informality, exclusion, and uneven service delivery. Participatory models provide a framework for including local knowledge, fostering social accountability, and enhancing the legitimacy and sustainability of urban interventions.

In Ghana, local participatory approaches are institutionalised through the decentralisation framework established by the 1992 Constitution and the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936). Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) are mandated to involve residents in decision-making through mechanisms such as Area Councils, Unit Committees, and Town Hall Meetings. These structures serve as conduits for articulating community priorities, co-producing development plans, and ensuring the responsiveness of local authorities.

Beyond formal channels, innovative participatory practices have emerged through collaborative urban initiatives. Projects such as the Twin Cities in Sustainable Partnership

Project (TCSPP) in Sekondi-Takoradi and the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area Sanitation and Water Project (GAMA SWP) have operationalised community-based planning, enumeration, and social mapping exercises. These processes empower communities — especially marginalised groups such as women, youth, and informal dwellers — to co-design infrastructure upgrades, sanitation solutions, and livelihood interventions that reflect lived experiences and context-specific needs.

Moreover, participatory budgeting and grievance redress mechanisms are gaining traction as tools for deepening civic engagement and reducing mistrust between state and citizens. In urban informal settlements, grassroots organisations, faith-based institutions, and traditional authorities have often played vital intermediary roles—translating policy frameworks into culturally grounded community action.

Ultimately, participatory urban governance is not merely a procedural requirement but a strategic imperative. When communities are treated as co-creators rather than passive beneficiaries, urban development becomes more equitable, adaptive, and sustainable. As Ghana's cities continue to evolve, investing in inclusive, localised participatory models remains essential for delivering resilient urban futures.

3.3 Bridges between culture, tourism, and innovation

Revitalising urban spaces in Ghana's twin cities, particularly Sekondi-Takoradi, demands a multidimensional strategy that bridges culture, tourism, and innovation. These elements — often treated separately — are increasingly recognised as interdependent drivers of inclusive economic growth, identity preservation, and sustainable urban transformation. Currently, erroneous thinking that relegated culture to the background in the search for social and economic wellbeing of the populace has changed. This is evidenced by the provision of grant to artists in the Metropolis to support art festival during implementation of TCSPP.

Cultural heritage is a powerful, yet underutilised asset in Ghanaian cities. In Sekondi-Takoradi, colonial-era forts, historic marketplaces, fishing communities, and traditional festivals such as the Ankos Festival (also known as the Takoradi Masquerade) form a rich tapestry of local identity. However, the lack of deliberate cultural infrastructure, documentation, and integration into city planning has historically limited their contribution to development. Recognising this, emerging regeneration strategies are repositioning cultural assets as focal points for urban renewal and social innovation. Conscious efforts are being made to place statues and monuments at vintage points within the city and designation of art gallery.

Tourism, when strategically linked to cultural heritage and spatial planning, becomes a catalyst for economic revitalisation. Recent initiatives by STMA and regional development agencies have sought to rebrand Twin City as a creative and coastal tourism

destination. By restoring heritage buildings, improving public waterfronts, revitalising recreational parks and promoting cultural events, the city is attracting both domestic and international interest as tourism destination. These interventions not only enhance urban aesthetics but also create employment in the creative economy, particularly for youth and women.

Innovation serves as the enabling framework that ties these strands together. Through projects like TCSPP, digital tools and co-creation methodologies are being deployed to map heritage sites, digitise tourism services, and support artisanal industries. Smart tourism applications, eco-tourism models, and cultural entrepreneurship training programmes exemplify the fusion of traditional knowledge with contemporary innovation.

Importantly, the revitalisation of Sekondi-Takoradi hinges on inclusive governance. Local communities, creative professionals, traditional authorities, and diaspora networks must all be engaged in shaping a forward-looking urban narrative that values both legacy and modernity. Integrated strategies that align spatial planning, cultural policy, and digital innovation represent a new paradigm in African urban regeneration—one that transforms cities into resilient, vibrant, and culturally rooted hubs.



CONCLUSION

Palermo and Sekondi-Takoradi Together for a New Urbanity

by Maurizio Carta

The twinning between Palermo and Sekondi-Takoradi – developed, strengthened, and implemented within the TCSP Project – has laid the foundation for a robust and long-term urban cooperation. With the initial phase of mutual discovery and exchange completed, the time has come to consolidate a shared strategic vision that makes this partnership a stable tool for urban transformation—one that learns from experience and projects new perspectives. The first major achievement has been the creation of mutual trust among a wide range of urban actors: policymakers, citizens, youth, professionals, civil society, and academia. This relational capital forms the essential foundation for addressing urban transformations collaboratively.

Secondly, the project has highlighted the importance of integrated territorial governance. In Palermo, the networking of public offices, research centres, and local communities has increased coherence across policies for regeneration, sustainable mobility, ecology, and welfare. In Sekondi-Takoradi, the introduction of participatory practices has fostered more inclusive urban planning that is responsive to residents' needs and not solely driven by multinational interests. Thirdly, it has reinforced the understanding that urban sustainability cannot be achieved without social and climate justice. Joint activities between the two cities have underscored the strategic role of active local communities, resilient informal economies, solidarity networks, and grassroots innovation.

Towards a global urban diplomacy

In the context of these experiences, the twinning can evolve into a permanent programme of urban cooperation, as part of the broader movement for city diplomacy, articulated across several levels:

- a. Institutionalising the partnership through a Joint Office for Sustainable Urban Governance in both cities, coordinating activities, documenting practices, and facilitating access to national and international funding;
- b. Drafting a shared Urban Agenda, offering urban policy a formal “Twin Cities Charter” with measurable objectives on social equity, environmental sustainability, digital inclusion, green economy, and citizen participation;

c. Designing joint pilot projects that link local resources and transnational knowledge: participatory regeneration of public spaces in each city, youth-run urban gardens, and the establishment of civic centers focused on climate and the environment;

d. Facilitating mobility and joint training, supporting exchanges among students, technical staff, and public administrators through scholarships, internships, and summer schools focused on sustainable urban governance – to generate a shared urban learning ecosystem;

e. Activating diaspora and cultural networks by engaging diaspora communities in Palermo and leveraging historical and cultural ties between Italy and West Africa. Diasporas can act as cultural mediators and promoters of translocal projects.

A partnership for the urban common good

The future of this twinning does not lie solely in replicating best practices, but in the capacity to generate new urban imaginaries. Palermo and Sekondi-Takoradi – thanks to their geographic positions and the human richness of their communities – can serve as urban laboratories for a new post-global urban paradigm: one that is less focused on quantitative growth, and more attuned to quality of life, common goods, and territorial cohesion.

In this sense, their twinning may serve as a replicable model for other cities in the Mediterranean, Africa, and Europe, showing how inter-city cooperation is not just a tool for development, but a political act of responsibility and global solidarity.

Today's challenge is to build a global urban alliance, grounded in the right to the city, the sisterhood between humanity and nature, and the attentive listening to local communities. Palermo and Sekondi-Takoradi have shown that this is possible – the next step is to make it lasting, inclusive, and generative of a new urbanity.



The “Twin Cities in Sustainable Partnership” project contributed to enhancing urban management in response to persistent challenges such as urban sprawl, climate change, poverty, social exclusion, and the unprecedented realities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. This ultimately led to sustainable and integrated urban development in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis – Ghana (Overall Objective/Impact), through the strengthening of the twinning relationship that had been initiated with the city of Palermo (Italy) in 2019, home to one of the largest Ghanaian diaspora communities in Europe.

The project drove comprehensive change by leveraging three key areas:

1. Building capacity and strengthening partnerships at both territorial and transnational levels to improve urban governance;
2. Boosting local economic development through climate-smart production techniques and green technologies;
3. Integrating gender perspectives into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of actions, with the aim of achieving gender equity.

This mutual cooperation contributed to upscaling the partnership between the two cities in technical and administrative fields, as well as in programmes of social promotion, environmental protection, education, public health, energy planning, and sustainable development, in line with the attainment of SDGs 1, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, and 15.

The management of STMA coordinated the proposed action as Lead Applicant, involving the Municipality of Palermo as key partner (Co-applicant), in particular the staff of the Municipal Office of Cultures.

The exchange of good practices between the Ghanaian and Italian local authorities was facilitated by the Honorary Consulate of Ghana in Palermo, as well as by the Ghana Sicily Business Forum, CISS/International South-South Cooperation, and Kumasi Technical University.