

IUC Asia online series
International city cooperation as a response to the current corona crisis

REPORT

The [International Urban Cooperation \(IUC\)](#) is a project of the European Union managed by the Service for [Foreign Policy Instruments \(FPI\)](#) for the [European External Action Service \(EEAS\)](#). The [Asia chapter of the IUC](#) organised on **27. March 2020** an online discussion about international city cooperation as a response to the current Covid19 crisis. The goal of the meeting was to facilitate mutual learning and help among cities from Europe and Asia. A total of **66 experts** joined the discussion, including participants from the European Union (EU Commission and EU Parliament) and leading urban managers from Guangzhou (China), Gwangju (Korea), Indonesia (Jakarta), Spain (Barcelona and Granada), France (Nice), Italy (Rome and Bologna), Germany (Mannheim and Stuttgart). The event was the first in a series of thematic online discussion rounds to be implemented in the coming months.

Representing the [Directorate General of the European Commission \(DG REGIO\)](#), Ronald Hall stated that the EU is undertaking extraordinary efforts to support the member states and to encourage cross-border health cooperation. Pablo Gándara, team leader of the EU's IUC Asia programme - explained the European Union's [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative \(CRII\)](#), a fast and comprehensive support package from untapped EU Cohesion Policy resources able to mobilise over EUR 37 billion of cohesion policy funding unallocated within the current EU budget. On the one hand, the CRII initiative aims to support health systems, procure medical equipment and ensure access to healthcare for vulnerable groups. On the other, the package will support a much-needed boost to economic investments during and after the crisis.

[Lambert van Nistelrooij](#), former chairman of the Urban Intergroup at the [European Parliament](#), explained that the chamber has just passed three urgent proposals in an extraordinary plenary session to support EU countries. The proposals referred to the above mentioned EU Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII), the extension of the [EU Solidarity Fund](#) to cover public health emergencies and the temporary suspension of EU rules on airport slots to stop air carriers from operating empty flights during the pandemic. Mr van Nistelrooij also stated that the upcoming EU programmes for international cooperation with cities in Asia will offer a good framework to encourage mutual learnings. He also underlined the role of the cities as crisis managers, as local authorities are the closest ones to the citizens. Also, he encouraged cooperation on medical equipment purchasing among EU and non-EU cities.

Several best practices and lessons learned were exchanged among experts. Nikolaos Kontinakis from [Eurocities](#) introduced the online portal [Covid19 - European cities respond to the coronavirus crisis](#). The tools showcase best practices from European cities and relevant information from the European Union's comprehensive support to cities in this crisis. The website allows to filter the cities' response according to several categories including Culture, Food, Homelessness, Procurement, Volunteers and Waste. Visitors are able to register and receive new posts information by email.

The city of [Barcelona](#) has developed a highly intuitive [social media app](#) for the elderly people so that they can interact from home in an easier manner. Also, several measures have been implemented to prevent a collapse of the health system, reduce the impact on vulnerable people and families, including a right to housing and extended telecare, with more than 90,000 users. Barcelona's Director for

International relations **Felip Roca** stated that measures also focus on reducing the impact in the cultural sector, one of the city's most dynamic areas currently seriously hit due to the lockdown. He also underlined the importance of improving the City's organisational intelligence to anticipate problems during the upcoming weeks, and also to plan for the social and economic dimensions of the recovery and post-crisis phase. Barcelona is committed to further developing digital services within the existing Smart City framework.

Francisco Aranda, Director General for Economy, Enterprise and Budget in **Granada** Municipal Government, underlined that the city council is acting in security and compliance control of the measures of confinement, providing social services to most vulnerable people, and injecting liquidity to companies with a plan to pay debts to suppliers. Mr Aranda mentioned that a municipal sports facility has been opened to accommodate homeless people. Also, the council is developing an after-crisis plan of action with fiscal and economic measures. He explained that thanks to the IUC-cooperation with China, the city has received an offer from Changsha City to ship 50,000 masks to Granada. Representing the ICT sector, Francisco Benítez explained that Granada enterprises from [the OnTech Granada Cluster](#) are developing tools, surgical masks and respirators with 3D printers. The facilities of the University in the [Health Technology Park](#) are going to be converted in a full medicalized area (as a new hospital).

Flavio Rosa from [CITERA at La Sapienza University of Rome](#) underlined the cooperation with Liuzhou – a pairing city of Rome within the IUC Asia programme – resulting in an offer from Liuzhou's Technical Vocational College to donate 1.000 face masks.

David Linse - Head of the International Relations Department of [Mannheim](#) in Germany – illustrated the lockdown measures to mitigate the Covid19 outbreak, including social distance. He explained fast response measures / several best practices, including infographics in "[simple language](#)" for foreign people to easily understand how to behave to mitigate the corona spread. The [City Mayor Dr Peter Kurz](#) has also had online discussion rounds with hundreds of citizens through social media. The city's start-up agency has also launched the "[Cope with COVID](#)" portal for positive initiatives in all the hustle and bustle and mostly bad news. The initiative aims at creating digital offers for social, economic and cultural exchange, to test the interaction in virtual space. Mr Linse also underlined the importance of ensuring the supply of personal protection equipment for health and municipal workers engaged in essential services. He asked IUC cities in China and Europe to cooperate in this area too and asked the IUC programme to support these coordination tasks.

Frieder Oesterle, Coordinator for International Relations the [Stuttgart Regional Association](#) in Germany stated that the region is providing fast online response to subsidies requirements by local business in Stuttgart. The city region has also re-established the high frequency of public transport in order to avoid crowded trains and buses. Mr Oesterle underlined the importance of solidarity within society and among countries, mentioning that patients from France that are treated in hospitals in the region of Stuttgart (Baden-Württemberg). He also expressed the importance of restabilising supply chains and free movement of people in order to boost the economic activity after the crisis.

Jérôme Sieurin from the European affairs office at [Nice-Cote D'Azur Metropole](#) explained that the authority has arranged maintaining nursery and schools for mobilised people (medical personnel, security services, etc.). In order to implement social distancing, also [drones](#) inform people to follow containment rules. To alleviate the economic effects of the crisis, the Metropolitan Council of Mayors decided to take exceptional measures to support the territory's companies. Measures include the cancellation of payment for occupancy tax on public property, the payment of rents for auto-

entrepreneurs and small businesses (starting end of March) and the anticipation of new public orders targeting local companies. Also, the Council has increased and renewed the offer in all sectors of culture, sport and events. The package includes full support to local economic associations and providing visibility of local merchants thanks to an online directory. The Council will further contribute up to 1M€ to the regional economic support fund. Mr Sieurin was very interested in cooperating with other cities to ensure the supply of personal protection equipment for health and municipal workers engaged in essential services.

Samuel Seo from **Gwangju's** (Korea) International Climate & Environment Center (ICEC) stated that the Gwangju Metropolitan Government is fully integrated into the nation-wide control of [Korea Center for Disease Control & Prevention](#) (KCDC) and Central Disaster and Safety Countermeasures Headquarters (CDSCH). Cooperation includes daily national and local briefings (status quo of confirmed, tested and quarantine cases; masks in stock, availability of beds. Real-time Instant App Messages are sent to all new convicted cases including moving trajectory. Gwangju (Korea) shared several best practices including early alert, anticipatory countermeasures, clear and open information on COVID-Control. Inter-city cooperation in Korea is implemented in the so-called East-West Alliance-Gwangju-Daegu for medical team / equipment dispatch and patient transfer. An Emergency Fund for livelihood of the vulnerable has been launched too. A challenge remains the rational 'landing gate & quarantine control' avoiding 'general ban' of international and domestic movement. A lesson learned is the fast development of an "[all-in-covid-19 mobile app](#)" released by Ministry of Interior and Safety.

Councillor **Frederik Ekol** from **Penampang** (Sabah) in Malaysia explained the city's mitigation measures and the strategy for supporting local economy upon the expected effects of the crisis. Mr Ekol specified that so far only one case of Covid19 has been registered in Penampang. However, the city is planning ahead and focusing on citizens' voluntary engagement to prevent the outbreak of the Corona virus. Herefore – he stated – the Council has issued several printed and online messages requesting the citizens to maintain social distance and implement hygiene measures. He underlined the importance of cooperation of local decision makers in Penampang.

Dominique Li, Managing Director of Global Star Investment Co. Ltd. at **Guangzhou** Development District (Huangpu) in China, underlined the importance of an effective complete emergency response network and strict rules for fighting epidemic. He explained that Guangdong Province was the first province to launch the Level-1 Response to the major public health emergency, so that local people followed the experts' suggestions and the national requirement of home isolation and all necessary protection measures. Thus, the situation is well controlled in the city he said. At the same time of fighting the corona-19, the city is now positively adapting measures to the resumption of business and production, including the provision of protective equipment to guarantee safe work environment, and reducing the burden of local enterprises. He underlined the importance of confidence and international unity, cooperation and coordination.

In **Jakarta** (Indonesia), Mr. Helmi Abidin from [UCLG ASPAC](#) explained that the schools are closed for 14 days starting 16 March to 2 April and imposed the work from home for government officers (social distancing) until further notice. He mentioned the [regional portal](#) of best practices at where best practices from Asia can be accessed.

In summary, there is a strong interest among cities to cooperate in both mitigation measures for the Covid19 crisis and recovery measures for the economy, including:

- 1) Ensuring the supply of personal protection equipment for health and municipal workers engaged in essential services (mentioned by Nice and Mannheim)
- 2) Setting up local investment funds to support innovative start-ups which have financial difficulties caused by the CORONA-Crisis (Nice, Mannheim)
- 3) Foster city to city cooperation with new health/biotechnology clustering projects (Granada)
- 4) Innovative measures to reduce the impact on the culture sector like contracting preference for cancelled shows at municipal festivals, e.g. Grec 2020 (Nice)
- 5) Central role of digital services in maintaining a certain level of social cohesion and economic activity in the cities (Barcelona)

About the Programme

[IUC - International Urban Cooperation](#) – is Project of the [European Union](#) managed by the [Service for Foreign Policy Instruments \(FPI\)](#) for the [European External Action Service \(EEAS\)](#). The programme supports the realisation of EU policy objectives in areas including climate change and the external projection of the EU's growth strategy "Europe 2020". It constitutes one part of a Global IUC initiative of the European Union which includes as target countries and regions India, Japan, North America, and Latin America, as well as China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam. The IUC Asia consists of two components:

- 1) City-to-city cooperation on sustainable urban development, covering cities in the EU and China
- 2) Cooperation on climate change through sustainable energy building upon the Covenant of Mayors initiative, covering cities in China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, the Republic of Korea, Vietnam as well as Hong Kong SAR.

For further information, please visit our website (www.iuc-asia.eu) or contact the IUC Asia regional team:

Contact:

Pablo Gándara

Team Leader IUC Asia

EU International Urban Cooperation (IUC) Project

Regional Office Asia:

16th Floor, Unit 1610, Landmark Tower 2

8 North Dongsanhuan Road, Chaoyang District

100004 Beijing, PR China

北京市朝阳区东三环北路8号亮马河大厦二座1610室

Mobile China: +86 150 1014 0815

Mobile Europe: +49 179 9052720 (WhatsApp)

WeChat: PabloGandara

pgandara@iuc-asia.eu

www.iuc-asia.eu