

# ***Sustainability and Historic Cities; challenges and opportunities***

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## ***Brief history of the initiative***

Mauro Bignami  
DG 2012-2013 – District 2090

Dear fellow Rotarians, good morning and thank you for your presence at this sixth conference of the *UNESCO Historic Cities, Heritage of Peace* Initiative, a programme which tends to unite all the Rotary Clubs based in the cities and historic centres declared UNESCO world heritage sites.

The initiative was born in the Rotary year 2012-2013 (I was governor of District 2090), when, inspired by the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, signed by the member States of UNESCO and by the motto of the then president of Rotary International Sakuji Tanaka, who explicitly referred to the construction of *Peace through service*, the members of RC Urbino felt it was necessary to organize the first *UNESCO Historic Cities, Heritage of Peace* Conference in Urbino.

At the end of the work, all the delegations present approved the Urbino Declaration, which commits the Rotary Clubs of UNESCO cities and historic centres “to be of real help above any personal interests, for the perpetuation with sounds, colours and today planning of historic urban landscapes for being an enjoyable reality by every woman and man in a future of peace.”

Since then, every two years (except for the shutdown due to the COVID epidemic) the permanent Secretariat of the Conference - based in Urbino - coordinates the organization of a thematic meeting, the topic of which is proposed by the Club or Clubs in whose city the event will take place.

In the twelve years that have passed since then, five international conferences have been held interspersed with various preparatory meetings aimed at making the biennial meeting more effective.

In the first conference, in Urbino, *Time* was identified as the initial theme, considered a fundamental element for the construction of historical memory and a reason that unites all the participating cities and historic centres.

The second meeting took place in 2015 in Istanbul and had the theme *Sounds and colours of historic cities*. An event of great impact whose objective was to strengthen the Rotary commitment to intervene with perseverance and determination for the conservation and enhancement of UNESCO historic centres and cities.

The third meeting took place in Florence in 2017. On the banks of the Arno river, the participants spoke about *Which lighting for historic cities*. It has been an opportunity to promote, with testimonies and proposals, a reflection and comparison for a correct use of artificial light, in relation to the characteristics of historic centres and monuments, also following the progressive introduction of LED technologies.

In 2019, the fourth meeting entitled *Synergies in architecture* was held in Zamość, Poland. It was another opportunity for discussion, this time on the theme of planning in historic cities, between conservation and contemporaneity, with the participation of architecture students from various European universities, who gathered in a series of workshops to study and plan restoration actions for a part of the city of Zamość.

Siena, Pienza and San Gimignano welcomed the 2023 edition of the conference, whose title was inspired by a phrase from the *Sienese Constitution* of 1309: *The cheerfulness of foreigners cannot be dissociated by the dignity of citizens*. The objective was to study the relationship between tourism and cities that are part of the world heritage, so that all the Rotary Clubs located there can be brought together in a positive circuit, operating in favour of improving urban quality and the set up of a methodology for implementing development policies for UNESCO historic centres and cities.

No less interesting and also very current, is the theme of the conference which opens today in Malta: *Sustainability and Historic Cities; challenges and opportunities*.

In my opinion, the theme ideally connects to all the previous ones and, with an eco-systemic approach, shifts the focus from artefacts to people, culture, to skills, to resources and to their integrated management in order to obtain sustainable development, that is, as the Brundtland Commission defined in 1987, “a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the possibility of future generations to meet their own.”

In my opinion it's a step forward, generated by evidence that can no longer be hidden: the impossibility of protecting, making alive and developing our UNESCO heritage cities and historic centres, ignoring the knowledge and practices that generated them and without integrating, sharing, strengthening Rotary's Avenues of Service and, in particular, those related to the Community and International Service.

I thank you for your attention and I hope that the work of this conference will be fruitful.