

UCLG Community on Urban Innovation

I. Introduction and background

Urban innovation provides the impetus for cities and local governments to improve the quality of life of its citizens. It lies at the heart of finding new ways and means to meet the social, economic, environmental and governance challenges that face cities today.

For this reason the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Association of Major Metropolises (Metropolis) and the City of Guangzhou established on 28 March 2012 the Guangzhou International Award for Urban Innovation (abbreviated as the Guangzhou Award).

The first cycle of the Guangzhou Award in 2012 generated a wealth of knowledge, expertise and experience with submissions coming from 56 countries and 153 cities and regions around the world. As the Award becomes better known, it is expected that subsequent cycles of the Award, to be held every even year, will solicit wider and deeper participation. The quality and quantity of submissions has led the City of Guangzhou to explore how best to tap the knowledge, expertise and experience generated by the Guangzhou Award to help cities worldwide learn from each other. The proposed strategy consists of three action areas:

- Advocacy and partnerships: enhancing awareness of cities and regions worldwide and their partners (including universities, professional associations, civil society organisations and the private sector) on the benefits and the importance of urban innovation;
- Knowledge dissemination and exchange: organising real and virtual conferences, seminars, workshops and exhibitions for and between cities, regions and their partners to exchange and learn from best practice in urban innovation;
- Research and policy development: deepening the concepts and understanding of urban innovation and their policy implications.

Following the success of the 1st Guangzhou Award in 2012, the 2nd Guangzhou Award has received 209 initiatives from 159 cities and local governments. To promote the innovation and learning agenda of UCLG, the Executive Bureau, during its meeting in Liverpool in June, decided on the establishment of a Community of Practice on Urban Innovation. The Community serves to enhance international exchange and cooperation in urban innovation, facilitate relevant research and development, provide suggestions for policy and decision-making, and ensure the continued involvement of the Award's finalists in the future work of UCLG.

II. Objectives and Activities of the UCLG Community on Urban Innovation

The objectives of the Community are:

1. To enhance the international exchange and cooperation in urban innovation by advocating the concept of urban innovation and strengthening collaboration with relevant organizations and individuals at the global and regional levels;
2. To benefit from the participation by and feedback from members of UCLG/Metropolis on the organisational and substantive aspects of the Guangzhou Award, the international conference and exhibition, the database and other similar initiatives;
3. To mobilise members of UCLG and cities worldwide to organise city-to-city knowledge sharing opportunities and exchange/learning events on urban innovation (such as conferences, seminars, workshops, field studies and exhibitions) either as new activities or as part of their recurrent activities;
4. To strengthen research on urban innovation and development and put forward suggestions for policy and decision making.

The Main activities of the Community include:

1. Networking of Members and Partners. Invitations to join the Community have been disseminated via UCLG, Metropolis, and Secretariat of the Guangzhou Award, and have earned worldwide attention. A network has been established consisting of cities and local governments, as well as partners in academia, specialized institutions, professional associations, international organizations and the media. Currently, an increasing number of UCLG members and partners are applying for the Community, which serves as a platform to share ideas and practices on urban innovation.
2. Field Studies. To fulfill commitments made by the leadership of Guangzhou at the conclusion of the 2012 Guangzhou Award, the Community, together with the Guangzhou Institute for Urban Innovation, has conducted field studies on all of the 15 shortlisted cities. Participants include city managers, experts, scholars, and partners from the media. The Community has been studying findings of the field research, which will contribute to improved city-to-city cooperation strategies and practices. Further field studies have been scheduled in the future for all members and partners of the Community.
3. Report Compilation. In order to provide cities and local governments with practical suggestions for urban innovation, the Community, in cooperation with the Guangzhou Institute for Urban, has conducted in-depth analysis of short-listed initiatives of the 1st Guangzhou Award in various manners, including field studies, literature review, data analysis, comparative studies and logical deduction. By October, 2014, reports on 12 initiatives have been compiled and published. It is the Community's agenda to set report compilation as a routine task for a considerable long period of time, which will contribute to broader learning and exchange of successful innovative practices.

III. Main actions undertaken in 2014

In January, a delegation from Guangzhou conducted a study tour to Kaohsiung City – a short-listed city for the 1st Guangzhou Award. The study tour focused on urban innovation initiatives concerning public service, including the initiative Kaohsiung’s system “1999”.

In March, a delegation from Guangzhou paid a visit to Seoul, Korea--- an award-winning city for the 1st Guangzhou Award to learn from its initiative --- *Healthy Seoul: free from Internet Addiction and youth prostitution prevention*. The study tour focused on studying what the youth learned from the initiative and how Guangzhou Award promoted the initiative.

In March, a delegation conducted a study tour to Chiang Rai City, Thailand – a shortlisted city for the 1st Guangzhou Award for its initiative --- *Enhancing Urban Ecosystem and Biodiversity in Chiang Rai City*. The study tour focused on studying the core concept of the initiative--- building sound environment, following the ideas of Buddhism, refocusing on the citizens’ welfare and developing a liveable city. The initiative has set a good example for global cities to handle ecological environment problems.

In March, a delegation from Guangzhou conducted a study tour to Sylhet, Bangladesh --- a shortlisted city for the 1st Guangzhou Award for its initiative ---*A Disaster Resilient Future: Mobilizing Communities and Institutions for Effective Risk Reduction*. The delegation paid a field visit to Sylhet. The initiative has helped families make better preparation for earthquake by improving residents’ awareness of earthquake prevention, educating them, and supplying them with related equipment. It has disseminated disaster prevention methods in local schools, fire fighting organizations, civil defense system, and the media with the help of volunteers. It has set a good example for global cities on disaster prevention.

In April, when the 7th UN-HABITAT World Urban Forum (Medellin, Colombia) was held, City of Guangzhou co-hosted with UCLG and Metropolis a seminar entitled Urban Innovation and Governance. The event was designed to share lessons learned from the 1st Guangzhou Award process and new trends of innovation in global cities. It invited academic experts, international organization and representatives from short-listed cities and award-winning cities of the 1st Guangzhou Award to give a speech. More than 100 experts, local government officials and concerned personnel attended the seminar. During the seminar, the delegation paid a field visit to Medellin--- a short-listed city for the 1st Guangzhou Award for its initiative--- *Medellin Digital*, which, by effective utilization of computers and Internet, aims at introducing new technology to communities in Medellin so as to improve people’s life, strengthen social cohesiveness and lay a solid foundation for the modernization of Medellin.

In June, the UCLG Executive Bureau meeting held in Liverpool agreed to set up UCLG Community on Urban Innovation headed by the city of Guangzhou.

In August, a delegation of Guangzhou paid a visit to Bremer, Germany--- a short-listed city for the 1st Guangzhou Award, to conduct a research on its initiative named *Car-Sharing*. With the promotion of this initiative, Car-Sharing has become a popular and prevalent means of transport throughout the City of Bremer, which has improved the environment, transport and the utilization of urban public space by a large margin.

In August, a delegation of Guangzhou paid a visit to Vienna, Austria--- a award-winning city for the 1st Guangzhou Award to conduct an in-depth field research on its initiative named *New Immigrant Integration*, which helps new immigrants integrate smoothly into the local community.

In August, a delegation of Guangzhou paid a visit to Salerno, Italy --- a shortlisted city for the 1st Guangzhou Award, to conduct a research on its initiative named *Sustainable Energy Now*, which covers various urban construction activities concerning sustainable energy, aiming at saving energy and reducing greenhouse gas emission. The initiative has effectively reduced various aspects of energy consumption, improved energy use efficiency and optimizd energy structures.

In September, a delegation of Guangzhou paid a visit to Vancouver, Canada --- a award-winning city for the 1st Guangzhou Award, to conduct an in-depth research on its initiative named *Visionary Vancouver: Creating a welcoming and sustainable place for all*. It aims to transform Vancouver into the most environmentally friendly city in the world by 2020 by setting up environment-friendly standard for new constructions, building low-carbon facilities, increasing house diversity, and strengthening urban planning.

In September, a delegation of Guangzhou paid a visit to Kocaeli, Turkey--- a award-winning city for the 1st Guangzhou Award, to conduct a research on its initiative named *Prepare Before It's Too Late: Learn To Live With Earthquake*. The initiative has improved people's capacity to handle disasters, by strengthening research and development on earthquake monitoring technology, enhancing the cooperation between all social circles and citizens, and conducting various earthquake-prevention activities.

In September, a delegation of Guangzhou paid a visit to Lilongwe, Malawi --- a award-winning city for the 1st Guangzhou Award, to conduct a research on the initiative named *Johannesburg: Cities Mentorship Program*. By integrating the resources of UCLG, UN, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and National Department of Land and Resources, the initiative has promoted the city to develop medium- and long-term urban development strategy with Johannesburg as the Mentor.

In September, a delegation of Guangzhou paid a visit to Sakhnin, Arab-Israeli --- a short-listed city for the 1st Guangzhou Award, to conduct a research on the initiative named *Towns Association for Environmental Quality (TAEQ)*.The initiative promotes excellent energy-serving concept and design, becoming a local education center for environment protection.

In October, UCLG, Metropolis, and Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries make full use of their membership and partnership networking to disseminate UCLG Community on Urban Innovation and invite city governments and local governments to join it. The Community has won world-wide attention.

In November, the first working report of the Community was compiled. The first research report of the outstanding initiatives for the 1st Guangzhou award was also compiled and published. The latter was issued officially at the UCLG World Council Meeting held in Haikou, Hainan province of China.

IV. Proposed Work Plan 2015

1. Improve the Community in terms of network structure and membership service. Expand its partnerships to cover international organizations, research institutes and experts. Gradually establish a complete on-line communication platform.
2. Arrange 3 to 5 field studies on outstanding initiatives of the 2nd Guangzhou Award. Engage experts and Community members in the field studies, and publish relevant findings for future references.
3. Arrange 1 to 2 thematic seminars to exchange ideas and practices on urban innovation.
4. Compile and publish findings on urban innovation.