



IDURL

A Look Back

at the IDURL 2025

International Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages 2025



中国外文局西欧与非洲传播中心
CICG Center for Europe and Africa



UN-HABITAT

1. Setting the Scene

The **2025 International Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages (IDURL)** marked a vibrant continuation of global efforts to bridge the urban-rural divide through inclusive, sustainable, and locally rooted development. Held in Songyang County, China, the event brought together policymakers, scholars, practitioners, and community leaders from over twelve countries to share experiences and expertise for territorial development.

In its fourth edition, this international advocacy platform on urban-rural linkages was co-organized by UN-Habitat and the Center for Europe and Africa of China International Communications Group (CICG). The Dialogue strengthened efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda.

The first day of the 2025 international Dialogue offered participants to overall opening plenary session, keynote presentations, immersive field visits and knowledge and experience sharing on approaches to enhance urban-rural linkages in Songyang, China and other contexts represented.

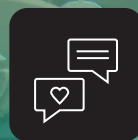


Social Media Outreach



1M+

Views



50K+

*Engagements/
Interactions*



2,854+

Impressions

From UN-Habitat and CICG social media platforms



2. Opening Ceremony



A. Welcome Remarks

To officially kick off the Dialogue, a round of welcoming remarks were delivered by leaders from the host County, co-organizers, Lishui Municipality publicity department and the ministry of housing and urban development department of traditional villages.



Ye Bojun, Member of the Standing Committee of the CPC Lishui Municipal Committee and Head of the Publicity Department, emphasized Lishui's commitment to integrated urban-rural development rooted in ecological sustainability, cultural vitality, and international cooperation. He highlighted the city's strategic efforts under the "88 Strategy" to bridge urban-rural gaps through coordinated initiatives

Liang Haigang, Secretary of the CPC Songyang County Committee, highlighted the county's transformative



journey through urban-rural coordination. He shared four inspiring initiatives in Songyang in the recent past. First is the enhancing integrated urban-rural water system in the mountainous rural regions improving access to tap water to over 32,800 people through the 237 water stations renovated. Secondly is the renovation and regeneration of the former bus station into a public fitness center which includes related services and children's facilities. Thirdly is

in urban strengthening, rural revitalization, and integration. Lishui's cultural infrastructure, grassroots engagement, and international outreach; through platforms like the Lishui Photography Festival and Overseas Chinese Culture; demonstrate its expanding global presence. He praised Songyang as a model of classical Chinese urban-rural integration, showcasing inclusive services, preserved heritage villages, and

the village transformation and revitalization through industrial development to compact poverty and integrating older persons care. Finally the Songyang translator that has made Songyang a global village with cultural discussions across different global languages. He outlined the diverse emerging agricultural industries in Songyang including water, tea, mushroom and digital transportation which have improved incomes for Songyang residents. He finalized with a resounding affirmation of Songyang County as a testament of coordination between urban and rural areas.

revitalized cultural spaces. Ye underscored the importance of mutual learning and cultural exchange in advancing territorial cohesion, expressing hope that the Dialogue would serve as a bridge not only between urban and rural areas, but also between China and the world. He concluded by highlighting Songyang as a demonstration of urban-rural integration in Lishui Municipality.





Sun Xiaochun, Director of the Division of Traditional Villages Conservation at the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China, reaffirmed the national strategic commitment to integrated urban-rural development, highlighting the launch of the “Ten Million Project” and the call to bridge urban-rural disparities. She noted the launch of the national guiding principles for village enhancement, leading to over 1,000 people-centered projects addressing local challenges and showcasing demonstration models.

The Ministry has also introduced renovation guidelines and subsidies to support rural residents in upgrading their homes, while advancing conservation efforts for traditional villages. With over 170 villages nationally recognized for revitalization, these initiatives reflect China’s rich territorial diversity and cultural heritage. As part of the 15th Five-Year Plan, this marks a new phase in inclusive and sustainable development. Sun concluded with a call for action on the importance of protecting shared cultural legacies while fostering resilient, connected communities across the urban-rural continuum.

Rafael Tuts, UN-Habitat’s Director for the Global Solutions Division, underscored the urgency of strengthening urban-rural connections in light of global urbanization trends. He highlighted how the Dialogue aligns with key global agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and the Paris Agreement, all of which advocate integrated and resilient development across urban and rural areas. He outlined UN-Habitat’s people-centered approach and ongoing efforts, including the forthcoming Global trends and insights on Urban-Rural Linkages

report and a growing repository of case studies and tools supporting national and local capacities. He stressed the importance of IDURL theme—Culture, Housing, and Basic Services—as essential connectors that foster identity, inclusion, and equity across urban and rural areas. He finally called for active engagement, collaboration, and innovation to ensure that no one and no place is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable urbanization





Xie Gang, Vice President of China International Communications Group (CICG), co-organizer for IDURL 2025, then closed this segment. He pointed to the importance of international cooperation

and cultural exchange in advancing integrated urban-rural development. He highlighted the Bureau's role in promoting Chinese narratives globally and commended the Dialogue's focus on culture, housing, and basic services as foundational pillars for territorial cohesion. Xie underscored the need to overcome urban-rural divides by recognizing their

shared destiny and fostering mutual learning across regions. He praised Songyang as a living example of cultural preservation and inclusive development and encouraged deeper collaboration with UN-Habitat and global partners to amplify communication, showcase best practices, and engage diverse audiences. He highlighted that enhancing urban-rural linkages isn't meant to change rural areas to urban areas but rather leveraging their uniqueness and creating a balanced, mutually beneficial relationship between the contexts. Calling for innovation in storytelling and people-to-people exchanges, he urged participants to work together in building livable, resilient, and culturally rich urban-rural environments that reflect shared human aspirations.

B. Award Ceremony for Songyang Rural Revitalization National Architectural Design Competition



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This segment involved the awarding of the final three competitors under the Songyang Rural Revitalization National Architectural Design Competition. In his remarks, **Xu Maoyan**, Professor, School of Architecture, Tsinghua University, representing the judging committee, celebrated the creative achievements of over 590 participating teams, with 15 award-winning entries selected for their design logic, feasibility, and social value. The competition, themed “Annual Rings” and focused on Xinhua Road, highlighted Songyang’s approach to architectural renewal rooted in cultural preservation and minimal intervention.

Designs explored diverse strategies, from rooftop public spaces to full street revitalization, reflecting deep engagement with Songyang’s historical context and contemporary needs. The speaker emphasized architecture’s role in connecting past and present, and praised Songyang’s ability to inspire designers through its living heritage. The competition was recognized as a platform for aligning national design talent with local development goals, and a call was made to continue this momentum into future editions, deepening the integration of architecture and urban-rural revitalization.



C. Official Unveiling of the IDURL 2025

The awards ceremony was then followed by a Joint Announcement of the Opening of the IDURL 2025 by Attending Leaders, where the leading representatives symbolically declared the Dialogue officially opened.



D. Keynote Addresses

Moderated by Remy Sietchiping (UN-Habitat) the aim of this session was to unpack the theme Enhancing Urban-Rural Linkages: *Culture, Housing and Basic Services*. *The session comprised of five dynamic speakers who brought out what the theme entails, why these aspects are important, how they can be implemented in practice and possible practical pathways for local action.*



Klaus R. Kunzmann,
Professor Emeritus/Dr. techn. Dipl. Ing., TU Dortmund/Germany

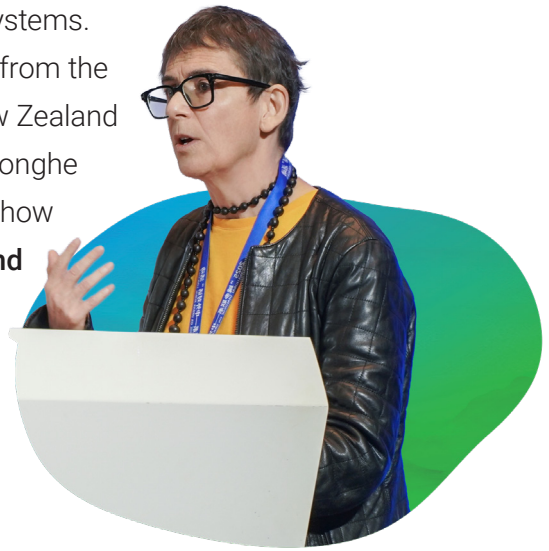
In his keynote presentation, **Klaus Kunzmann** examined the **multifaceted role of cultural and creative industries** in supporting rural development and addressing regional disparities. He started by underscoring “unless you have regional planning you cannot talk about urban-rural linkages”. He further introduced these industries - including music, architecture, crafts, literature, digital media, and visual arts - as rapidly growing sectors that contribute to economic vitality, cultural preservation, social inclusion, ecological awareness, and education. He emphasized that both cultural and creative industries can generate

employment, foster innovation, and reinforce local identity, particularly in rural areas with rich cultural assets. However, he also acknowledged several challenges to implementation, such as the absence of local champions, limited political support, closed community attitudes, and a lack of welcoming environments. While creative industries alone cannot eliminate regional inequalities, they can help stabilize rural economies and attract creative talent when conditions are favorable. Professor Kunzmann concluded by advocating for place-based strategies, supportive infrastructure, and stronger local leadership to unlock the full potential of creative industries in rural revitalization.



Marie-Noël Tournoux focused on the role of heritage as a driver for sustainable urban-rural development, emphasizing the need to shift perceptions of heritage from static preservation to dynamic development. She argued that cultural and natural heritage assets should be **integrated** into planning, governance, and infrastructure design to enhance well-being, resilience, and territorial cohesion. The presentation explored how heritage contributes to better building and transport design, improved service infrastructure, poverty alleviation, climate action, and inclusive governance. She stressed the importance of identifying and valuing heritage through civic engagement, regulatory frameworks, financial

tools, and knowledge systems. Using global examples, from the Whanganui River in New Zealand to the rice terraces of Honghe in China, she illustrated how **heritage landscapes and intangible practices can be leveraged** for ecological stewardship, community resilience, and economic viability. The presentation also highlighted the potential of **functional reuse of historic buildings, eco-tourism, and agrotourism** to revitalize rural economies while preserving cultural identity. Ms. Tournoux called for a **change in approach**, advocating for heritage to be seen as desirable, modern, and central to development strategies at the territorial scale.



Marie-Noël Tournoux,
*World Heritage Institute of
Training and Research for the
Asia and the Pacific Region
under the Auspices
of UNESCO*



Zhao Zhongshu,
*Professor-Level Senior Planner,
China Academy of Urban
Planning & Design; Winner
of the National Science and
Technology Progress Award
(First Class)*

Zhao Zhongshu, followed, presenting a structured framework for conserving historic urban areas in China. He categorized these areas into three functional types: ancient cities and their surroundings, modern-era commercial and transport districts, and early industrial zones. Using Songyang Old Town as a case study, he illustrated how its organic layout, cultural landmarks, and natural setting support a conservation approach rooted in incremental renewal,

preservation of historical layering, and support for traditional crafts. Professor Zhao emphasized the need to protect not only physical structures but also social networks and living traditions, advocating for micro-renovation strategies such as “acupuncture” and “weaving.” He concluded by calling for **policy innovation, multi-sectoral coordination, and long-term stewardship**, highlighting Songyang’s local mechanisms and incentives that encourage private restoration and community engagement.



Lian Yirui then presented a comprehensive framework for urban and rural renewal as a pathway to industrial revitalization. He traced the historical evolution of rural construction and urban renewal policies in China, highlighting the shift from basic infrastructure development to high-quality, innovation-driven regeneration. He emphasized the strategic importance of **integrating cultural confidence, ecological sustainability, and industrial functionality into spatial planning**. Using the Pingyao Diesel Engine Factory renovation as a case study, he illustrated how restrained architectural interventions and adaptive reuse of industrial heritage can catalyze cultural and economic transformation.

The presentation underscored the role of knowledge economies, creative industries, and public space design in revitalizing old urban areas and attracting talent. Lian advocated for leveraging collective land use, low-tech construction, and digital platforms to foster inclusive development and reconnect communities. The Pingyao Film Festival was showcased as a successful model of cultural-led regeneration, demonstrating how heritage, industry, and innovation can converge to create vibrant, resilient urban-rural territories. He concluded by stating “a city with a past, is a people with roots”



Lian Yirui,
*Director, Joint
Research Center
for Industrial Parks,
Architectural Design
and Research
Institute, Tsinghua
University*



Yang Guiqing,
*Professor, Ph.D.
Supervisor, and Vice
Chair of the Academic
Committee, College
of Architecture and
Urban Planning, Tongji
University*

Concluding the keynote segment, **Yang Guiqing** explored the spatial evolution of traditional villages through the lens of rural transformation. He examined the “productivity–spatial form” a theoretical framework to explain how village layouts reflect underlying economic and social structures. He argued that traditional village forms - such as courtyard-style compounds -were optimal responses to historical agricultural productivity and social organization. However, they have become increasingly incompatible with modern industrial and urban dynamics. Yang emphasized that the decline of traditional village

spaces is a natural outcome of shifting production relations and societal changes. To address this, he advocated for a dual strategy of **creative transformation and innovative development**, integrating cultural, economic, and spatial planning to revitalize village spaces. He highlighted the role of digital technologies in reshaping rural production and lifestyles and proposed that traditional villages can evolve into vibrant hubs for education, tourism, and new rural economies. Ultimately, he called for systematic, culturally sensitive, and future-oriented approaches to guide the regeneration of traditional village spaces.





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3. Field visits and parallel sessions

The afternoon session of Day 1 of the Dialogue involved field visits to grasp contextual realities in relation to the themes of the event followed by parallel sessions. This was comprised of two sessions namely: cultural heritage preservation and the revitalization of existing urban spaces and Cultural Heritage Protection and Thematic District Development.



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A. Cultural heritage preservation and the revitalization of existing urban spaces

This session explored how revitalizing housing and upgrading basic services can serve as a foundation for inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban-rural transformation.

To begin the session, participants visited the Hetianling Block, experiencing firsthand the outcomes of organic renewal and heritage preservation. They then proceeded to the **Ancient Songyang Street** —a dynamic commercial and cultural core where preserved heritage successfully integrates **industry, commerce, and public life** for the community.



The second site was the **Songyang Public Fitness Facility Construction Project**, formerly the **Old Bus Station**, which has been redeveloped using the winning design from the Third Songyang Rural Revitalization National Architectural Design Competition in 2023. Originally built in 1935, the station played a pivotal role in Songyang's transportation history

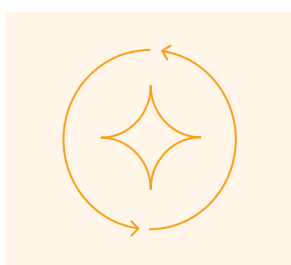
and now serves as a multifunctional space for sports, culture, and recreation for the community. The visit highlighted how **adaptive reuse** of historic infrastructure can enhance public services and foster a sense of belonging. These two cases are an illustration of cultural heritage preservation while in revitalization efforts.



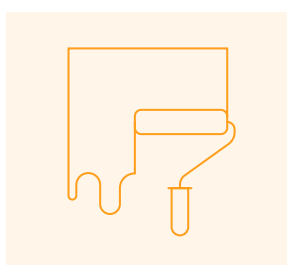
These field visits sites demonstrated:



Preservation of cultural memory while improving infrastructure



Need to balance transformation with continuity in regeneration efforts



Using micro-renovation strategies to adapt historic spaces to modern needs



Linking housing upgrades with service delivery and community well-being





This field visit culminated with a parallel session focused on how revitalizing housing and upgrading basic services, including water, sanitation, energy, and mobility, can improve quality of life and support inclusive, resilient urban-rural transformation. The session highlighted housing, heritage, and resilience as entry points for advancing **urban-rural integration** and balanced territorial development. Discussions emphasized the need to move beyond sectoral silos toward systems that link housing, livelihoods, and local identity. Examples from Morocco,

Central Asia, and China demonstrated how community participation, adaptive legislation, and traditional knowledge enhance resilience and heritage conservation. Key challenges identified included limited implementation capacity, risks of displacement, and weak policy coordination. Participants agreed that **territorial and people-centered approaches**—combining policy innovation, inclusive housing, and community empowerment—are essential to ensure that urban and rural areas develop together in a resilient and sustainable manner. Below are highlights from each speaker.



Hassan Radoine,
Full Professor and Managing Director of Citinnov for Integrated Territorial Planning & Smart Cities, Mohammed VI Polytechnic University

In his presentation, **Hassan Radoine** explored housing in Morocco’s historic medinas, emphasizing the integration of heritage preservation with sustainable urban development. He noted the complexity of these UNESCO-listed areas, where the challenge lies in conserving tangible heritage while improving living conditions. Prof. Radoine outlined an integrated

master plan for urban conservation and called for collaboration among planners, conservationists, and archaeologists. He advocated for community-centered design and holistic, context-specific approaches that respect identity and landscape, positioning housing as a catalyst for inclusive, balanced, and sustainable territorial development.



In her presentation, **He Yi** explored the concept of the “acquaintance society” in traditional urban blocks, emphasizing the value of people-centered approaches in urban planning and architecture. Drawing on case studies from traditional villages and historic streets, she illustrated how strong social connections and familiarity among residents foster a sense of intimacy, identity, and community vitality. Through interviews with local

residents, she highlighted emotional attachments to historical spaces and challenges posed by limited resources and modernization. Examples of craftspeople and small businesses underscored how these networks sustain neighborhood life. Professor He concluded by stressing the importance of preserving traditional social structures while navigating the shift toward modern, external societies.



He Yi,

School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Huazhong University of Science and Technology; Member of the Committee for Historic and Cultural Preservation and Inheritance, Science and Technology Commission of the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development



Pietro Elisei,

International expert in Urban Regeneration Policies

Pietro Elisei examined how urban regeneration can revitalize heritage neighbourhoods while strengthening **urban-rural linkages** and territorial cohesion. He challenged the perception of ageing districts as problematic, instead recognizing their informal economies, solidarity, and cultural richness as shared assets that connect cities and surrounding rural areas. Emphasizing the importance of community participation, he advocated for co-design, co-creation, and co-implementation

to prevent displacement and foster local ownership. Elisei highlighted the potential of temporary uses of abandoned buildings to stimulate local economies and innovation, linking them to rural value chains and creative industries. He underscored that regeneration must integrate cultural heritage, governance, and partnerships with affordable, inclusive housing policies—positioning regeneration as a **long-term social contract** that bridges urban and rural communities through shared sustainability and empowerment.



On her part, **Madina Junussova** shared insights from the Naryn Urban Resilience Programme, highlighting how resilience in housing and planning can strengthen **urban-rural linkages** in mountainous regions of Central Asia. She emphasized the importance of adapting legislation and enhancing local capacities to create resilient and inclusive living environments. Despite strong policy frameworks, implementation remains weak due to limited capacity and insufficient monitoring of building codes.

The programme focuses on training civil servants and residents in resilience planning, ecosystem restoration, and locally grounded urban greening. By integrating indigenous knowledge and local species, these efforts have bridged gaps between municipalities and surrounding rural communities. Junussova underscored that resilient housing requires localized legislation, community participation, and territorial approaches that balance environmental preservation with sustainable urban and rural development.



Madina Junussova, *Urban Development Lead/Senior Research Fellow, University of Central Asia*



Yue Jian,
Director, Academic Committee for Urban and Rural Cultural Heritage Protection, Guizhou Society of Civil and Architectural Engineering

Yue Jian then highlighted efforts to restore and conserve traditional folk dwellings in Guizhou's Tunbao villages—an area rich in cultural heritage and distinctive landscapes. He described the project's focus on **memory restoration** through field studies, exhibitions, and filmmaking, aimed at revitalizing community livelihoods while strengthening **urban-rural cultural linkages**. Traditional craftsmanship techniques are being combined with modern materials and

sustainable practices to ensure both authenticity and resilience. Collaboration with local tourism initiatives and active community participation have been key to transforming historic spaces into functional, living environments. Yue underscored that integrating contemporary lifestyles with traditional values not only enhances rural quality of life but also fosters **territorial continuity**, enabling younger generations to engage with and sustain their living heritage within broader urban-rural systems.



B. Cultural Heritage Protection and Thematic District Development

This session focused on how urban-rural linkages can serve as powerful levers for preserving cultural heritage and shaping community identity.

The session began with engaging in a **cultural journey through Songyang Old Street**, featuring live heritage performances such as traditional puppet shows and Gaoqiang opera. During the field visit, participants explored several key sites that showcased Songyang's approach to organic renewal and cultural heritage preservation. Highlights included a 2-kilometer-long historical street lined with diverse shops on both sides, ranging from traditional crafts to modern cultural venues. The area has been designated as a cultural heritage preservation zone, featuring landmarks such as the Songyang Intangible Music Spot, a puppet theatre,

and a high-pitch opera museum housed in a repurposed building. Notably, the former post office and old town housing have been adaptively reused, blending historical memory with contemporary community functions. These sites reflect centuries of local heritage and demonstrate how micro-renovation and reuse strategies can activate public spaces, preserve identity, and support inclusive urban-rural development. The visit also included the **Wenli Songyang Three Temples Cultural Exchange Center**, an architecturally acclaimed site that exemplifies the integration of cultural heritage into contemporary community spaces.



Core highlights from the field visit were:



Traditional culture strengthens community identity.



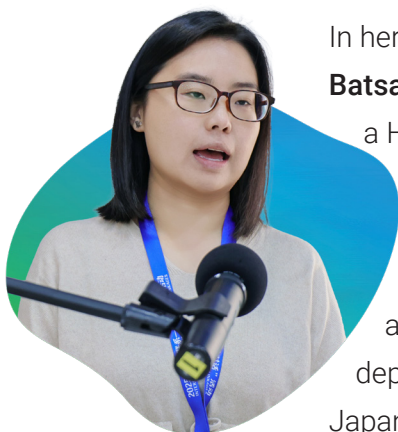
Adaptive reuse preserves heritage while supporting modern functions.



Heritage-led strategies enhance inclusive urban-rural development.



The session then transitioned into a parallel session on governance strategies for embedding culture, housing, and basic services into broader urban-rural development frameworks.



Anudari Batsaikhan,
*Policy Researcher,
Integrated Sustainability
Centre, Institute for Global
Environmental Strategies
(IGES)*

In her reflections, **Anudari Batsaikhan** from IGES introduced a Hachinohe-based (Circulating and Ecological Sphere) intervention model aimed at sustaining traditional agricultural practices in the depopulated region of Hachinohe, Japan. The region, known for its rich cultural heritage and traditional rice and wheat farming, faces challenges such as population decline, aging workforce, and increasing underutilized land. To address these, IGES proposed agrivoltaics—co-locating solar panels with crops—as a strategy to generate clean energy, support

food production, and create green jobs. Through participatory scenario building and stakeholder engagement, the project aims to develop a **Net-Zero Hachinohe model that integrates renewable energy, cultural preservation, and rural revitalization**. A key innovation is the AgriVolt Navigator, a decision-support tool that helps assess land suitability and calculate co-benefits of agrivoltaics. The CES model is designed for replication across Asia and aligns with broader goals such as SDGs, climate action, and inclusive urban-rural development.

Daniele Vettorato's presentation explored how Alpine villages are leveraging cultural heritage and energy self-reliance to drive sustainable and inclusive transitions. Through the concept of **Positive Energy Villages (PEVs)**, communities are integrating **smart energy systems, local governance,** and **heritage conservation** to create resilient, adaptive, and self-sufficient ecosystems. The **Smart Villages approach**, supported by EU policies, empowers rural areas through digitalization, innovation, and participatory governance.

Energy self-reliance, via decentralized systems like **agrivoltaics, district heating,** and **local cooperatives,** is positioned as a foundation for smartness, enabling local decision-making, economic regeneration, and cultural continuity. The case of **Prato allo Stelvio** in South Tyrol exemplifies this model, showcasing a community-owned energy system that reinvests profits into public services, environmental projects, and social welfare, transforming energy into a tool for collective prosperity.



Daniele Vettorato,
*Head of EURAC Research
Group*





Yao Zigang,
*Researcher, National
Historic Cities Research
Center, Tongji University;
Director and Professor,
Institute of Tourism
Planning and MICE,
East China University of
Science and Technology.*

Yao Zigang’s intervention explored the evolution of urban development in China, emphasizing a shift from expansion to quality-focused renewal as cities enter the “second half” of urbanization. He introduced the concept of “Four-Dimensional Revitalization”, integrating spatial, cultural, industrial, and social renewal, as a holistic strategy for revitalizing historic urban districts. Drawing on global planning theories like Historic Urban Landscape (HUL), urban acupuncture, and urban catalysts, he advocated for dynamic, community-driven, and culturally sensitive

approaches to urban regeneration. The presentation highlighted the importance of preserving architectural diversity, cultural identity, and social continuity, while promoting inclusive participation and resisting over-commercialization. Case studies such as M50 Creative Park and Tianzifang illustrated successful transformations of old urban spaces into vibrant cultural hubs. Ultimately, Yao called for planning models that prioritize gradual, adaptive change, rooted in local heritage and aimed at enhancing the quality of life and urban resilience.

Nyasha Mutsindikwa then took participants through the context of Zimbabwe. He began with addressing the challenges and opportunities of urbanization in Zimbabwe, highlighting the rapid growth of urban populations and the associated issues such as inadequate infrastructure, poor service delivery, informal settlements, and environmental degradation. He emphasized the importance of **in-situ urbanization**, developing urban amenities within rural areas, preserving agricultural land and promoting balanced regional development. The strategy includes transforming metropolitan

areas into regional hubs, revitalizing old neighborhoods, and ensuring equitable distribution of resources through devolution. A key focus was on strengthening **urban-rural linkages** by upgrading rural service centres and growth points to provide essential services, foster local economies, and ensure no region is left behind. The presentation also outlined a national plan to develop **71 growth centres** across Zimbabwe by 2030, reinforcing the role of cultural heritage and identity in sustainable urban planning.



**Nyasha Takawira
Mutsindikwa,**
*Lecturer, Rural and Urban
Planning, University of
Zimbabwe*





Han Yan,

Member of the Standing Committee of the CPC Jungar Banner Committee, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China. Director-General of the Communication Department, Jungar Banner, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China

On her part, Han Yan showcased Zhungeer Banner’s innovative approach to cultural tourism through the “Three Platforms, One Brand, One Activity” strategy. Emphasizing a shift from consumer-driven tourism to immersive cultural experiences, the initiative integrates local heritage; multi-ethnic traditions, Yellow River culture, and industrial legacy, into tourism spaces. Key projects include the “Impression · Zhungeer” water-stage

performance, the transformation of mining sites into eco-tourism zones, and the creation of interactive cultural hubs like the “Notte della Changheli” night city and themed cultural lounges. The “Dahe Zhenxuan” regional brand elevates local agricultural products by embedding cultural narratives, while daily and festival events sustain public engagement. Ultimately, the strategy aims to revitalize the third sector, enhance livelihoods, and foster a sense of belonging and happiness among residents.

Ouyang Jianghe concluded the segment by reflecting on the historical and cultural legacy of **Songyang** and its place within the broader narrative of ancient China. He drew connections between the poetic imagery of “Old China” and the evolving **ecology of rural development**, emphasizing how traditional values, landscapes, and cultural expressions continue to shape contemporary transformations. His remarks highlighted the importance of preserving cultural memory while embracing change.



Ouyang Jianghe,

Renowned Poet, Poetics and Cultural Critic, Calligrapher; Lifetime Distinguished Professor, Beijing Normal University; “Xiaoxiang Scholar” Chair Professor, Hunan Normal University; Vice President, Chinese Poetry Society



Day 2

The second main day of IDURL 2025 comprised of field visits and parallel sessions, IDURL 2025 Legacy co-creation activity for participants and the closing ceremony.

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1. Field Visits and Parallel Sessions

The field visits and parallel sessions entailed showcasing a) innovation and sustainability of heritage in Songyang's traditional villages and b) green transportation and sustainable urban-rural development.

A. Innovation and Sustainability of Heritage in Traditional Villages

The visit began with Songzhuang Village, where participants explored how living heritage and innovation intertwine through a vibrant cultural ecosystem that includes historical exhibits, community-driven art, and creative entrepreneurship. They visited Songzhuang Space and the Village History Hall to learn about the village's 600-year legacy and its evolution

through governance and rural revitalization; experienced local artistic expressions at the "Graffiti at the Village Entrance" exhibition and Valley Market events; engaged with returning youth and new residents at the Mountain Folk Theater who are reshaping village governance and industry; discovered herbal crafts and tie-dye techniques at the Mountain Herb Studio; viewed

collaborative contemporary artworks rooted in traditional crafts at the Z Museum; and connected with nature-inspired handmade creations at Sutu Studio. The tour concluded with a broom weaving workshop and a discussion session to reflect on the integration of heritage, creativity, and community development.





Following the refreshing while educative tour, participants gathered for a parallel session on the topic of heritage and innovation. The session explored how cultural heritage and local identity can drive sustainable urban-rural transformation. Case studies from China, Austria, Nigeria, and beyond demonstrated how heritage-led planning, participatory conservation, and adaptive reuse strengthen community resilience and social cohesion.

Discussions highlighted the value of traditional knowledge, place-based approaches, and small-scale interventions (“urban acupuncture”) in revitalizing rural and peri-urban areas. Emphasis was placed on shifting from top-down preservation to community-driven engagement, integrating heritage conservation with sustainable development goals and balanced territorial growth. More specifically, below are summaries from each speaker.

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Luo Deyin,

*Professor, School of Architecture,
Tsinghua University; Deputy
Director, Academic Committee
on Vernacular Architecture,
Architectural Society of China*

Luo Deyin shared insights into the historical and spatial development of Yangjiatang village in Songyang County, China.

Through the stories of three key figures - Song Hongtang, Song Jun'en, and Song Weifeng - the case study illustrated how Confucian values such as education, public service, and filial piety shaped the village's

architecture, social structure, and intergenerational legacy. The intervention emphasized the importance of safeguarding traditional settlements as living heritage and as models for sustainable rural transformation, contributing to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



In her intervention, **Elisabeth Gruber** explored the multifaceted challenges of rural revitalisation in Austria, focusing on the Villgraten Valley in Eastern Tyrol as a case study. She emphasized that while mountain farmers have historically shaped Austria's cultural landscapes, contemporary pressures such as depopulation, vacancy, and restrictive land-use regulations now threaten the adaptive reuse of traditional Alpine farmhouses. Gruber highlighted how supply-

side factors including strong familial attachment, heritage protection laws, and governance frameworks, can hinder revitalisation efforts. She advocated for place-based, participatory, and context-sensitive approaches that integrate micro-level decision-making with meso-level policy instruments and emphasized on communicative planning and sustainable land reuse strategies.



Elisabeth Gruber,
Human Geographer and Associate Professor, University of Innsbruck, Austria



Harry den Hartog shared reflections on rural revitalization strategies in China's Yangtze River Delta Region, emphasizing the use of walking as a research method. His intervention highlighted how immersive, site-based exploration can foster inclusive spatial planning,

reconnect planners with local realities, and support sustainable development. Drawing on examples from Zhejiang Province, including reconstructed cultural routes and model villages, he illustrated how walking enables deeper understanding of rural transformations, water heritage, and community-led initiatives.

Harry den Hartog, *Associate Professor, Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands*



Abdul Husaini presented an innovative approach to heritage-led urban regeneration in Minna, Nigeria. Framed within the “New Niger Vision,” the intervention showcased how urban acupuncture (small, targeted interventions), can restore dignity and cultural continuity by revitalizing sacred landscapes, particularly cemeteries, as ecological and spiritual assets. The Minna Urban Regeneration Through Acupuncture (MURTA) initiative integrates inclusive design, community participation, and environmental sustainability, aligning with SDGs 11 and 15.

By blending formal planning with traditional wisdom and fostering interfaith harmony, the project exemplifies how heritage can serve as an entry point for inclusive urban transformation. Inspired by Songyang County’s low-cost rural revitalisation model, Niger State aims to deepen collaboration with UN-Habitat to scale culturally grounded regeneration strategies that promote resilience, identity, and shared prosperity. He also reminded participants that **“infrastructure is the body; heritage is the soul”**.



Abdul Husaini,
*Permanent Secretary, Niger State
Ministry of Lands and Survey, Minna,
Nigeria*



Li Shuangning,
*Ph.D. in Architecture, Politecnico di
Milano; Lecturer, School of Design and
Art, Yancheng Institute of Technology*

Concluding this parallel session, Li Shuangning presented a human-centered perspective on heritage conservation in Songyang County, Zhejiang Province. She explored how local villagers’ self-initiated participation in restoring ancestral temples and traditional dwellings has transformed heritage from a static object into a dynamic social process. Songyang’s approach -

grounded in community agency, cultural continuity, and inclusive governance - demonstrates how heritage protection can foster collective identity, stimulate rural economies, and support sustainable development. The case illustrates a shift from top-down preservation to bottom-up engagement, offering valuable insights into how cultural heritage can serve as a catalyst for rural revitalization.



B. Urban-Rural Green Transportation and Sustainable Development



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The participants started with a ride in an autonomous shuttle equipped with advanced sensors and L4-level safety systems. They then proceeded to Songyang's smart transportation and logistics ecosystem, where they experienced a live demonstration of the WeRide Robobus, showcasing its smooth navigation, emergency response, and real-time monitoring capabilities.

They then explored the Digital Highway project, a 26.5-kilometer smart corridor that has significantly improved traffic efficiency, safety, and sustainability through intelligent infrastructure and cross-agency collaboration. At the Smart Transportation Industrial Park, they visited Neolix, the world's leading robovan manufacturer, and Chengguang LianLian, a pioneer in solar-powered smart lampposts, both contributing to green, intelligent mobility.

The tour concluded at the Songyang Public Distribution Center, where guests explored the high-speed automated sorting systems, AI-powered robotic arms, drone and unmanned vehicle delivery operations. These innovations form part of Songyang's integrated passenger-cargo-postal model, which has significantly improved rural logistics, reduced costs, and boosted local e-commerce and agricultural circulation, positioning the county as a provincial leader in smart rural development.



Following the field visit, participants gathered for a parallel session on Urban-Rural green transportation and sustainable development. The session highlighted how digital innovation and intelligent systems are transforming urban-rural linkages and advancing green connectivity. Discussions showcased practical applications such as smart agriculture tools, intelligent transport systems, and inclusive metropolitan governance models. Emphasis was placed on the role of digitalization in bridging spatial divides, improving resilience, and supporting sustainable mobility and livelihoods. Participants also recognized peri-urban areas as key frontiers for climate action and territorial cohesion. Overall, the session underscored that inclusive digital transformation is central to building balanced and connected urban-rural systems. More specifically, below are summaries from each speaker.



Giovanni Zandoni,
*Program Officer, OCCAM,
Observatory on Digital
Communication (UN-affiliated)*

Giovanni Zandoni discussed a compelling case for the role of digital innovation in enhancing urban-rural linkages and promoting green connectivity. He introduced a collaborative project involving 20 partners and 30 research students, focused on rural communities in African countries. A key feature of the initiative is the “PlantHead” platform—an offline-capable IT diagnostic tool that enables farmers to receive real-time assistance on crop health, thereby reducing the need for long-distance travel and improving agricultural resilience.

Over five years, the project has addressed more than 25 agricultural challenges and compiled data on over 3,000 products. Zandoni emphasized that such tools exemplify “green, immaterial connectivity,” bridging spatial divides and supporting inclusive, climate-resilient development. Highlighting OCCAM’s broader work under the EU-funded EWA-BELT project, he concluded with a call to expand collaboration through platforms like the Infopoverty World Conference, reinforcing the importance of digital inclusion in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.



Yang Xiaoguang of Tongji University delivered a visionary presentation on the future of integrated urban-rural transportation systems. Grounded in the principles of digitalization, intelligentization, and sustainability, his intervention emphasized transportation as a foundational element of human development and territorial cohesion.

He introduced the concept of “New Quality Development,” advocating for smart, inclusive, and resilient mobility solutions that respond to evolving urban and rural needs. Drawing from decades of research and innovation, Yang showcased intelligent transport systems (ITS), vehicle-to-infrastructure technologies, and multi-modal integration as key enablers of equitable access, safety, and environmental stewardship.



Yang Xiaoguang,

Lead Professor of the National Key Discipline of Transportation Engineering and Ph.D. Supervisor, Tongji University; Honorary Director, Professional Committee of Intelligent Transportation, Chinese Association for Artificial Intelligence



Ousmane Sow,
*Permanent Secretary,
Grand Bamako*

Ousmane Sow followed, and presented the case of **Greater Bamako**, highlighting its emergence as a metropolitan governance model aimed at addressing critical urban challenges in Mali. With over 5 million residents across 26 municipalities, Greater Bamako was established to promote integrated planning, participatory governance, and inclusive development.

The presentation outlined key issues such as lack of urban planning, informal transport, and environmental degradation, and introduced the **Decennial Investment and Activities Plan (DIAP) 2021–2030** as a strategic framework for action. Emphasizing the importance of urban-rural flows of people, goods, services, and information, he advocated for balanced partnerships and territorial cohesion.



Joe Ravetz presented the **Peri-cene Project** as a global initiative aimed at understanding and transforming **peri-urban–rural linkages (PURL)** in the face of climate change, urbanization, and governance challenges. He emphasized that peri-urban areas—often overlooked—were critical frontiers for sustainable development, climate resilience, and inclusive governance. Drawing from over 40 case studies across the Global North and South, including Manchester and Chennai, Ravetz highlighted both the risks—such as ecological degradation, fragmented governance, and

social exclusion—and the opportunities for innovation, food systems resilience, and socio-ecological regeneration. He introduced a transformation agenda that shifted from negative “PURL syndromes” to positive synergies through integrated planning, adaptive governance, and community-led action. He underscored the need for evidence-based policy, participatory planning, and investment in local capacities, calling for a shift from extractive models to regenerative, socially inclusive approaches.



Joe Ravetz,
*Leader, Future-Proof Cities,
 Manchester Urban Institute*



Wang Yiming,
*Head of Songyang
 Baidu Apollo Intelligent
 Transportation Ecosystem
 Alliance Innovation Center;
 Chairman of the Board,
 Dalezhixing (Zhejiang)
 Technology Co., Ltd.*

Wang Yiming introduced Apollo Intelligent Transportation, a company established in 2022 that specialized in smart mobility solutions with a focus on enhancing transportation systems in Songyang. He highlighted the company’s emphasis on innovation in intelligent technology applications, including smart vehicles and autonomous sweepers. Wang acknowledged the strong support from the local government, which had cultivated a favorable business environment through progressive

policies and open communication platforms. He noted that Apollo was committed to providing comprehensive services for startups and had already facilitated the settlement of over 30 qualified enterprises in the region. Looking ahead, the company aimed to elevate the development standards of these enterprises, strengthen the local transportation ecosystem, and foster collaboration with other intelligent transport companies to build mutually beneficial platforms for both clients and the broader industry.



2. Co-creation Activity

As the dialogue came towards its conclusion, participants once more headed to Songyang County Old Residential Community Renovation Project (Phase I) - **Hetianling Block Organic Renewal Project**, located in the historic district of the Old City in Songyang County. This focused and systematic renovation aims to **comprehensively upgrade the area by constructing essential supporting facilities (including parking lots, public green spaces, and fecal pumping stations), improving the infrastructure and public service facilities such as water, drainage, flood control, and lighting**. The overarching goal is to enhance space utilization, preserve the historical and cultural style of the old town, and forge a distinctive urban character consistent with “Songyang” characteristics.

At the site, participants took turns installing symbolic windmills as a sign of friendship and continuing partnerships to advance urban-rural development. The co-creation activity included not only the co-organizers, international participants, experts from China and local community residing in this village.



3. Closing Ceremony

After three engaging days full of knowledge sharing, advocacy, and partnerships strengthening, IDURL 2025 participants gathered once more at the closing ceremony.



Liang Haigang, speaking on behalf of the Songyang County Government, celebrated the successful conclusion of the three-day international dialogue, expressing gratitude to UN-Habitat, the China Foreign Languages Bureau, and all participants. He reflected on the immersive experiences and exchanges that took place in Songyang, highlighting the county's efforts to balance cultural preservation with innovation, from ancient villages to smart urban

developments. He emphasized that urban and rural areas are interconnected and must develop in harmony, with culture, livability, and inclusive services as core pillars. Liang reaffirmed Songyang's commitment to sustainable development guided by the "Ten Million Project," and called for continued collaboration to realize the vision of "beauty in diversity and harmony in commonality" across broader scales. He concluded with appreciation and a hopeful invitation for future engagement.

On his part, **Rafael Tuts** (UN-Habitat) reflected on the successful conclusion of the three-day event, expressing deep appreciation to Songyang County for its generous hospitality and to CICG for its co-hosting role. With over 100 participants from more than 15 countries and 14 organizations, the dialogue explored the theme "Enhancing Urban-Rural Linkages: Culture, Housing and Basic Services." Field visits in Songyang showcased how heritage, innovation, and inclusive planning can transform communities—from adaptive housing upgrades in Hetianling Block to smart mobility solutions like autonomous buses. The Dialogues' subthemes- housing, culture and basic services- offered practical insights

into territorial cohesion. He highlighted that Songyang's experience proves balanced urban-rural development is both achievable and essential. He went on to stress that UN-Habitat reaffirmed its commitment to supporting member States through its 2026–2029 strategic plan and invited participants to continue the conversation at the upcoming World Urban Forum in Baku, Azerbaijan. His remarks closed with a call to carry forward fresh ideas and renewed energy for inclusive, sustainable development.



4. Summing Up IDURL 2025

The International Dialogue on Urban-Rural Linkages (IDURL 2025) offered participants a rich and immersive experience, blending grounded field visits with forward-looking dialogue sessions. From the cultural vibrancy and community-led innovation in Songyang's traditional villages to the cutting-edge demonstrations of smart mobility and digital agriculture, the day highlighted the diverse pathways through which urban-rural linkages can be strengthened.

Presentations from global experts underscored the importance of integrated planning, inclusive governance, and technological innovation in addressing shared challenges and advancing sustainable development.

Whether through heritage conservation, intelligent transportation, or peri-urban resilience, the discussions reaffirmed that balanced urban-rural development is not only possible but essential.

The co-creation activity and closing reflections further emphasized the value of collaboration, local ownership, and international exchange in shaping resilient, inclusive, and culturally grounded futures.

The momentum generated at IDURL 2025 sets the stage for deeper collaboration, knowledge exchange, and policy innovation to advance urban-rural linkages as a cornerstone of sustainable development.

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