

Local Alliances Lead to Global Growth

Hopping on a bus or getting off at a metro station downtown might seem like simple everyday habits for most of us, but public transportation is more than buses and trains and UITP is the absolute expert to ask. With almost 135 years of experience under its belt, the International Association of Public Transport has become a point of reference both for achievements in its field and as a distinguished global organization. A talk with Mohamed Mezghani, UITP Secretary General, unveils the secret to the association's constant growth and the opportunities seized once globalization settled in.

Words Vicky Koffa



"What's our secret? Our global membership and our hard-working international staff. There is of course more to it than that, but our association is only as strong as the people who make UITP what it is. We're an old association, having existed since 1885, and we now have more than 1,700 members in 100 countries. With that reach, comes a lot of responsibility, and by working side-by-side with all public transport stakeholders, UITP can continue to develop and grow," explains Mohamed.

CLARITY AND STABILITY BRING DEVELOPMENT

Growth is not the result of some isolated decision-makers around a desk. It is achieved through close collaboration of all stakeholders involved and a steady mission used as overall guidance throughout the years and across countries. "UITP represents the entire public transport ecosystem, all types of stakeholders are part of it, which is very important to highlight as it's a unique distinction for an association to hold," says Mohamed. "A large part of why UITP remains so strong and relevant is what we stand for: we deal with urban mobility around the world – a subject growing in importance each day due to global environmental concerns. UITP will always continue to develop, but never forget the core message: moving people around our cities. And you can't do that without the staff and members who make UITP what it is."

This focused mission right from the beginning has helped the association reach its objectives so far, convey a clear message to its members worldwide and set future goals: "Our vision is not purely about transport, but about what we know great public transport offers to all of us: more economic prosperity, access to jobs, culture and recreational activities, and better well-being. UITP doesn't just focus on the means – public transport – but on the end result: making people's life happier. Our future objectives are also clear. UITP plans to advance the sector even more, by bringing more stakeholders together, growing our global membership and participating in even more relevant events to make the role of public transport known."

LEVERAGING FRUITFUL PARTNERSHIPS

When asked how they achieved such global expansion, Mohamed clarifies: "We are not a European association expanding globally, we are a global association that happened to be born in Europe. It changes the perspective. Our working priorities are coordinated from Brussels with input coming from all over the world. It's with this approach that we make sure our global membership is best served by UITP at all times."

Staying true to the promise to always remain relevant for its members and serve them within their local context, UITP is seizing opportunities of beneficial partnerships to create regional offices and Centres for Transport Excellence in key places like Dubai or Singapore for instance. This has been instrumental for its growth, but Mohamed recognizes they could not have done it without local connections and meaningful collaboration both at home and abroad: "Brussels is UITP's native city, where we were born. If

I am not mistaken, it's now the world's second city for the number of associations it hosts. It's a great asset for UITP to interact with our peers based in Brussels. We build alliances for advocating the EU institutions, we collaborate for organizing joint events and we benchmark about our services and practices to identify improvement potential. This ecosystem of associations is very enriching for UITP."

"In Dubai, we were among the first associations to become legalized," Mohamed continues. "The Dubai Association Centre supports us for recruiting staff and other administrative issues. Our Dubai office is hosted by the Roads and Transport Authority, a leading organization in the MENA region. This helps us a lot in connecting with transport organizations and their officials, and this serves our membership development in the region. Both Brussels and Dubai are excellent hubs for association events not only for their infrastructure but also because they are home to good practice cases in our field that people want to see and experience when coming to our events."

UITP has also decided to enhance its activities in the Asia-Pacific region, this time promoting knowledge and research, with the establishment of a Centre for Transport Excellence in Singapore. "In response to specific UITP membership needs and to help develop sustainable mobility in the region, the UITP Asia-Pacific Centre for Transport Excellence was established to consolidate knowledge and research by making experience and know-how on accommodating mobility needs available in the Asia-Pacific region," says Mohamed. "It further expands UITP's relationship with our members at the local level and, alongside our Asia-Pacific bases, we're delighted to continue expanding in this part of the world."

VERSATILE STRATEGY, IMPACTFUL RESULTS

UITP can now boast that its manifold approach brings added value to its members and makes a significant social impact. "We have members from different profiles, private and public, multinational companies and local actors, operators and regulators, mature organizations and start-ups, from all over the world. Therefore, when we cover an issue, we cover it from this multiplicity of perspectives, putting the citizens and the cities at the heart of our approach, and going beyond industrial interests. This is a strong positioning because it makes our studies, our policy positions, our services, very comprehensive and relevant. This is how we make an impact, by being inclusive and comprehensive. This strategy is reflected in our missions: advocacy, knowledge and networking."

This piece is part of the exclusive partnership between Boardroom and the Global Association Hubs Partnership (GAHP), which comes as an innovative response to the increasing decentralisation of international associations, as they look to develop their activities globally. www.associationhubs.org