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**T7 Task Force International cooperation for the global common good**

## **POLICY BRIEF**

# **A G7 INFRASTRUCTURE CLUB – MOBILIZING THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF CITIES TO SUPPORT MULTILATERALISM AND THE AGENDA 2030 IN POST-COVID G7/G20**

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The global share of emissions that can be attributed to urban areas is increasing. In 2015, urban emissions were estimated to be 25 GtCO<sub>2</sub>-eq (about 62% of the global share) and in 2020, 29 GtCO<sub>2</sub>-eq (67-72% of the global share). The drivers of urban GHG emission are complex and include population size, income, state of urbanization and urban form (...). In modelled scenarios, global consumption-based urban CO<sub>2</sub> and CH<sub>4</sub> emissions could be up to (as high as) 40 GtCO<sub>2</sub>-eq in 2050 with low mitigation efforts.

IPCC, April 4, 2022

## Abstract

**In the context of an increasing divergence of models, a highly divergent recovery and overlapping and multiple global crises, multi-level governance is critical to address systemic challenges. The benefits of such a strategy, too long ignored by national governments, was well documented during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, the G7 presidency of Germany has launched a G7 Urban development track to support investments for a better future and a sustainable planet and it has acknowledged the formation of an urban engagement group in the G7. The creation of an infrastructure club, complementing the G7 Germany proposal of a climate club would be an innovative way to support the transformative power of cities in the G7 and nurture a quality dialogue between G7 and G20 in support of the delivery of the Agenda 2030 despite times of uncertainties.**

# Challenge

It took the worst pandemic since the Spanish flu of 1918 to highlight crudely the gaps and inherent fragilities of contemporary growth and development processes. Yet, the Sars-Cov-2 virus and its subsequent mutations are not the only factor of distress of globalization, as underlined by the U.S. Treasury Secretary J.Yellen in an address to the Congress in April 2022 (Lawder, Shahal, 2022) where she called to reboot the World Bank to meet overlapping and multiple global crises.

Declarations at G7 meetings since the beginning of 2022 highlight a fragile world order, following the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine. In 2021, the G7 Leaders already acknowledged an increasing divergence of models whilst looking at the future frontiers of the global economy and society (G7, 2021 para. 31). During the past decade, the first paragraphs of the annual G20 leaders' declarations commenting on the state of the world's economy also showcased mounting levels of uncertainties, rising protectionist tendencies and difficulties in managing global issues through multilateral institutions. The Rome G20 Leaders' declaration even stated that the recovery was highly divergent across and within countries and exposed to downside risks (G7, 2021, para. 3).<sup>1</sup> In 2022, the enduring war in Ukraine combined with the surge of the Covid-19 pandemic in China is further disrupting supply and value chains in critical sectors such as energy and food. Globalization is no longer just distorted or at risk of decoupling<sup>2</sup> but at crossroads.

The G7 has displayed a strong consensus among its members since February 2022. It has adopted several rounds of economic and monetary sanctions against 'President Putin and its regime'<sup>3</sup> and reinforced sectoral coordination such as on energy or agriculture<sup>4</sup>. At the inception summit of the group of think-tanks of the G7 in January 2022, the Sherpa of the G7 Germany underlined the need to build greater cooperation between the G7 and G20 space, yet on several occasions at the United-Nations, a number of major countries from the G20 did not follow the same way as of the G7 countries, raising questions about the complementarity between the G7 and G20 spaces.

The dual crisis of the pandemic and the current war expose interdependent economies and societies to disruptions at a magnitude rarely seen since the end of the Cold War, including a steep rise of inflation risks and debt gridlock risks, especially in lower and middle income countries. In a period of global uncertainty, the role of multilateral fora is more relevant than ever, albeit with an imperative to update priorities and governance models. This includes a need for the G7 and the G20 to maintain a high level of dialogue. Within this framework, the role of cities and subnational governments has to be better foregrounded to support multilateralism and achieve the goals of the Agenda 2030 whereas informality, poverty levels, risks of hunger, and other challenges such as global warming, are rising. In other terms, fostering multilevel governance is inseparable from supporting multilateralism to cope with systemic crises.

Since the global financial crisis of 2008, subnational governments have been largely ignored by major geopolitical fora, especially the G7, although urbanization investment models are proving substantially unsustainable (IPCC, 2022). In 2021, the G7 Carbis Bay summit brought up the notions of new frontiers ranging from cyber space to outer space (G7, 2021, para. 3) But it remained silent about the geo-economics

of our increasingly urban planet, where more than 4 billion people live in cities and the servicing of natural ecosystems exceeds planetary boundaries. Urbanization and infrastructure investments are not only two critical issues underpinning climate change, inclusive recovery or future pandemic preparedness. They are cross-cutting dimensions between the G7 and G20 space which can no longer be overlooked.

The G7 has created an Urban track for the first time in 2022 and it is preparing a summit of urban development ministers in Potsdam in September 2022, but an important question remains about how to avoid that this new agenda is overshadowed by other pressing issues such as energy. The Seoul Development Consensus was established at the G20 South Korean in 2010. It opened the way for a decade of G20 work on infrastructure investments but it is only in 2021 that the G20 really recognized the need to assess urban development issues in global recovery responses and this assessment remains fragile. The current combination of health, economic, environmental and geopolitical crises could accelerate the divergence between major infrastructure plans globally such as the European Union's 'Global Gateways' and the United-States' trillion Dollar infrastructure package, on the one hand, and on the other hand, China's Belt and Road Initiative (Aktar, Yoshino, Gili, Fasulo, Amighi, Rizzi, Secchi, Buchoud, et al., 2022). This would 1) hamper the ability of the international community to foster effective cooperation across the G7 and G20, 2) prevent the implementation of a new infrastructure vision connecting social, digital and physical infrastructure, and 3) hinder a much needed upscale in addressing sustainable urbanization for the common good.<sup>5</sup>

A renewed focus on infrastructure investments including cities and a multilevel governance perspective could support a green revolution in the G7 and develop new partnerships through a step change in the approach to investment for infrastructure, including through initiatives for clean and green growth (G7, 2021, Our Shared agenda for global action to build back better). But this approach cannot be limited to the G7 space only, as the bulk of transformations and investments in the built environment are taking place in Asia and Africa.

## Proposals

Fruitful research was under development before the pandemic to strengthen an urban science commensurate with contemporary global challenges, well across the G7 and the G20 (Pieterse, Parnell, and Croese, 2017, [Elmqvist](#), Bai, Frantzeskaki, Parnell, et al., 2018, Bai, Colbert, Mc Phearson, Webb et al., 2019, Karvonen, Cvetkovic, Herman, Johansson, Kjellström, et al., 2021). The understanding of the transformative power of cities (Brandi, Messner and Schwachula, WBGU, 2016) at the time of the launch of the Agenda 2030, of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Habitat III Summit, is an outcome of

interactions with promising research aiming at new earth politics to govern the Anthropocene (Nicholson and Jinnah, 2017), in light of ten years of nine planetary boundaries (Stockholm Resilience Centre, 2019).

The pandemic outbreak has abruptly terminated that momentum, only to highlight the importance of building networked resilience through cross city collaborations (Bai et al 2020) and intra-city, localized cooperation at neighborhood scale (Cohen, 2021). Therefore, globally coordinated urbanization and cities diplomacy (Van der Pütten, 2022) are necessary to nurture a more solid multilateral dialogue and implement policy solutions to pressing Earth challenges. The latest report from the IPCC in 2022, the launch of a new platform by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CB) to galvanize cities commitments to post-2020 global biodiversity framework (CBD, 2022), the adoption of a roadmap towards a legally binding treaty on plastics at the General assembly of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP, 2022) are ways take environmental action through cooperation at all scales.

Yet, the global macroeconomic responses to the Covid-19 pandemic have triggered a surge in private wealth globally, alongside rising inequalities at all scales (Snower, 2020, Kelly and Snower, 2021). Another consequence of abundant and inexpensive liquidities is the rise of inflationary risks, also a consequence of supply chain disruptions. Thus, there is more to it than relaunching and expanding pre-crisis urban research or multiplying calls for cross-sectoral cooperation. While academic literature recognizes the complexity and opportunities of more potent city-driven dynamics, global urban governance runs the risk of being politically sidelined in the resolution of immediate macroeconomic priorities and geopolitical challenges (Espey, Revi, Parnell, Keith, Buchoud et al., 2022). By 2050, that is in less than thirty years from now, over 7 billion people that is 70% of the world population should be living in cities and we know current governance and development models are exhausting all natural resources and are not sustainable. A shared priority for national governments and international institutions gathered in leading macroeconomic fora is to capture the transformative potential of the global urban agenda (Buchoud, Hoven, Kurz, Messner, Schulze et al., 2022) and to leverage solutions for the urban imperative to become, at last, part of core 21<sup>st</sup> century global policy-making.

For a long time since the turn of the millennium, there has been a wide range of commitments at the multilateral level for the implementation of solutions at the city level. For instance, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) has supported various international agendas, aiming at fostering a modern understanding of urban development in international processes.<sup>6</sup> And yet, the outcomes of the U.N. Habitat III summit in 2016 and of the corresponding New Urban Agenda (NUA) were below expectations (WBGU, 2016-1 and 2016-2), even if the adoption of SDG 11 focusing on sustainable cities has been widely acknowledged. In 2020, cities and urban governance were still ignored in the declaration from the 75<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the U.N. aiming at reinvigorating multilateralism, despite the release of a policy brief by the U.N. Secretary General 'On Covid-19 in an urban world' (U.N., 2020). That same year, the G20 extraordinary summit on Covid-19 also largely overlooked the role of cities and the urban impacts of the pandemic, although some significant initiatives were undertaken, mostly by the civil society and research.<sup>7</sup>

In the course of the past 15 years, both the resolution of 2008 financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic have yielded strong recentralizing effects, which have seriously downplayed the impact of multilateral commitments focusing on urban issues. In many cases, it has hampered the resilience of urban centres hit

by crises. At the G20 high-level summit on Local Infrastructure Investment in Genoa in 2021, the OECD has well documented the decline and the slow, uneven recovery of subnational governments' investment capacities, in particular to address social, digital, physical infrastructure needs, following the 2008 crisis. The study warned that the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic could be even more lasting and serious. Since 2015-16 and the adoption of the Agenda 2030, the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) of regional and municipal governments assessing the implementation of the Agenda 2030 at the local level, have proven helpful to reinforce the territorialization of the SDGs. Such reviews also complement the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate. Yet, subnational governments' institutional and investment capacity are growingly unequal, in addition to be weakened by multiple crises.

Now is the right time for a true scaling up of urbanization in global affairs and to anchor that in the G7. It is a good moment to profit by the reinforced role of the engagement groups under the G7 German presidency, including the recognition of the Urban 7 Alliance (U7, 2022).<sup>8</sup> This move echoes the development of the role of civil society in the G20, and complements the Major Groups in the U.N.<sup>9</sup>

The experience of creating and managing global policy frameworks to support transformations has a substantial track-record in the field of urban research. This should be showcased in the G7 and combined with the vision and inputs of Indonesia, India and Brazil, as they hold the G20 presidency from 2022 to 2024. An enduring quality dialogue between G7 and G20 supported by the civil society and cities has the potential to leverage a new generation of infrastructure investments, commensurate with existing social and environmental challenges and valuing people's potential. The issue of infrastructure investment and financing is one of the most solid way to regenerate a global urban agenda and build on both the G7 and G20 space capabilities. A stronger, cooperative G7 urban and infrastructure agenda could help reinforce the impact of a climate club and raise more substantial financial leverage to reach net zero emissions (Nordhaus, 2015, G7 Germany priorities, 2022).

## Implementation

Germany is chairing the G7 in 2022, followed by Japan in 2023. Indonesia has taken the presidency of the G20 in 2022, followed by India and Brazil in 2023 and 2024, and potentially South-Africa in 2025. At this juncture, a comprehensive transformation of development pathways in line with the needs and rising capacities of emerging economies and rapidly urbanizing regions could emerge (Parnell, Pieterse and Watson, 2009, Nagendra, Bai, Brondizio and Lawsa, 2018, Sudarshan, 2021, Teixeira, 2021). Such a direction to 'Recover Stronger, Recover Together' (G20 Indonesia) from the Covid-19 pandemic is all the more necessary as the Agenda 2030 shows signs of premature fatigue. Structural finance gaps have been pointed out in countless reports, which are aggravated by risks of geopolitical fragmentation and short term crises. Thus, a new range of long-term investment strategies has become urgent (T20, D20, B20, 2021), which is also emphasized by the science and social and human science academies of G20 countries

(S20, 2020, SSH20, 2021).<sup>10</sup> We thereby propose two steps to develop the transformative power of cities in the G7/G20.

1. A regular dialogue between think tanks (T7, T20) and urban engagement groups (U20, U7) in the G7 and in the G20 space.

An urban perspective in the G7 is a novelty introduced in 2022. Our research shows that the G20 has not been completely silent on urban issues in the past decade -even if a more serious consideration is very recent.<sup>11</sup> Joining forces across the G7 and G20 could provide the ground for a renewed approach to multilevel governance and complement G7 and G20 forces. We welcome the invitation of the Urban 7 Alliance for the T7 to take part to the first U7 Mayors' summit and that in return, a similar mechanism is implemented at the T7 summit, May 24-25 2022. This process should be pursued in preparation of the summit of the ministers of sustainable urban development of the G7 scheduled in Potsdam, 13-14 September 2022, for the 2023 summit of the Global Solutions Initiative and during the G7 Japan.

In addition, a dialogue mechanism between the Urban 7 alliance and the Urban 20 should be put in place, profiting by the G7 Urban track momentum in 2022. The organizations supporting the creation of the Urban 7 and the development of the Urban 20 are complementary. Together, they could greatly facilitate exchanges between cities. In addition, voluntary initiatives designed by international organizations to involve local governments, such as the European Commission Covenant of Mayors, could also be associated (Crocchi E, Lucchitta B, Molteni T, 2021).

2. An infrastructure club to complement the G7 Germany's proposal of a climate club.

A new approach of infrastructure investment and financing as a driver for urbanization within planetary boundaries across G7 and G20 (Buchoud, Keith, Parnell, Van der Pütten, 2022) would be a powerful driver for multilevel governance in uncertain times.

Better coordination and interoperability of infrastructure investment plans across the globe are critical to rebalance increasingly unstable and unbalanced global urban systems. The creation of a G7 infrastructure club could play the same role, in the infrastructure space, as the climate club regarding climate finance, that of a coalition of the willing to overcome existing financial barriers and propose solutions for long-term transformations. Following the call of the G7 Germany presidency and the example of the climate club, the G7 infrastructure club would be open and cooperative to expand partnerships beyond the G7, especially with G20 partners. This approach could yield significant benefits in terms of international development cooperation by 1) allowing for a high-level exchange between G7 and G20 capacities and experience in the fields of infrastructure investment and financing (eg. engagement groups, ministerial working groups, etc), 2) contributing to the preparation of the review of SDG 11 in 2023 and to the edition of the new Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) whereas the one edited in 2019 already pointed to urbanization as a mega-trend across all SDGs (UNDESA, 2019) 3) channelling and scaling up resources from national and multilateral development banks (MDBs and NDBs) and leveraging private sources of investment (Hauert, Yang, Studart and Lev, 2021).

## Conclusion

The year 2022 is a pivotal time for improving intra G7 and G7 /G20 dialogue on urbanization, cities and infrastructure investments, as multiple crises lead to a better but fragile recognition of the role of subnational governments to support multilateralism. Assessing the transformative power of cities in major macroeconomic fora could support the institutional transformation under way in the U.N. to recognize the role of local and regional governments and as SDG 11 will be reviewed in 2023. In that context, our proposals build on the macroeconomic leverage of G7 -and G20- to accelerate the recovery from the pandemic and to overcome deepening finance gaps to achieve environmental and development global goals. Defining and implementing a new generation of infrastructure investments at all scales would also favor a continuous dialogue across G7 and G20 as global macroeconomic risks are mounting.



# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the G20 2021 Rome Leaders Declaration’s paragraph 3 on the Global economy displays a typical phrasing highlighting contemporary imbalances: ‘Over 2021, global economic activity has been recovering at a solid pace, thanks to the roll-out of vaccines and continued policy support. However, the recovery remains highly divergent across and within countries, and exposed to downside risks (...)’ Source: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/52732/final-final-g20-rome-declaration.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Bloomberg, April 20, 2021, China President Xi Jinping argues that decoupling ‘works against economic and market principles’, <https://fortune.com/2021/04/20/china-president-xi-jinping-decoupling-boao-forum-speech/>

<sup>3</sup> G7 Leaders’ Statement on Ukraine: 11 March 2022, Press Release, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/g7-leaders-statement-on-ukraine-11-march-2022>

<sup>4</sup> G7 Agriculture Ministers Respond to Russian Invasion of Ukraine, March 11, 2022, <https://www.fas.usda.gov/newsroom/g-7-agriculture-ministers-respond-russian-invasion-ukraine>

<sup>5</sup> For instance, the G7 announced in 2021 a ‘Build Back Better World’ infrastructure agenda but a year later, the adoption of financial sanctions such as limitations for Russian banks to use the SWIFT system is accelerating the development of ‘China’s nascent Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS)’ (Handwerker, 2022), especially in the space of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Similarly, the Russian Federation and India are relaunching talks to establish a rupee-ruble payment scheme, despite many challenges (Bhattacharjee, 2022, Chakravarty, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> In the past years, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) has run several global initiatives such as Urbanet, with a focus on decentralisation or the CitiesCHALLENGE 2.0 ideas competition, which tests innovative approaches to climate-friendly and socially inclusive urban development. Another tool, City WORKS is meant to target the implications of global agendas locally

<sup>7</sup> In 2020, the U.N. Secretary general issued a policy brief on cities and the pandemic, whereby engagement groups in the G20 and global initiatives such as the Oxford Global Urban Roundtable or such as the Intersecting series with GSI, GIZ ADBI and others (Intersecting, 2021, 2022) clearly pointed out to the role of subnational governments and communities to build resilient responses to the pandemic. A global, multiyear Sustainable Urban Regeneration Lab was initiated at Bocconi University in Milano right after the G20 Rome leaders’ summit. Its creation was, in part, inspired by the results of the G20 Italy on urban investments, circular economy, and regional development through major and secondary cities. A ‘Council on Urban Initiatives’ was launched in the beginning of 2022 by UCL, LSE Cities and UN Habitat. In March 2022, a different, more open process was initiated as the Oxford Global Urban Roundtable, aiming at interconnecting research, advocacy, international institutions, central and regional bodies of the U.N., across the G7 and G20 space. (Espey, Revi, Parnell, Keith, Buchoud et al., 2022).

<sup>8</sup> 2022 U7 Mayors Declaration 3 May 2022 Embracing the Urban World: Cities, Urbanization and Multilevel Cooperation as Drivers of Change for Peace, Democracy and Sustainability, [https://g7u7.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Materials/Summit\\_2022/2022\\_U7\\_Mayors\\_Declaration.pdf](https://g7u7.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Materials/Summit_2022/2022_U7_Mayors_Declaration.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> The G20 Indonesia has set up a dense G20 civil society agenda through multiple joint meetings of engagement groups and numerous G20 related seminars and events addressing both an international and a domestic audience. For instance, at the inception meeting of the Urban 20 group in March 2022, the governors of West Java and Jakarta provinces who are co-chairing the group hosted representatives of all other G20 engagement groups.

<sup>10</sup> ‘In 2008, the world experienced a global financial crisis, a critical transition that warranted the G20 the G20 discussions to be elevated to include G20 leaders Twelve years later, we are faced with another critical transition of far-reaching impact in COVID-19. These transitions are abrupt shifts in the state of our

ecosystems and become critical when they have global or far-reaching impacts’. Science 20, 2020, Critical Transitions: Abrupt Shifts in the State of Ecosystems, [https://www.academie-sciences.fr/pdf/rapport/S20\\_Saudi\\_Arabia\\_Communique.pdf](https://www.academie-sciences.fr/pdf/rapport/S20_Saudi_Arabia_Communique.pdf)

‘The fragility of interdependent economies and societies has been exposed, for example, in financial markets instability and increased indebtedness, struggle for resources, large-scale reduction or misuse of common goods, supply-chain challenges, and uncontrolled migrations, particularly severe in those countries most affected by this phenomenon.’ SSH20 Academies Joint Statement, 2021, Crises: Economy, Society, Law, and Culture Towards a Less Vulnerable Humankind, <https://rsc-src.ca/sites/default/files/SSH20%20Joint%20Statement.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> The G20 Argentina released High-Level Principles on Sustainable Habitat through Regional Planning in 2017. In 2021, the T20 introduced the proposal of a ‘G20 pact on sustainable urbanization’ (T20, 2021), among other G20 level urban inputs (G20, 2021, paras. 20, 17).

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Her early academic research was in the area of urban historical geography and focused on the rise of racial residential segregation and the impact of colonialism on urbanization and town planning in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since 1994 and democracy in South Africa her work has shifted to contemporary urban policy research (local government, poverty reduction and urban environmental justice). By its nature, this research has not been purely academic, but has involved liaising with local and national government and international donors. Sue is also on the boards of several local NGOs concerned with poverty alleviation, sustainability, and gender equity in post-apartheid South Africa. She serves on several national and international advisory research panels relating to urban reconstruction.

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Martin van der Pütten has been the Head of International Relations of the City of Dortmund since 2019. Prior to that (2017-2019) Martin worked in the mayor's office of the City of Dortmund. From 2010-2016, he was employed at Emschergenossenschaft (Watermanagement Company) as the assistant to the CEO. After finishing his studies in 2008 (MA), Martin began his career as a PR consultant and worked for the German Bundestag (national parliament). He wrote his bachelor's thesis about music ethnology in China. The master's thesis was about mega issues like climate change and their impacts on media companies.

"I would like to put the dimension of cities more into the global context (keyword Urban Diplomacy). It would be nice if we could integrate it even better in G7 and G20."



The Think7 engagement group under the German G7 presidency 2022 is jointly chaired by the Global Solutions Initiative and the German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) as mandated by the German Federal Chancellery.



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