CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT

MANAGING URBANISATION

- a global and just approach

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November 2021

→ By 2050, an estimated two-thirds of the global population will be living in towns or cities. As a result, cities have a vital role to play in achieving sustainable transformation and implementing the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda.

→ The UN's New Urban Agenda and the EU's Pact of Amsterdam provide some initial approaches for ensuring sustainable urbanisation processes, yet fail to include a transformative perspective.

→ Sustainable urban transformation needs technical, institutional, financial and political support as well as strong, democratic urban governance.

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Inhalt

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INTRODUCTION

In light of the sheer force and speed of the current wave of urbanisation, cities are playing an increasingly important role in the global transition towards a more sustainable future.[1] While cities can offer enormous potential to help achieve social, economic and environmental sustainability, they can also pose tremendous challenges to the achievement of sustainable development.[2] In the words of former Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) Ban Ki-moon: »Our struggle for global sustainability will be won or lost in the cities.«[3]

This publication discusses why cities are so fundamental to the transition to sustainability. After outlining the main challenges urbanisation poses for transformation, the paper goes on to analyse the role of cities in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement. It also examines the New Urban Agenda adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in 2016, the purpose of which was to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The publication concludes by outlining a number of potential urban transformative paths for sustainability.

1   Wissenschaftlicher Beirat der Bundesregierung Globale Umwelt- veränderungen (WBGU) / German Advisory Council on Global Change, 2016

2   Messner; Brandi, 2015. For the purposes of this publication, the definition of »sustainability« is based on the following excerpt taken from the 1987 Brundtland Report: »Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.«

3   Remarks to the High-level Delegation of Mayors and Regional Authorities, in New York, 23. April 2012

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URBANISATION: CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL FOR TRANSFORMATION

The potential and challenges related to sustainable development are increasingly found in the world's cities. Today there are already more people living in urban than rural areas – despite the fact that cities only comprise two per cent of the Earth's surface. By 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will be living in cities and towns – and 90 per cent of this urban growth will occur in developing and newly industrialised countries.[4] Although cities offer a wealth of opportunities for economic, cultural and social development as well as for the promotion of resource and energy efficiency, urbanisation also poses numerous challenges.

An increasing share of the urban population lives in precarious conditions, lacking proper access to basic social and technical infrastructure and the corresponding services.[5] Although many developing countries have achieved rapid economic growth in recent decades, this progress is, for the most part, unevenly distributed. Urban populations continue to face significant challenges related to the existing major inequality or as regards access to decision-making and governance structures.

Moreover, if we continue to plan and develop cities as we have been over the last few decades, we risk reaching a dangerously high level of land use and resource depletion that will make limiting global warming to the levels set out in the Paris Agreement, as well as the achievement of the 2030 Agenda goals, much more difficult, if not outright impossible. Given that over 70 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions are produced by towns and cities, from the perspective of the Paris Agreement, urbanisation is a highly relevant issue.

One key problem is that rapidly growing cities can cause damaging path dependencies – especially through the creation of major »carbon lock-ins«, in other words long-term locked-in carbon emissions in connection with large-scale infrastructure projects, such as roads or power stations. Even today, the development of new infrastructures in developing and newly industrialised countries already accounts for around one-third of the world's remaining carbon budget, assuming we want to limit the global temperature rise to under 2°C. If the temperature rise is to be limited to 1.5°C, these large-scale infrastructure projects account for as much as three-quarters of the budget.[6] Ongoing processes of urbanisation therefore entail a disproportionately high increase in resource consumption, which in turn increases greenhouse gas emissions massively. The momentum and pace of global urbanisation and the associated impact on climate protection and resource consumption must not be underestimated. By 2050, the urban infrastructures of the world's cities will need to accommodate a further 2.5 billion people.[7]

When it comes to tackling these challenges, incremental solutions are not enough. What is urgently needed is radical urban transformation.

Although rapidly growing cities present considerable challenges, they also provide a crucial window of opportunity for the global transition towards a more sustainable future. That said, this window will not stay open for long, leaving us with very little time to ensure proper management and organisation of advancing urbanisation. The crucial questions here are how negative lock-ins can be avoided, what possibilities exist for scaling small, sustainable solutions, and how we can ensure that newly planned cities will be able to accommodate millions of urban dwellers.

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4   The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2018
5   This section draws on Brandi (2018).

6   Müller et al, 2013
7   The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), 2018

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THE INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR URBAN TRANSFORMATION

There are countless overlaps between the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set down in the 2030 Agenda and the Nationally Determined Contributions or national climate plans which underpin the Paris Agreement.[8] These overlaps provide significant potential for the mutually beneficial implementation of both agendas.[9] To promote effective implementation and policy coherence, both the synergies and the conflicting objectives between the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda must be taken into account.[10] This is especially important when it comes to SDG 11, which focuses specifically on urban development, but also with regards to the other SDGs which play an important role in the context of urbanisation.

THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Several of the 17 SDGs are relevant when it comes to cities and how we deal with urbanisation, for example those focused on clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) and infrastructure (SDG 9). However, there is one SDG which places cities right at the heart. SDG 11 states: »Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.« Goal 11 comprises seven targets. Targets 11.1 and 11.2 concentrate on the provision of services to urban areas (housing, transport etc.); target 11.3 deals with settlement planning and management; target 11.4 focuses on the world's cultural and natural heritage; target 11.5 refers to the effects of natural disasters; and, lastly, targets 11.6 and 11.7 cover environmental issues (air quality, waste manage, as well as green and public spaces).

Despite the overlaps with other goals, SDG 11 is especially important as it is the only goal to address sustainable development with a specific focus on cities. Another reason

is that it urges political decision-makers to adopt a broader perspective on urban planning and development.[11] At the same time, it must be pointed out that the majority of SDG 11 targets are very broad and fail to go into detail on the specifics of operationalisation. Indeed, there are a series of fundamental aspects, including inequality, social welfare and communication technology, which SDG 11 does not adequately address. Moreover, SDG 11 runs the risk of disregarding how cities contribute to global environmental change or affect the Earth's system, such as through their emissions or their dependence on distant ecosystem services.[12]

While cities and local actors are essential in the context of SDG 11, they are also of fundamental importance for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in general. Around 65 per cent of the SDG targets can only be reached if they are implemented in collaboration with local actors.[13] In terms of implementing sustainable development strategies, besides development, monitoring and evaluation, local efforts and cooperation are also of central importance.[14] Highlighting the key role that cities play in implementing these strategies can also help make sure that their capacity for achieving the SDGs and promoting sustainable development in general is used efficiently.

THE PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT

Ahead of the negotiations for the Paris Climate Agreement, the countries disclosed their plans to address climate change for the period after 2020 or what are known as Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Following the adoption of this historical agreement in 2015, it is now of the utmost importance to ensure that it does not become a paper tiger, and that all signatories duly implement the agreement including the NDCs. When it comes to the implementation of the NDCs, cities play a fundamental role: indeed, 110 NDCs refer explicitly to cities.[15] At the

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8 This section draws on Brandi (2018).

9 Casado-Asensio; Steurer, 2014. Le Blanc, 2015. The various areas where these two agendas pursue the same goal illustrate where mutual benefits can be achieved. This applies not only to Goal 13 of the 2030 Agenda, which focuses specifically on climate action, but also to many other critical dimensions of sustainable development. For instance, sustainably managing forests and halting biodiversity loss (SDG 15) also helps combat climate change. For more information, also see www.ndc-sdg.info.

10 Lay et al, 2017

11 Brandi, 2015a

12 Brandi, 2015a

13 Misselwitz et al, 2015

14 Scholz, 2017

15 United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), 2016b

same time, alongside the UN member states, cities and other subnational actors have a crucial part to play in the implementation of the Paris Agreement. While in 2016, only 2,500 cities and regions had registered their activities with the Secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), by 2021, this number had increased to over 12,000, illustrating just how important these subnational actors are in limiting the global average temperature rise.[16]

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16   UNFCCC, 2021

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POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS: URBAN TRANS-FORMATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

The process of urbanisation can help countries meet 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement goals. Unlocking this potential, however, is not without its challenges. In light of this, the German Advisory Council on Climate Change (WBGU) developed a »normative compass« to provide guidance and orientation for shaping the current and future processes of urbanisation. This comprises three dimensions.[17]

The first dimension calls for urbanisation to be compatible with the preservation of natural resources and the protection of the local environment by adhering to what it refers to as planetary guardrails[18] or planetary limits[19]: »All cities and urban societies should pursue development pathways that take account of the universal planetary guardrails and solve local environmental problems. This involves, for instance, meeting the 2°C climate-protection guardrail and combatting harmful air pollution.«[20]

The second dimension of the normative compass, ensuring inclusion, relates to the social, political and economic inclusion of urban dwellers: »Universal minimum standards for social, political and economic inclusion should be met in all cities and by all cities."[21] This includes access to food, clean drinking water, sanitation, healthcare and education, access to labour markets as well as electoral rights and procedural rights of information. The inclusion dimension also emphasises that privatisation of public space in cities is extremely problematic (e.g. through the creation of privately owned shopping centres or streets) as this not only increases inequality and exclusion but also results in the loss of public spaces that are crucial for democracy and political mobilisation,[22] since demonstrations, for instance, are not allowed on privately owned land.

The third dimension of the normative compass for urban development is what is referred to as Eigenart (a German word meaning »individual character«) and pertains to the sociocultural and spatial diversities of cities and urban societies. The Eigenart of cities is not only hugely important for creating urban quality of life and identity. It is also an indispensable resource when it comes to developing each city's specific potential for creativity and innovation[23]

With a view to potential solutions, some of the key fields of action for the transformation of cities towards sustainability are:[24]

Energy and mitigation of climate change: in order to make the global energy transformation towards zero CO_2 emissions energy systems possible, direct CO_2 emissions in cities must be cut to zero. At the same time, people living in cities must still be provided with access to energy and infra-structure.

Adaptation to climate change: Urban development must take greater heed of the need to adapt to climate change, for instance by integrating climate adaptation into long-term planning and developing strategies to protect the population.

Mobility and transport: Urban mobility offers huge potential for sustainability, as urban transport systems are among the main producers of carbon emissions. Transport systems must be completely decarbonised by 2070 at the latest, for example through efficient public transport options as well as supporting infrastructures for pedestrians and cyclists. At the same time, mobility must be inclusive, i.e. it must be possible for members of any income group to travel around the city at affordable prices.

Urban form: In order to be able to respond better to population dynamics or climate change, the focus should be on flexible concepts in architecture and urban development.

17 WBGU, 2016. For a summary of potential solutions from the WBGU perspective, also see Brandi (2018).

18 WBGU, 2014

19 Steffen et al, 2015

20 WBGU, 2016: 142

21 WBGU, 2016: 122

22 Nemeth, 2008.

23 WBGU, 2016

24 WBGU, 2016

It is not enough for city planning and urban development to be low carbon. In fact, they should also focus on strategies that are tailored to the local specifics and at the same time respect the geographical and cultural context.

Poverty reduction and inequality: Local governments should ensure that not only the existing stakeholders, but also less well organised civil society actors have enough opportunities to help shape urban development and contribute to the improvement of their living conditions. This includes, for instance, strengthening and developing informal, often precarious city districts, mobilising extensive public and private financial resources or preserving public spaces.[25]

With regard to specific measures for the transition of cities towards a more sustainable future, the focus should be on these transformative fields of action, i.e. on those areas of urban development which have particularly great potential to drive urban transformation towards sustainability.[26]

25 WBGU, 2016
26 WBGU, 2016

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THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

The year 2016 was a crucial one for the transformation of cities towards a more sustainable future.[27] Following on from the last United Nations Conference on Human Settlements – Habitat II, which took place in Istanbul (Turkey) in 1996 – Habitat III was held in Quito (Ecuador) in 2016. This provided the first opportunity to discuss the implementation of the commitments laid out in the Paris Agreement and 2030 Agenda on the level of cities.[28] The New Urban Agenda was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development Habitat III.[29]

An important dimension of the New Urban Agenda is its emphasis on the »right to the city«, the right of an individual to access the urban infrastructure and to shape the character of their own municipality or city. In light of the growing inequality, this right is of the utmost importance, especially due to the fact that cities are frequently marked by enormous social and economic disparities, which are also a central theme in the 2030 Agenda.

Although, overall, the New Urban Agenda refers to many important topics pertaining to sustainable urban development, such as the importance of social inclusion, and the document promotes effective urban management,[30] it does not entirely succeed in recognising the vital importance of cities for the future of humanity.[31] For instance, although the Agenda refers to the key role of environmentally sustainable urban planning, it does not make it clear enough that if the current momentum of urbanisation continues, planetary limits will be exceeded, jeopardising the natural resources that maintain the very existence of humankind.[32] Nor is there any reference to Eigenart in the New Urban Agenda, meaning it is missing a dimension that provides urban transformation with important direction, a dimension which emphasises that »conditions should be created in urban living environments which ensure that (a) people can develop self-efficacy in the spatial structures and have an opportunity to create and experience urban

quality of life for themselves; (b) that local identity and social cohesion can develop; and (c) that greater potential for social and economic creativity and innovation is generated through local interactions (connectivity) between actors from different spheres of society.«[33] Moreover, while it is commendable that the New Urban Agenda calls for an improvement in the agency of municipal authorities to act at national and local levels, the document overlooks the importance of the international level as well as the question of the role of cities and local governments in United Nations policymaking.[34]

At the same time, the New Urban Agenda serves as an important basis for global actions to foster more sustainable urban development.[35] What is now required for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda is increased transnational cooperation. The Quito Implementation Plan calls on governments, municipalities, civil society organisations, private companies, research institutions and other key actors to put forward proposals for specific implementation measures for the New Urban Agenda. However, by the end of the Habitat III conference, only 64 commitments had been received. Moreover, the Quito Implementation Plan fails to explain how the different commitments should be consolidated into a suitable global-level urban development strategy.[36] Another major challenge is that the New Urban Agenda does not contain any clear indicators for measuring implementation and thus fails to answer the question as to how its impact can be monitored.[37]

Although the New Urban Agenda mentions the 17 SDGs as well as many other important themes pertaining to the future of sustainable urban development, it lacks a clear transformative perspective. Moreover, it fails to provide any fresh impetus for the debate on the role of cities and urbanisation in the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. This is an important missed opportunity. Although the first section of the New Urban Agenda refers to the fact that it can make a contribution to achieving the SDGs, it fails to go

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27 On this, also see Brandi (2018).

28 WBGU, 2017

29 UN-HABITAT, 2016a

30 UN-HABITAT, 2016a

31 Dick, 2016b

32 WBGU 2016,

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33 WBGU, 2016: 143

34 On this, also see WBGU 2016

35 Both of the following paragraphs draw on Brandi (2018).

36 Dick, 2016b

37 Dick, 2016b

into any further detail on this. Moreover, in the entire New Urban Agenda, the Paris Agreement is only referred to twice. Overall, the New Urban Agenda fails to adequately acknowledge the fundamental importance of cities for global sustainable development, as well as for mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change. However, in order to ensure that the urban transformations taking place worldwide achieve sustainability, efforts must be stepped up in future – in Germany, Europe and worldwide.[38]

38   WBGU, 2016. WBGU, 2017

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THE EUROPEAN UNION, GERMANY AND BEYOND: APPROACHES TO URBANISATION

In 2016, the member states of the European Union (EU) signed the Pact of Amsterdam, which formed the basis for the first European Urban Agenda. The core objectives of this first Agenda involve better integrating the cities of Europe into EU decision-making processes and improving cooperation between the EU member states on urban development. This should be based on »Partnerships« in which representatives of the EU Commission, the EU member states, regions, cities and European institutions and associations work together over a period of up to three years on a total of 12 Priority Themes (jobs and skills in the local economy, digital transition, innovative public procurement, urban mobility, inclusion of migrants and refugees, urban poverty, housing, sustainable use of land, circular economy, climate adaptation, energy transition and air quality) to develop specific solutions in three areas: (i) better regulation with a view to better integrating urban factors into existing and new EU regulations; (ii) better funding, in particular more efficient use of existing resources and the use of tools such as Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI), a new EU instrument for the implementation of integrated spatial strategies and concepts; (iii) better knowledge, with a focus on enhanced exchange of experience through the *European Urban Knowledge Network* (EUKN).

The Pact of Amsterdam builds on the 2007 Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities, the framework for integrated urban development in Europe that focuses on integrated urban development and disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In Germany, the Leipzig Charter is implemented by means of the National Urban Development Policy, a joint initiative of the federal, state and local governments. The Policy was refined during the course of Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2020 and in November 2020, it was adopted as the New Leipzig Charter which addresses current issues and challenges.[39]

The implementation of the National Urban Development Policy in Germany is based on three instruments: (i) A »good practice« approach, where the promotion of urban development as well as legislation and research in this field are adapted to improve existing strategies. (ii) The »project series for cities and urbanity«, which grants funding for projects which provide momentum for and strengthen local sustainable development with minimum resources. (iii) The »communication platform for urban development«, which focuses on the future of our cities and provides opportunities for an exchange of information, knowledge and experience on urban development, for instance by organising various events.

The German government has also proposed other important initiatives in the past. Its 2012, »Urban Energies – Future Challenges for Towns, Cities and Regions« memorandum, for example, focused on green redevelopment of buildings and entire urban districts, technological infrastructure upgrades for urban utilities, the development of a new mobility concept, and social integration. This resulted in backing for economic and urban development projects as part of the »cities and urbanity« project initiative. In 2017, the German government proposed the white paper »Green Spaces in the City« (Stadtgrün), which comprised ten fields of action, including specific measures the government planned to implement over the following decade to help the municipalities develop an green urban infrastructure that would improve the quality of the urban environment and the quality of life in our cities. To achieve this objective, the white paper envisages, for instance, a stronger legal basis for planning green and open spaces, more targeted funding measures, the development of benchmarks and guidelines and the implementation of pilot projects.

The Leipzig Charter and the Urban Agenda for the EU in the Pact of Amsterdam, as well as more recent German initiatives, are good starting points for improving urban development and increasing the focus on the key role of the cities in the global transition towards a more sustainable future. That said, they neglect to include an explicitly transformative angle. While urbanisation in the EU may have its challenges, cities in many other regions of the world face even bigger problems. Many of the cities in the Global South are growing exponentially and often suffer from problems such as poor infrastructure, a lack of financial resources, as well as ineffective local governance. At the same time, cities in newly industrialised and developing countries play an essential role in global transformation towards sustainability. Cities of the Global South have particularly high potential for collaborative solutions involving the urban population, municipal governments and other

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39 Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (2020)

government institutions as well as non-governmental organisations. In the field of housing provision, a number of active civil society organisations, some of which are part of transnational networks (e.g. Slum Dwellers International), are already working with local governments, in doing so increasing visibility and generating additional resources (e.g. through savings systems and microcredit groups).[40] Development cooperation can help strengthen solutions to the challenges posed by urbanisation in cities in developing and newly industrialised countries, for instance by making the right to decent housing a central part of development cooperation and ensuring that the vital cross-cutting issue of urbanisation is firmly embedded in the UN and other multilateral organisations and development banks.[41]

To facilitate an exchange of knowledge and experience between the cities of the Global North and those of the Global South, city networks such as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) and the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40) play a vital role. Transnational city networks enable mutual learning and an exchange of experience and knowledge on innovations and policies. Such city networks should therefore be strengthened. Some useful approaches here might be to consolidate network activities in an overarching umbrella association such as the Compact of Mayors and to advocate for city networks to be recognised as key actors in international political contexts, such as the UN climate talks, for instance.[42]

40   Herrle et al., 2015
41   WBGU, 2016
42   WBGU, 2016

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cities are increasingly being recognised as important levers in the global transition towards a more sustainable future. In this context, the Paris Agreement, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the New Urban Agenda are essential internationally binding reference points, which can, and indeed must, serve as catalysts for transformative strategies at all levels of action. For the targeted integration of these climate, sustainability and urbanisation agendas, it is crucial that each of the multilateral commitments be transformed into an action plan and implemented at national and local level. However, without comprehensive investment and the necessary technical, institutional and political support for the implementation of these action plans, the transformative ambitions expressed in multilateral declarations will quickly revert to the standard business as usual mode.[43]

Our aim must still be the parallel and strategic imple-mentation of the Paris Agreement and the SDGs as a means of driving radical structural transformation towards sustainability, particularly in the context of cities. If we are to systematically develop the potential offered by urbanisation, this process requires both creativity and coordination on the part of the different stakeholders and sectors.

To achieve these objectives and foster sustainable urban transformation, particular attention must be paid to the fields of action described above. To be able to implement the changes facilitated by these fields of action, more democratic, stronger urban governance is of fundamental importance. An approach such as this entails placing urbanisation at the centre of international cooperation and improving the capacity of cities to implement effective policy through cooperative governance.

Existing urban agendas provide the initial basis for more sustainable towns and cities, but what they are missing, both at the global and the European level, is a transformative angle. As a result, these agendas are not fit for the challenge of radical transformation. What is urgently needed, therefore, is for a new charter for urban transformation to be built on the existing Leipzig Charter.

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43 Brandi et al. (2016)

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IMPRINT

GLOBAL AND EUROPEAN POLITICS

The Department of Global and European Policy provides advice on key European and international policy issues to policymakers, trade unions and civil society organizations in Germany, Brussels and at the UN offices in Geneva and New York. We identify areas of transformation, formulate concrete alternatives and support our partners in forging alliances to implement them. In doing so, we reflect on national as well as European and international policy. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its far-reaching political claim to promote a social-ecological transformation provides a clear orienting framework for pursuing our work.

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- a global and just approach

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This publication explores why cities are so fundamental for the transformation to sustainability. After outlining the main challenges urbanisation poses for transformation, it goes on to analyse the role of cities in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement.

The publication also examines the New Urban Agenda adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in 2016 as well as the EU's Pact of Amsterdam, both of which can make significant contributions to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The publication concludes by outlining a number of potential urban transformative paths for sustainability.

Further information on the topic can be found here:
www.fes.de/themenportal-die-welt-gerecht-gestalten/klimawandel-energie-und-umwelt

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