

## WITHOUT CITIES THERE WILL BE NO GREEN DEAL

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*Cities are key to dealing with the climate emergency. According to UN Habitat, cities occupy only 2% of the planet's surface but concentrate 70% of GDP, are responsible for 70% of greenhouse gas emissions, consume 66% of the world's energy, and produce 70% of its waste. As the main epicentres of the problem, they play a crucial role in its solution.*

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The more than notable presence of cities at the COP25 UN Climate Change Conference, which was held in Madrid, was a sure sign of their firm commitment to the struggle against climate change. Examination of the urban universe attests to the capacity of cities to present solutions showing great resolve and innovation. Hence, in order to tackle such an ambitious climate agenda as that which the European Union proposes with its Green Deal, cities must be taken into account. It would not be realistic to go ahead with the plan for zero emissions by 2050 without including cities. However, in order to assure that they can exert their full potential and that their contribution is optimal, cities must have adequate institutional and financial structures. Failure to provide these frameworks would mean obstructing one of the major assets involved in a highly complex transitional process.

According to UN Habitat, cities occupy only 2% of the planet's surface but concentrate 70% of GDP, are responsible for 70% of greenhouse gas emissions, consume 66% of the world's energy, and produce 70% of its waste. Moreover, their populations are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Accordingly, the public policies they promote and the solutions they are working on are essential for mitigating and reversing the phenomenon. Cities can effectively reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, encourage sustainable energy use, foster strategies of resilience, and help to ensure that citizens, civil society, and companies will revise their patterns of production and consumption.

European cities, like their counterparts elsewhere in the world, are showing considerable dynamism in the struggle against climate change. Their ambition is far greater than that presently shown by national governments,

as became clear in the negotiations for the final agreement of the COP25. Of the Eurocities members, 64% have committed to attaining climate neutrality by 2050, while the Covenant of Mayors, the European initiative launched in 2008 to promote local action plans in the areas of climate and energy, now has almost 10,000 local government members from all over Europe, representing more than 315 million inhabitants.

The catalogue of urban solutions and innovations that cities are working on is wide-ranging. They intervene in very different sectors including sustainable mobility, energy-efficient construction, urban planning, creation of green spaces, waste management, energy efficiency or use of alternative forms of energy, to cite just a few examples. All of this is demonstrated in projects like Barcelona's Low Emission Zone, the Madrid Central urban pedestrianisation project (now questioned), Stockholm's emission reduction strategies in the construction sector, and Rotterdam's overhaul of its fleet of urban buses with the aim of making it wholly electric by 2029.

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But cities cannot move forward alone. They are just one piece in a broad, complex set of alliances of all the actors committed to responding to the climate emergency. The different spheres of government—local, regional, national, and European—civil society organisations, the private sector, universities, and research centres must contribute resources, knowledge, and solutions towards the project of guaranteeing the viability of strategies that are more efficient, inclusive, and committed to and bearing in mind all sectors of society, including its most vulnerable members.

The European Green Deal is expressed in terms of this logic. It proposes a just and socially equitable process of ecological transition that will allow progress to be made in a shared effort involving all socioeconomic actors and aiming at a thoroughgoing change of paradigm based on climate neutrality. In this regard, it draws attention, albeit timidly, to the role played by cities and the importance of supporting them in their efforts. It indicates the need to reinforce the urban dimension of the new politics of cohesion and to redouble assistance to cities so that they can keep promoting strategies of sustainable urban development. It highlights the importance of the Covenant of Mayors as a mechanism for sharing knowledge and experience.

Nevertheless, in its present form, the urban dimension of the Green Deal is still ill-defined. The road map designed by the new European Commission to proceed with the transitional process towards a climate-neutral Europe does not include specific measures for sustainable urban development. Work continues at the national level when it should be moving towards a scenario of shared sovereignty. Cities will clearly have a role in some of the policies that have been proposed, but they are not given visibility. And European cities require clear and explicit support. Not all of them have the same resources as the big capitals or those located in the more decentralised, advanced, and committed countries. Urban Europe is not homogenous and there is a high degree of disparity among countries, and even within them.

Attaining the goal of zero emissions by 2050 will not be possible without the involvement of cities. Without their commitment, ability to innovate, organise alliances, and include the most vulnerable people, it will be very difficult for Europe to make progress with the ambitious plan it has set itself. Cities should have a visible role in the European Climate Pact which is to be launched in March 2020. They must participate in its design and implementation, and also in the new financing and investment mechanisms that will be implemented with the new EU budget. It is essential that cities should have easier access to these funds. They need support. As Bill de Blasio, mayor of New York, has stated with regard to the minimal agreement reached at COP25 in Madrid, cities can't go it alone. And European cities can't either.