

---

## TOWARDS A DEAL WITH CITIES

- A GREEN DEAL FOR THE URBAN AGE: A NEW ROLE FOR CITIES IN EU CLIMATE ACTION

*Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado*

- THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL AND THE CHALLENGE OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE IN URBAN AREAS

*Vanesa Castán Broto*

- FINANCING THE GREEN TRANSITION OF EUROPEAN CITIES: WHAT DOES THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL CHANGE?

*Priscilla Negreiros and Angela Falconer*



## A GREEN DEAL FOR THE URBAN AGE: A NEW ROLE FOR CITIES IN EU CLIMATE ACTION

---

**Sonia De Gregorio Hurtado**

*Department of Urban and Spatial Planning, School of Architecture,  
Polytechnic University of Madrid*

In December 2019, just before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, a European Commission communication set out the “European Green Deal for the European Union”. The opening paragraph recognises that “tackling climate and environmental-related challenges is this generation’s defining task” (EC, 2019a: 2), placing this responsibility at the core of the EU’s new post-2020 growth strategy. Compared with the EU’s previous economic roadmap, the Europe 2020 strategy (2010–2020), the European Green Deal (EGD) introduces an important paradigm shift. While climate and sustainability issues were present in the former, they appeared as sectoral targets that were frequently in contradiction with the overall objective of turning “the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy” (EC, 2010: 7). By contrast, the EGD proposes a new holistic strategy that seeks to decouple economic growth from the use of resources and achieve carbon neutrality by “mainstreaming sustainability in all EU policies” (EC, 2019a: 15). The Commission has presented the new strategy as an opportunity for Europe to undertake pending structural changes and to become a world leader in the circular economy, clean energy and clean technologies. The EGD aims to deliver benefits for the environment and biodiversity protection, health, quality of life, resilience and competitiveness as part of an ambitious vision that will require the review of existing policy and governance frameworks (including legislative changes) and the commitment of all EU actors.

The paradox of our urban age (Gleeson, 2011) is that European cities are at the forefront of the complex and ambitious transformations that lie ahead of the EU. Cities not only concentrate some of the major challenges of our time, they are also the territorial and socioeconomic nodes driving the solutions to these very challenges.<sup>1</sup> This chapter highlights the need to include cities as active stakeholders in the EGD and explores the opportunities for strengthening the initiative’s local dimension in the post-2020 funding period.

1. European cities are hubs of innovations that concentrate around 70% of jobs and generate 85% of the EU’s GDP (Futurium, 2020).

While the EU has played a leading role in global environmental debates and international climate politics, its progress towards the holistic vision and developmental paradigm shift proposed by the EGD has been slow.

## I. City climate transition as an opportunity for the EU

At a time of “climate emergency”, the EGD presents a vision of a future Europe that establishes a new policy discourse at EU level. It seeks to open up a transformational path for the economy in line with environmental sustainability. In broader international policy debates this discourse is far from new. In the early 1970s, the landmark Club of Rome report *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972) concluded that the dictum of economic growth is unsustainable in the long term, unless it is based on principles of ecological stability. While the EU has played a leading role in global environmental debates (Zito, 2005) and international climate politics (Wurzel & Connelly, 2011), its progress towards the holistic vision and developmental paradigm shift proposed by the EGD has been slow. The long-term reluctance to decouple economic growth from environmental and climate impacts suggests that the EGD’s implementation will meet considerable political, economic, societal and industrial obstacles and opposition, even if only implicit in many cases. It will also encounter administrative and technical limitations that will make path dependency one of the main obstacles EU institutions and member states must overcome (at national, regional and local levels).

To tackle these challenges, the EU has embarked on a series of initiatives. Legislative changes include the European Climate Law of March 2020. Strategies and action plans have been drawn up, such as the 2030 Climate Target Plan adopted in December 2020, increasing the EU emissions reduction target for 2030 to 55%, the Circular Economy Action Plan presented in March 2020, and the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Non-legislative initiatives include the European Climate Pact launched in December 2020 (see García in this volume). Financing instruments have been created, above all the new Just Transition Fund (see Negreiros & Falconer in this volume), and investment in advanced research and innovation has been promised (35% of the Horizon Europe budget is earmarked for projects addressing climate solutions).

While the EGD’s greater climate ambitions and the intention to introduce a developmental paradigm shift have been widely greeted as good news, the initiative’s shortcomings have also been heavily criticised. Most relevant to this chapter is the concern that the EGD may evolve into a greenwashing tool. This risk is particularly high if the EU fails to redistribute growth opportunities and foster socioeconomic opportunities for the most vulnerable, and continues to undermine its environmental integrity by providing support to fossil fuel infrastructure projects and industries (Pontecorvo, 2019; Varoufakis & Adler, 2020).

The implementation of the EGD is particularly complex because of the programme’s comprehensive approach, which aims to mainstream the green transition in all EU policies and address economic, social and environmental issues in synergy. Its wide-ranging measures cover policy areas from finance to energy production, industry, mobility, construction, pollution, agriculture and biodiversity, among others.

Around 80% of Europe’s population live in urban areas. Logically then, the political agency of cities and the regenerative development of urban environments are crucial to achieving the ambitious goals of the von der Leyen

Commission (De Gregorio Hurtado, 2020a). Cities are at once “places of high concentration of problems and generators of growth” (EC, 2011), innovation and social cohesion. On the one hand, they are responsible for 75% of global energy consumption (UN-Habitat, 2007) and generate about 70% of GHG emissions as well as other pollutants (*Urban Agenda for the EU*, 2019: 6). Further, their population density, infrastructure, economic activity and goods make them highly vulnerable to climate change impacts (EC, 2019b: 6). But local governments have also become “climate leaders” (Fuhr et al., 2018) since the turn of the century, pioneering the design and implementation of innovative climate policies and actions (Reckien et al., 2018; Eurocities, 2020b). Many European cities have taken a proactive role by developing local climate plans and participating in cutting-edge climate research projects (e.g. in the context of the EU Horizon 2020 programme). Cities like Copenhagen, which has committed to carbon neutrality by 2025 in the framework of the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA), are setting more ambitious climate goals than the EU and member states.

Notably, urban climate change experimentation has been both technical and social in nature (Bulkeley & Castán Broto, 2013). It has not just been about delivering route-maps for GHG mitigation, but also about social awareness-raising through participation and co-creation processes, as well as drawing increasing attention to and mitigating climate change impacts on the most vulnerable urban groups and neighbourhoods. Because of their role as pioneers, cities are ready to contribute to EU progress on climate, sustainability and environmental standards in the short-to-medium term. They are also much-needed consensus-building arenas as well as territories of experimentation for achieving the EGD’s objectives, while supporting delivery on other global sustainability agendas (e.g. the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement).

The EU Commission has recognised the importance of cities and their governments for reaching the EGD’s objectives. But plans for the concrete involvement of cities, as well as EGD multi-level governance mechanisms that fully integrate local authorities are still evolving and lack ambition. An interesting initiative that recognises the relevance of cities for the EU’s climate goals is the newly created Horizon Europe Mission Area for Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities, which presented its first comprehensive report, “100 Climate-neutral cities by 2030 – by and for the Citizens” (Gronkiewicz-Waltz et al., 2020) in September. The report makes concrete policy proposals on how to make the most of the EGD (and its financing lines, including the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the Next Generation EU Recovery and Resilience Facility) by investing in the urban climate transition and financing city climate plans. The Mission Board proposes to support 100 cities with over 50,000 inhabitants in the systematic transformation towards climate-neutrality over the course of the next decade.<sup>2</sup> The idea is to promote these cities as national and European frontrunners in the implementation of the EGD and to gather knowledge and experience on effective localisation strategies. The initiative, which will foster governance transformation, financial mechanisms to support local authorities and the identification of policy gaps, has five key objectives: to establish an agenda for the transformation of cities into innovation hubs; develop new forms of participative and innovative city governance; develop a new economic and financing model for climate action; put in place an “integrated urban planning model”; and deploy smart systems and data platforms (Gronkiewicz-Walter et al., 2020: 8).

Plans for the concrete involvement of cities, as well as EGD multi-level governance mechanisms that fully integrate local authorities are still evolving and lack ambition.

2. A shortcoming of the proposal is the exclusion of smaller cities, which are those most in need of support to build capacity around climate governance and action.

The active involvement of cities in the holistic transformation the EGD envisions provides an opportunity to turn Europe's green transition from a utopia into a reality in the medium term.

When examining the role of cities in the EGD, it is important to recall that the EGD aims to be more than a programme for Europe's ecological transformation and the construction of a sustainable and resilient economy. In July 2020, David Sassoli, the President of the European Parliament, held a series of public events entitled "Ideas for a New World",<sup>3</sup> in which he sought to develop new approaches to a post-COVID Europe with philosophers, writers, economists and civil society and social leaders. At the first event Sassoli described the EGD as an instrument for tackling the economic and environmental crisis we currently face. But also, and importantly, he presented it as a policy framework that consolidates a "new European humanism", which recognises the intimate interrelations between the economy, ecology, social policies and democracy, and which can potentially guide Europe into a more sustainable future. This vision echoes the writings of the French philosopher Edgar Morin (2011), who argues that the environmental question is the key to understanding and rethinking the contemporary world. From this perspective, the EGD can act as a uniting force at a time when European society and the EU political apparatus are characterised by increasing fragmentation, as well as an all-encompassing policy instrument through which a more equitable Europe and other necessary societal changes can be pursued.

Cities are crucial to this ambitious vision. The profound political, economic and societal changes it requires will essentially depend on local-level action and the commitment of civil society and other local stakeholders to construct a more sustainable Europe through more sustainable urban communities. As the closest level of government to citizens, cities have the capacity to raise awareness and engagement around the green transition, while providing arenas for building consensus around common visions and necessary changes in fields such as consumption, mobility, energy use and social cohesion. Planned investments in the digital transformation by the Next Generation EU (NGEU) recovery fund will be of great importance for further enabling citizen and community engagement and monitoring local advancements in this regard.

The active involvement of cities in the holistic transformation the EGD envisions provides an opportunity to turn Europe's green transition from a utopia into a reality in the medium term. At the local level, the necessary political, economic and social transformations for the first time appear feasible by building on existing knowledge, affordable technologies, institutional capacities and governance structures, as well as by taking advantage of a European urban society that is increasingly concerned with climate and environmental risks.<sup>4</sup>

3. <https://europarl.europa.eu/the-president/en/newsroom/event-6-july-1500--europe-changing-the-paradigm>
4. A 2019 Eurobarometer survey found that 92% of Europeans agree that GHG emissions should be reduced to a minimum to make the European economy climate neutral by 2050 (EC, 2019b).
5. The MFF regulates the annual EU budget in terms of allocation of resources to specific policy fields aligned with EU priorities for seven years.

## II. Towards a green and just urban recovery post-COVID

Two months after the announcement of the EGD, when the first steps towards its implementation were taken in the framework of the institutional negotiations around the new MFF 2021–2027,<sup>5</sup> which had been delayed by Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and its socioeconomic impact radically changed the European policy landscape. It is remarkable that in the midst of this crisis and its highly uncertain evolution at EU, national and local levels, the EGD has not been side-lined by more immediate and urgent concerns. Instead, the programme has been defended as essen-

tial by different institutional and non-institutional actors. An analysis of the vivid policy and media debate during the spring and summer of 2020 shows a general consensus that the EGD is central to the EU's capacity to tackle the health and socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic. It has not only been seen as putting Europe on track for a healthier future, but its financing instruments and action plans have also been considered an opportunity for a sustainable and just recovery.

The majority of member states share this vision. In March, the members of the European Council made a joint statement highlighting the important role of the green transition and the digital transformation in the allocation of the NGEU funds to address the socioeconomic crisis.<sup>6</sup> In April, 17 EU climate and environment ministers circulated an open letter in which they declared that the EU's capacity to manage the impact of the pandemic will essentially depend on its ability to bridge the fight against COVID-19 with tackling biodiversity loss, the low carbon transition and climate change. The opposite view had been raised in a debate in March, when a group of 37 members of the European Parliament (MEPs) asked the Commission to delay the EGD. However, the majority of MEPs shared the Council and Commission's view (EP, 2020: 4).

The commitment of the majority of member states to the EGD, as expressed in the open letter by the climate and environment ministers, not only demonstrates the intention to align their policies with those of the EU on the issue, but also signals a commitment to place the green transition at the centre of their national COVID-19 recovery plans. For most member states this will require changes to their national energy and climate plans (NECPs)<sup>7</sup> in the short-to-medium term, as these were drafted before the launch of the EGD.

As mentioned above, the EU has presented a number of plans and instruments to lead Europe out of the health crisis and repair the economic and social damage caused. The most important is the NGEU plan, which integrates the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility, a sort of "Marshall Plan for the EU", which was proposed by the Commission in May 2020. From the very first draft, the plan was devised in a manner that requires recovery measures to adhere to the priorities of the EGD. More specifically, along with the instruments of the MFF 2021–2027, the NGEU will fund actions in the fields of climate and energy. Member states are now under pressure to rapidly plan the allocation of the resources that will be available from 2021 to fund projects advancing the green transition.

Building on their experience with urban climate action, cities can effectively contribute to implementing the climate dimension of the EU recovery plans and instruments. The complex, multilevel nature of European governance constitutes an opportunity in this context, as it integrates European, national and sub-national governments (Bache, 2008). The climate initiatives implemented by cities in previous and current MFFs, as well as other EU instruments that operate at local level, such as the EU's urban policy, have high potential for fostering top-down and bottom-up Europeanisation (Kern & Bulkeley, 2009; De Gregorio Hurtado, 2020a). Europeanisation here includes not only the impact of EU institutions on member state actions but also vice versa. Crucially, these top-down and bottom-up dynamics extend to relations between the EU and local authorities and allow for the up-scaling of innovative ideas and policies formulated at the local level.

6. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43076/26-vc-euco-statement-en.pdf>

7. National energy and climate plans (NECPs) are the member states' route-maps to meet the EU's energy and climate targets for 2030, introduced under the Regulation on the governance of the energy union and climate action (EU/2018/1999). "These plans, along with the legislation for their implementation (e.g. The Spanish Government is working in the Climate Change Act) will set the framework in which the different actors will have to face the decarbonization of the economy and the adaptation to climate change effects in the short and medium-term" (De Gregorio Hurtado, 2020a).

Because of their capacity and willingness to act in alignment with EU urban and climate policies, cities and their networks are emerging as much-needed allies of EU institutions in achieving the transformation proposed by the EGD.

At the same time, European cities have become more Europeanised thanks to a long tradition of transnational cooperation to exchange knowledge and jointly develop solutions to shared challenges. Some of the most effective European city networks have formed around urban climate issues. To aid these cooperation structures, the EU Commission supported the creation of the European Covenant of Mayors (CoM) in 2008, which today has 10,198 signatories (Ruiz Campillo in this volume). The Europeanisation effect of the CoM has often been described as a driver for the construction of local capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change in member states (e.g. Croci et al., 2017). There are clear indications that national and regional governments' climate strategies could benefit from the knowledge acquired in the CoM framework and the experiences of member cities.

Yet, the tensions and fragmentation between member states with diverging priorities that emerged in the negotiations around the next MFF and NGEU increase the risk of de-Europeanisation. Further, as the EGD stresses, "not all Member States, regions and cities start the (green) transition from the same point or have the same capacity to respond" (EC, 2019a: 16). If not addressed sufficiently, this imbalance could worsen disparities and the lack of consensus between and within member states on how the EU should advance towards a just green transition. To counter these divisions and support the most vulnerable regions, the Commission plans to reinforce the EGD's Just Transition Mechanism, mentioned above, as part of its COVID-19 crisis response.

Enhancing the role of municipalities in climate action could help advance EGD objectives across the EU and overcome the governance challenges posed by the risk of de-Europeanisation. National interests do not determine European cooperation at the local level in the same way they do at member state level. Because of their capacity and willingness to act in alignment with EU urban and climate policies, cities and their networks are emerging as much-needed allies of EU institutions in achieving the transformation proposed by the EGD. The implementation of the EGD and the recovery plan contain much room for enhancing collaboration between the Commission and cities around climate issues in the post-2020 period. But to mobilise cities' capacity to contribute to EU climate action, EU institutions and member states must formally recognise their potential contribution, institutionalise it in concrete policy arenas and instruments that will be implemented in the years to come and provide cities with the necessary economic resources.

For the past three decades cities and regions have been demanding that EU institutions become more responsive to their needs and interests and give them a bigger role in decision-making, policy design and implementation, and budgeting. To lobby for accelerating this change in the context of the EGD, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) launched a new "Green Deal Going Local" working group in June 2020. The group's objective is to guarantee that cities (and regions) are involved in the definition, implementation and assessment of EGD initiatives that have an urban dimension. Similarly, cities and regions have lobbied for more involvement in the 2021–2027 MFF and NGEU. In May, the CoR, together with various European city networks, created the so-called Cohesion Alliance (with more than

12,000 signatories) to demand a recovery plan that is fully accessible to all regions and cities to strengthen the post-2020 Cohesion Policy in order to address social, economic and territorial disparities. A declaration from July 15<sup>th</sup> specifically asks for the MMF and recovery plan to “be channelled through a bottom-up approach” and for their design to take into account local needs.<sup>8</sup> Further, in October, the mayors of nine capitals and major European cities<sup>9</sup> sent an open letter to the EU institutions,<sup>10</sup> urging them to earmark at least 10% of the recovery fund for local governments and to mandate that member state governments better engage cities in their national recovery plans (Missé, 2020). The message of these various lobbying initiatives is twofold: on the one hand, cities clearly signal their commitment to contribute to the objectives of the EGD and NGEU; on the other, they underline their lack of resources and competencies, calling for more EU support and engagement in EU decision-making and policy design.

Responding to these calls, at the 2020 Cities Forum<sup>11</sup> Elisa Ferreira, Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, declared that cities would have a formal role in the design and implementation of the Cohesion Policy for the post-2020 period. But similar promises were made in the previous programming period (2014–2020). The intention to engage local authorities needs to be translated into concrete policy mechanisms, instruments and legislation at EU level. The Communication that announced the EGD took some initial steps in this direction by highlighting that the “the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy will be strengthened” (EC, 2019a: 23), as well as by recognising the EU Covenant of Mayors as “a central force” that the Commission will continue to support (ibid.). However, as described above, the urban dimension of the EGD and the mechanisms for its implementation in a multi-level governance system still need fuller formulation. Further, member states need to commit to developing association agreements and operational programmes for the 2021–2027 period that give a greater role to municipalities in the delivery of the EGD and that are in full coordination with NECPs and other relevant sectoral policies (urban, social, etc.). Some member states have begun to engage cities in designing their post-2020 operational programmes.

### III. Cities as “Green Dealers” for a development paradigm shift in the EU

To fully develop the EGD’s urban dimension and build on cities’ experience in climate governance and action, a number of city-specific approaches could be integrated into the instruments and initiatives that will formalise the NGEU and MFF 2021–2027. To be effective and cohesive, these would need to take into account differences between cities across and within member states, allowing for alignment between EGD policies and instruments, NECPs, regional and local climate plans, and other relevant sectoral policies. Further, they should not only focus on cities, but view cities in relation to their wider functional areas, adopting the territorial view that is crucial to climate policies. This final section details some city-specific initiatives that could be particularly effective in supporting the EGD and that in many cases build on already-existing programmes:

The intention to engage local authorities needs to be translated into concrete policy mechanisms, instruments and legislation at EU level.

8. <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Documents/Cohesion%20Alliance/Declaration%202020.0/COR-2020-02262-00-03-WEB-TRA-EN.pdf>
9. Barcelona, Bratislava, Budapest, Hannover, Lisbon, Milan, Paris, Prague and Warsaw.
10. The letter can be read here: <https://eurocities.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/202010-Letter-from-European-Mayors-on-the-EU%E2%80%99s-Recovery-and-Resilience-Facility.pdf>
11. Annual forum at which the European Commission (represented by the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, DG Regio), member states, regions and municipalities jointly discuss urban development.

- Critics of the NGEU recovery plan have expressed concerns about the difficulties member states will face in allocating funds in a responsible and efficient manner, responding to the urgency the situation requires and complying with EU deadlines. Delays allocating structural funds in some countries in the present MFF (2014–2020) drew particular attention to this issue during the negotiation of the recovery budget.<sup>12</sup> Against the backdrop of these debates, **municipal governments’ potential to allocate funding from the MFF and Green Deal instruments to policy areas that lie within their competencies and where they can generate more added value is an interesting prospect.** Cities have been on the frontline of managing the impacts of both climate change and the pandemic. They have good knowledge of their citizens’ needs, of the interrelated socioeconomic and ecological challenges in their territories, and know where action is most needed and where best results can be achieved. In most cases, they also have relevant experience in the implementation of EU instruments and local climate plans. The direct engagement of local authorities in the distribution of EU funds and the delivery of sustainable development agendas is supported by the recognition of cities as drivers of sustainability and climate mitigation and adaptation in the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- **Cities have proven particularly effective at implementing EU programmes that engage with the physical dimension of sustainable urban development.** The MFF and NGEU could capitalise on this capacity by channelling funding towards urban physical and infrastructure transformation programmes, especially in the following areas: mobility, waste treatment, energy renovation of residential and public buildings, incentives for the creation of local energy communities, the electrification of heating and cooling systems in residential and public buildings, the greening of public space to reduce heat island effects, biodiversity recovery, and the creation of green corridors and nature-based solutions. Yet, such projects need to include ex-ante conditionality to guarantee the carbon-neutrality ambition is met and to ensure coherence with programmes characterised by a holistic approach to sustainability (see following bullet point). Many of these initiatives could be aligned with the Renovation Wave for Europe launched in October 2020 under the EGD,<sup>14</sup> which aims to foster energy efficiency in public and private buildings.
- **To achieve the EGD’s holistic vision, the urban physical and infrastructure transformations mentioned above need to be integrated with actions geared towards the social, economic and governance dimensions of sustainable urban development.** The latter have proven to be more difficult for cities to address in the framework of comprehensive strategies. Nevertheless, the past decade has seen some advances in this area in the context of EU urban policy instruments, which stress the need to further support holistic sustainable urban development approaches. In this regard, the integrated regeneration of vulnerable urban neighbourhoods, a pending policy issue in the EU 2014–2020 framework (De Gregorio Hurtado, 2020b), constitutes a relevant field of action. A social Green Deal that leaves no one behind can boost transformation, address vulnerabilities and explicitly integrate the objective of creating social opportunities for all by working in the urban domain.<sup>15</sup> Further, cities’ capacity to drive socioeco-

12. It is relevant to point out that in June 2020, “85% of planned spending [for the programming period 2014-2020] has been committed, and 41% spent paid out, which is slower than in previous periods” (Bachtler et al., 2020: 48). Beyond this, there are relevant differences between programmes and thematic objectives. For example, climate adaptation, an area that is closely connected to the green agenda of the Recovery Plan, has even lower commitment and spending rates (ibid.).

13. For the EU to reach its 2050 target, smaller cities must also be engaged in such initiatives over the coming years.

14. [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-efficiency/energy-efficient-buildings/renovation-wave\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-efficiency/energy-efficient-buildings/renovation-wave_en)

15. <https://eura.org/8-urban-regeneration/>

conomic transformations in the context of the EGD was addressed in a recent Eurocities' report, *The European Green Deal. Delivering results for citizens with Europe's cities* (2020a), which showed that many European cities are well-positioned to lead local re-skilling and upskilling programmes that prepare workers for the green and digital transition, boost a circular economy and make "strategic use of public spending to drive transformation while sustaining social cohesion" (Eurocities, 2020a: 2). Cities are also well-positioned to raise awareness around climate change-related issues, fostering citizen engagement, participation and co-creation.

- **Local institutional and social capacity building (involving all relevant actors, including citizens) will be another priority.** Programmes need to be designed that focus on building local capacity transversally across different sectors of local government and with specific economic resources and personnel. Other urgent cross-cutting themes are urban health and equal opportunities (e.g. better understanding the gender dimension of policy actions). Such programmes should particularly respond to the needs of small cities and towns, cities with less capacity (institutional, technical, economic, etc.) and those that have little or no experience with holistic approaches to climate action and governance.
- **Finally, all the measures proposed could be enhanced by aligning their climate dimension with the urban dimension of Cohesion Policy,** under which all member states will allocate at least 6% of their European Regional Development Fund expenditure to integrated sustainable urban development (ISUD). Instruments such as the Integrated Sustainable Urban Development Strategies, Integrated Territorial investments (ITI) and Community-led Local Development (CLLD) have great potential to create synergies with EU climate policy. If, as announced, the Commission reinforces its urban agenda in the new programming period, this would constitute a promising field of action. There is especially fertile ground for creating synergies and fostering cooperation between the Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG Clima) and the Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG Regio).

Closer collaboration with cities would enable the EU to deliver progress on the decarbonisation of the European economy and other EGD objectives in the short-to-medium term. The socioeconomic and environmental benefits this would bring in urban and rural areas, along with the growing collective awareness of moving towards a greener and better future for all, could help overcome remaining resistance to a green transition the EU cannot put off any longer.

## References

Bache, I. *Europeanization and Multi-level Governance*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.

Bachtler, J., Méndez, C. and Wishlade, F. *The Recovery Plan for Europe and Cohesion Policy: An initial Assessment*. EORPA, 2020 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://www.eprc-strath.eu/public/dam/jcr:0bde4db2-61d4-4cc6-b463-d7de1d3c049e/THE%20RECOVERY%20PLAN%20FOR%20EUROPE%20AND%20COHESION%20POLICY:%20AN%20INITIAL%20ASSESSMENT.pdf>

Brenner, N. and Schmid, C. "The 'Urban Age' in question", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38(3), 2014 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12115>

Bulkeley, H. and Castán Broto, V. "Government by Experiment? Global Cities and the Governing of Climate Change", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 38 (3), 2013, pp. 361–375.

Croci, E., Lucchitta, B., Janssens-Maenhout, G., Martelli, S. and Molteni, T. "Urban CO2 mitigation strategies under the Covenant of Mayors: An assessment of 124 European cities", *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 169, 2017, pp. 161–177 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652617311174>

De Gregorio Hurtado, S. "Policy Alignment Perspectives for a transforming Climate Action in the EU", ZINE, 6, 2020a (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://regions.regionalstudies.org/ezine/article/policy-alignment-perspectives-for-a-transforming-climate-action-in-the-eu/>

De Gregorio Hurtado, S. "Putting Deprived Neighborhoods Back at the Core of EU Urban Policy". In: E. Jones, *European Studies: Past, Present, and Future*. Newcastle upon Tyne. Agenda Publishing, 2020b.

Eurocities. 2020a. *The European Green Deal. Delivering results for citizens with Europe's cities*. Eurocities, 2020a (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: [http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES\\_reaction\\_to\\_the\\_Green\\_Deal\\_2020\\_Final\\_.pdf](http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES_reaction_to_the_Green_Deal_2020_Final_.pdf)

Eurocities. *Cities leading the way on climate action*. Eurocities, 2020b (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: [http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES\\_cities\\_climate\\_action\\_2019.pdf](http://nws.eurocities.eu/MediaShell/media/EUROCITIES_cities_climate_action_2019.pdf)

EC - European Commission. *Europe 2020. A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*. Brussels. European Commission, 2010 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>

EC - European Commission. *Cities of Tomorrow*. European Commission, 2011 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/citiesoftomorrow/citiesoftomorrow\\_final.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/studies/pdf/citiesoftomorrow/citiesoftomorrow_final.pdf)

EC - European Commission. *The European Green Deal*. Communication From The Commission To The European Parliament, The European Council, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions, Brussels, COM(2019) 640 final, 2019a (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf)

EC - European Commission. *The future of cities. Opportunities, challenges and the way forward*. Joint Research Center. European Commission, 2019b (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/future-cities>

EC - European Commission. *Citizen support for climate action, 2019c* (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: [https://ec.europa.eu/clima/citizens/support\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/clima/citizens/support_en)

EP - European Parliament. *The Von der Leyen Commission's priorities for 2019–2024*. European Parliament Think Tank, 2020 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS\\_BRI\(2020\)646148](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=EPRS_BRI(2020)646148)

Fuhr, H., Hickmann, T. and Kern, K. "The role of cities in multi-level climate governance: local climate policies and the 1.5°C target", *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 30(1), 1–6, 2018 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877343517300738>

Futurium. *Urban Agenda for the EU, 2020* (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/urban-agenda>

Gleeson, B. Critical Commentary. "The Urban Age: Paradox and Prospect", *Urban Studies*, 49(5), 2011, pp. 931–943.

Gronkiewicz-Waltz, H., Larsson, A., Lisa Boni, A.L., Krogh Andersen, K., Ferrao, P., Forest, E., Jordan, R., Lenz, B., Lumbreras, J., Nicolaidis, C., Reiter, J., Russ, M., Sulling, A., Termont, D., Vassilakou, M. "Proposed Mission: 100 Climate-Neutral Cities by 2030 – by and for the Citizens". Report of the Mission Board for climate-neutral and smart cities. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation Clean Planet, European Commission, 2020 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/bc7e46c2-fed6-11ea-b44f-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-160480388>

Jiménez García, E., De la Fuente Ballesteros, R. and Francisco Carrera, F. J. (Eds.). *Hermenéutica, Educación y Sociedad: en los albores de la utopía*. Colección de hermenéutica analógica. Libro 3. Madrid. ACCI, 2017.

Kern, K. and Bulkeley, H. "Cities, Europeanization and Multi-level Governance: Governing climate change through Transnational Municipal Networks", *JCMS*, 47(2), 2009, pp. 309-332.

Meadows, D. H., Meadows, D. L., Randers, J. and Behrens III, W. W. *The Limits to Growth; A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*. New York: Universe Books, 1972.

Missé, A. "Las ciudades y los fondos europeos", *El País*, 02.11.2020 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://elpais.com/economia/2020-11-01/las-ciudades-y-los-fondos-europeos.html>

Morin, E. *La vía para el futuro de la humanidad*, Barcelona: Paidós, 2011.

Pontecorvo, E. "Europe's "Green Deal" doesn't live up to its name, critics say". *Grist*, 13.12.2019 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://grist.org/politics/europes-green-deal-doesnt-live-up-to-its-name-critics-say/>

Reckien, D., Salvia, M., Heidrich, O., Church, J.M., Pietrapertosa F., De Gregorio-Hurtado, S., D'Alonzo, V., Foley, A., Simoes S.G., Krkoška Lorencová, E., Orru, H., Orru, K., Wejs, A., Flacke, J., Olazabal, M., Geneletti, D., Feliu, E., Vasilie, S., Nador, C., Krook-Riekkola, A., Matosović, M., Fokaides, P.A., Ioannou, B.I., Flamos, A., Spyridaki, N., Balzan, M. V., Fülöp, O., Paspaldzhiev, I., Grafakos, S. and Dawson, R. "How are cities planning to respond to climate change? Assessment of local climate plans from 885 cities in the EU-28", *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 191, 2018, pp. 207–219 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652618308977>

UN-Habitat. Climate Change. UN Commission on Sustainable Development, 15<sup>th</sup> Session. United Nations Human Settlements Programme. Nairobi. UN-Habitat, 2007.

*Urban Agenda for the EU. Energy Transition Partnership Action Plan*, 2019 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: [https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/uaetp\\_final\\_action\\_plan.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/system/files/ged/uaetp_final_action_plan.pdf)

Varoufakis, Y. and Adler, D. 2020, "The EU's green deal is a colossal exercise of greenwashing", *The Guardian*, 07.02.2020 (online). [Accessed on 10.12.2020]: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/feb/07/eu-green-deal-greenwash-ursula-von-der-leyen-climate>

Wurzel, R. K. W. and Connelly, J. *The European Union as leader in the international climate change politics*. New York. Routledge, 2011.

Zito, A. R. "The European Union as an environmental leader in a global environment". *Globalizations*, 2 (3), 2005, 363–375.