

CIDOB Global Cities Dialogues

The Green, the Digital and the Social Transitions: Towards a New Eco-Social Pact

21 November 2022, 18:00h-20:00h

CIDOB, Sala Maragall. Elisabets 12, 08001 Barcelona

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The post-pandemic recovery of the world economy offers a unique chance to build back our socio-economic fabric in a way that ensures green and sustainable growth for generations to come. During the last two years, many governments have promoted recovery programs to initiate and accelerate the transformation of our current models of consumption and production building on two closely interlinked processes: the transition to climate neutrality and digitally optimized urban ecosystems. On the one hand, advancing in the green transition is no longer an option: it is a matter of collective responsibility to preserve the future and mitigate the impacts of climate change. In the same vein, digital innovation promises to be a crucial enabler and accelerator of this process, while offering new pathways to address some of the most pressing challenges facing our societies.

Yet, these twin transitions come with their own risks, especially for the most vulnerable sectors of society, who may be left behind in the progress made. For one thing, the pandemic has revealed the negative externalities of digitization, which generates gaps and inequalities that are expressed socially and territorially in cities. Crucially, a new digital divide has emerged between those who can benefit from digital infrastructures and disruptive technologies such as artificial intelligence, and those who can either not afford them or do not have the necessary skills to navigate the digital landscape. Similarly, oftentimes the solutions that are defined to achieve climate neutrality in areas as sensitive as mobility, alternative energies, or housing, can exacerbate urban inequalities. In fact, rising inequalities that were already apparent before the pandemic (i.e., persistent poverty, social exclusion, governance failures, digital divide, climate crisis) have deepened, hence signalling that existing social pacts may be broken.

In this context, calls for renewed attention to questions of justice and equity in the political response to global challenges are growing louder. Indeed, notions of a fair and inclusive transition have joined long-standing discourses on environmental and climate justice in public debate and are also becoming commonplace in the discussions about the digital transition. This has brought to the fore the idea of just urban transitions, understood as the integration of the twin transitions, green and digital, with a social and rights-based agenda. In turn, advancing towards just urban transitions may require building a new eco-social pact as a way of catalysing the necessary alliances, resources, and political commitment by all concerned actors.

To be sure, such transitions must take place at a global scale, whilst connecting effectively with multi-scalar realities. Here cities can play a very relevant role by providing contextualized solutions to urban realities. Many are already doing it, placing humanism or ethics at the core of their digitization strategies; or betting on promoting concrete solutions to advance towards climate neutrality, integrating inequality as an alienable variable aimed at ensuring that no one, nor any territory, is left behind.

However, while a growing number of climate and digital governance schemes are explicitly considering equity and justice, important questions remain unaddressed. What does it mean programmatically and politically to develop and implement an agenda for a just green and digital transition? How can digital globalization efforts be carried out in a socio-ecologically just way? What specific role do cities play within this multi-scalar process? How can alliances between cities, other urban stakeholders, and the international community support a new eco-social pact?

The CIDOB Global Cities Dialogues aim at reflecting on the main challenges of global cities and the way in which they are linked to international agendas. This first edition focuses on the interplay of digitalization, environment, and social challenges. Specifically, it revolves around the question of how the rights agenda can be placed at the core of a process of multiple transitions that are currently framing the post-pandemic recovery efforts, taking into consideration the foreseeable global inequality crisis derived from the current geopolitical context. The discussion will be approached from a broad global perspective, whilst highlighting the added value of local contributions in advancing a more just global green and digital transition.

Programme

- 18:00 – 18:10 **Opening Remarks**
Pol Morillas, Director, CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)
Bàrbara Pons Giner, Commissioner for the 2030 Agenda, Barcelona City Council
- 18:10 – 18:20 **Introduction**
Agustí Fernández de Losada, Senior Research Fellow and Director, Global Cities Programme, CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)
- 18:20 – 18:45 **Keynote: Only recovery or deep transformation? Towards a new eco-social pact**
Carlo Ratti, Director, MIT's Senseable City Lab
- 18:45 – 20:00 **Roundtable: The quest for justice in green and digital urban transitions**
Renata Ávila, CEO, Open Knowledge Foundation
Max Bouchet, Senior project Manager and Senior Policy Analyst, Center for Sustainable Development, Brookings Institution
Isabelle Anguelovski, Director, Barcelona Laboratory for Urban Environmental Justice and Sustainability
- Moderator:* **Marta Galceran Vercher**, Research Fellow, Global Cities Programme, CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)