Old Cities New Ambitions

The Future of Urban Europe

LSE Cities

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Foreword

Europe may be home to some of the oldest urban centres on the planet, but European cities have long embraced change and driven innovation.

Amsterdam was a precocious champion of bike lanes, and Milan has been quick to follow suit. Barcelona has an outstanding record of urban design and pedestrianisation. London was an early adopter of congestion charging, and Paris of shared bikes. Today, cities like Brussels, Copenhagen, Glasgow, and Zagreb are leading the way in rethinking growth, going beyond GDP to a richer and greener conception of prosperity and well-being.

In an era of mounting global uncertainty and social and ecological crises, cities around the world are stepping up to provide the public sector leadership often lacking within regional or national governments. Europe's cities – and those leading them – have an important role to play as they work to shape more just and sustainable futures for citizens across the continent and beyond it.

LSE Cities' European Cities Programme brings Bloomberg Philanthropies' government innovation and capacity-building expertise together with the research and academic rigor of LSE to track developments across the region's cities, produce research on the challenges they face, and provide executive education opportunities and resources for city leaders and their governments. This publication presents the results of the Programme's first two years of insights, as well as individual perspectives surrounding the economic and governance dynamics in European cities and the policy priorities of their urban leaders.

Bloomberg Philanthropies and LSE Cities' partnership began in 2015, when a collaboration was formed to map the state of urban innovation across Europe based on the applications from cities to the European Mayors Challenge. Since 2016, Bloomberg Philanthropies has supported four full-tuition scholarships through the Bloomberg Scholarships for Public Service, helping students focused on government participate in LSE Cities' Executive MSc in Cities, alongside a Bloomberg Visiting Fellowship in Government Innovation.

As part of this work, we look forward to building a network of European partners to support the region's urban leaders in strengthening their cities' capabilities, bettering the lives of residents, and sharing their results with peers around the world.

James Anderson, Head of the Government Innovation program, Bloomberg Philanthropies

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European Cities Programme

Rising inequality, climate breakdown, political polarisation, migration pressures, tech disruption … the issues European cities are facing can easily feel overwhelming.

In 2021, LSE Cities launched a new initiative to support Europe's urban governments as they navigate the complex challenges ahead. The European Cities Programme brings together city leaders, policy makers and civil society movements from across the continent to plan pathways towards more just, sustainable and democratic futures.

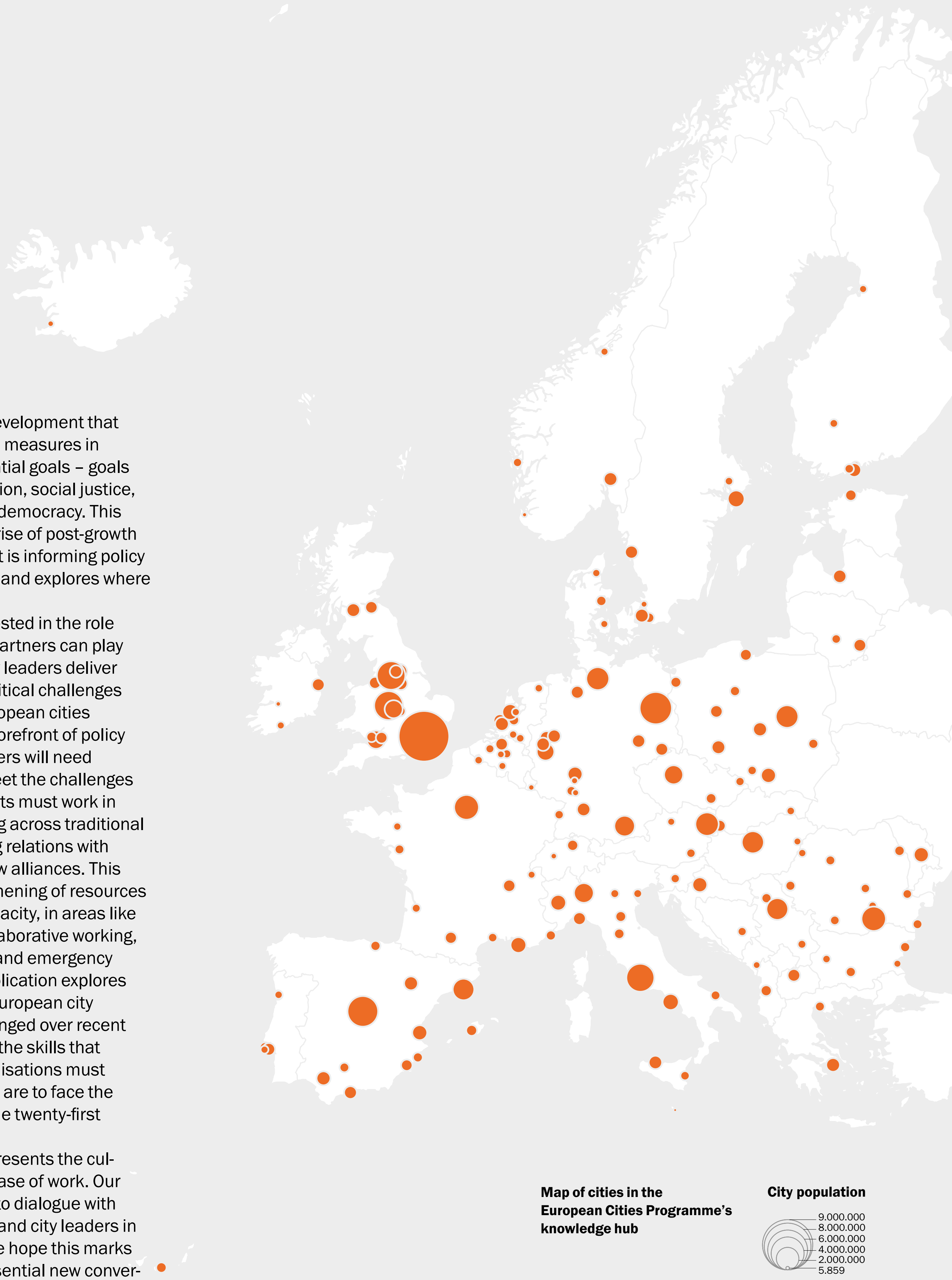
Despite the growing political and economic influence of European cities, our early research revealed an astounding lack of comparative data and analysis on the continent's urban centres. Without this foundational resource, city leaders, policy makers and practitioners lack a basis for informed leadership and evidence-based policy. In its first two years, our initiative has sought to address this need in several ways.

First, we are building a European Cities Knowledge Hub: a live database on European city government and its priorities and challenges. The Knowledge Hub collects in-depth information on 162 cities across 37 countries. This publication presents early findings on the surprising demographics of European mayors in office today. It also presents the most pressing priorities and urgent challenges for cities – climate ambition, transport and housing. We explore the extent to which city governments are setting the agenda in these key policy areas, as well as tracking the varying capacities of local administrations.

Second, we are delivering deep-dive research into the key policy agendas keeping Europe's leading thinkers up at night – starting with the policy and politics of post-growth. Our research shows growing interest from European leaders in models of development that reject narrow GDP-type measures in favour of more substantial goals – goals of ecological regeneration, social justice, human well-being and democracy. This publication traces the rise of post-growth thinking, looks at how it is informing policy in six of Europe's cities and explores where it might go next.

Finally, we are interested in the role universities and their partners can play in helping Europe's city leaders deliver bold solutions to the critical challenges of our times. While European cities have long been at the forefront of policy innovation, urban leaders will need exceptional skills to meet the challenges ahead. City governments must work in new ways, collaborating across traditional boundaries, deepening relations with citizens and forging new alliances. This will require the strengthening of resources and organisational capacity, in areas like behaviour change, collaborative working, digital transformation and emergency management. This publication explores how the demands on European city governments have changed over recent decades and points to the skills that mayors and their organisations must urgently develop if they are to face the interlocking crises of the twenty-first century.

This publication represents the culmination of our first phase of work. Our findings are brought into dialogue with essays from urbanists and city leaders in Europe and beyond. We hope this marks the beginning of an essential new conversation on the role of European cities on the world stage. We invite readers – city leaders, researchers, policy makers and citizens – to continue to connect with us through our events, policy briefs, blogs and academic articles. Please do get in touch with us directly to join discussions shaping the future of Europe's cities.



Map of cities in the European Cities Programme's knowledge hub

View over the rooftops of Bologna, Italy. The University of Bologna, founded in 1066, is the oldest university in continuous operation in the world, and the Palazzo Comunale, built in the 1300s, still houses the city government offices.
Credit: Ken Welsh / Alamy Stock Photo.

The past, present and uncertain future of European cities

Ben Rogers, from LSE Cities, writes that the continent's cities will have to draw on their long history of civic innovation to meet the challenges ahead.

The last century has seen a remarkable revolution in the way we view Europe's cities. Most "forward thinking" European politicians, architects and planners of the 1920s and 30s took it for granted that the continent's old, dense urban centres were not fit for the future. Dirty, poor, crowded and prone to disease, they were manifestly unable to accommodate the motor vehicles, parkways, towers, factories and public buildings that a modern city needed.[1]

By contrast, we now tend to see Europe's cities as things of extraordinary value. The density: just right for walking, cycling and public transport. The small flats and terraced houses: just the thing for sustainability and affordability. The mix of activities: precisely what's needed for efficiency and innovation. The historical fabric: a source of character, connection and inspiration. Their relatively small size and close proximity: just right for building networks and sharing learnings.

We have seen a similar revolution in the way we view urban government. Faith in state planning reached its apogee in the years after the Second World War. Big was beautiful. National government knew best. Now, city governments are lauded for their closeness to citizens, their capacity for innovation, their ability to network and their progressive spirit and openness to the world.[2] European cities in particular, it is sometimes noted, benefit from long traditions of self-government and well-established civic cultures.[3] Bologna is perhaps an extreme example, but its communal system of government is around 1,000 years old. The Palazzo Comunale, built in the early 1300s, still houses city government offices, as well as its archives. No wonder Bologna is a stronghold of municipal radicalism.

There is a lot of truth in these arguments. Looking back over the last few decades, Europe's cities have a good story to tell. They have benefitted, like the continent as a whole, from nearly 80 years of relative peace, the spread of liberal, social market democracies, EU-led political and economic integration and the expansion of the global economy.

"Politicians, architects and planners of the 1920s and 30s took it for granted that Europe's old, dense urban centres were not fit for the future. But now we tend to see Europe's cities as things of extraordinary value."

Many of Europe's former industrial cities have done well in re-inventing themselves as high-skilled service, knowledge and creative economies, attracting investors, migrants, students and tourists from around the world. Employment over the last 20 years has grown much faster in Europe's cities than in other areas – and especially fast in capital cities.[4] Europe's urban hubs have forged national and European-wide city networks and played a leading role in global ones. They have been at the forefront of innovation across a whole range of areas, from sustainable transport and liveability, through affordable housing and refugee integration to climate change.

Yet, for all their successes, Europe's cities face massive challenges. Three issues in particular stand out.

Urban prosperity

First, while living standards have risen across the continent – and often most spectacularly in nations in the relatively newly established democracies of Southern and Eastern Europe – we find huge variation in urban prosperity.[5] There are clear regional patterns here, with cities of Western and Northern Europe generally richer than those of neighbouring regions. But there are also anomalies within these patterns. Productivity and living standards in the UK's cities outside the South-east of England, for instance, are closer to those in Eastern Europe than Northern or Western Europe.[6]

At the same time, many of Europe's most successful global cities have been victims of their own success, with housing and labour markets becoming ever more polarised.

Sustainability

Second, for all their efficiency and innovation, Europe's cities consume and pollute more than the planet can sustain. It's true that many of the continent's urban hubs are showing ambition in cutting carbon emissions from their buildings, transport and energy supplies; however, they have made much less progress on decarbonising their imports or adapting themselves to the extreme weather that climate change will bring.

Relationships with central government

Third, relations between urban and national governments in Europe have come under increasing pressure. For a long time, Europe's nations have tended to vote more conservatively than their cities, but over the last 15 years – at least in part as a result of the 2008 banking crisis and the public spending cuts that followed – this pattern has become much more pronounced. We have seen a surge in support for nationalist movements that define themselves against "metropolitan elites". It is not clear if this is a phase that will pass or whether it represents a new, enduring feature of Europe's political geography. For now, however, cities across Europe find themselves faced with hostile central governments – a phenomenon seen in its extreme form in Poland and Hungary, where authoritarian national administrations have cut city budgets and centralised power.

Europe's cities would no doubt find it easier to address these challenges if they had more self-government. While policy experts make the case for decentralisation – and while international agencies and national governments look to cities to lead the way in addressing environmental and other challenges – these cities have gained very few new powers over their affairs.[7]

But they can also do more with the powers and resources they have. Europe's cities have built impressive networks and have learned to advocate for their interests. They have made much less progress, however, on working together to develop their governance capacity and learn how to make better use of data, promote innovation, forge partnerships and engage citizens in new ways. European city leaders are too often left to work things out on their own. Tackling these capacity challenges should be a new priority for urban Europe.

Europe's cities have been at the forefront of civic innovation not just for decades but for centuries. They are likely to remain beacons of hope in what look like difficult times ahead. Greater decentralisation and increased capacity in city hall would help those beacons burn more brightly.

Ben Rogers, Director, European Cities Programme, LSE Cities

Pandemic legacies: funding urban recovery in Europe and the US

Catarina Heeckt, from LSE Cities, argues that the European Union has missed a key opportunity to empower cities – and that there is much to learn from the bold approach taken in the US.

Cities across the globe were hit hard by the pandemic, and the impacts have been compounded by the war in Ukraine and the cost-of-living crisis. But these shocks have also shown us that city leaders are well-placed to navigate complex emergencies. In their response, many city governments proved impressively agile: they are uniquely positioned to stay attuned to local needs, work across silos and can often react faster than those on the national stage. As we emerge from this crisis and ask how to prepare for those yet to come, the case for investing in cities has never been clearer.

> **"In the US, there's real momentum building behind the idea of empowering and investing in local government to drive forward key national policy agendas."**

The US and the EU, the two Western economic superpowers, have committed historically unprecedented levels of recovery funding. The US$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) is mirrored in the EU by the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), the centrepiece of the €800 billion NextGenerationEU. These are temporary recovery instruments, operating on tight timelines – all must be spent by 2026. In the US, recovery funding has been bolstered by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act, which introduce a further US$2 trillion of federal spending over the next ten years. In the EU, the overall financial package amounts to €2 trillion over the next seven years.

Both these spending programmes are framed as tools to not only stimulate the economy but to support a reimagining of our social and economic fabric and address the existential threat posed by climate change. Both aim to fuel "transformative" investments in local communities. However, there are important differences in the role city governments will play in the allocation of these funds.

The US – experimenting with more direct funding and control for local governments

The Biden administration has put US$350 billion of ARPA funding directly into the hands of state and local governments, to be used flexibly to meet local priorities.[1] The US Treasury consulted directly with local leaders before publishing final guidance about the types of projects that would be eligible. And there's serious money on the table.

Take Cleveland, Ohio, which received US$511 million in ARPA funding - nearly 30% of the city's annual budget. To maximise the impact of such a large cash injection, the Mayor of Cleveland set up a new Centre for Economic Recovery, tasked with identifying priority investment areas ranging from affordable housing to the digital divide, and established a Civic Participation Fund for neighbourhood-level projects.[2] Others have followed suit, with 9,000 projects across 329 large cities and counties set to receive ARPA funding.[3] The real test now will be what cities do once basic fiscal health has been restored and, perhaps more importantly, how they will spend other major funding streams on the horizon. In the US, there seems to be real momentum building behind the idea of empowering and investing in local government to drive forward key national policy agendas.

Europe – local governments mostly side-lined in the decision-making process

To access EU recovery funds, member states had to submit national recovery and resilience plans (NRRPs) demonstrating how the spending will align with the EU's green and just transition agenda. To the dismay of many cities and city networks, subnational governments were not formally involved in the planning stages of this process. In a Eurocities survey, 63% of respondents felt that their views were not taken on board and that the top-down approach was undermining the sort of multi-level cooperation that a successful recovery requires.[4]

Although local governments are playing a more proactive role in shaping national spending plans in some countries, overall, national governments are calling the shots. This means that the impact of this funding on cities is really varied across Europe. While the Spanish NRRP has a strong urban dimension, and as much as 25% of the funding is going directly to cities, the German and French plans don't have a clear spatial focus, with the money benefitting cities in more indirect ways. And in countries like Hungary, where more liberal city administrations are in open conflict with central governments, it's unlikely that cities will see much of this funding drive forward strategic urban priorities.[5]

Empower cities to drive forward shared policy agendas

The Biden administration has taken a bold step to empower cities by putting hard cash directly in the hands of urban leaders. That's not to say the US model is without flaws. As always, the devil will be in the detail when it comes to implementation, but there is no doubt that this historic shift in federal funding allocation is a promising experiment with huge potential to unlock local solutions to the challenges of our times. There will surely be growing pains as cities expand their financial management skills and implementation capacity. However, they will be helped by a promising new ecosystem of technical support, such as the Local Infrastructure Hub, which will aid smaller cities to navigate the new funding landscape.

The EU has a lot to learn from the US approach. Given the central role cities are already playing in driving forward key EU agendas, it is not surprising that they are demanding more of a voice in EU decision-making, as well as more support to strengthen their implementation capacity. New EU initiatives like the Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission that will directly fund projects in 100 cities are a step in the right direction but may not go far enough fast enough. In a recent survey of European mayors, more than 50% said that EU policies fail to consider their specific needs and the potential cities offer.[6] This fundamental disconnect risks undermining solidarity between cities, nations and the EU, hampering progress on some of the most critical policy challenges we face. By contrast, empowering Europe's cities financially would unlock their unique strengths and make them key partners in delivering the EU's ambitious vision for a green and just transition.

Catarina Heeckt, Programme Lead, European Cities Programme, LSE Cities

People looking over the Danube at the Hungarian Parliament building from a café in Trinity Square, Budapest. Budapest's Mayor, Gergely Karácsony, has been one of the most outspoken European city leaders advocating for EU recovery funding to be channeled directly to cities.
Credit: theodore liasi / Alamy Stock Photo

A family crouch to read the messages placed around the plinth at the site of the toppled statue of Edward Colston in Bristol. The statue was pushed into Bristol harbour during Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. Colston's statue had long been a focal point for anger at the city's role in the slave trade and the continued commemoration of those who were involved in it.
Credit: Adrian Sherratt / Alamy Stock Photo

Looking in across the Mediterranean

Edgar Pieterse, from the African Centre for Cities, argues that European cities need to do more to address centuries of colonisation and its legacy.

What is the function of cities – arguably the apogee of cultural achievement – when an empire dies? What does a good death look and feel like? Can Europe's cities become the midwives to usher in new sources of identity and pride that challenge defensive nostalgia for the continent's fading "greatness"? The slow death of the European imperial project has been delayed by stubborn cultural chauvinism; a hard-to-expunge belief that, ultimately, the future of the world is some form of liberal democracy, seen as an inheritance of European enlightenment. The subtext being that imperialism couldn't have been all that bad if Europe endowed the world with its future.

Coming to terms with the Anthropocene and its runaway environmental dystopia should once and for all dislodge European chauvinism and confidence. But it won't. Europe makes a lot of noise about its commitments to Africa's sustainable development and more equitable trading relations,[1] but its flagship EU Green Deal does little to challenge exploitative power relations between Europe and the Global South. Its carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM), for example, sets out to reposition European firms as global leaders in an emerging low-carbon and circular economy, but fails to commit Europe to addressing the true cost of climate mitigation in the Global South and carries dire economic development impacts for many African countries.[2]

Given the hard realities of geopolitical realpolitik, despite the warm and fuzzy rhetoric of Europe's just transition, might it be too much to wish for that European cities see a role for themselves to call out contradictory and unjust EU strategies? Might African and European cities forge direct agreements of solidarity and partnerships for just transitions? In this short reflection I want to hold on to a fictional European city with the audacity to figure out what it might mean to recover a Europeanness rooted in the values of freedom and solidarity. How might this city consider its role in relation to interdependent futures?

The decolonial current that is slowly but surely finding space and resonance in the Global North is perhaps a good starting point. European cities that want to acknowledge their culpability in the continued aftermath of colonialism and its distortionary effects in contemporary economic and political systems can proactively pursue three interwoven imperatives: (1) recognition; (2) reparations; and (3) redistribution.

> **"Europe makes a lot of noise about its commitments to Africa's sustainable development, but its flagship EU Green Deal does little to challenge exploitative power relations."**

Recognition

Most African cities reflect the original colonial imperative to have a base station to manage extractive industrialisation. Over time, divisions between the luxurious trappings of small colonial elites and the neglected dormitories for essential workers were fixed in space through racialised modernist design principles obsessed with functional division. These regimes of control were designed to guarantee uninterrupted extraction of raw materials and minerals and required the erasure of languages, cosmologies, tacit knowledge systems and social values of reciprocity and interdependence. This cultural violence was mobilised by racialised norms in Europe that both justified the grand imperial projects and the establishment of international and trade relations that would safeguard the unfair technological and financial benefits accrued through intergenerational injustice.

Coming to terms with these deep, multi-generational and compounded forms of exploitation is the central focus of a politics of recognition. The much-publicised debates about returning African cultural artefacts, for example, the Benin Bronzes[3], is but the tip of the iceberg of what we need. What can European cities do to normalise recognition policies and practices and acknowledge both historical and contemporary wrongs?

Reparations

It is not especially viable for European cities to finance and effect reparations, but they can lend their political capital and voice to the symbolic importance of such action. At COP 27, a report was tabled that clearly defined the investment needed for mitigation, adaptation, resilience, damage and natural capital.[4] The authors underscore that the US$100 billion per annum investment committed to at COP 21 in Paris in 2015 had not yet been realised by 2022, demonstrating a shocking lack of commitment and follow-through. Furthermore, they suggest that in any case, the US$100 billion figure is a gross underestimation. "The world needs a breakthrough and a new roadmap on climate finance that can mobilise the $1 trillion per year in external finance that will be needed by 2030 for emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs) other than China."[5]

By raising the ambition and consistency of European governments and the EU, cities can generate powerful political pressure for progress. Reparations must go beyond financial investment to include technical know-how, technology and skills development for a new generation of low-carbon, circular cities. This would be consistent with the social justice values of the New Leipzig Charter that morally anchors the political ambitions of European cities.

Redistribution

A lot of work remains after reparations to ensure that uneven playing fields are systematically rebalanced. Cities will need capital, research and development, and institutional and digital learning to put into practice circular, regenerative built environments and explore new models of citizenship based not on consumption, but on generating public goods.[6] As the global community figures out post-carbon urban futures, learning and resources must be shared equitably in open-source forums. To be sure, practical approaches to redistribution are inconceivable without cultural work to shift norms, expectations, dispositions and demand structures inside European cities. The current framing and management of the so-called immigration crisis is a powerful litmus test of whether European cities are ready for this heavy cultural lifting.

European cities are indeed the midwives for a zero-carbon, circular city of the near future. But this societal learning project must also incorporate a reckoning with the bloody history of extraction and pillage that enabled industrialisation and post-industrialisation.

Edgar Pieterse, Founding Director, African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town

From division to solidarity

a conversation with Neil Lee

Neil Lee is Professor of Economic Geography at LSE with a particular interest in cities. He talks to LSE Cities about what's driving anti-metropolitan politics in Europe and how a more inclusive innovation economy could help address it.

Ben Rogers: Can you tell us a bit about your connections to Europe and where your interest in Europe's cities comes from?

Neil Lee: I'm British and grew up in Oxford, but I have Dutch family so I used to spend Easters in Utrecht, in the Netherlands. That left me with an idea that things can be done differently in different places. These two university towns have taken very different paths. Utrecht is one of the most densely populated parts of Europe, but you can get around on bikes and public transport very easily, and there's great access to nature. My kids and I spent last summer there without a car and it was no problem at all - we were always swimming in lakes. But if you don't run a car in Oxford? It's very, very hard to do things.

Let's talk about populism, if we can use that term. It seems to be a force in European politics, as it has been in the US, with Brexit or the rise of support for far-right nationalist parties in France, Italy, Hungary, Poland and elsewhere. And, arguably, there is also a left-wing version of this – people vote against the "system" from the left as well as the right. Do you see clear geographic patterns to this and patterns in terms of cities and non-cities?

There's a perception that cities are the homes of liberal values – things like women's rights, LGBTQ rights – that most people at an institution like the LSE take for granted.

We recently published research looking at rural urban polarisation around the world. This shows that there is indeed an urban–rural divide in these values in Europe. You can see it in voting patterns and you can see it in some of the political protests. The Gilet Jaunes in France, for example, was called the revolt of the suburbs and the countryside against the sort of policies that were favoured by city dwellers and politicians like Macron. In the bigger, richer European countries this divide was clear. But we also found something more troubling, which is that these socially liberal values were really only felt in the rich cities of the developed world. So, while we believe that cities everywhere are liberal, it is only really cities in rich countries that are.

How would you explain the differences in attitudes between Europe's cities and other areas? How much can be explained by the demographic makeup of cities? And how much is explained by what social scientists refer to as "place effects"? Does where you live affect your view of the world?

People in cities tend to be younger, be recent migrants, have spent more time in education, and so on. That can explain a lot about why cities are more progressive.

But research shows that where you live – in particular, where you grow up – does affect your attitudes. It also seems that for adults, staying in the place where you were born, rather than moving out, influences your outlook, controlling for everything else.

Rush hour cycling traffic in central Utrecht, the Netherlands. Utrecht has one of the highest rates of bicycle use of any city in the world, with cycling accounting for 56% of daily trips.

Credit: Jochen Tack / Alamy Stock Photo

"It really matters if there's a geographical division in your democracy. It erodes social solidarity."

So, we find these clear differences between people who live in cities and those that don't. But do we know if these gaps have got bigger? Can we say Europe's cities and nations are growing apart?

I suspect the differences have always been there, but they've got deeper. One of the themes of the populist playbook has been to pit the big cities against the rest. We did some work that showed that a lot of the urban–rural divide comes out of the Eurozone crises of 2008 to 2015. That was the spark.

People's trust in the political system fell right across Europe after the crash and the public spending cuts that followed. But trust was much slower to recover outside of richer metropolitan areas. It's not just about city versus rural, you also see this in bigger versus smaller cities – for example, London versus Leeds or Glasgow. And the division is stark in Southern Europe, where cuts to government spending were pretty devastating. It was bad for Athens but worse for other parts of Greece, which were very dependent on the state for benefits, transport and public services.

Why does it matter if some areas do worse than others? Shouldn't we be thinking about people, not places?

I think it really matters if there's a geographical division in your democracy. It's difficult if parts of a country take vastly different paths, and the people in them feel very differently. It erodes social solidarity.

We've seen this in the US with Donald Trump beating up on the cities – even though he's from New York!

You write a lot about inclusive innovation. Many of Europe's cities are highly dynamic places with strong digital, creative and scientific sectors. But these are often highly unequal cities, with success squeezing out those without the same skills or private wealth. What does inclusive innovation actually mean?

I'm interested in inclusivity from two perspectives.

One is about how we manage the impact that big innovation investments have on the affordability of a place. I'm from Oxford. I look at my childhood friends who stayed in the area. None of them can afford to live there, in part because all the public funding that has gone into the innovation economy has driven up house prices. So, I'm motivated by this question: how can you invest in innovation in a way that doesn't have those negative consequences?

But I am also interested in how you can include more people in the innovation economy. This matters partly for ethical reasons, but also because if you have a very exclusive innovation economy then it's not going to be the most dynamic it can be.

What do you think is the right scale for thinking about this? Is it the city region, or can you think about creating an inclusive national economy or continent?

I think you do both. There are three groups of European countries that are strong on innovation, and a high proportion of the benefits go to workers: the Nordics, the lowland countries, and Alpine areas of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. This does not happen much outside Europe, except, perhaps, in Japan. And it's delivered through an interplay of national, city and firm policies.

Tell us a bit more about those policies

The Swiss model is interesting because they have top universities, but they also have applied universities. These applied universities are much better at working with smaller companies that aren't necessarily at the leading edge but are supported to use innovation. Plus, they have colleges and labour market regulation that mean people who are mid- and low-qualified can be trained for new jobs and get well paid in them. You can earn a good living as a lab technician in Switzerland. As a result, you get a good supply of well-trained lab technicians – something that employers really value. These policy frameworks are about diffusion of innovation. They're about letting people who are not necessarily at the leading edge of innovation benefit from being close to companies, firms or labs that are.

Is there a connection between your interest in national solidarity and inclusive innovation?

Yes. If we want to have an innovative economy and innovative cities, they have to deliver for everyone.

Going back to the Oxford example, my friends will take the view that, "Well, Oxford's got loads of R&D and all that's happened is I now have to live on the outskirts, miles away from mum and dad". That leads to a suspicion of innovation and hostility towards experts and universities. One of my arguments for inclusive innovation is that it will stem those anti-innovation politics.

Neil Lee was interviewed by Ben Rogers, Director of the European Cities Programme at LSE Cities

Who's leading Europe's cities?

We need to open new routes to city leadership in Europe, if mayors are to become representative of the citizens they serve.

The average European mayor is a centre-left, 53-year-old white male with a background in the private sector. If we had to summarise in one sentence what we have learned by collecting data on who is leading Europe's largest cities, that would be it.

Soon after we launched the European Cities Programme, we realised that there was no readily available database with information on the people leading our cities. Who are they? How did they get the job? When are the next elections? The European Cities Knowledge Hub was created to help answer these questions. Since then, the Hub has expanded to include hundreds of data points for a total of 162 large European cities. This will enable us to carry out comparative analyses and track change over time. Here, we highlight the key findings arising from our data on city leadership.

Only 1 in 5 (22%) of the city leaders in our sample is a woman. However, some countries are doing better than others on gender. While most mayors in Southern and Eastern Europe are male, 6 out of 11 of the French mayors in our sample are female.

The percentage of mayors and council leaders from an ethnic minority background is even lower at only 4% (7 out of 162 cities). Europe clearly still has a long way to go to achieve a more diverse city leadership.

The majority of leaders (91%) are between 40 and 69 years old. Female city leaders tend to be slightly younger than their male counterparts, but not by much.

Most leaders have a higher education degree (94% in total, of which 20% are at PhD level) and three disciplinary backgrounds dominate: political sciences (22%), economics/business (17%) and law (17%). There is a surprising shortage of mayors with backgrounds in the arts and humanities.

More than one third of city leaders (34%) worked in the private sector before getting involved in local politics. These include lawyers (for example, the mayors of London, Madrid and Gdansk), entrepreneurs (including Ljubljana, Venice and Thessaloniki), corporate executives in large companies (Milan) and insurance salespeople (Berlin). A quarter were previously employed in the public sector (for example, Paris and Oslo). There are also some more unusual career trajectories among our sample. The mayor of Gothenburg was a carpenter. Liverpool's new council leader was a railway manager. And a handful of city leaders gained popularity as professional athletes (football in the case of Verona and water polo in Belgrade).

When it comes to their political careers, we found that most mayors in our sample (64%) were local councillors or deputy mayors before getting the top job in the city. However, the number of city leaders that previously held positions in regional (14%) or national government (28%) is also significant – and there is even one mayor that was previously a European Commissioner (Carlos Moedas, Lisbon). Only 23 leaders (15%) had no previous political experience.

A closer look at the political spectrum represented by city leaders in our sample reveals an interesting trend. Most are left-leaning (53%, compared to 36% on the right). Overall, European mayors are quite moderate: over 80% identify as centre-left to centre-right. Cities are widely regarded as more progressive and sometimes even radical in their politics when compared to nations. Be that as it may, mayors on the extremes of the ideological spectrum – or even outside of the spectrum, as with the perceived surge in "big tent", apolitical or populist movements – are currently unusual in Europe.

> **"The average European mayor is a centre-left, 53-year-old white male with a background in the private sector."**

The typical term length of European city leaders ranges from four to six years in most countries, although in some countries, like Germany, mayors have terms lasting seven or eight years. Term limits are unusual in Europe at the city level and of the countries included in the Knowledge Hub, only Albania, Italy, Poland and Portugal impose them. For this reason, a small number of mayors have been in office for over 20 years (for example, in Krakow, Lille, Malaga and Luxembourg City). On average, city leaders in our sample have been in office for six years and eight months, with one third of them (33%) having been in office for less than three years. This means that we are going to get to know a new generation of European mayors in the next decade and that there is an opportunity to help them achieve their ambitious and innovative agendas.

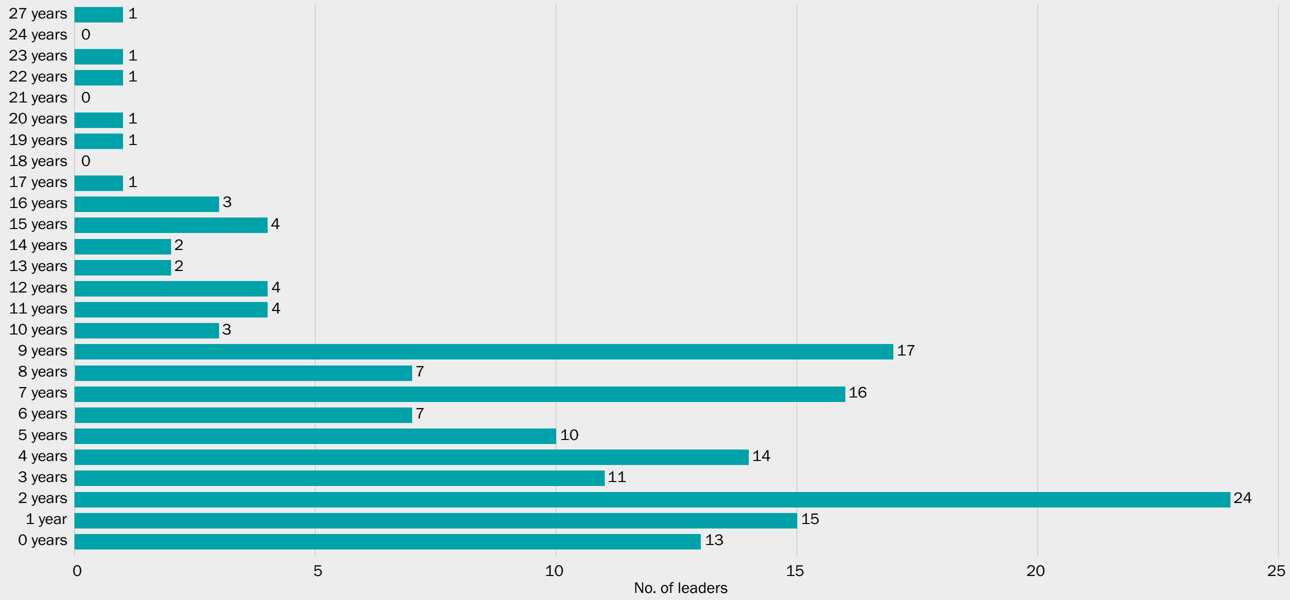
Unsurprisingly, most mayors in Europe are democratically selected: two thirds are directly elected and 21% are indirectly elected. The remaining 14% of city leaders are appointed by local, regional or national-level bodies or, in the case of Ireland, hired through a competitive recruitment process. Whichever mechanism got them the job, European city leaders in our sample on average only have jurisdiction over 42% of the population in their metropolitan area. This highlights the complex, networked, and multilevel nature of urban governance in Europe, where the responsibilities and decision-making powers of city leaders are shared and constantly negotiated by many actors.

The data we have collected so far for our Knowledge Hub sheds light on the immensely rich and diverse world of leadership in urban Europe. As recent elections have shown, the face of European city leadership is constantly changing.[1] As pressures and expectations on cities and their leaders only seem to increase, we look forward to building on these findings and tracking key changes over the coming years.

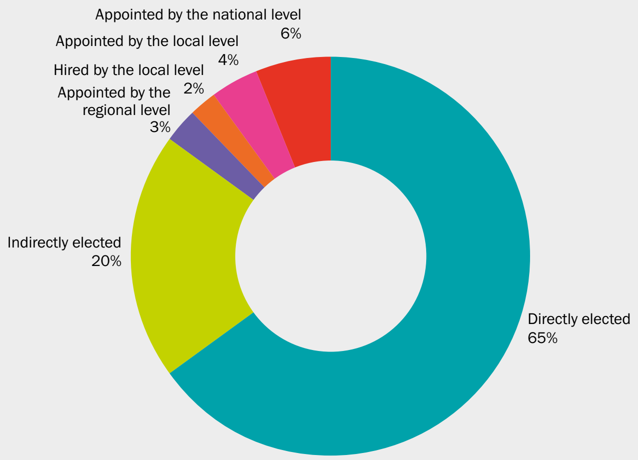
The European Cities Knowledge Hub offers a new overview of developments and challenges in Europe's cities, based on data from a sample of 162 cities (capital cities and cities over 200,000 inhabitants) from 37 countries. The number of cities included in each visualisation may vary depending on the availability of data. **See pages 34 and 35 for the full list of cities.**

Ethnic background

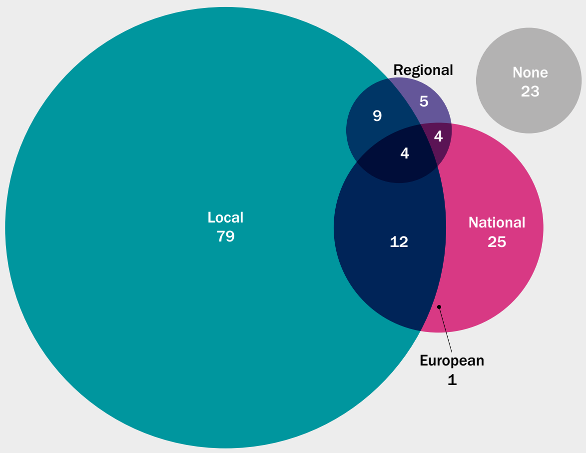
Total time in office



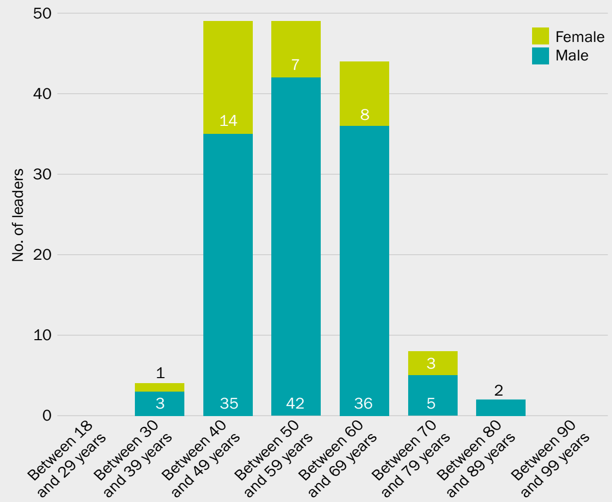
Method of selection



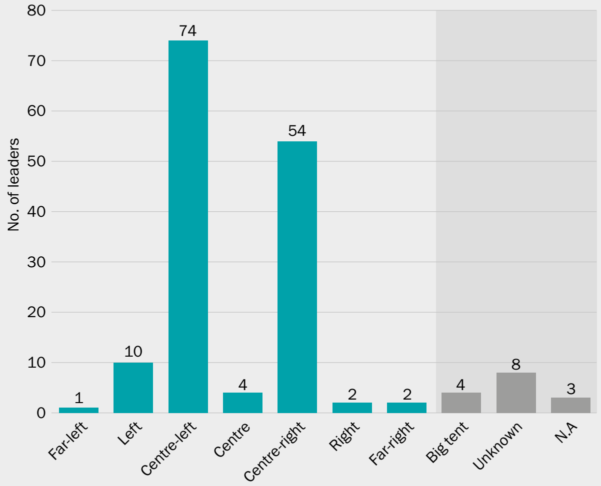
Previous political experience



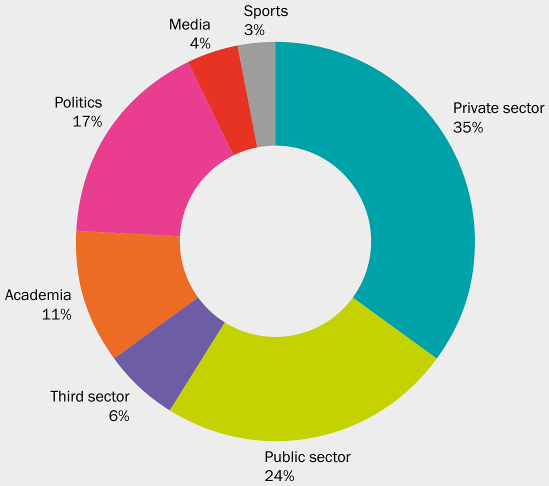
Age and gender split



Political alignment



Professional background



Gender diversity

Learning from City Leaders

Mohamed Ridouani
Mayor of Leuven

Motivation? If you aspire to have a meaningful impact on society, engaging in city politics can be the most effective way to achieve it. In Belgium, few people have confidence in national politicians, but in city politics, it is still possible to collaborate constructively and to make a difference.
Most encouraging change witnessed? A few years ago, I started implementing a new governance model based on mission-driven, collaborative and inclusive innovation: different groups of leaders coming together, with common purpose, to innovate around the complex challenges we face, like decarbonisation and climate change. It wasn't always easy to convince those leaders and innovators that this was the best way forward. However, today, this approach has become the norm for cooperation, a culture, an identity.
Biggest wish? I wish there were ways to expedite the realisation of our ideas without the extensive procedures and hurdles that can often delay progress. It can be frustrating to see the significant amount of time and effort it takes to bring our vision to fruition, as we are driven to improve the lives of those in our city.
Advice for new mayors? It's impossible to satisfy every citizen's needs and preferences. As a mayor, you're the keeper of the common good and the protector of the most vulnerable members of society.

Marvin Rees
Mayor of Bristol

Getting more people into city politics? Anyone waiting for the perfect invitation from the perfect party to get involved in the perfect political system will be waiting a long time. We have to be prepared to bring our imperfect selves to imperfect structures.
Most encouraging change witnessed? Our city's increased willingness to begin to talk about race, class, poverty and inequality – and to understand and not hide from them.
Hardest day in office? It's not a day, but more of a realistic realisation: that our city couldn't be fixed in our two terms (eight years) in terms of ending child hunger, completely decarbonising our city and building all the new homes we need to end the housing crisis. It's not about days, or major events, but the underlying systems and trends.
Most inspiring European City? One of the biggest tests of a city's values is how it treats the poorest and most vulnerable. I admire the Mayor of Milan, Giuseppe Sala, for his work supporting refugees.
Political hero? I admire Malcolm X's self-awareness and sacrifice.
Advice for new mayors? You can't boil the ocean, so try to be humble and gracious. Appoint a good team of people who combine competence, trustworthiness and emotional intelligence. Make sure you pick people who are smarter than you.

Susan Aitken
Council Leader of Glasgow

Motivation? Having been a persistent proponent of gender balance mechanisms it was time to put my money where my mouth is.
Happiest day in office? The day before COP26 began in earnest. I had gone to the main venue to collect my pass and on seeing it all set up realised that this was all now real and that Glasgow was hosting an amazing and globally significant event. After all our work to secure COP and the many months of build-up, that was a pretty special moment.
Political hero? Anne Hidalgo. She has taken on vested interests, traditionalists and sexism to bring about genuine and tangible transformation on the streets of Paris. If Paris can transform its traffic-clogged, noisy and polluted streets to make much more open spaces that people can walk, cycle and move around more freely and safely, then it gives me hope that Glasgow can do the same.
Advice for new mayors? There is no other job in politics like city leadership and no other job where individuals in that post, regardless of vastly different contexts and cultures, have more in common and more shared challenges than city leadership. Anyone coming into the job will find that there are incredibly valuable support networks. Make use and learn from them.

Matúš Vallo ▶
Mayor of Bratislava

Motivation? Before I entered politics, I worked as an activist and architect on how the city should function and how people feel in it. Like many before me, I understood that if I really wanted to make a difference in Bratislava, I had to become part of the city management. I realised that the process was not a betrayal, but a normal development, and I really enjoy dedicating myself to public service and improving people's lives.
Biggest wish? I wish we had a government in Slovakia that we, as a city, did not have to fight. We spend an extreme amount of energy explaining that it is important for local governments to have autonomy and influence over certain topics and, of course, to access funding.
Most inspiring European City? Our twin city Vienna, a 40-minute drive from Bratislava, is one of the best cities I know. It is an example for us in many ways. Whenever we need some know-how, our Viennese colleagues have no problem sharing it.
Advice for new mayors? Have high-quality people around you. A mayor's results depend on whether they have a good team and whether they know how to take care of it and to encourage and listen to its feedback – even if it is tough and unpleasant.

Femke Halsema ▲
Mayor of Amsterdam

Motivation? The love and admiration for this wonderful city and its people. The city where I've been living for ages and where my children were born. I want Amsterdam to be a great place for all children to grow up in.
Getting more people into city politics?
Local politicians and administrators need to show that the decisions they make actually lead to an improvement in the lives of inhabitants. This also means that local experiences should be the basis of governance decisions and not abstract administrative concepts.
Most encouraging change witnessed? In 2021, I apologised on behalf of the municipality for the involvement in global slavery on which an important part of the city's historical prosperity is based. Recently, the national government has also apologised. This is the result of the black community's decades-long struggle for recognition of suffering and structural racism. The emancipation and new pride among black Amsterdammers gives hope for the future.
Political hero? I have deep respect for Angela Merkel. Her perseverance, independence and reasonableness are an example in this polarised and populist time.
Advice for new mayors? Don't let the hustle and bustle of the city drive you crazy. Stay calm and always side with your most vulnerable citizens. They need you.

Kostas Bakoyannis ◀
Mayor of Athens

Motivation? City politics is action-based. Our work concerns tangible, visible and measurable results. It's about the small things that make a big difference to people's everyday lives. In this way, mayors align with citizens' needs and expectations and get to close the gap between political institutions and citizens.
Getting more people involved in city politics? I think that in 2023, "all politics is local". As the role of city politics becomes more and more enhanced and its importance increasingly more recognised, more people and more talent, passion and skills are going to be attracted to get involved in it.
Most encouraging change witnessed? When I meet people, they no longer say "this or that doesn't work". Instead, they tell me, "Mayor you should fix this too". This means they now believe that things can change and get better.
Happiest day in office? I've had a lot of good days. I might sound grumpy, but I don't think the happiest has come yet. It will though. It will be when I leave office, look back and feel that I played my part in making Athens a city all its residents are proud to call home.
Advice for new mayors? I don't like giving advice so I will just say what I tell myself. Keep your feet on the ground. Think big, start small. Create practical solutions to improve your citizens' everyday lives. Build bridges, participate in networks and foster solidarity.

Charting the climate ambitions of cities

While some of Europe's cities have taken a lead on climate change, others are struggling.

High hopes have been placed on cities to lead the fight against climate change. We look at the progress being made by European cities to develop climate plans and meet climate targets.

With cities responsible for more than 70% of CO_2 emissions,[1] decision makers across all levels of government increasingly recognise their crucial role in delivering solutions. In many cases, however, this recognition is not yet accompanied by the necessary authority and budget for delivery. Nonetheless, European city leaders appear to be rising to the challenge, with a recent survey of mayors revealing climate action as their top priority.[2]

In practical terms, cities are demonstrating leadership on climate in a number of ways: by developing and delivering climate action plans; setting ambitious emissions reduction targets; and by participating in peer-to-peer and knowledge exchange networks that focus specifically on sustainability and the green transition. To take a temperature check on European cities' ambitions, we are tracking progress in these areas across the 162 large cities in our European Cities Knowledge Hub.

We found that 72% of these cities have committed themselves to achieving climate neutrality at some point over the next three decades. Setting a target year to achieve climate neutrality is a crucial step. It must, of course, be followed by effective strategy and implementation. Most cities in our sample have stated either 2030 or 2050 as their target. These dates align with the targets being promoted by the EU and prominent international initiatives like the Global Covenant of Mayors, suggesting that global policy frameworks and strategies are proving extremely influential for city-level thinking on climate. But what of the one third of cities in our sample that have not yet set a target? Mapping out this data, we found a stark geographical disparity: the cities that have not yet formally committed to achieving climate neutrality are overwhelmingly found in Southern and Eastern Europe.

Almost all cities in our sample (98%) have a climate plan (a document setting out strategies to tackle climate change, often including intermediate targets), but around one quarter of these plans are outdated. Some city plans, for example, cite emissions reduction goals for 2020 that have not yet been replaced with new targets.

Of course, having a plan is not the same as executing it. When cities take the lead in developing climate plans that are tailored to their unique context, and invest effort in keeping them up to date, this tends to be a good predictor of action. A recent review found that it matters *how* these plans are developed: the most effective ones are those developed by each city autonomously.[3] These are followed by plans mandated by national governments and then by those supported by international climate networks. The least effective plans are the ones focusing on specific sectors (e.g. energy).

We found that most of the cities in our sample have developed their climate plans autonomously (44%) or as part of their membership of international climate networks (40%). Only 10% arose from national requirements. Climate plans developed autonomously by city authorities are most common in Germany, the UK, Scandinavia and Poland. Nationally mandated plans prevail in France and Ireland, suggesting stronger national climate legislation. Most cities in Southern and Eastern Europe have plans that were developed with the support of international climate networks, suggesting that these regions may be vulnerable to low implementation and home-grown monitoring.

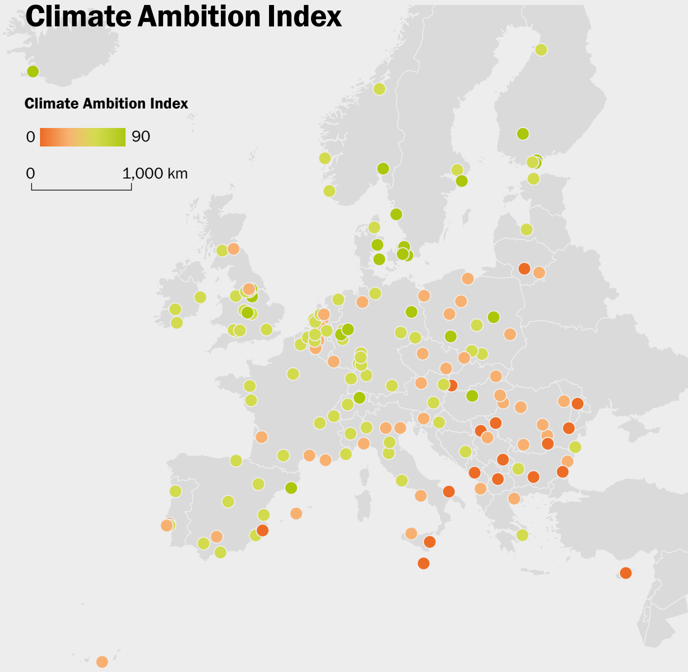
The majority of the Knowledge Hub cities belong to at least one climate network, the Covenant of Mayors being the most popular. In fact, most cities are members of more than one climate network, while a small group of cities participate in five or more, making up an ambitious, highly networked core. These highly networked cities are spread across the continent, but with a slightly higher concentration in North-Western Europe.

"Almost all cities in our sample have a climate plan but around one quarter of these plans are outdated."

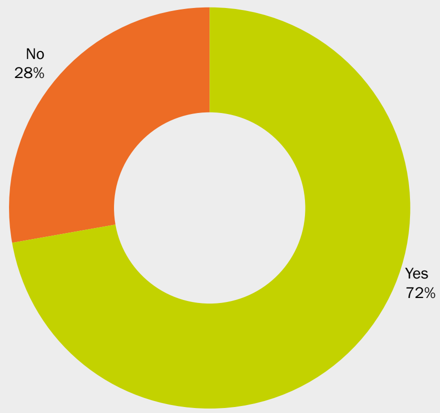
When it comes to emissions reductions, intermediate targets are hard to compare as cities use different baseline years, carbon accounting and reporting methods, and goals (e.g. 20% reduction). To complicate things further, only a handful of cities – including London, Paris and Amsterdam – have started to quantify emissions outside of their boundaries resulting from activities taking place within the city. These indirect emissions, embedded in the goods and services consumed and produced in the city (known as Scope 3 emissions), are significant. Amsterdam estimates that such emissions may amount to as much as 80% of the city's total carbon footprint.[4] Since most cities in our Knowledge Hub sample are only monitoring Scope 1 (emissions within the city boundary) and Scope 2 (energy use emissions), this could have huge implications for cities' progress towards climate neutrality.

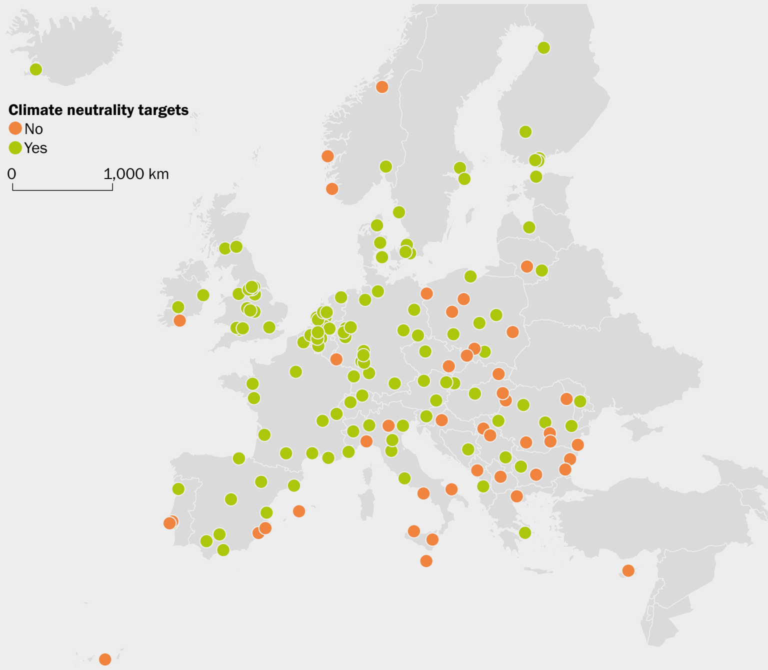
To provide an overall measure of the climate ambition being displayed by the 162 cities in our sample, we have developed a Climate Ambition Index that aggregates all the data for the indicators discussed above. This index captures the extent to which European cities are committed to climate neutrality (and how soon); whether they have set intermediate emission reduction targets; what kind of plan they have developed; and whether they are actively engaging in climate-relevant networks. The results show that the most ambitious cities can be found in Northern Europe, particularly in Scandinavia, where Copenhagen, Oslo, Aarhus, Gothenburg and Malmö make up the top five. In addition to identifying patterns, this metric will also allow us to probe into the determinants of urban climate action. For example, it is often assumed that larger cities are more ambitious on climate, but our data shows that many small cities have big ambitions and some large ones do not. In the following pages, we explore some of the possible factors driving these differences.

Climate Ambition Index

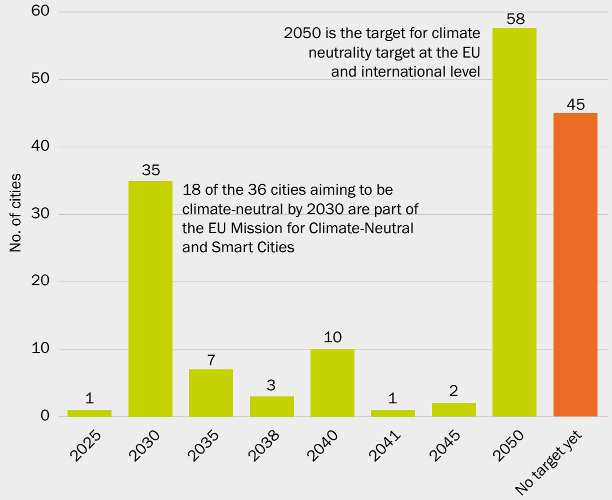


Climate neutrality targets

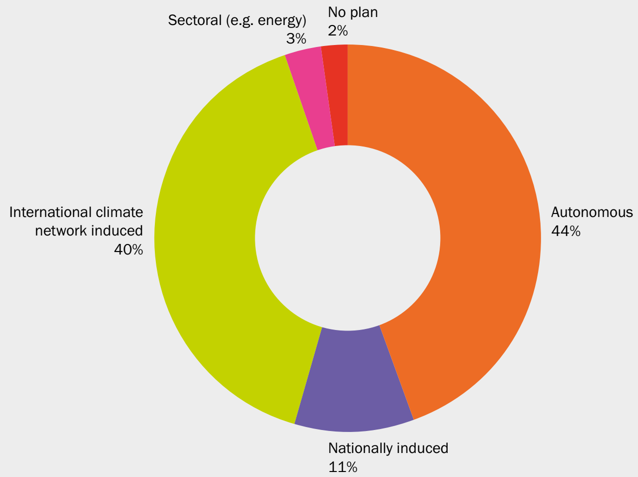




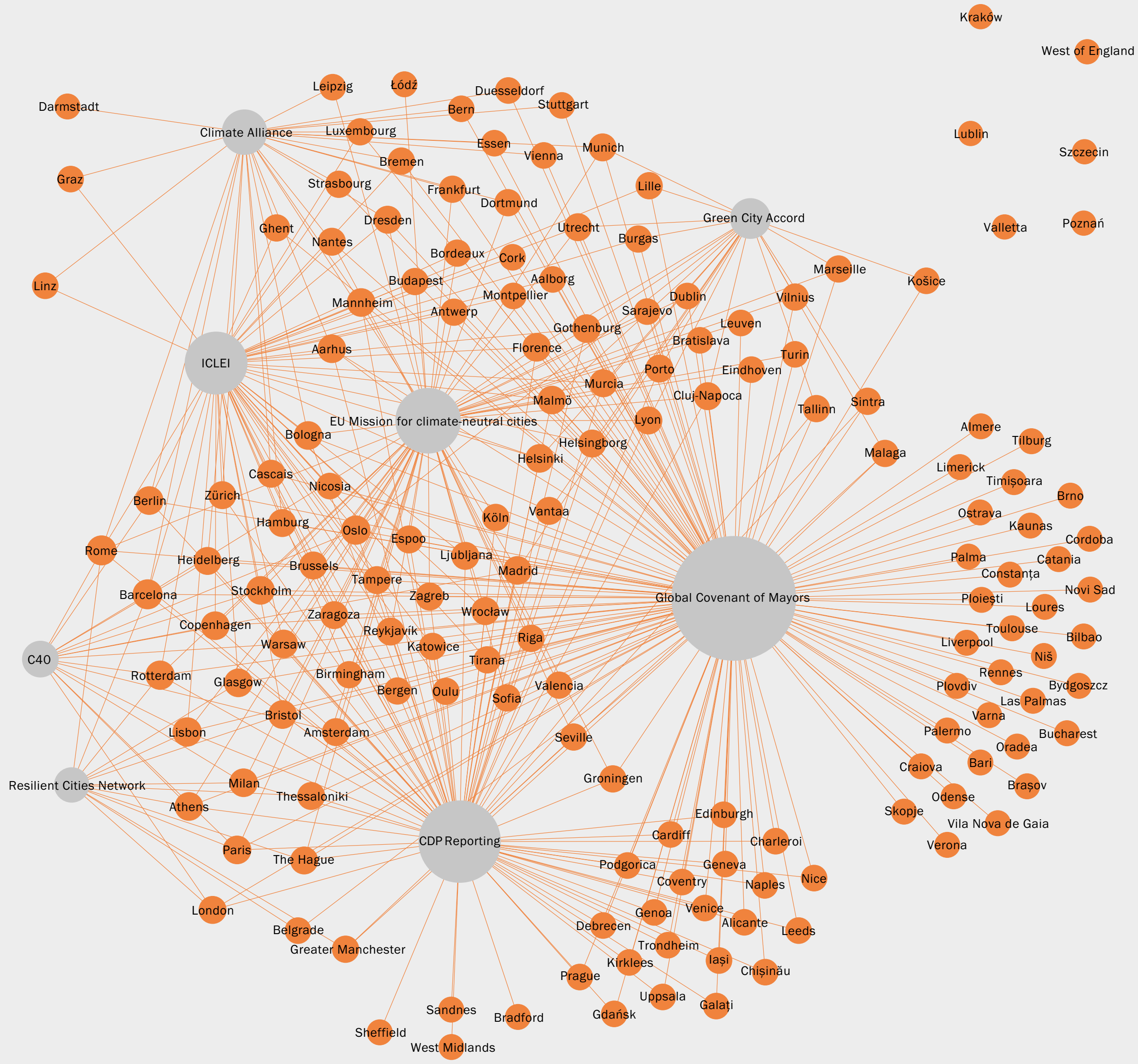
Climate neutrality target by year



Origin of climate plans



Climate network membership



A future beyond the car?

Europe's cities are leading the way in promoting walking, cycling and sustainable public transport, but are they moving fast enough?

We have looked at the profile of European city leaders and their ambitions in terms of climate action. When developing and pursuing their ambitions, city leaders are influenced by two main factors:

1. The point of departure in key policy sectors: what leaders have inherited in terms of infrastructure and the legacy of past investments, decisions and priorities affects what they can aim for.

2. The capacity of local administrations to deliver on those ambitions: the availability of human, institutional, financial and other resources impacts the likelihood of success of any political initiative or policy decision.

The European Cities Knowledge Hub compiles data to help us understand cities' point of departure in two fundamental sectors – urban mobility and housing. We have chosen these sectors because they represent essential levers to deliver on overarching objectives, such as the transition to climate neutrality and the reduction of urban inequalities. Furthermore, decision-making in these areas tends to be devolved to local administrations, meaning that city leaders can achieve a lot by changing the ways in which housing, land use and transport policies and services are planned and delivered. Here, we present an overview of mobility in the Knowledge Hub cities.

Urban transport accounts for one third of CO_2 emissions in large cities, reaching as high as 45% in some of them.[1] Shifting to more sustainable modes is, therefore, a key challenge for city leaders intent on pursuing their climate ambitions. While European cities are generally known for their well-established public transport systems, strong cycling culture and high degree of walkability, traffic congestion remains a significant issue for all major EU cities, costing nearly €100 billion, or 1% of the EU's GDP, per year.[2] And despite recent technological advances in fuel efficiency and electric mobility, emissions from road transport across EU member states increased by 21% between 1990 and 2019, making it one of the sectors that has been most challenging to decarbonise.[3]

In large part, this emissions growth has been fuelled by the absolute increase in the number of passenger cars in Europe.[4] Cities with the highest motorisation rates can be found in Poland, Italy and in some Benelux countries. The number of cars per capita can vary substantially across European cities and, on average, it does not seem to depend on city size. However, cities in Eastern Europe buck this trend – in this region, the number of cars increases with population. Conversely, our data suggests that cities where residents are financially better off tend to have fewer cars per capita.

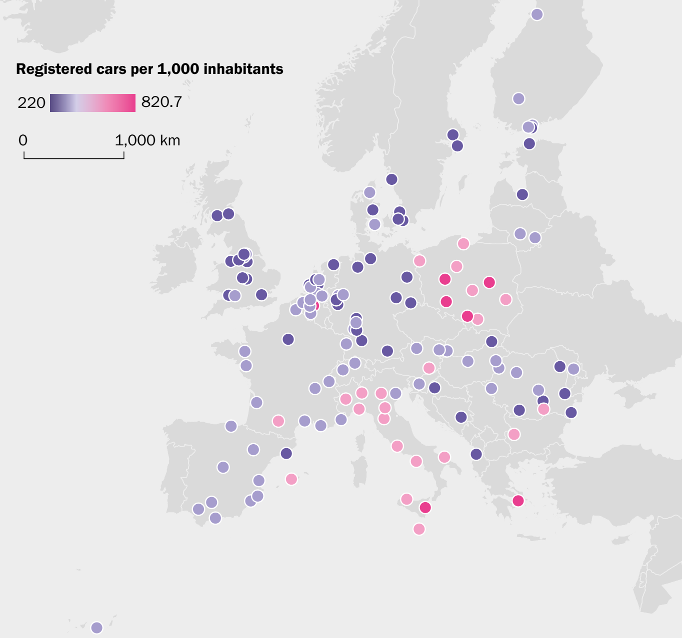
Although the rate of car ownership is increasing most rapidly in Eastern Europe,[5] on average, cities in this region still have the lowest share of journeys by private motorised vehicles (33% compared to the European average of 48%). By a small margin, public transport accounts for the largest share of trips in the East and active travel (walking and cycling) is also higher than the European average. In all other regions across the continent, the car remains the dominant mode of travel. Higher public transport costs do not seem to push people into their cars – in fact, the opposite is true as cities with higher costs tend to have lower motorisation rates. This is a reminder that attractive public transport systems are not necessarily cheap and that residents are willing to pay if the costs translate to high quality, reliable services.

Average commuting times are similar across Europe – at around half an hour – but they are longer where more residents rely on public transport and shorter where more residents can walk or cycle to work. Once again, this suggests that more investment across Europe is needed to improve active travel infrastructure and public transport services to offer a credible alternative to the car.

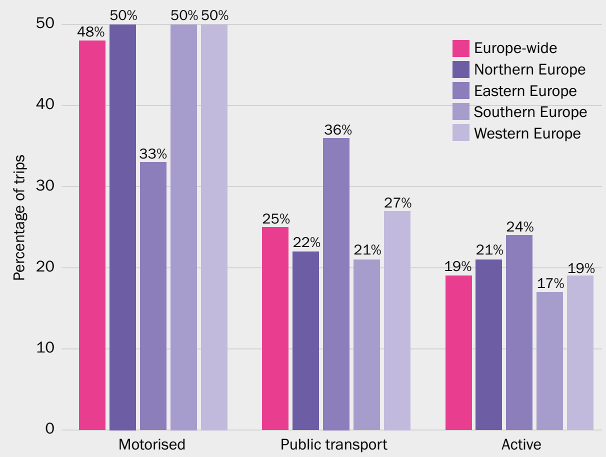
> **"While European cities are generally known for their well-established public transport systems, strong cycling culture and high degree of walkability, traffic congestion remains an issue for all major EU cities, costing nearly €100 billion per year."**

Restricting car use continues to be controversial, even within cities. While there has been a recent surge in the number of cities introducing Low Emission Zones (with an increasing number of them now designating Zero Emission Zones in their inner cities), these are still only a feature in 43% of the cities in our sample. Congestion charging seems to be even less politically palatable: to date, only 12 cities have introduced such an instrument. Most of these are in Northern and Western Europe, with Milan, Palermo and Valletta representing notable exceptions in Southern Europe.[6] Part of the reason for this may be that not all cities have the powers to roll out these policies. For example, in London, congestion charging only became possible in the early 2000s once the central government devolved those powers to city government. Currently, cities in Eastern and Southern Europe are the ones struggling the most to adopt and enforce low emission and road pricing policies, although some capitals such as Warsaw, Riga and Sofia are hoping to reverse this trend.[6]

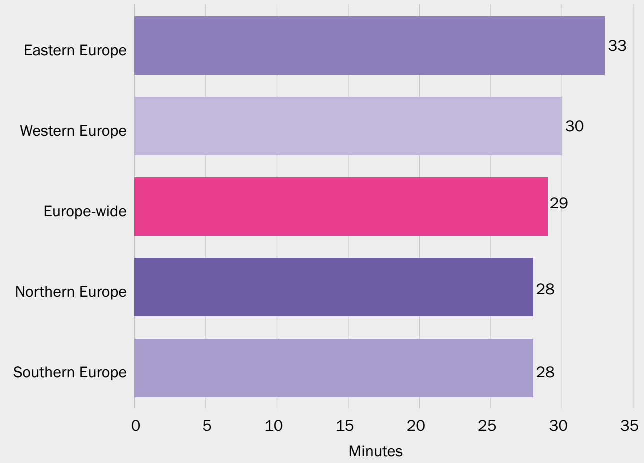
Motorisation rate



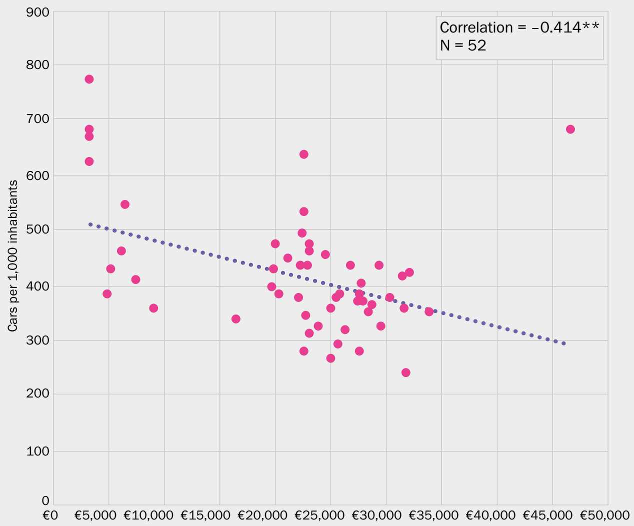
Transport mode share



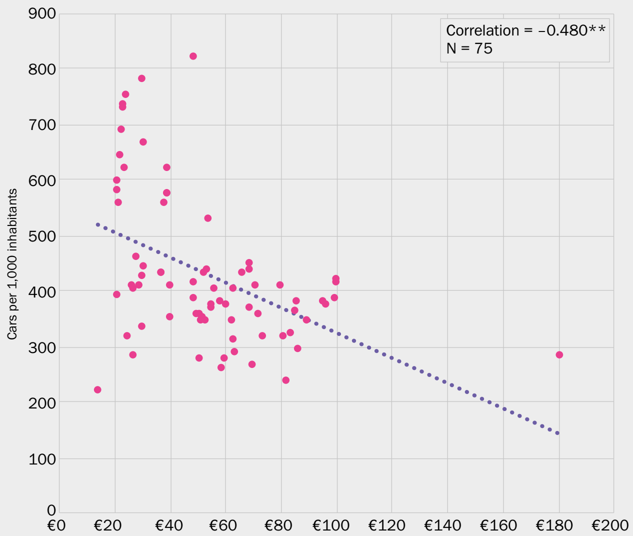
Average commuting times



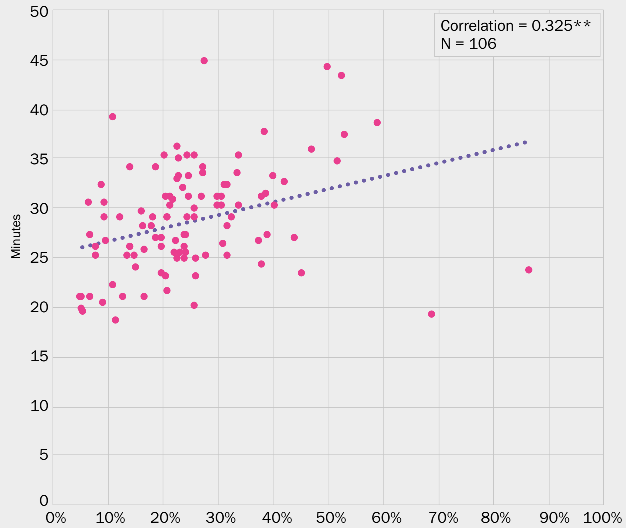
Motorisation rate vs median disposable annual household income



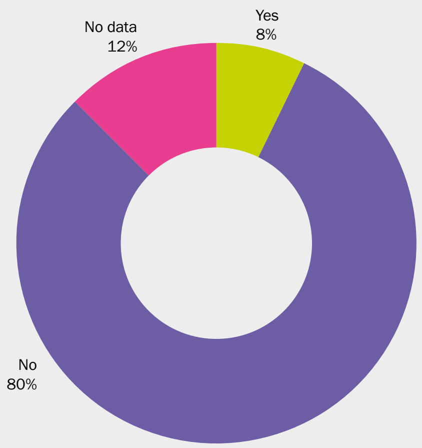
Motorisation vs public transport cost per month



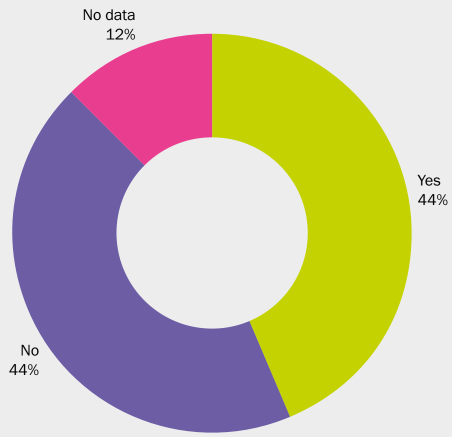
Commuting times vs share of public transport trips



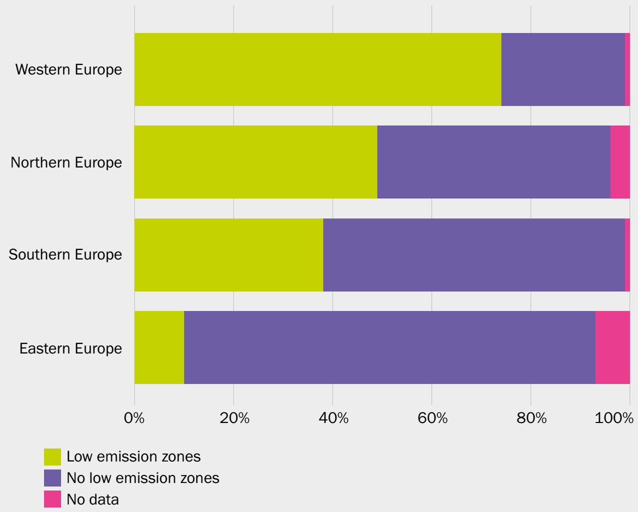
Cities with congestion charging



Cities with low emission zones



Low emission zones by region



European Cities Knowledge Hub

Affordable homes for all?

City leaders are starting from very different positions when it comes to securing housing for their residents.

In Europe and beyond, the challenges around housing have become so serious that many consider it to be a social emergency.[1] However, our Knowledge Hub reveals that the current situation is quite diverse for cities in Europe. The number of homes per inhabitant varies substantially within and across European regions, although no significant relationship was found to population size. On average, there are more homes per capita in Western and Northern European cities than in Eastern and Southern European cities, but there are exceptions – for example, Birmingham (0.38 homes per inhabitant) and Thessaloniki (0.63 homes per inhabitant).

Although these numbers speak to the availability and scarcity of housing, it is important to note that some cities may have naturally larger or multi-generational households. Whether people are living with their elderly relatives and/or adult children by choice or out of necessity is, however, difficult to discern. As well as less homes per capita, cities in Southern and Eastern Europe also have a higher share of empty homes when compared to their counterparts in the West and North. Some of this may be explained by the higher incidence of holiday homes in these regions, but it is most likely compounded by the state of repair of the housing stock.

The most radical differences between cities can be observed in the provision of social housing. The share of households that are classed as living in social housing ranges from virtually 0% to 50%. All cities with shares of over 40% are in Western Europe, namely, Amsterdam (50%), Rotterdam (42%), Vienna (42%) and Eindhoven (41%). The average share of households in social housing across Knowledge Hub cities is 13%, with 17% in Western and Northern Europe, 8% in Eastern Europe and only 4% in Southern Europe.

The same significant variation can be seen when it comes to housing costs. The average rents per square metre vary by a factor of 10 across cities in our database. There are no relevant associations between rent prices and population or homes per capita. Conversely, the higher the share of empty homes, the lower the average rent per square metre. Taken together, our data suggests that the financial well-being of populations is the main driver of prices.

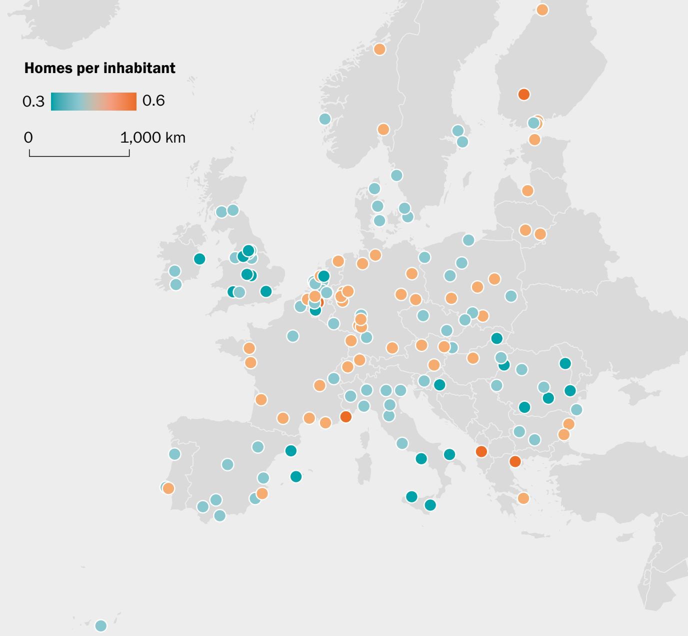
In terms of affordability, the situation is similar across all regions of Europe. On average, an apartment costs around 10 times the median of disposable annual household income. However, there are significant differences between cities. For example, apartments in Lisbon, Belgrade and Paris cost around 20 times the median disposable income of families in those cities – four times less affordable than apartments in Coventry, Rotterdam or Dresden.

As we have seen, newly elected city leaders will encounter quite different points of departure depending on where they are on the map. Generally speaking, cities in Eastern and Southern Europe need more help in adapting their built environment and developing the infrastructure required to deliver the new ambitions being set. But the picture is quite diverse and there is huge variance even within regions. Some cities in the North and West of Europe also face significant infrastructural challenges, particularly when it comes to the retrofitting and decarbonisation of building stock. The transformations ahead will not be easy for anyone.

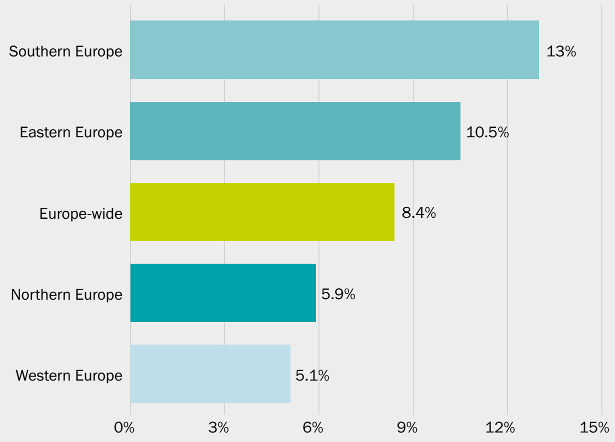
Despite a recent wave of urban renewal, Porto continues to have one of the highest rates of vacant properties of any major European city, with as many as 20% of city centre buildings classed as vacant or abandoned.

Credit: Credit: Endless Travel / Alamy Stock Photo

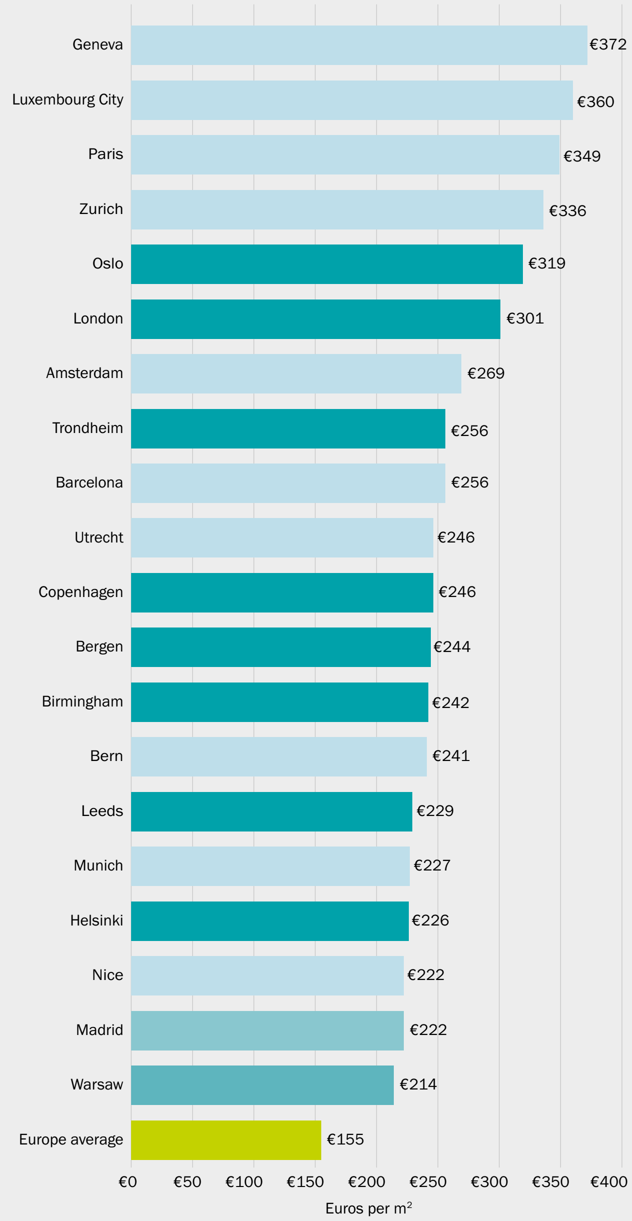
Homes per capita



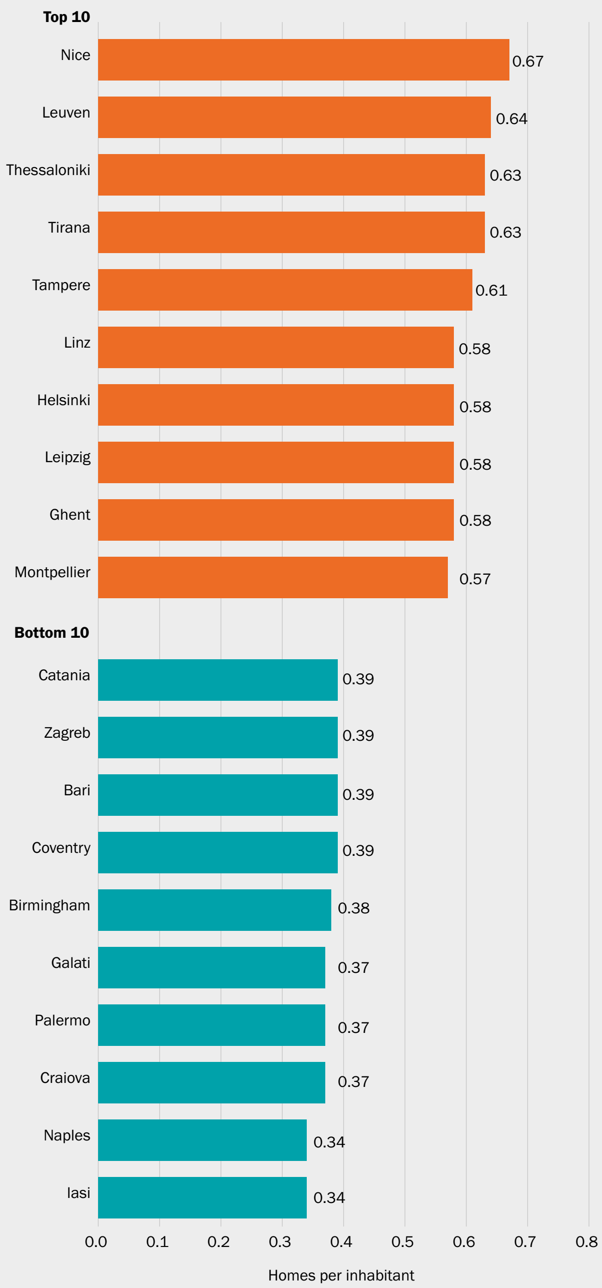
Share of empty homes



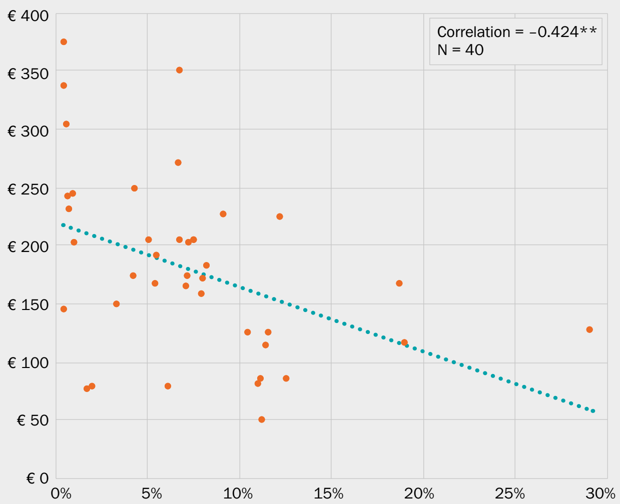
Average rent per m²



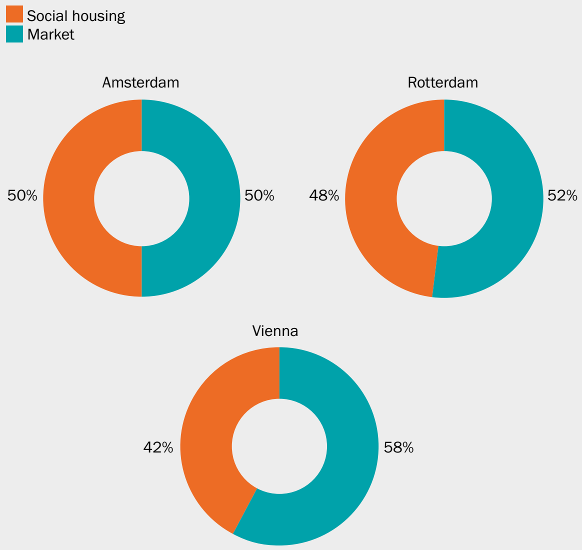
Homes per capita: ranking



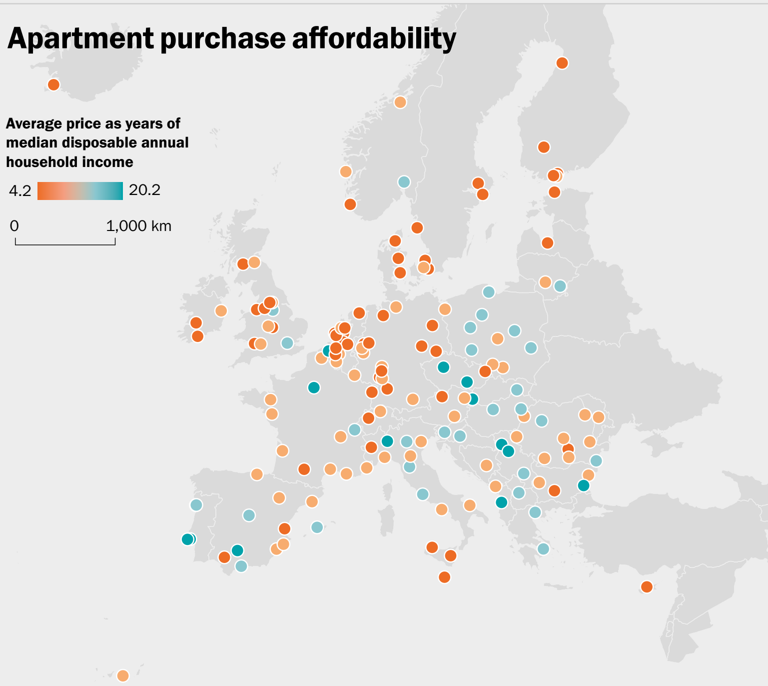
Average rent per m² vs share of empty homes



Cities with highest share of social housing



Apartment purchase affordability



How much capacity do Europe's cities have?

While most European cities have long traditions of self-government, the capacity and resources they can draw on vary significantly.

The ambitions of city leaders have never been bolder. However, the capacity of their administrations to deliver on those ambitions is a source of ongoing concern. Both the European Union and national governments, helped along by initiatives coming out of the philanthropic sector, are beginning to invest more in capacity building support for cities. But urban powers and capabilities vary widely by locality and progress has been hampered by a lack of solid, comparable data.

In recent years, several important efforts have been made to get a better understanding of the strength or capacity of city governments. For example, in 2019, OECD and Bloomberg Philanthropies teamed up to survey hundreds of city governments across the globe about their ability to innovate.[1] In 2023, Eurocities launched a new mayors' survey to establish the common needs and priorities of local administrations. Such surveys offer a valuable snapshot, but rely on self-reporting and are limited in frequency by the time commitment required from busy city staff.

To complement these resources, LSE Cities is working to identify data to track the changing capacities of city governments across Europe. We have sought to identify publicly available data that might act as a proxy for cities' capacity and can be gathered independent of city input and tracked over time. Using 162 cities as a starting point, we have identified metrics in three relevant areas.

Financial resources

First, we looked at city budget per capita. On average, city administrations in Europe spend €3,700 per inhabitant per year – although this average is skewed somewhat by a handful of cities, with eight administrations spending €10,000 or more per inhabitant. We found no relation between city size and budget per capita, but we did find a huge variation between regions. In Eastern Europe, the average city budget, at €1,500 per inhabitant, is less than half the continent's average. In Southern Europe, budgets fall just below average (at €3,200 per capita), whereas in Western and Northern Europe they tend to be higher (around €5,000). There is also variation within regions. These differences are explained by three main factors:

1. Devolution. Some cities have authority over many policy sectors and are responsible for financing, providing related services and carrying out capital investments. Others have a very limited remit. Reflecting this, the percentage of total government expenditure allocated to local governments varies significantly across the parent countries of the cities in our database.

2. Financial resources. Even for cities with similar competencies, resourcing levels can differ radically, reflecting differences in tax-raising powers, local economic vitality and debt servicing.

3. City-level governance structures. Our analysis focuses on funding available to core city-level government, so does not include arms length city government agencies, or lower levels of local or neighbourhood government.

Human resources

Second, we looked at the headcount of city governments. We found employee data was publicly available for most of the capital cities in our database. Among our sample, Europe's capitals have on average 23 employees per 1,000 inhabitants. Once again, cities in Southern and Eastern Europe appear at a disadvantage: the average city administration in the East has just 3.6 employees per 1,000 inhabitants, compared to 10.6 in the South, 24.2 in the West and 35.0 in the North.

As with the data on financial resources, there are some limitations to this data, since government workers in arm's length agencies or in lower tiers of government are not included.

> **"The average city administration in the East has just 3.6 employees per 1,000 inhabitants, compared to 10.6 in the South, 24.2 in the West and 35.0 in the North of Europe."**

Institutional makeup

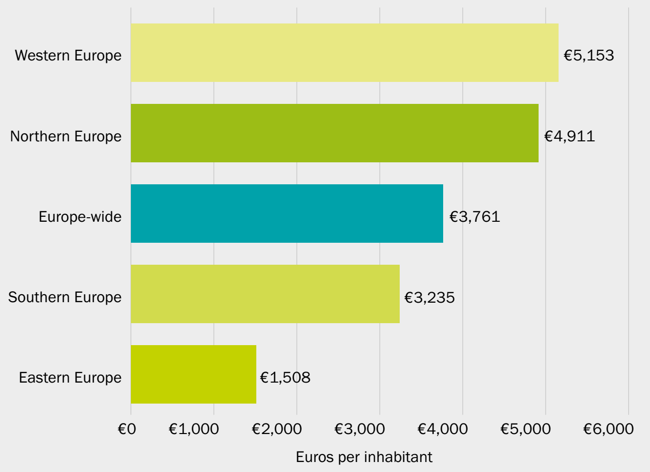
Finally, we looked for evidence that European city administrations are investing in the skills needed to run a twenty-first-century government. European cities are slowly establishing units to exploit opportunities around data and analytics and to foster innovation and evaluation. Nearly half of the cities in our European Cities Knowledge Hub have a dedicated department or agency to support innovation, digitisation or evidence-based decision-making. However, the practice of appointing a Chief Innovation Officer, Chief Digital Officer or similar remains rare. Only around 10% of the cities in our sample have one and they are concentrated in certain regions – for example, these posts are more common in UK cities.

Institutionally, some of these data and innovation units are formal (departments, directorates, offices, divisions, secretariats and committees) and others are more informal (groups, hubs, clusters and labs). Some emphasise a traditional focus on "statistics", while others focus on novel areas such as "science and innovation" and "digital transformation". While the activities of these units vary, they reflect a growing consensus on the value of data and digital. And for all their apparent resource constraints, Southern European cities are taking the lead – 68% of them have an innovation, data analytics or city science office or similar.

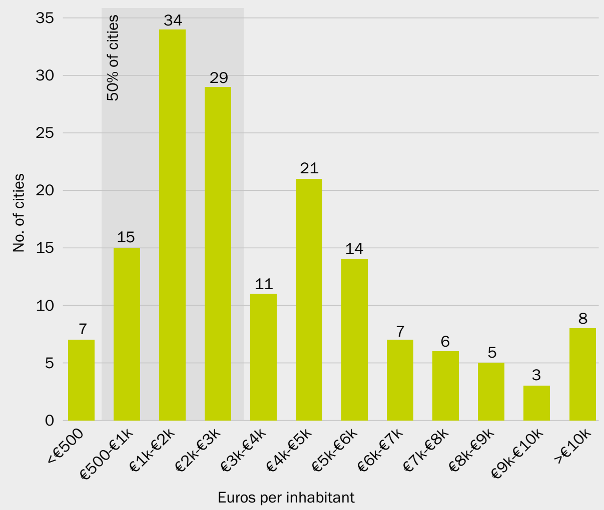
The future of European city capacity building

These metrics provide tantalising insights into the strengths, weaknesses and deep inter- and intra-regional inequities in city government resources. But there's a long way to go before we have consistent and comparable data that can help guide future investments. This year, Bloomberg Philanthropies and the UCL Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose launched an exciting effort to develop an index for public sector capabilities that aims to measure city governments' capacity to solve problems.[4] New metrics like this can help local governments understand their strengths and weaknesses and where they might benefit from further investment and capacity building. The European Cities Programme will complement this effort, expand the Knowledge Hub and explore the links between political ambition and cities' capacities to execute those ambitions.

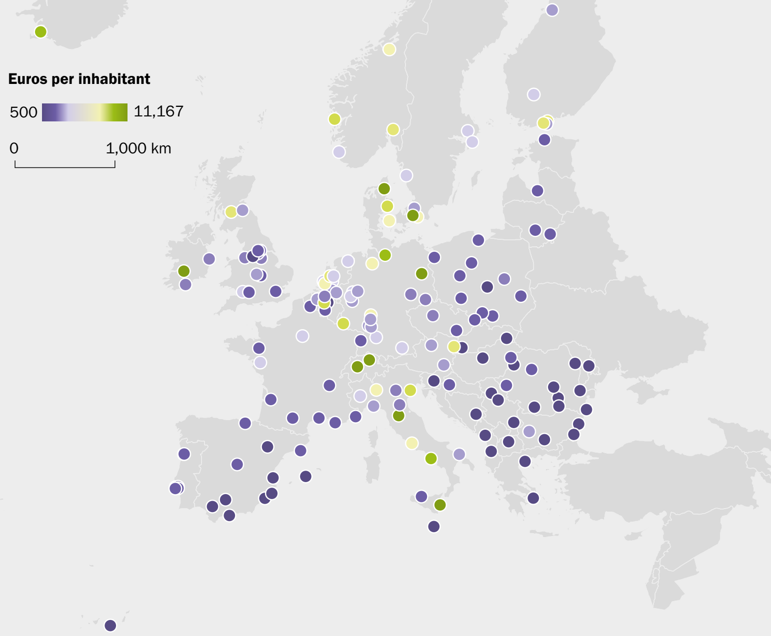
Average city budget per capita



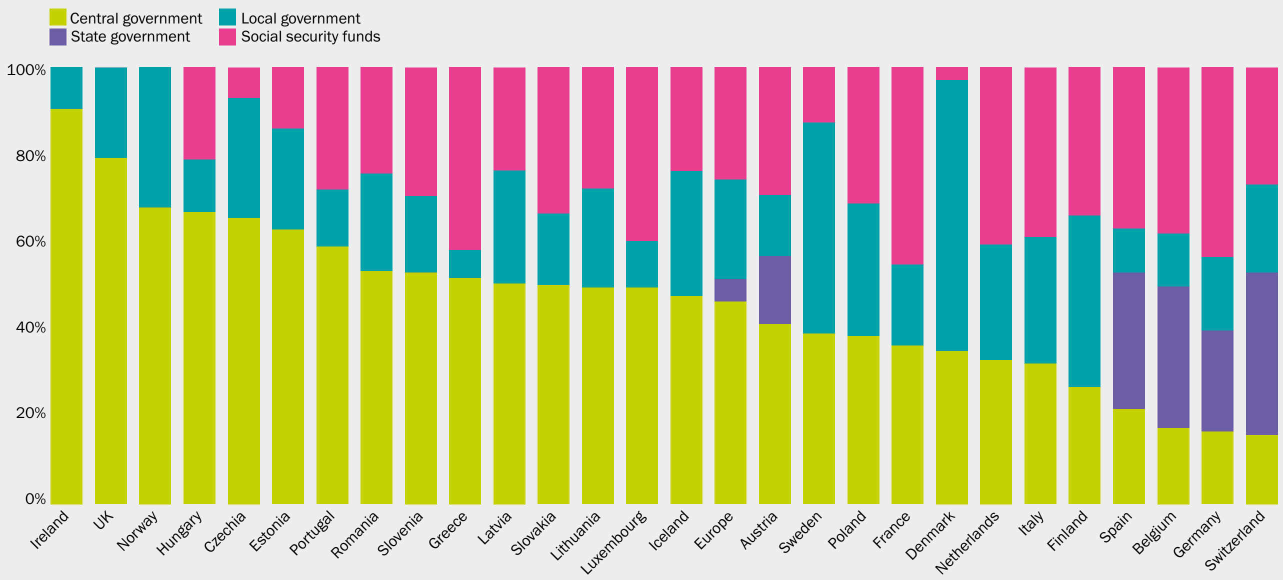
City budget per capita



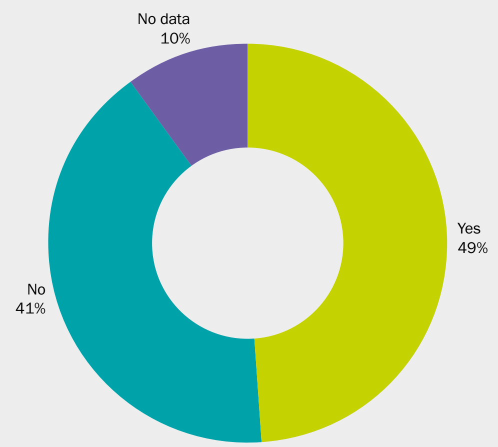
City budget per capita



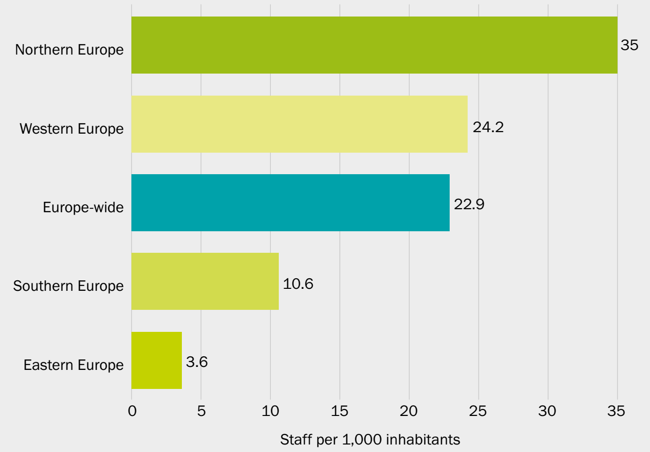
Expenditure across levels of government



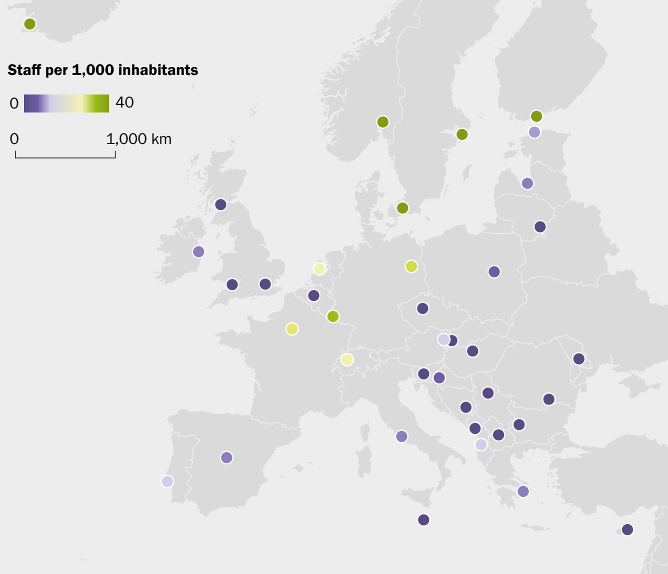
Local government unit for innovation (or similar)



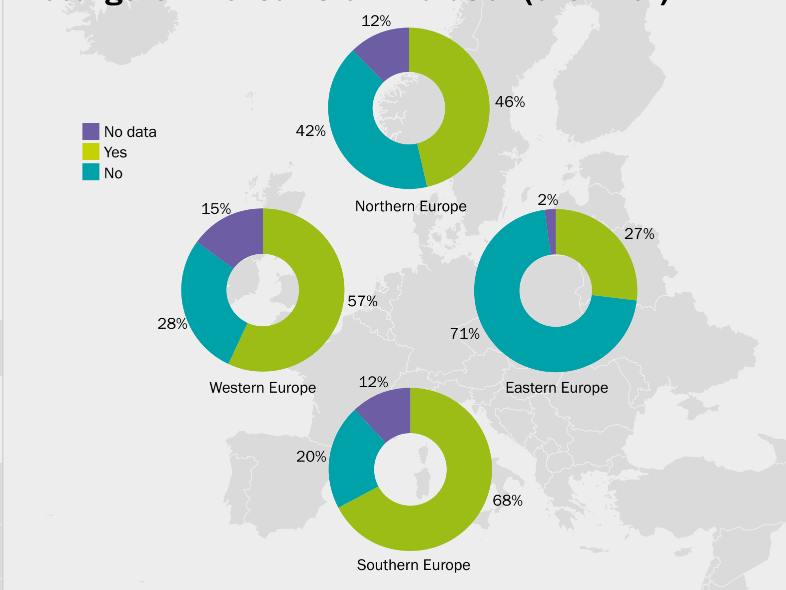
Capital city average municipal staff per capita



Capital city municipal staff per capita



Local government unit for innovation (or similar)



Prosperity beyond growth: an emerging agenda for European cities

Imogen Hamilton-Jones and Francesco Ripa, from LSE Cities, chart the growing interest in post-growth thinking in Europe's cities.

"A growth model centred on fossil fuels is simply obsolete," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pronounced from the podium of the European Parliament. Her words sent a wave of applause through the crowd at the 2023 Beyond Growth conference.

More than 7,000 people, from civil society, universities and governments, had gathered to unpack the promise of post-growth in what was hailed as a landmark moment for this once fringe agenda.[1]

But what did they mean by post-growth? The conference brought together a wide range of perspectives, from conservative politicians to climate activists to environmental scientists, from advocates for Kate Raworth's "Doughnut Economics" to those arguing for "degrowth". All of them recognised the call to reorient our focus away from the endless accumulation of GDP and towards social and ecological well-being.

The conference programme criss-crossed topics, from the care economy and Universal Basic Services, to biodiversity, food, digital futures and the four-day week. But though the downsides of growth are often felt most acutely in cities, the urban dimension was only mentioned incidentally in the discussions. This is all the more surprising given that our research has found that Europe's cities are at the centre of interest in post-growth thinking.

How can European cities make the most of this distinct political moment where space is opening for alternative economic thinking? What might a post-growth urbanism look like in Europe? And how might cities shape this growing movement?

Growing momentum in Europe

The seeds of growth-critical perspectives in Europe were planted back in 1973 with the Club of Rome's seminal *Limits to Growth* report. It argued that our addiction to growth is unsustainable and will, if continued, result in environmental, economic and social catastrophe.[2]

Calls for a scaling back of economic growth have mounted in Europe.[3] Critics argue that post-growth economics would plunge us into recession, but this assumption misses the deliberate and targeted approach of post-growth. To meet human needs within planetary boundaries, advocates argue, we must restrict harmful sectors (from aviation to advertising) that tend to drive economic growth, while investing in socially and ecologically valuable sectors of the economy (like care or education), regardless of their impact on GDP.[4]

Proponents of more widely accepted concepts like sustainable, inclusive development and "green growth" may also argue for more socially and ecologically responsible investment, but they maintain that it is possible for GDP growth to continue, decoupled from its environmental and social harms. Post-growth economists point out that there is no evidence that decoupling works in practice anywhere in the world, let alone that long promised green technologies will arrive in time to save us. As time runs out, we need to make a deliberate choice to prioritise well-being over GDP.[5]

As these proposals have been refined, there has been a growing awareness that the transition towards a post-growth society will look different in different parts of the world. Regions of the Global South (and some places in the Global North) may still need economic growth – albeit of a less extractive, more redistributive nature – to meet the basic needs of their inhabitants.[6] It makes sense that Europe – comparatively well-off, historically a leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions[7] and responsible for exporting extractive models of economic growth around the globe through colonisation – should recognise its responsibility to take the first steps in curbing growth.

Our analysis of academic and policy publications and internet search trends (see Figures 1 to 4 on p. 26) shows that the message of post-growth has been resonating across Europe. Over the last two decades, and especially since the 2008 financial crisis, interrelated post-growth concepts, such as "the circular economy", "the well-being economy", "doughnut economics" and "degrowth", are vying for space in public discourse and are increasingly finding their way into policy circles as well as academic debate.

A leading role for cities?

Post-growth is often discussed at the national and global level; its exploration within an urban context remains relatively understudied.[8] Our research (see Figures 5 and 6 on p.27) shows that this is beginning to change. Interest in urban post-growth, especially in Europe, is picking up pace, perhaps in recognition that post-growth has distinct potential in cities.

Cities have traditionally been celebrated as engines of growth, but are also sites where the harmful effects of growth tend to concentrate – from widening inequalities to air pollution and congestion, from mass tourism to overwork and mental stress. At the same time, dense urban environments can enable efficient use of energy and space, making it easier for us to envisage urban lifestyles that are compatible with planetary boundaries. European cities, especially, tend to have compact urban forms and historic centres built before the advent of the car. A "Doughnut" or "steady-state city", centred around walking and cycling and shared services like neighbourhood food hubs or community-owned renewable energy infrastructure, can feel within reach.

Urban density fosters face-to-face interactions, communal bonds and democratic relationships. This is a strong foundation for the pursuit of social well-being and the innovation of new economic relationships. European cities can build on their rich civic history in elaborating a new post-growth urbanism. In the 1970s and 80s, for example, urban movements in Europe championed cycling, housing cooperatives, local food production, street markets and self-managed common spaces – all concepts that resonate with post-growth urban strategies today.

As post-growth thinking gains momentum across Europe and cities from Barcelona to Glasgow to Zagreb explore post-growth experiments, it must stay grounded in its history. European cities should learn from longstanding values and ideas around well-being economics, including non-Western approaches to communal living,[9] to make the most of the current rush of enthusiasm on the European stage. More fundamentally, they should recognise Europe's obligation to curb the continent's harmful economic growth, which soared for so long at the expense of the rest of the world. In the crisis-riven context of the 2020s, European cities can take the lead in developing post-growth policies.

Imogen Hamilton-Jones, Programme Manager and Francesco Ripa, Policy and Engagement Manager, European Cities Programme, LSE Cities

People relax along the Isar river in the English Garden in Munich, Germany – one of Europe's largest urban parks. A slower pace and a renewed focus on well-being and sustainability are central to the way cities are envisioning a post-growth future.
Credit: Sonja Novak / Alamy Stock Photo

These figures chart the rising interest in post-growth thinking in academia, international policy agendas and public debate.

Figure 1: Trends over time in usage of post-growth-related terms in academic literature
Academic interest in post-growth has taken off around the globe in the past 20 years with publications on "sustainable development" and "green growth" steadily increasing. Since the mid-2000s, particularly after the 2008 financial crisis, there has been a surge of interest in "degrowth" and "doughnut economics".

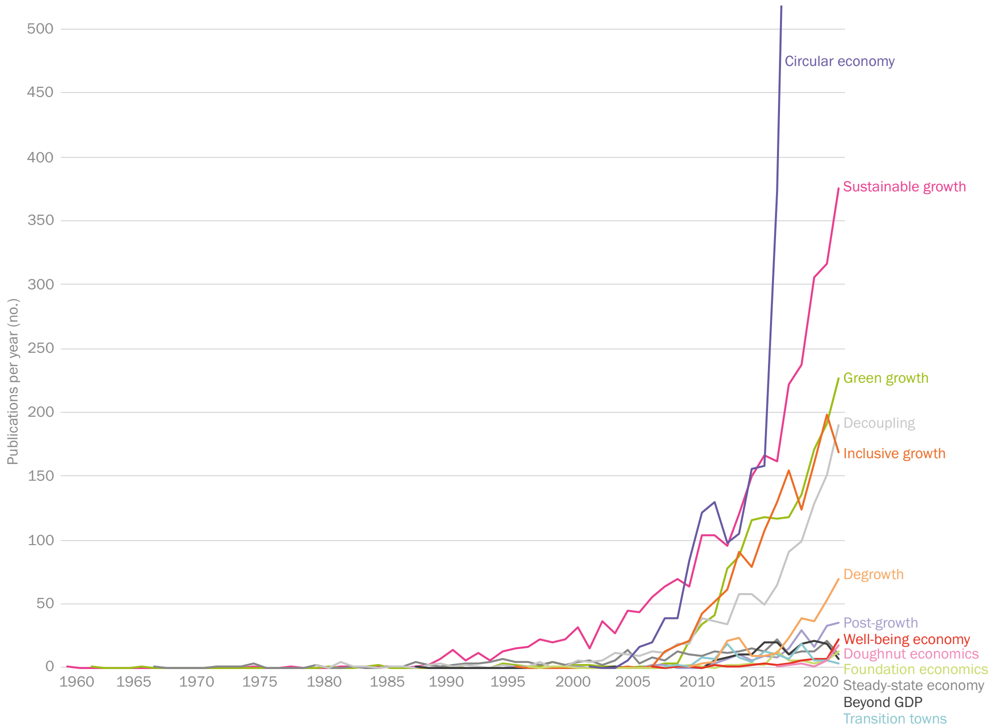


Figure 3: Search trends of green, inclusive and sustainable growth-related terms (top) and post-growth-related terms (bottom) (Google Trends 2022)
The public has shown an increased interest in post-growth terms in the last few years. The "circular economy" (a model that some argue can be compatible with GDP growth) continues to attract growing interest, but interest in the pro-growth terms ("sustainable growth", "green growth" and "inclusive growth") has been fairly flat. In contrast, "degrowth" and "doughnut economics" are steadily gaining popularity.

NB: Google Trends data is adjusted by normalising the actual search volume numbers to a 0-100 index. This means that a keyword's maximum popularity is shown as 100.

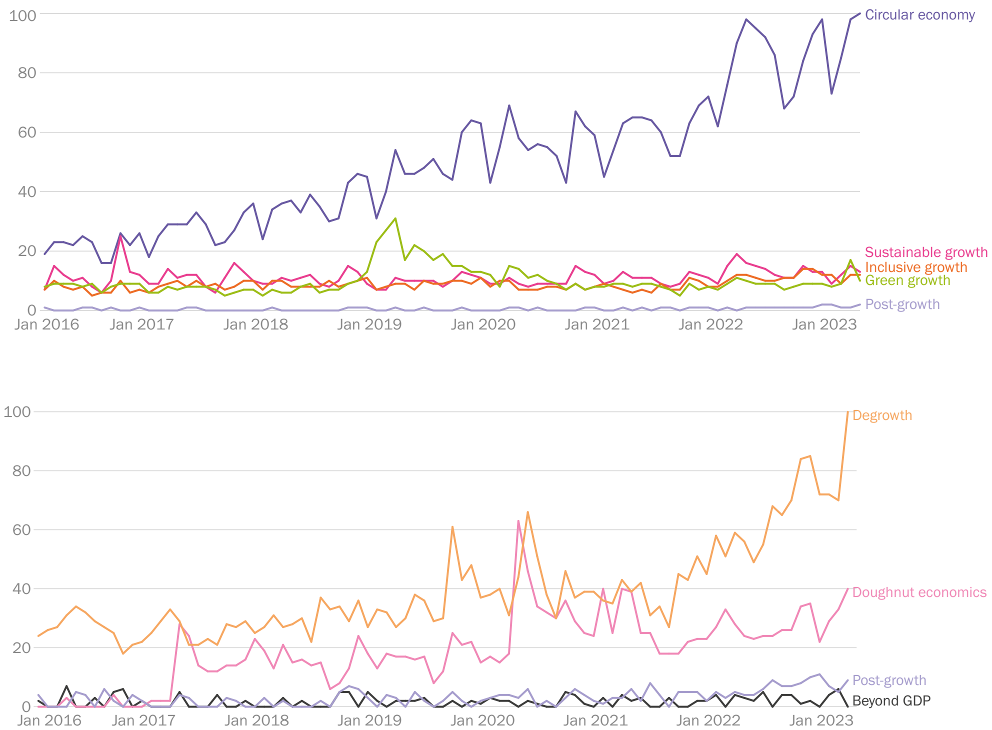


Figure 2: The prevalence of post-growth terms in policy publications from five leading multilateral and non-governmental organisations
Post-growth concepts are also beginning to feature in international policy agendas. Although most policy publications are still dominated by concepts of sustainable, inclusive and green growth, there is a new prevalence of post-growth terms: 9% of publications from OECD and 27% from the EU address the "circular economy" or "beyond GDP"; 25% from the World Economic Forum and 28% from UN address the "circular economy", "beyond GDP", "well-being economy" or "post-growth". Most strikingly, the IPCC's *Sixth Assessment Report* in 2022 included a comprehensive discussion of post-growth.

Figure 4: Prevalence of post-growth themes across the globe (Google Trends 2022)
Internet search trends reveal that Europe is the region where interest in growth-critical terms is most concentrated. "Degrowth" is the most Googled term in most of continental Europe. "Doughnut economics" is the most Googled term in the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark (as well as in New Zealand). In contrast, "sustainable growth" is the most Googled term in the US, Pakistan, Australia and South Africa; "green growth" in Canada and South Korea; and "inclusive growth" in India and Nigeria.

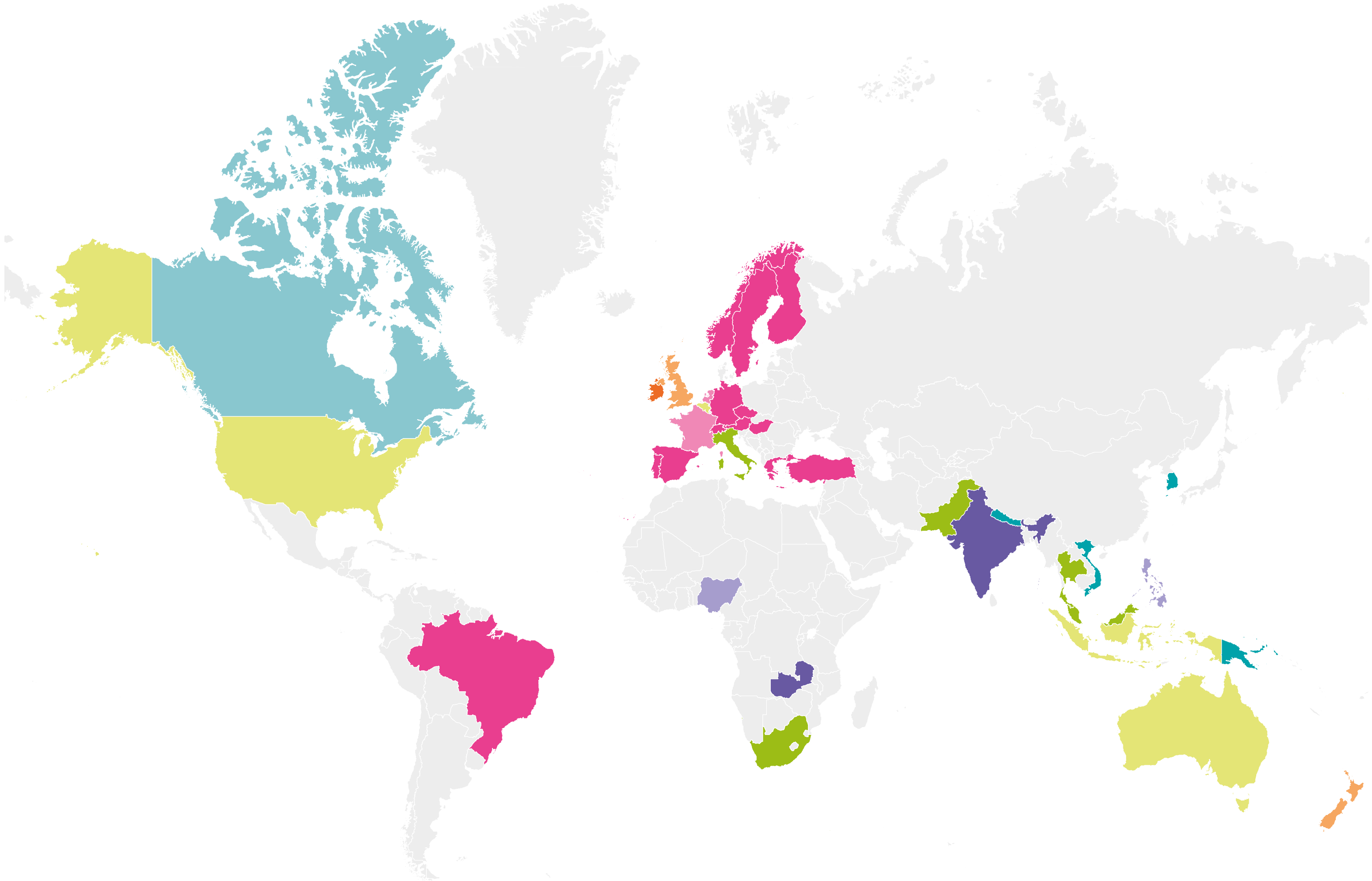


Figure 5: The emergence of post-growth thinking at the urban scale in academic literature
Cities have only recently come into focus among critics of growth. The first general academic publication about "beyond GDP", for example, was in 1987, but the first publication connecting "beyond GDP" with cities wasn't until 2016. Similarly, the first general entry for "well-being economy" is 1987, but it's not mentioned in relation to cities until 2014.

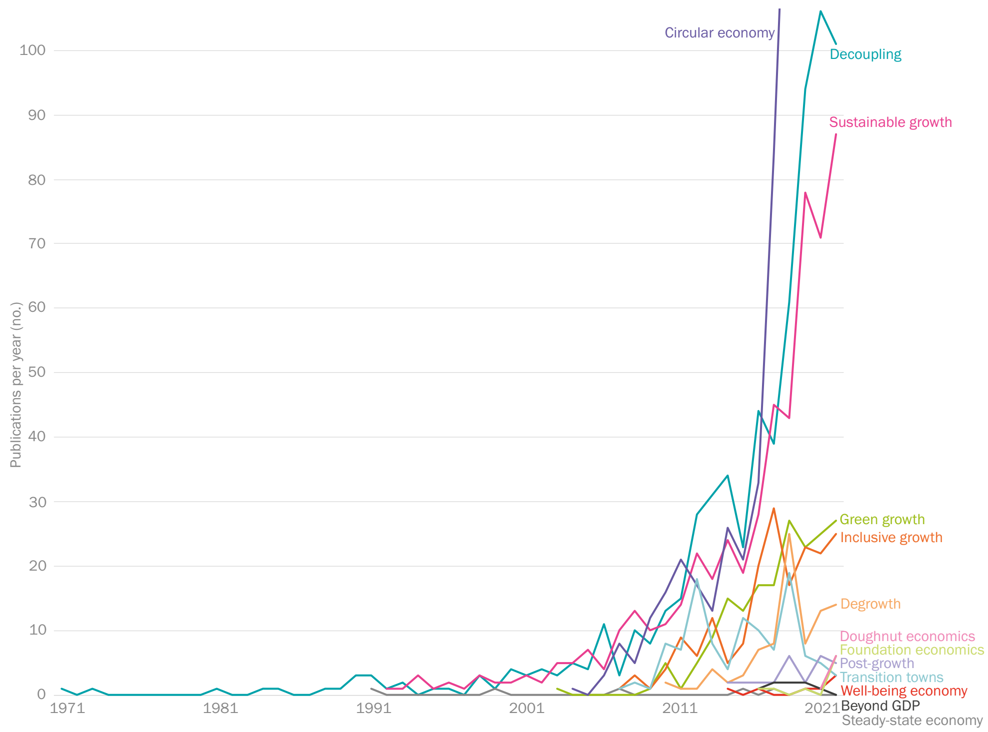
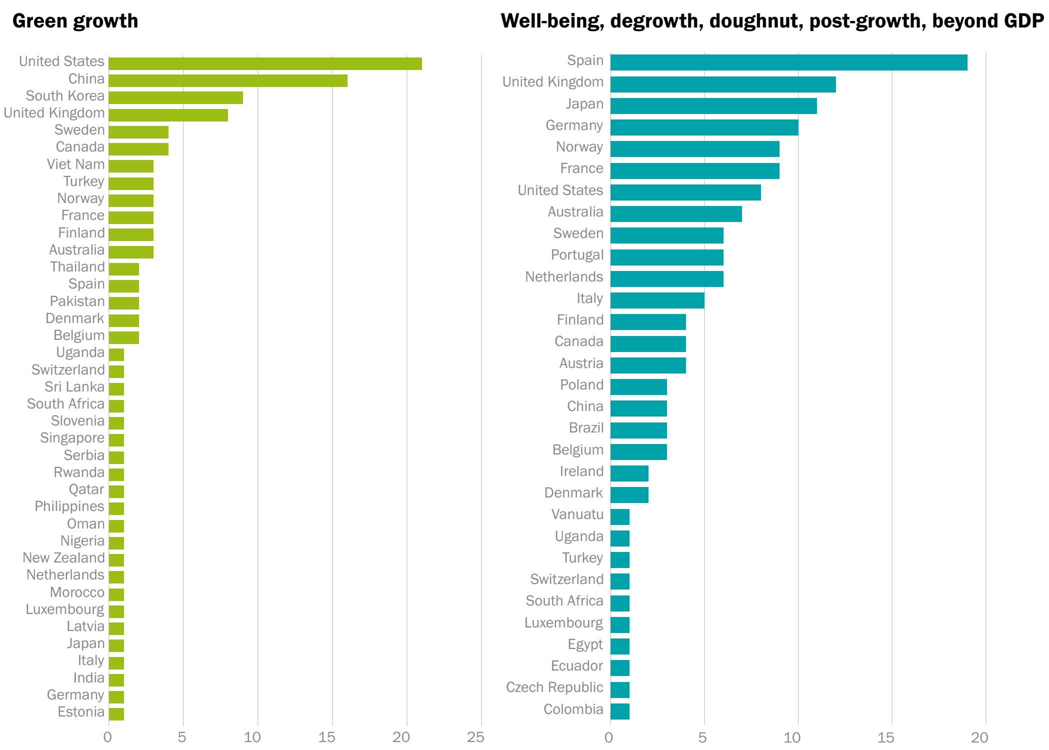


Figure 6: Countries of origin of post-growth and green growth research focusing on cities

Europe is the centre of interest in urban post-growth concepts. The US and China dominate the production of urban research on green growth, but Europe stands out for its interest in post-growth concepts. These findings correlate with a recent survey of post-growth urban research literature, which found that 28 of 40 case study cities were in Europe.[10]



Making time for post-growth in European cities

Imogen Hamilton-Jones, from LSE Cities, reflects on how European city governments are putting post-growth into practice, working under pressure to deliver urgent change while laying the groundwork for long-term economic transformation.

Post-growth advocates and urbanists often arrive at a similar proposition: we need to slow down.

Breaking with the pressure to produce and consume ever more, ever faster, means fostering alternative conceptions of the good life – grounded in conviviality, care and moderation.[1] These underlying values of post-growth have long enticed urban movements and city governments looking to build liveable cities fit for the twenty-first century. The Cittaslow network, founded in Italy in the 1990s, is now nearly 300-cities strong. Today, calls to embrace the "15-minute city" echo the principle that slower, more localised urban living could help heal the social and ecological cleavages of our times.

There is no shortage of ideas on what slow post-growth cities might look like – more walking and cycling, shorter working hours, sustainable tourism, more convivial, green public spaces and time for democratic participation. But how to get there?

City governments in Europe are working under intense pressure. They rush to keep pace with spending targets and funding deadlines, relentless news and election cycles, competing short-term emergencies and the ever-intensifying signals of imminent climate breakdown.[2]

At this critical moment, with so much else on their plates, how are European city governments beginning to slow down urban growth in practice? How can economic systems and cultural values be fundamentally and democratically transformed when we have no time to lose?

To begin to answer these questions, we have interviewed politicians, policy makers and activists from six European cities working against the clock to bring post-growth visions, cultures and policies to life.[3]

Short-term pragmatism: piloting post-growth innovation

The well-being economy, Doughnut economics, Community Wealth Building – a patchwork of post-growth visions is emerging in city strategies and urban policy documents across Europe. Academics and activists spend hours comparing these approaches – weighing up which might resonate most with the general public, which risk being incorporated into greenwashing agendas more easily, or which address both the local and global impacts and responsibilities of a city.

Policy makers, in contrast, want to get on with testing them on the ground. They prefer to treat these terms as interchangeable, as what one described as a range of "tools in the toolbox" of post-growth. As an elected official in Preston told us, Community Wealth Building may be a macroeconomic policy to be debated, but "it's also what we do on Monday. It's very, very deeply practical."

In this spirit, cities are trialling different strategies at once, and seeing what sticks. What works in Amsterdam's stable, green-left coalition does not resonate in the fractious coalition that has governed Barcelona in recent years. The Amsterdam City Doughnut has been implemented as a comprehensive, top-down "political assignment towards all the departments". In Barcelona, post-growth terms are rarely mentioned explicitly, even though a host of urban policies and programmes are founded around care, sufficiency, conviviality and equity. The *Metropolitan Strategic Plan of Barcelona* (PEMB) draws on an assortment of similar and complementary approaches (it uses Doughnut economics as an overarching framework, Foundational Economy to identify priorities, and Community Wealth Building for practical interventions).

Inspired by a shifting array of post-growth ideas, cities are experimenting with proposals to re-municipalise services and resources, re-localise the economy and re-centre care and well-being in areas including energy, transport, housing, food, skills and digital futures.

But many of these initiatives are small scale and short-term. Are they up to the task of delivering post-growth cities to Europe? When growth-driven urban projects are maintained alongside them (Amsterdam remains the world's largest gasoline port and Barcelona is considering airport expansion), it can be hard to believe that large scale economic transition is indeed underway.

Long-term systemic change: building a post-growth city government

One policy maker we spoke to described the painstaking process of introducing post-growth policies in Amsterdam as like "swimming against the current" of an urban system optimised over decades to prioritise economic growth above all else.

Cultural shifts are needed across society if post-growth values of well-being, commoning and care are to displace individualism and consumption. In city governments, that means forging new working practices and partnerships across departments and with citizens. To bring together ecological and social aims, environmental and economic development departments must work together. To democratise economic decision-making, citizens need to know their voices are taken seriously. In Amsterdam, efforts are being made with new Citizen Councils and a regulation that makes the recommendations from participatory civic processes more binding.[4]

Building support for post-growth is a slow process of growing understanding and trust. Cities must invest in training and resources for politicians and policy makers. New indicators and decision-making tools that prioritise well-being (currently being trialled in Brussels, London and Amsterdam) are a good start, but pivoting long held practices and priorities, as one policy maker pointed out, also requires "in-depth dialogue to go beyond quantifying metrics".

Swimming together: the international project of urban post-growth

Frustrated by slow progress as they battle the current within their own cities, some are calling for more unity in the urban post-growth movement at an international level. "We don't align ourselves well enough", one political organiser who worked in Preston told us: "We're all fighting our own little patch for survival. [We need] a 'post-growth coalition', which is coordinated and savvy."

But it seems wishful thinking that a single post-growth framework could meet the diverse needs of cities across Europe. Researchers are sceptical about urban interventions being copied and pasted between cities at speed[5] and policy makers are cautious of constantly jumping on board with the latest buzzwords:

"I'm very wary that there's always something new coming along ... we were talking about inclusive growth and then everybody started talking about

Community wealth building, the well-being economy and then the Doughnut approach. All these things have tools that we can use, but it's the end goal that matters …. It's high quality, well-paid, sustainable jobs that all our population have access to, it is a sustainable city where everyone can live a carbon-free lifestyle as much as possible and continuing to reduce inequalities. Those are the things that we want to achieve. Those are the things that citizens understand."
Elected official, Glasgow City Council

This vision of post-growth's "end goal" can resonate across borders, and even across ideological divides. Increasingly, post-growth interventions like re-municipalisation are proving as popular with conservative city governments, like Nice, as with green-left ones like Grenoble). Looking ahead, post-growth agendas and cross-European coalitions will need to stay adaptable and take time to learn from different approaches.

It might sound counter-intuitive, even perverse, to call for slowness in the middle of a climate emergency and acute cost-of-living crisis. City governments are understandably keen to trial post-growth innovations urgently, making the most of the current wave of interest and working within the tight corners of today's urban political possibilities. But they must also devote time and energy to long-term systemic transformation, collaboratively developed with their citizens and peers in cities across Europe and beyond.

Imogen Hamilton-Jones, Programme Manager, European Cities Programme, LSE Cities

Credit: Pickles of Preston Ltd.

Preston: Designing procurement for local communities

Preston is known for pioneering Community Wealth Building, a people-centred economic approach which redirects wealth back into the local economy.[6] Progressive procurement is at the heart of Preston's efforts to invest locally. Simplifying the procurement process to encourage small-scale sustainable local suppliers to bid for opportunities is a practical first step, and contributes to a broader effort to democratise economic expertise and decision-making: **"We talk a lot about ownership over the economy. But ownership over the debate, I think, is even more important."**

Image: Pickles of Preston is a family run cheesemonger based in Preston market since 1972.


Credit: Alexandra Gomes

Barcelona: Protecting the right to housing

Barcelona, led until recently by a former housing activist, made history with its *Right to Housing Plan 2016-2025*.[10] The plan was co-designed by citizens, local associations and architects. It takes a mission-oriented approach to strengthening tenant protections, building new housing units and curbing financial speculation. Shifting towards post-growth housing inevitably causes conflict with developers and real estate investors, but policy makers are cautiously prepared to confront these vested interests: **"How far do you dare to go as a politician? Do you dare to break with long established practices and stakeholders influencing city politics?"**

Image: La Borda housing cooperative is an internationally acclaimed model of collective ownership, affordability and sustainability.

Amsterdam: Tackling over-tourism

Tackling over-tourism and protecting residents' quality of life has become central to Amsterdam's new economic model. Amsterdam's Vision on Tourism emphasises that **"the city is not a product to make money, but an ecosystem to take part in."**[7] Building a sustainable visitor economy has meant banning new tourist shops and restricting visitor numbers, holiday rentals, cruise ships, and new hotels.[8] The government is rebuying assets in the city centre, converting hotels into homes or offices, and encouraging a slower and more mindful tourism that contributes **"value to the immediate environment."**

Image: Crowds on the Oudezijds Voorburgwal in the Red Light District of Amsterdam.

Credit: Jason Langley / Alamy Stock Photo

Copenhagen: Raising the climate ambition

Copenhagen is aiming to become the first carbon neutral city in the world, building on decades of ambitious climate policies. Current targets are for 75% of all trips in the city to be on foot, by bike or via public transport by 2025.[11] So when the city voted to introduce Doughnut Economics recently, there was some scepticism in city hall. **"Do we really need another way of talking about the problems we already know?"** In response, the city wove new thinking **"into some of the processes that already existed, instead of creating new ones."**

Image: People swimming in Copenhagen harbour and cycling on the Lille Langebro cycle bridge.


Credit: Jochen Tack / Alamy Stock Photo


Credit: Martin Bertrand / Alamy Stock Photo

Brussels: Developing post-growth funding criteria

Brussels recently introduced new criteria for economic, research and innovation subsidies to enterprises. From now until 2030, only projects deemed "exemplary" in their social and environmental impact will get access to a €450 million pot of city-level funding.[9] Policy makers told us how pleased they were to have enshrined this economic transition into local law, protecting these reforms from political swings. **"It would take several readings in the regional parliament to amend the law on subsidies again. Our goal was to make these rules not so easy to change."**

Image: The BIGH rooftop aquaponics farm in the centre of Brussels is one of the largest in Europe.


Credit: gerard ferry / Alamy Stock Photo

Glasgow: Investing in free childcare

Glasgow is investing in access to early learning to combat deep, entrenched inequalities and invest in social wellbeing. The Scottish Government is funding local authorities to deliver 30 hours a week of free childcare for three- and four-year-olds, but Glasgow is frontloading the investment, building new nurseries and focusing on closing the poverty related attainment gap in education.[12] An elected official told us that **"Glasgow is working to shift from a post-industrial to a post-carbon economy,"**[13] but that this transition will be founded on social justice and protecting social services, in ways the deindustrialisation in the 1980s and the recovery from the financial crisis failed.

Image: Children playing in Glasgow's Victoria Park.

Building a global community for local leadership

Glendean Hamilton and Jorrit de Jong, from the Bloomberg Center for Cities at Harvard University, champion the role universities can play in developing city leadership capacity.

The art of governing has always been associated with urban spaces. After all, *polis* – the ancient Greek word for "city" – is the root of the words "politics" and "policy". Determining how to live, survive and thrive together is what people in cities have had to do throughout history. In today's rapidly urbanising world, local leaders remain at the frontline of public problem-solving, facing challenges that range from poverty and climate change to migration pressures and organised crime.

Typically, local leaders work under less than ideal circumstances: many are underfunded and lack the resources and authority they need to tackle problems effectively. Mayors bring their expertise and skills to the job, but nothing quite prepares them for the dual task of being a community-facing public leader and the CEO of a large and complex governmental organisation.

Building problem-solving capabilities

At the Bloomberg Center for Cities at Harvard University, we have had the honour of working with extraordinary leaders from 22 European cities as they build key capabilities for public problem-solving. These capabilities include: thinking and acting strategically; leveraging data and evidence; forging collaborations with private and non-profit sectors; and innovating. Our approach is to share research findings in accessible formats, facilitate learning through executive education programmes and support leaders in the application of new insights.

After Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, Mayor Staķis of Riga, prioritised refugee management, leading the region in developing the first refugee plan and using data to track services and support for tens of thousands of people. Leveraging lessons from our executive education programme for mayors and guidance from our city support team, the city collected new data, built a dashboard, communicated effectively with the press and public, and increased trust and credibility. It also took these lessons into subsequent projects. "With the refugee centres, we've developed a 'data-first model' and validated operations with feedback from data," Mayor Staķis told us. "We are in the middle of the process of changing the culture."

In 2020, another major disruptive event forced mayors to innovate: the COVID-19 pandemic. On 19 March 2020, mayors from around the world convened in Harvard's Virtual Studio. Former New York City Mayor, Mike Bloomberg, kicked off the session by warning attendees that their job was about to get much harder. However, he added that if anyone could help communities adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was them. In the months that followed, the sessions became a platform for city leaders from 370 global cities to learn from faculty members about crisis management, economic recovery and the virus itself. Mayors told us: "It was, quite literally, a lifeline."

Importantly, university expertise was not the only driver of success. By uniting leaders from around the globe who faced similar challenges the programme reminded participants of the pandemic's reach and their own interconnectedness. As faculty members presented research-backed leadership and management approaches that could be put into practice, they also created space for leaders to become peers. In the US context, in many cases, mayors acted faster and more decisively than state and national governments.

Bridging the gap between academia and practice

Universities around the world are recognising the critical role they can play in equipping city leaders and local governments with insights, tools and techniques grounded in academic research. The Bloomberg–Sagol Center for City Leadership at Tel Aviv University recently celebrated the conclusion of their first cohort of Israeli mayors. The Center for African Cities and the University of Cape Town launched their programme for African mayors earlier this year in collaboration with Big Win Philanthropy and Bloomberg Philanthropies.

However, as much as universities have to offer to cities, and vice versa, they often struggle to forge productive partnerships. According to Peter Szanton, author of *Not Well Advised* (1981), these connections flounder when academics fail to understand the realities of city government and offer information and support that doesn't align with city leaders' practical needs. Advice can sometimes focus too much on policy and implementation becomes an afterthought. Academics can also fail to appreciate the deep knowledge local leaders and their staff have about their own city. Academic institutions and city governments inhabit different worlds, with different languages, habits and dynamics. Creating truly beneficial partnerships where collaboration flows both ways can be difficult, but it's a challenge that many scholars and centres of expertise in this emerging field, including the dynamic team at LSE Cities, have taken on with passion.

The key to building mutually supportive relationships between academia and practice is to arrive with a learning mindset and plenty of questions. What problems or opportunities are emerging in urban governance? What types of knowledge are essential to navigating these problems and opportunities? How can this expertise be delivered in an actionable way? What can city leaders learn from each other – and how can such an exchange be facilitated?

Investing in the next generation of local leaders

Together, our work is to build a global, mutually informing practice that leads to better leadership, capacity and results. The Bloomberg Center for Cities supports today's city leaders while at the same time investing in future leaders. Undergraduate and graduate students alike are discovering they can make concrete improvements to the world around them by working in cities. Harvard Graduate School of Design alumna Shannon Slade, an architect and current Bloomberg Harvard City Hall Fellow, works on flood preparedness in the coastal city of Charleston, South Carolina. In her first fellowship year, Shannon successfully engaged ten city departments to use and share a dataset that helped to identify the biggest flood risks and to prioritise investments in resiliency. Over the past seven years, more than 300 students have engaged with our work, including through fellowships in city governments.

A global community of local thinkers and doers, scholars and practitioners, seasoned professionals and motivated novices is working to advance the field of city leadership and governance. Together, they can make a tremendous impact on the lives of residents of cities worldwide.

Glendean Hamilton, Senior Director, Collaborations and Learning Community and Jorrit de Jong, Director both at Bloomberg Center for Cities, Harvard University

A newly created square in front of a school in Quarto Oggiaro, Milan. With the Piazze Aperte programme (open squares), Milan is transforming once car-filled squares into places of social interaction, vitality and gathering. The programme started in 2018, but most interventions took place during COVID-19 lockdowns. Initially planned as temporary interventions, many of these piazze aperte have now become permanent.

Credit: City of Milan

People march through the centre of Warsaw during the annual Equality Parade in support of LGBTQ rights. The Mayor of Warsaw, Rafał Trzaskowski, has championed policies that promote the inclusion and safety of the LGBTQ community, a key social justice issue where the Polish central government and the city government do not see eye to eye.
Credit: Łukasz Szczepanski / Alamy Stock Photo

Reforming urban governance in Europe

We need to focus on strengthening governance, not just policies, if we want to help Europe's cities, argues Nuno F. da Cruz, from LSE Cities. This means knowing more about how to secure effective governance reform in a European context.

As the essays and analysis in this publication demonstrate, Europe's cities face some huge challenges. That begs the question, what can social scientists do to help them? How can universities and research organisations best support leaders and policy makers at all levels of government in creating fairer, healthier and more sustainable cities?

One obvious answer might be that social scientists should focus on research into policies. They should devote themselves to evaluating existing urban policies, modelling new ones and making recommendations about which combination of policy instruments cities should adopt.

These days, most researchers and practitioners would acknowledge that this is too simplistic. The character and quality of a city's policies are likely to be determined by upstream factors and, in particular, by the nature of a city's governance: the legal powers, institutional arrangements and political culture that prevail at the urban level. That is why the governance conditions in a city are sometimes referred to as the "enabling environment".[1] Effective governance is a necessary, even if not sufficient, condition for the generation and implementation of good policies. It follows that we need a better understanding of how to strengthen urban governance.

Currently, we lack this understanding. We don't have roadmaps that can help European leaders at all levels (local, regional, national and supranational) identify concrete interventions that can strengthen city government capacity, make best use of resources, build coalitions and harness the latent energy within and outside government.

For example, should we decentralise the responsibility for making decisions in more policy sectors from nations to cities, as suggested by Ben Rogers earlier in this publication? If so, which policy sectors should we devolve? Or, as Catarina Heeckt argues, should we perhaps allocate more funding to local governments? If so, what levels of operational and capital expenditure per capita would be suitable? Should we rethink the sorts of skills our city leaders need, as follows from Jorrit de Jong and Glendean Hamilton's work at Harvard with mayors from around the world? If so, which skillsets should be prioritised?

These are difficult questions. But they will become a little easier if asked on a European rather than global scale. And if we have a theory about the fundamental determinants of effective city governance.

Anyone seeking to develop a detailed understanding of how governance works in a particular city, at a particular time, will have to recognise different constraining and enabling forces at work. Four are particularly important:

1. The relevant rules and institutions framing and facilitating public policies and decisions. The options facing city governments are conditioned by legal frameworks and administrative procedures that regulate the various authorities, institutions and other societal actors.

2. Availability of and access to resources. City governments are enabled and constrained by the resources available to them. This includes funding but also other assets like knowledge, skills, the human and social capital of politicians and municipal officers or the commitment to place of non-government actors.

3. The city's political culture, ideologies and beliefs. The choices facing local leaders will be shaped by political attitudes in the city and the preferences of civil society organisations, media platforms, organised lobbyists and voters.

4. The relationships between governance actors as well as the conditions regulating those interactions. Public bureaucracies (captured through the first and second points above) and elected officials (captured through the third point) do not operate in a vacuum. Other societal actors and the way they are interconnected, formally or informally, also help shape the flow of ideas, information, influence and authority in a city.

In addition, from time to time, these forces and the governance regimes they shape are disrupted by external shocks. Consider, for example, the extra powers conferred to governments during the COVID-19 emergency and, in some cases, the recentralisation of responsibilities that had previously been under cities' jurisdictions.[2]

The four arenas described above, plus external shocks, can provide the building blocks for a framework to help us understand, and so strengthen, urban governance in a deliberate way. Zooming in on each of these arenas and how they shape governance in cities remains an important exercise. But it's also important not to lose a sense of the big picture. We must be able to zoom out as well and consider the ways in which all these arenas come together to create the city's "enabling environment".

The key challenge for researchers wanting their work to help European city leaders will be exploring the relationships between governance and outcomes on the ground. To do this, we need analytical frameworks that facilitate comparative analyses between European cities and generate empirical insights that travel in time and space. The emphasis should then move from questions around what works to questions around why something does (or doesn't) work.

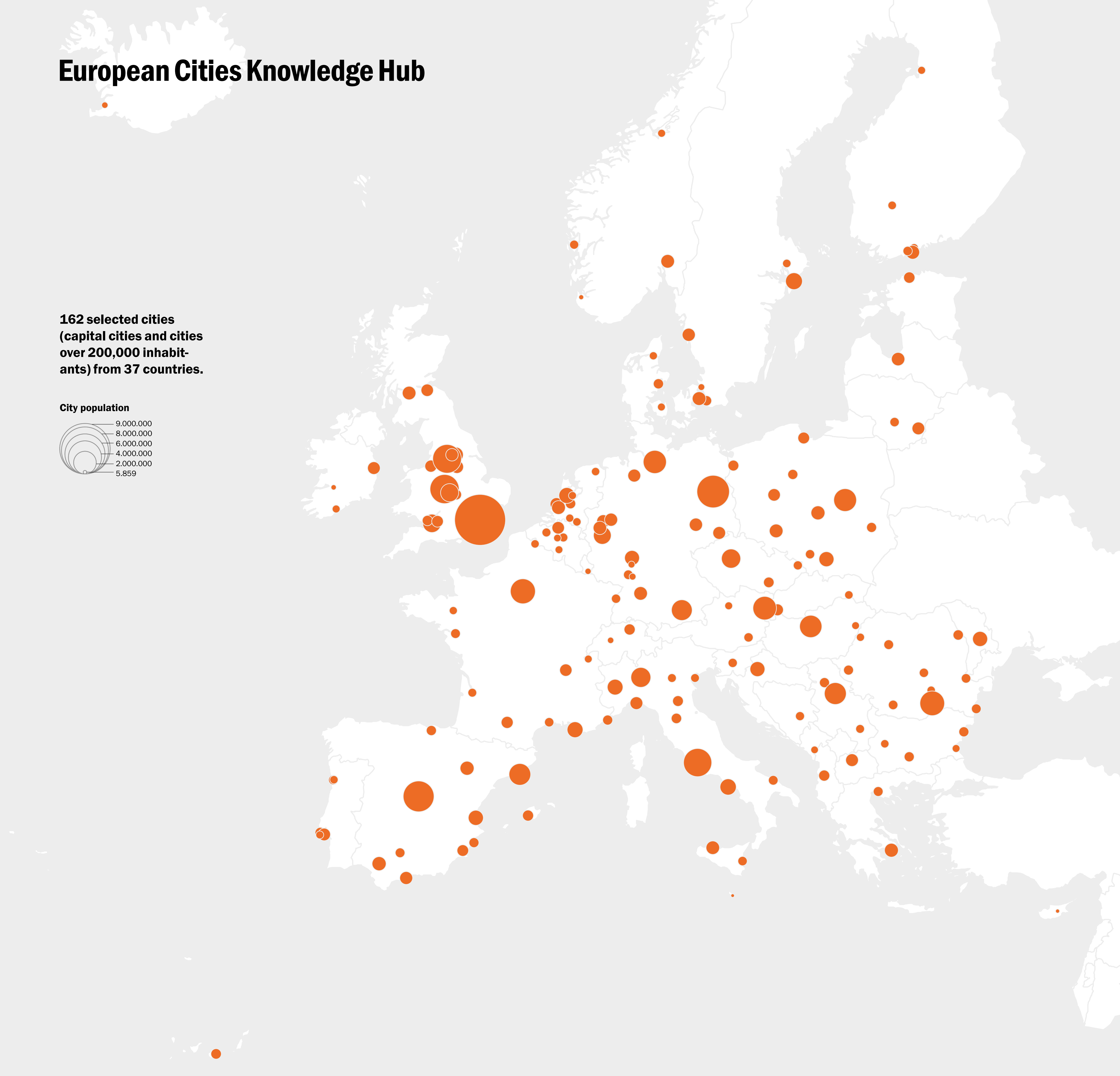
We want to find out what organisational features are helping city administrations to be more agile and to continuously adapt to rapidly changing conditions; what might be causing capable local governments to roll out unsustainable policies; or how is it that we sometimes achieve similar outcomes on the ground through completely different strategies and different types of actors.

At this juncture, either urban governance research takes a step towards explanation and prediction or it embraces the less ambitious role of an approach to study processes of collective action in cities. Echoing recent calls for research work that bridges disciplines, mixes methods and reconciles qualitative and quantitative data, I believe that there is a lot more we can do to help prepare our cities for the future. At the European Cities Programme, we are excited to do this for and with the leaders of our cities and their teams.

Nuno F. da Cruz, Research Lead, European Cities Programme, LSE Cities

European Cities Knowledge Hub

162 selected cities (capital cities and cities over 200,000 inhabit-ants) from 37 countries.



City	Country	City population
Tirana	**Albania**	**418,495**
Graz	Austria	291,000
Linz	Austria	207,000
Vienna	**Austria**	**1,920,000**
Antwerp	Belgium	532,927
Brussels	**Belgium**	**190,763**
Charleroi	Belgium	203,207
Ghent	Belgium	265,740
Leuven	Belgium	266,386
Sarajevo	**Bosnia & Herzegovina**	**275,524**
Burgas	Bulgaria	204,804
Plovdiv	Bulgaria	343,070
Sofia	**Bulgaria**	**233,607**
Varna	Bulgaria	341,737
Zagreb	**Croatia**	**769,944**
Nicosia	**Cyprus**	**55,014**
Brno	Czechia	379,466
Ostrava	Czechia	279,791
Prague	**Czechia**	**1,275,406**
Aalborg	Denmark	221,082
Aarhus	Denmark	352,751
Copenhagen	**Denmark**	**644,431**
Odense	Denmark	205,978
Tallinn	**Estonia**	**437,811**
Espoo	Finland	297,978
Helsinki	**Finland**	**658,800**
Oulu	Finland	209,893
Tampere	Finland	244,640
Vantaa	Finland	239,738
Bordeaux	France	260,958
Lille	France	234,475
Lyon	France	522,969
Marseille	France	870,731
Montpellier	France	295,542
Nantes	France	318,808
Nice	France	342,669
Paris	**France**	**2,165,423**
Rennes	France	220,488
Strasbourg	France	287,228
Toulouse	France	493,465
Berlin	**Germany**	**3,664,088**
Bremen	Germany	566,573
Darmstadt	Germany	159,174
Dortmund	Germany	587,696
Dresden	Germany	556,227
Düsseldorf	Germany	620,523
Essen	Germany	582,415
Frankfurt	Germany	764,104
Hamburg	Germany	1,852,478
Heidelberg	Germany	158,741
Köln	Germany	1,083,498
Leipzig	Germany	597,493
Mannheim	Germany	309,721
München	Germany	1,488,202

City	Country	City population
Stuttgart	Germany	630,305
Athens	**Greece**	**664,046**
Thessaloniki	Greece	325,182
Budapest	**Hungary**	**1,723,836**
Debrecen	Hungary	200,974
Reykjavík	**Iceland**	**135,688**
Cork	Ireland	208,678
Dublin	**Ireland**	**554,554**
Limerick	Ireland	94,192
Bari	Italy	316,140
Bologna	Italy	392,203
Catania	Italy	298,324
Florence	Italy	367,150
Genoa	Italy	560,688
Milan	Italy	1,371,498
Naples	Italy	914,758
Palermo	Italy	630,828
Rome	**Italy**	**2,761,632**
Turin	Italy	848,885
Venice	Italy	254,661
Verona	Italy	257,274
Riga	**Latvia**	**614,618**
Kaunas	Lithuania	297,214
Vilnius	**Lithuania**	**550,333**
Luxembourg	**Luxembourg**	**128,500**
Valletta	**Malta**	**5,859**
Podgorica	**Montenegro**	**191,637**
Almere	Netherlands	214,715
Amsterdam	**Netherlands**	**873,338**
Eindhoven	Netherlands	235,691
Groningen	Netherlands	233,273
Rotterdam	Netherlands	651,631
The Hague	Netherlands	548,320
Tilburg	Netherlands	221,947
Utrecht	Netherlands	359,370
Skopje	**North Macedonia**	**555,217**
Bergen	Norway	278,121
Oslo	**Norway**	**634,463**
Sandnes	Norway	81,305
Trondheim	Norway	210,496
Bydgoszcz	Poland	344,091
Gdańsk	Poland	470,805
Katowice	Poland	290,553
Kraków	Poland	779,966
Łódź	Poland	672,185
Lublin	Poland	338,586
Poznań	Poland	532,048
Szczecin	Poland	398,255
Warsaw	**Poland**	**1,794,166**
Wrocław	Poland	641,928
Cascais	Portugal	214,158
Lisbon	**Portugal**	**545,923**
Loures	Portugal	201,632
Porto	Portugal	231,828

City	Country	City population
Sintra	Portugal	385,654
Vila Nova de Gaia	Portugal	303,854
Chișinău	**Republic of Moldova**	**779,300**
Brașov	Romania	290,743
Bucharest	**Romania**	**2,106,144**
Cluj-Napoca	Romania	321,687
Constanța	Romania	317,832
Craiova	Romania	305,689
Galați	Romania	304,340
Iași	Romania	362,142
Oradea	Romania	222,736
Ploiești	Romania	233,663
Timișoara	Romania	332,983
Belgrade	**Serbia**	**1,659,440**
Niš	Serbia	260,237
Novi Sad	Serbia	341,625
Bratislava	**Slovakia**	**475,577**
Košice	Slovakia	238,593
Ljubljana	**Slovenia**	**285,604**
Alicante	Spain	337,304
Barcelona	Spain	1,636,732
Bilbao	Spain	346,405
Cordoba	Spain	322,071
Las Palmas	Spain	378,675
Madrid	**Spain**	**3,305,408**
Malaga	Spain	577,405
Murcia	Spain	460,349
Palma	Spain	419,366
Seville	Spain	684,234
Valencia	Spain	789,744
Zaragoza	Spain	675,301
Gothenburg	Sweden	588,123
Helsingborg	Sweden	150,106
Malmö	Sweden	352,090
Stockholm	**Sweden**	**979,394**
Uppsala	Sweden	237,927
Bern	**Switzerland**	**134,591**
Geneva	Switzerland	203,856
Zürich	Switzerland	421,878
Birmingham	United Kingdom	1,140,525
Bradford	United Kingdom	542,128
Bristol	United Kingdom	465,866
Cardiff	**United Kingdom**	**369,202**
Coventry	United Kingdom	379,387
Edinburgh	United Kingdom	527,620
Glasgow	**United Kingdom**	**635,640**
Greater Manchester	United Kingdom	2,848,286
Kirklees	United Kingdom	441,290
Leeds	United Kingdom	798,786
Liverpool	United Kingdom	500,474
London	**United Kingdom**	**9,002,488**
Sheffield	United Kingdom	589,214
West Midlands	United Kingdom	2,939,927
West of England	United Kingdom	1,165,600

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