



“Fostering more aligned cooperation is on the agenda of the G20 Italy in 2021. Moving from good intentions to a global roadmap of urban recovery will require strong and accountable implementation mechanisms and institutional frameworks.”

– Nicolas BUCHOUD, Global Solutions Initiative

Image Source: Wikimedia Commons. February 23, 2020. Italian government task force to face coronavirus outbreak. Image by the Governo Italiano.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:2020_coronavirus_task_force.jpg



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Which growth can we achieve?

Nearly fifteen years ago, the subprime mortgage crisis in the United-States triggered a global financial crisis. It was largely a consequence of real estate finance going wrong, supplying massive quantities of housing nowhere near basic services and urban amenities and mobility infrastructure. Since then, new prudential regulations and global financial, macro-economic governance mechanisms have been entailed by the G20, which has successfully secured the global banking system.

The same G20 has yet devoted much less efforts to address the urban roots of the crisis, whereas massive amounts of constructions have continuously been delivered across the globe without much corresponding urban and infrastructure planning. Then in less than a year in 2020, many social and economic indicators have declined to pre-2010's level, erasing years of growth while the environmental costs are yet to be paid for.

The prediction of what kind of economy will emerge from the pandemic is currently difficult to make but INTERSECTING argues we should not wait to take responsibility and refine our collective understanding of the crisis several causes and of the options that are at our hand. Even if it had a spatial expression, the financial crisis of 2008 could clearly be attributed to actors and processes of financial markets and reforms could be built accordingly and economists' recommendations targeted central banks as saviors to restore confidence in markets. In 2020, the problems caused by the pandemic have affected all sectors. As we perceive urbanization has something to do with the unfolding of the crisis, no single explanation can account for the disruptions it has triggered. Therefore, no sectoral reform could help restore confidence in economic demand and supply after the pandemic. 'Framing the crisis' (M. Engels) depends on our collective ability to align and intersect various factors, from bridging the gaps between global resilience and community resilience, to enact creative economy, to entail stronger partnerships to support the 2030 Agenda, to shape health and welfare policies that fits the dimensions of our urban age, to revive global agreements.

One of INTERSECTING's findings is that cross-border data management and regional value chains could well become the foundations of more active and inclusive regional agendas, including smart urbanization and infrastructure in a wider social and political perspective. In any case, trust is

a critical dimension of all post-COVID-19 options and recovery scenarios, one which has to be (re)built not only in the alleys of global conferences but also in the backstreets of every neighborhoods. Even in the digital society, it is not all about data superhighways, as even the G20 sustainable development agenda that has emerged since 2016 has demonstrated.

The Italian G20 presidency has made clear the local level should become part of post COVID-19 recovery solutions and to tackle longer term environmental challenges, and it has announced the organization of several meetings, including an international summit of environment and energy ministers scheduled in the summer of 2021 in Napoli and connecting with the Urban 20, to make the case for G20 action on urbanization. Even before the pandemic outbreak, more than 80% of the regions in OECD countries were not keeping on track on any of their seventeen sustainable development goals (SDGs). Key report from 2019 and 2020 were pointing out to the pre-pandemic period immense challenges to reach out the targets of the 2030 agenda, including urbanization and infrastructure development as critical issues.¹ Unless coordinated local and global efforts are undertaken to reposition the SDGs at the core of recovery policies, the delivery of the Agenda 2030 will be slowed down for a long time, with rising disparities among local and regional governments hampering global climate and carbon neutrality goals.²

Issuing a G20 agenda on urbanization that is effective depends on many factors. Locally, such a move is complicated by the fact that most local government leaders are called to undertake long-term transformative actions and plans that will bear consequences well after their own particular mandate. Therefore, it is not only about understanding the role of infrastructure in building up resilient societies, it is also about creating new forms of productive and transformative partnerships at the confluence of previously unconnected spheres of knowledge and policy. To bridge the gaps between global and community resilience, data should become a public good shared between city governments, urban communities and citizens, by decision makers at national levels and international financial institutions. Digital governance is key to sustain multilateralism in an interconnected urban world, whereas a handful of monopolistic companies are now accumulating data from billions of people around the world.

INTERSECTING is edited at pivotal moment when the reconciliation between the macroeconomic objectives of the G20 and the regional recovery strategies can additionally leverage large scale social and environmental investments and benefits. This is a chance. The development and coordination of data collection and of a shared smart city agenda -including smarter infrastructure systems and mobility services- across key economic regions, such as the ASEAN or Europe could provide a robust leverage and drive the economy out of the crisis in an inclusive and sustainable

way. But this has to go with creativity. From Milan to Bandung, cities' creativity has not been erased by the crisis and prove there can be many creative ways to build the infrastructure of a new sustainable economy. The conjunction of infrastructure for distribution and the development of creative economy is a way to support local communities, create jobs and maximize the inclusion potential of digital services, while taking into account that large segments of labor markets are informal, especially in emerging and lower income countries. Improving the articulation between multilevel governance and local responses could help address the vulnerabilities and exposure of poorer communities to pandemics and other global risks. It would also give more leverage to local governments and civil society players to address growing fragmentations within the middle-classes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has added a new challenge to 'recouple economic progress with social progress' and made this historic commitment of the Global Solutions Initiative more pressing and more necessary. The pandemic's aftermath might become one of greater fragmentations, greater inequalities. Addressing the 'Reversals of Fortune' the World Bank has identified in its report of the fall of 2020 requires global thinking but also to develop a common consolidated knowledge of local solutions that have been implemented successfully in the past years, understanding that cities, subnational governments and national governments closely depend on each other. National policies and

the enforcement of future climate, biodiversity or other trade, social and digital global commitments would benefit from redesigning a robust, multilateral new urban agenda.

1. The Future is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development, United-Nations Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2019, co-chaired by Peter Messerli and Endah Murniningtyas, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf

2. Sustainable Development Report 2020, The Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19, SDSN, Bertelsmann Stiftung, June 30, 2020, https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2020/2020_sustainable_development_report.pdf See and Europe Sustainable Development Report 2020, Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, SDSN, IEEP, Dec. 08, 2020 https://s3.amazonaws.com/sustainabledevelopment.report/2020/europe_sustainable_development_report_2020.pdf