

FACING AND LEARNING FROM COVID-19: EUROPEAN AND SPANISH URBAN STRATEGIES FOR A RESILIENT FUTURE

EUKN Policy Lab for Spain
Final Report of the Activities for 2020

European Urban
Knowledge Network



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Knowledge Network



About the EUKN

The European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN) EGTC is the only independent EU Member State driven network in the field of urban policy, research and practice. As a strategic knowledge partner, it supports its members through tailor-made services such as Policy Labs on contemporary urban topics. The EUKN has been closely involved in the establishment of the Urban Agenda for the EU and the global New Urban Agenda, and has been actively supporting the further development of these strategic agendas through events, research, and expert analysis. The EUKN Secretariat, located in The Hague, is responsible for the overall coordination and operations of the network.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CECOPAL	Torrent's Municipal Operational Coordination Centre
COP21	Twenty-first session of the UN Conference of the Parties
EC	European Commission
EGD	European Green Deal
EU	European Union
EUKN EGTC	European Urban Knowledge Network EGTC
HiAP	Health in All Policies approach
MITMA	Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility, and Urban Agenda
NLC	New Leipzig Charter
PAM 2020	Torrent's 2020 Municipal Action Plan to fight COVID-19
PGT	Territory Governance Plan
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SUA	Spanish Urban Agenda
UAEU	Urban Agenda for the EU
WHO	World Health Organisation

BACKGROUND

On 14th January 2021, the EUKN Secretariat virtually hosted the Policy Lab 'Facing and Learning from COVID-19: European and Spanish Urban Strategies for a Resilient Future', jointly prepared with the *Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility, and Urban Agenda* (MITMA). The webinar was part of the 'Thinking Beyond the Crisis' series, an initiative of the EUKN Secretariat to generate and exchange knowledge on the urban impacts of the coronavirus outbreak on its member countries and the strategic responses implemented towards facing it.

By providing an interactive space for exchange and reflection, the webinar offered insights into **how cities across Europe are rethinking their approach to the urban space** in light of the pandemic, embracing **health as a more holistic and transversal concept** which encompasses different dimensions of everyday life. During the first part of the event, after an informative overview of city actions and policy responses presented by EUROcities, experts from the Provincial Deputation of Barcelona (ES) and the municipalities of Torrent (ES), Paris (FR) and Milan (IT) presented the strategies put in place by their administrations. In the second part, the discussion was enfolded from different thematic perspectives, allowing participants to focus on urban challenges and opportunities related to: (1) sustainable mobility and transport; (2) urban planning; (3) inequality; and (4) national urban policies.

POLICY RELEVANCE

What we have learned from the past months is that **urban impacts and responses to the pandemic differ depending on a range of factors**. These include but are not limited to: city size and morphology; institutional capacity; population affected; geography; national approach and culture. As demonstrated by strategies implemented to contain the virus and protect citizens and economies, measures can in fact vary from preventative to reactionary, either in the short, medium, or longer term.¹ In fact, due to soaring infection rates and the threat of new COVID-19 variants spreading across Europe, the early days of 2021 have seen most countries extending or renewing their lockdown measures, strengthening restrictions once again.² While the first vaccines approved by the European Commission³ are being slowly distributed to the population, the pace of vaccination varies from country to country and, generally, the vaccine rollout has not been as swift as initially hoped for.

At the local level, given their share of the global population, **cities have been majorly hit**, suffering from the social, infrastructural, and economic crisis set in motion by the pandemic. On the flipside of the coin, **cities are also best placed to act and rethink the approach to the urban space** on the road to recovery. Cities have indeed both acted as implementation arenas of nation-wide measures and as laboratories for devising innovative strategies.

¹ See: OECD (2020). 'City policy responses'. *Tackling coronavirus (COVID-19)*. Last updated 13 May 2020. <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/en/policy-responses>.

² See: BBC News (2021). 'Covid: How are European countries tackling the pandemic?'. *Explainers*, 24 February 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53640249>.

³ More information available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/safe-covid-19-vaccines-europeans_en#information-about-vaccination-in-the-eu.

With this in mind, complementarity and coordination become key if an efficient post-COVID recovery is to be realised. The slogan #TalkWithCities is gaining traction among EU institutions and cities themselves⁴ to reiterate the crucial role local authorities play in the delivery of National Recovery Plans and should therefore be involved in their design. Understanding the importance of local and regional ownership of sustainability agendas, the Spanish Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda (MITMA) has been working alongside Spanish cities and municipalities towards the localisation of national and international goals via the formulation of *Local Action Plans* within the strategic, non-binding, flexible policy framework provided by the *Spanish Urban Agenda*⁵ (SUA) (or UAE - *Urban Agenda Española*). It is against this background that the Policy Lab was shaped.

KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY LAB

The goal of the Policy Lab was to explore cities' strategic role in recovering from the dredging effects of the pandemic, learning from different urban strategies and their successes and failures.

The key objectives were:

1. To **exchange knowledge and experiences** of Spanish and other European cities' strategies to face and cope with the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, from the perspective of *urban health* as a holistic concept applied to urban development;
2. To **co-produce knowledge on urban health strategies** which can be translated into practical recommendations and action plans;
3. To **highlight key recommendations** for Spanish municipalities to locally adapt these strategies, within the framework of the Spanish Urban Agenda and Local Action Plans.

⁴ See: EUROCITIES (2021). EU calls on member states to #TalkWithCities. 11/02/2021. <https://eurocities.eu/latest/eu-calls-on-member-states-to-talkwithcities/>.

⁵ See: <https://www.aue.gob.es>.

CASE STUDIES



1. CITY ACTIONS AND POLICY RESPONSES TO SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF COVID-19

Bianca Faragau-Tavares, Senior Policy Advisor, EUROCITIES

EUROCITIES' ongoing research on **city actions and policy responses to mitigate the socio-economic effects of COVID-19**⁶ provides a helpful snapshot of some of the key trends on how cities across Europe are responding to the unprecedented health, economic and social crisis brought by COVID-19. As a common denominator, European cities and, more in general, **urban areas are taking the lead**. More than national governments, they are redefining and shifting policy priorities, mobilising resources and acting in a timely, proactive and innovative way. From immediate emergency responses such as the extension of healthcare and shelter or service digitisation, many cities also acted with a view to building urban resilience in the longer term, converging social and green policy agendas.

"The crisis is first and foremost a health crisis, but it soon developed into an economic and social one..."

As it emerged from EUROCITIES' investigation, the **economic and social impacts of the pandemic have put the highest pressure on the local level**. While sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and retail have seen an undeniable drop in employment, most

"Local action represented a critical safety net..."

economic and social sectors have experienced an **increasing demand for digitisation** and information and communications technology. To fulfil this new demand, the urban sphere thus needs to adapt and strive for new skills-matching.

Figure 1: Delivery of basic material assistance to the elderly. Source: EUROCITIES website, n.d.

The pandemic has certainly acted as an **exacerbator of pre-existing inequalities**, with vulnerable urban communities becoming more vulnerable. It has also led to the **emergence of new groups of people at risk of poverty** – the **"new urban poor"**⁷, comprising middle-income earners becoming unemployed, freelancers, self-employed, working students, and undocumented migrants who have lost their stable sources of income. Inevitably, this has translated into worsening pressure over the health and social system, where rising number of citizens are in need of support and assistance. Once again, it is to cities' interest and responsibility to meet these



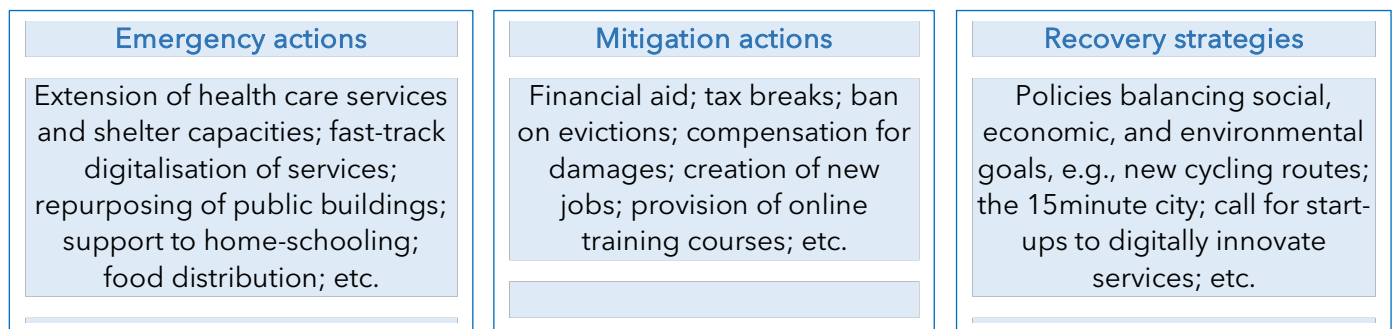
⁶ This research builds on an existing collection of economic measures on subnational level collated in the *Economic Bulletins* of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), while also reporting examples from more than 75 cities based on news from municipalities' websites and EUROCITIES web platform [COVID-19 live updates](https://eurocities.eu/latest/city-actions-and-policy-response-to-social-and-economic-impacts-of-covid-19/). <https://eurocities.eu/latest/city-actions-and-policy-response-to-social-and-economic-impacts-of-covid-19/>.

⁷ EUROCITIES (2020). *Position paper: A stronger social Europe powered by inclusive cities*, p.3. <https://eurocities.eu/latest/europes-recovery-must-be-social/>.

requirements with enough budgetary resources.

In order to address some of these worrying trends, cities have quickly designed and implemented a variety of actions. These can be clustered as **emergency actions**, **mitigation actions** and **recovery strategies**. The below diagram offers an example of policy menus under each cluster.

Figure 2: Example of actions taken by cities to face, cope with, and recover from the COVID 19 crisis. Source: the authors. 2021.



Whether addressing the short-, medium-, or long-term, cities' proactivity helped to not only implement and test national policies, but also to complement where they were falling short. In this sense, by capitalising on their unique proximity to peoples, the urban scale managed to guarantee a safety net to citizens, especially the most vulnerable.

Lessons collected so far by EUROCITIES advise cities to further enhance solidarity vis-à-vis austerity and to facilitate the uptake of a **people-centred approach** also at higher governance levels. If opportunity lies in crises, there is already evidence on how **COVID-19 has acted as an accelerator of green and just transitions**, helping to bridge the localisation of European social and green agendas. Nevertheless, given the critical financial strains faced by urban areas at the moment, the **support of the national and EU levels** becomes determinant. It is by engaging in coordinated and multi-level partnerships that urban areas can contribute to a sustainable and inclusive recovery. An enabling environment for collaboration is already on the expense; this is increasingly evident in the unprecedented availability and flexibility of funding schemes for cities both at the national and EU levels (i.e. the *Next Generation EU*). Moreover, **cities are being more and more recognised as engines for change**⁸, whose voice and involvement in the design of recovery plans is crucial.⁹

⁸ See: *The New Leipzig Charter: The transformative power of cities for the common good*, adopted by the Informal Ministerial Meeting on Urban Matters on 30 November 2020, under the 2020 German Presidency of the Council.
https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/brochure/new_leipzig_charter/new_leipzig_charter_en.pdf.

⁹ See: the European Committee of the Regions (CoR)'s interview with Juan Espadas (ES/PES), Mayor of Seville and Chair of the CoR's ENVE Commission and the Green Deal Going Local working group, "Our cities after COVID-19: the undiminished relevance of the Leipzig Charter".
<https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/Undiminished-relevance-of-the-Leipzig-Charter.aspx>.



2. DESIGNING RESILIENT AND HEALTHY CITIES: THE STRATEGY OF BARCELONA'S PROVINCIAL DEPUTATION

Lorena Perona, Housing and Urban Planning Office, Provincial Deputation of Barcelona

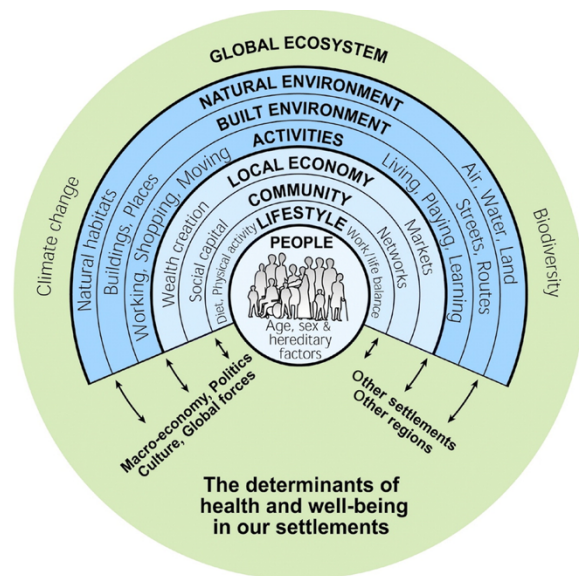
Since 2010, the Provincial Deputation of Barcelona has embraced **the principle of Health in all Policies** ('Salut a totes les Polítiques'), operated within the framework of a **Table for Urban Improvement** ('Taula per a la Millora Urbana') to foster the design and livability of healthy urban environments.¹⁰ It is against this background that the **Urban Environment and Health**¹¹ project took shape, grounding on collated evidence that identifies **urban planning as an effective tool to promote health**.

With the overarching goal of creating urban environments which encourage the healthy behaviour of residents and that minimise environmental risk factors to their health, the project is led by a working group bringing together professionals from different academic disciplines, from urban planning to infrastructures and housing; sport; the environment; economic development and welfare; and so on. This multidisciplinary working group shares the important mission of raising awareness among local authorities on how health is conditioned by structural policies (Figure 3). The inter-siloed nature of the project's lead has so far been critical to its success, **reinforcing the need for stronger inter-sectorial collaboration** between public administrations and experts.

"We are convinced that this crisis can be turned into an opportunity to promote a health approach in all planning policies..."

In line with established international frameworks such as the SDGs and the Urban Agenda for the EU (UAEU)¹² and the Spanish Urban Agenda (SUA), the Urban Environment and Health project is **inspired by the Health in All Policies (HiAP)**¹³ **approach to public policy** popularised by the World Health Organisation (WHO) which "systematically takes into account the health implications of decisions, seeks synergies and avoids harmful health impacts in order to improve populations health and health equity" (WHO, 2015, p.34).

Figure 3: Determinants of health and wellbeing in the urban environment. Source: Perona, 2021.



¹⁰ The Table for Urban Improvement (TxMU) is a "cross-cutting initiative sponsored by Barcelona Provincial Council [...] as part of the assistance provided to local councils in improving neighbourhoods with special needs. It was created with the goal of improving the service given to local councils through cooperation, knowledge sharing and cross-functional, multidisciplinary work within the corporation." <https://www.diba.cat/web/hua/barris/taula> (Catalan).

¹¹ See: <https://www.diba.cat/en/web/entorn-urba-i-salut/presentacio> (Catalan).

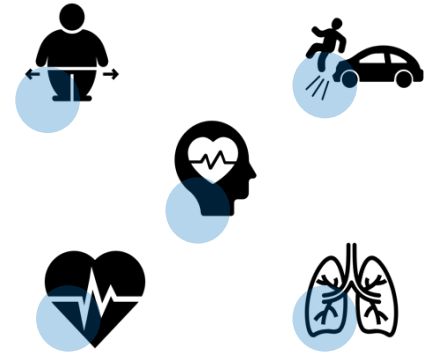
¹² Launched in May 2016 under the Pact of Amsterdam, the UAEU represents a new multi-level working method promoting cooperation between Member States, cities, the European Commission and other stakeholders in order to stimulate growth, liveability and innovation in European cities, and to identify and successfully tackle social challenges. See: <https://ec.europa.eu/futurium/en/urban-agenda-eu/what-urban-agenda-eu>.

¹³ See: https://www.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9360:2014-about-health-all-policies&Itemid=40177&lang=en.

In practice, the project guides and supports local municipalities in the **design of pilots and action plans with an urban health lens**. From the onset of the project, the **supply of scientific data** has been useful to engage local administrations in the integration of this new paradigm. Enough evidence has been produced proving the existence of a close relationship between people's health and the environment in which they live and work. Conclusive findings also exist which demonstrate how structural policies can *de facto* create health inequalities.¹⁴ Nevertheless, **a major challenge has been taking action beyond scientific findings** and bringing theory into practice.

Example

Through a close collaboration with local administrations, the project proposes a **comprehensive strategy to fight the five main chronic diseases** linked to the urban built environment: obesity and overweight; mental health issues; road injuries and accidents; cardiovascular diseases; respiratory diseases. This is done via a set of localised actions / recommendations for the redesign and repurpose of public and private space, encouraging citizen participation. Emphasis is given to monitoring and evaluation, stressing the need to improve health indicators.



Accompanying the general support services provided to municipalities in Barcelona's province, the **Urban Health and Environment project has created new knowledge**, generating useful methodologies made available through practical guides and dossiers.¹⁵ To a certain extent, the health crisis brought by the **COVID-19 outbreak reinforced the relevance of the people-centred approach** promoted by the project. In fact, it demonstrated how at the onset of the crisis, municipalities were already on the right track.

With a view to further capitalise on the **COVID-19 crisis as a catalyst for accelerating positive change**, Barcelona Provincial Deputation plans to further strengthen the transversal and inter-sectorial work between different agencies, with the long-term mission to guarantee that every urban policy puts people and their quality of life at their core.

"Ten years of transdisciplinary work have proved us that together we can multiply positive results in favour of people's health and wellbeing..."

¹⁴ See: the EU funded SOPHIE project. <http://www.sophie-project.eu/index.htm>.

¹⁵ The different guides are available at: <https://www.diba.cat/en/web/entorn-urba-i-salut/publicacions>.



3. FACING COVID-19 IN A MEDIUM-SIZED MUNICIPALITY IN A METROPOLITAN AREA: THE CASE OF TORRENT (VALENCIA)

Andres Campos Casado, Strategy, Innovation and Economy Advisor, Municipality of Torrent

Located within the wider metropolitan area of Valencia in eastern Spain, the municipality of Torrent has strong ambitions to become a reference city for digital and sustainable transitions. As its **2014-2020 Sustainable and Integrated Urban Development Strategy (EDUSI Torrent)**¹⁶ testifies, this medium-sized city had already taken important steps towards revising its urban policy and practice before the pandemic. From the digitalisation municipal administrative services, to creating healthy routes ('rutas saludables'), reducing the impact of road traffic, and fighting energy poverty, Torrent's City Council found itself well-prepared when COVID-19 hit Spain.

In fact, the **2020 Municipal Action Plan to fight COVID-19**

(PAM 2020 - 'Plan de Actuación Municipal 2020 de lucha contra el COVID 19'), can be seen as a continuation of the long-term strategy previously set in motion by the current administration in order to: 1) improve the quality of services provided; 2) promote electronic administration; 3) become a smart city. Moreover, Torrent's **active role in both Spanish and European city networks**¹⁷ granted the City Council vast experience with agile bureaucracy and the ability to fast adapt to the 'new' normal brought by the pandemic. In this direction, the municipality's willingness to learn and reflect collaboratively is a trait which reflects at all levels of the public administration. It is following this spirit, that the municipality has joined strategic networks, built multi-sectorial partnerships. and participated in peers' exchanges at the local, national and EU level. This, and access to additional EU funds via open calls, has helped the city to advance change at an impressive pace.

*"COVID-19
provided us impetus
to convert into a
more agile
administration..."*



Thanks to already existing institutional flexibility, the municipality was able to quickly reassess its priorities in the PAM 2020.¹⁸ Aligned with the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the plan elaborates **a public strategy centred on people, prosperity, and the environment**, which is the result of deliberations and agreements among experts, practitioners and opposition parties. With a proactive approach to tackle the pandemic since its early stages, the PAM 2020 also integrates an effective monitoring and evaluation system with well-defined indicators for each of its **nine strategic axes** and their associated operational objectives, ninety-five in total. Of these, already 72% of objectives have been achieved and 14% in progress (see [Table 1](#)).

¹⁶ Within this strategy, Torrent's *Smart City Plan 2015-2020* ('Plan Director 2015-2020') was launched, 50% co-financed by the ERDF and Torrent Municipality.

<https://www.esmartcity.es/comunicaciones/torrent-smart-medium-city-eficiencia-energetica-sensorizacion-ciudades-mediante-comunicacion-basada-tecnologia-plc>.

¹⁷ Among others, Torrent is a key member of the Spanish Network of Smart Cities (RECI - Red Española de Ciudades Inteligentes), the Network of Science and Innovation Cities (INNPUISO - Red de Ciudades Ciencia e Innovación), the Intelligent Cities Challenge (ICC) European programme, and URBACT.

¹⁸ See: <https://www.elperiodic.com/archivos/pdf/plan-actuacion-covid-19.pdf>.

Table 1: Strategic objectives achieved per priority axis of Torrent's PAM 2020. Source: the authors, adapted from Campos Casado, 2021.

Strategic objectives per axis	In progress	%	Pending	%	Achieved	%	Total objectives
1. Social care	3	16%	1	5%	15	79%	19
2. Commerce, industry and employment	2	12%	2	12%	13	76%	17
3. Health and hygiene	1	14%	2	29%	4	57%	7
4. Mobility, security, urban planning, and the environment	3	30%	1	10%	6	60%	10
5. Culture, sports, and participation	0	0%	0	0%	11	100%	11
6. Education, libraries, and youth	2	22%	4	44%	3	33%	9
7. Information and citizen care	0	0%	0	0%	6	100%	6
8. Modernisation, staff, and organisation	2	22%	0	0%	7	78%	9
9. Tax and economic management	0	0%	0	0%	7	100%	7
Total	13	14%	10	10%	72	76%	95

A key element of success has been the **timely creation of the *Municipal Operational Coordination Centre* (CECOPAL - 'Centro de Coordinación Operativa de la Administración')**, a multi-disciplinary advisory committee in charge of coordinating the actions that are being carried out by different sectors – economic, social, environmental – within the municipality.

Another strong determinant of Torrent's success has been its **long-track record in thinking 'smart'**. Undoubtedly, the City Council's ongoing efforts to undertake a smart transition have expedited Torrent's response and recovery. With a clear path already set, **COVID-19 only accelerated the administration's digitalisation**, helping the consolidation of an online environment which facilitated both the internal and external reorganisation of municipal services. Internally, the adjustment implied shifting to a fully work-from-home logic, guaranteeing access to digitalised documentation and establishing an electronic file management system. Rather than a shrinking of administrative activities, this shift fostered innovation as well as collaboration. Externally, digital channels helped consolidate the administration's relationship with citizens, allowing for more participatory methods, and the collection and monitoring of context-specific data. Citizens' approval of the PAM 2020 further demonstrates how the strategy was based on a transparent process grounded on fluent communication and collaboration.

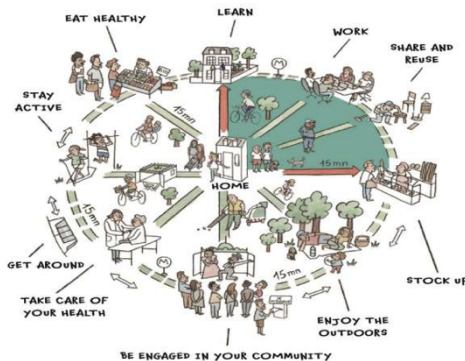
"The capacity of the local government to obtain political unity and support from all parties deserves considerable merit..."

Despite the forementioned achievements, Torrent faces **important challenges ahead**. With the impact of the pandemic remaining a top priority in the administration's agenda, much more work is needed to be done in order to assess 2020 operations and redefine strategic axes. In addition to this, the City Council hopes to soon be able to finalise and approve a new long-term Municipal Action Plan, which had to be postponed due to the pressing challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak. In parallel and true to its nature, Torrent will continue working towards further strengthening its efficient and modern public apparatus.



4. PARIS' 15-MINUTE CITY PLAN: LEARNINGS IN THE WAKE OF THE PANDEMIC

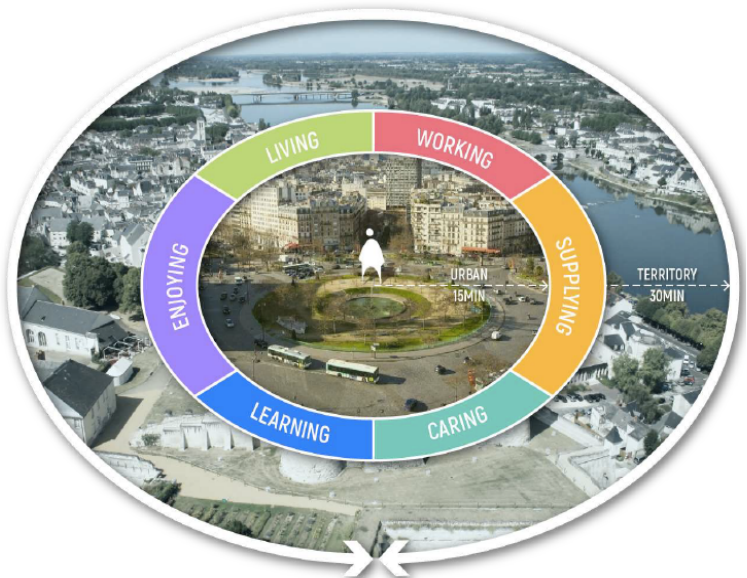
Carlos Moreno, The Mayor of Paris' Special Envoy for Smart Cities and Associate Professor at Sorbonne University, City of Paris



In Paris, the idea of 'hyper-proximity' through '*la ville du quart d'heure*' was a key element of Mayor Hidalgo's successful 2020 re-election campaign¹⁹, in line with the ambition of becoming carbon-neutral by 2050. As part of this vision, the city has already started the converting streets and motorways into pedestrian and cyclist routes (i.e. closure of the Seine River motorway), with a view to creating myriad neighbourhoods where everything becomes accessible within a 15-minute walk or cycle from home.

While the concept has gained revamped popularity during the pandemic, one needs to go a few years back in order to fully comprehend the 15-minute city model. It was during the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, also known as COP21²⁰, that **the 15-minute city was first envisaged as a sustainable alternative** towards reducing urbanisation's impact on the climate. Nevertheless, as a theoretical breakthrough, it intended to go even further. The 15-minute city **intended to revolutionise the urban paradigm**, questioning the prevailing urban logic based on segmentation, fractional urbanism and socio-economic segregation. In this sense, this model represents **a strategic vision for the development of cities**, one where economic, social and environmental goals converge, not just on paper but also practically, and, most importantly, spatially. Through the design of cities of proximity, sustainability can be accomplished not only by mitigating the ecological impact of urbanisation but also by introducing new economic models for the creation and distribution of value at a smaller scale. Here, the idea of proximity also underpins a more compact social fabric which contrasts exclusion and segregation, thus, contributing to the fulfilment of all three pillars of sustainable development.²¹

Figure 4: The 15-minute city model. Source: Moreno, 2021; Seunghoon Han, ETI Chair.



This conceptualisation of socio-spatial proximity not only objects

¹⁹ See: 'Ville du 1/4h' programme. <https://annehidalgo2020.com/thematique/ville-du-1-4h/>.

²⁰ The twenty-first session of the UN Conference of the Parties (COP) to the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the eleventh session of the Meeting of the Parties (CMP) to the Kyoto Protocol, which negotiated the historical *Paris Agreement*. It took place from 30 November to 11 December 2015, in Paris, France. <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/conferences/past-conferences/paris-climate-change-conference-november-2015/cop-21>

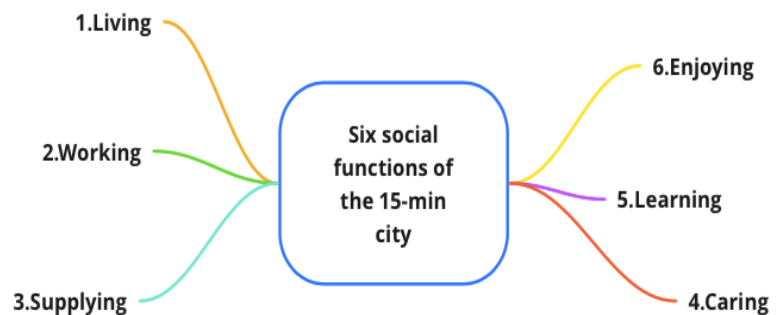
²¹ Popularised by the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, this idea is often referred to as the three Es of sustainable development: economy, environment, and equity.

the excessive mobilisation of contemporary cities but also strives **to re-organise urban functions in a way that revolves around people**, not the other way around (Figure 5).

In particular, the model highlights **six indispensable (social) functions** needed to ensure citizens' quality of life, namely: living; working; supplying; caring; learning; enjoying (Figure 6).

This people-centred perspective is built on the notion of **time being a key indicator of quality of life**. In fact, the model proposes that a liveable city should guarantee enough time for creativity, introspection, spirituality and socialisation as reflected in the mentioned social functions. By doing so, cities of proximity can fight anonymity and loneliness, supporting identity- and community-building around neighbourhoods, what Prof. Moreno calls "love of place".

Figure 5: Six social functions of cities of proximities. Source: the authors, adapted from Moreno, 2021.



In this sense, proximity would encompass all areas of urban life, thus generating new rhythms for a polycentric, multi-functional, inclusive, innovative and environmentally friendly city. Yet, in order to go from theory to practice, urban administrations are required to rethink, optimise, and invest in infrastructures and services in favour of multi-purpose arrangements.

"Far from being a magic wand, the 15-minute city represents a journey towards more sustainable urban making..."

Five years after its first appearance in public policy discourse, the 15-minute city model is under the spotlight of worldwide attention, being embraced by cities worldwide as **a new urban narrative to cope with COVID-19 and envision a 'new normal'**. Along with Paris, the model served as inspiration for the recovery plans of Barcelona²², Milan²³, Copenhagen²⁴, Utrecht²⁵, and Melbourne²⁶, among others. While its application to urban planning aims to radically shift lifestyles and use-value

of the urban space, change will not happen overnight. As Prof. Moreno reminds us, the 15-minute city is a long-term process.

²² See: Barcelona's superblocks system of road to improve the availability and quality of public space. <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/superilles/en>.

²³ Together with other C40 cities, Milan has integrated the 15-minute city framework for its post-COVID-19 recovery. See: *Milano2020 Adaptation Strategy*. <https://www.comune.milano.it/documents/20126/95930101/Milano+2020+Adaptation+Strategy.pdf/a33c4b73-1aa7-d8eb-bf21-288aaaab51d7?t=1591203939390>.

²⁴ The famous Nordhavn neighbourhood in Copenhagen has been designed as a 5-minute city, where is possible to reach shops, institutions, workplaces, cultural facilities and public transport within a 5-minute walk from any point in the district.

²⁵ Plans for the Merwede district in Utrecht will transform the neighbourhood into a car-free, 20-minute city. <https://dutchreview.com/cities/utrecht/utrechts-exemplar-city-design-that-prioritises-people-over-cars/>.

²⁶ See: *Plan Melbourne 2017-2050* guided by the principle of 20-minute neighbourhoods. <https://www.planmelbourne.vic.gov.au/current-projects/20-minute-neighbourhoods>.



5. MILANO2020 RECOVERING STRATEGY: HOW TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND?

Demetrio Scopelliti, Director of Urban Planning and Public Space Design, AMAT - City of Milan

Just a few weeks after the approval of the *Territory Governance Plan* (PGT - 'Piano di Governo del Territorio') **Milano 2030**²⁷, the territorial strategy that was supposed to re-shape Milan in the next decade to come, COVID-19 hit Italy. With the Lombardy being among the regions worst affected since the onset of the crisis in February 2020, **the local administration was promptly forced to rethink its transformation narrative** and actuate an immediate response to the emergency. In fact, Milan, the thriving business capital of

"Ongoing public deliberations around plans for Milan as a 'city of the future' were replaced by urgent yet thoughtful decisions for immediate radical change..."

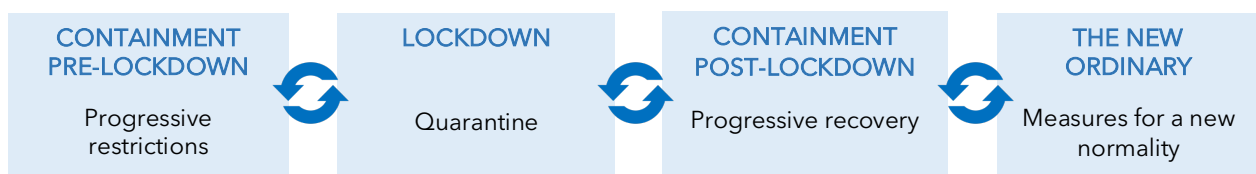
Italy, was one of the first major cities hit outside of China and left with no choice but to act quickly in order to reverse the tragic death toll and dredging socio-economic consequences caused by the COVID-19 outbreak. The crisis was thus turned into an opportunity for reflection and ultimately **a catalyst for rapid change**.

A series of concrete and quickly implementable measures were defined in **Milano 2020 Adaptation Plan**²⁸, a strategic document open to contributions from 'the city'. Grounded in **a shared process shaped by open-ended consultations**

with the public (citizens and relevant urban stakeholders), the Plan aimed to identify the most appropriate local strategies to complement global ones.

Based on the notion that the city's administration needs to operate in an uncertain and constantly evolving context, Milano 2020 identifies **four reference scenarios**, each with a set of time-specific and place-based measures for adaptation.

Figure 6: Milano 2020's adaptation scenarios. Source: the authors, adapted from Scopelliti, 2021.



In spite of uncertainties, thinking beyond the emergency was integrated into the city's consultative exercise. As a living document, Milano 2020 is striving to collaboratively envision, with citizens, **what the 'new normal' will entail**: simply going back to old lifestyles or taking a leap forward by improving the collective wellbeing of communities, and, by so doing paving the way for a more just and sustainable future. This future-looking vision hinges on Milan's commitment not to let a good crisis go to waste.

With a **transversal, inter-sectorial approach** to adaptation, the document has a vision which values 1) participatory, inclusive, and resilient governance; 2) social and economic innovation based on service digitalisation; 3) job-market reintroduction, safety and flexibility; 4) the environmental transition and sustainability applied to mobility and other sectors; and 5) the rethinking of urban timing, spaces, and services.

²⁷ See: <https://www.comune.milano.it/aree-tematiche/urbanistica-ed-edilizia/pgt-adottato-milano-2030>.

²⁸ See: 'Milano 2020 Strategia di adattamento: Documento aperto al contributo della città'. <https://www.comune.milano.it/documents/20126/95930101/Milano+2020.++Strategia+di+adattamento.pdf/c96c1297-f8ad-5482-859c-90de1d2b76cb?t=1587723749501>.

In establishing new targets materialising such vision, Milano 2020 considers crucial to **invest and protect people as a unicum**, especially the most vulnerable categories (e.g. the homeless; migrants; people with disabilities; the elderly; etc.), *leaving none behind*. This is translated as **a cross-cutting priority encompassing all policies²⁹ and actions**: from extending care services and housing options to giving the streets back to people, repurposing public space, promoting proximity neighbourhoods, spreading culture, and incentivising job creation. In this sense, Milano 2020 has undoubtedly addressed some of the most pressing challenges posed by the pandemic, while also sowing the seeds for longer-term transformation.

Example

In the case of ‘**public space and wellbeing**’ policies the Plan set the goal to reclaim public space for physical and social activities via a variety of measures.

Among the **immediate actions** taken by the municipality were:

- **the gradual reopening of sports centres and venues** facilitated via access monitoring systems to control safe physical distancing;
- **the development of open squares (‘piazze aperte’) in every neighbourhood** via tactical urban planning projects promoting pedestrianisation;
- **the incrementation of outdoor spaces for the service industry** by introducing a 30km/h speeding limit within the city and converting sidewalks or parking lots into seating space.

Figure 7: Before and after Milano 2020's open squares programme. Source: Scopelliti, 2021.



With a view to leave none behind, Milano 2020 envisages other cross-cutting priorities towards a more resilient future: the harnessing of **participation and shared decision-making**, ensuring people have a say in public policies affecting their daily lives. Some of the most immediate actions taken in this direction have already given the city a new face, one that is more human, environmentally friendly, proximate, and collaborative.

²⁹ The Plan defines nine main policy areas, each with an established goal and a series of immediate actions. See pp.9-19 for the full list:

<https://www.comune.milano.it/documents/20126/95930101/Milano+2020+Adaptation+Strategy.pdf/a33c4b73-1aa7-d8eb-bf21-288aaaab51d7?t=1591203939390>.

WORKING GROUP DISCUSSION: RESULTS

In the second part of the webinar, participants were divided into **four working groups** to address different thematic dimension of the policy discussion on urban health: 1) sustainable mobility and transport; 2) urban planning; 3) inequality and the social dimension; 4) national urban policy.

Each working group had a transdisciplinary character and counted with participants from local and national governments, the private sector, academia as well as built environment and urban policy professionals. Facilitated by experts in the specific themes, the working group discussions included a **strong interactive and participatory element** via the use of pre-designed Miro online whiteboards. By virtually reproducing a semi-structured workshop, where participants use post-it notes to collectively brainstorm, adding and re-organising ideas on a whiteboard, the use of Miro helped to maintain a level of non-verbal collaboration otherwise lost in virtual fora.

Asked to reflect on what learnings could be extrapolated from the presented case studies in relation to the working group's theme, participants identified:

1. **potential challenges and barriers** to promote sustainable transitions in light of their specific theme;
2. the most **effective, innovative, scalable solutions** that could help address those challenges; and
3. five to seven **practical recommendations** for local administrations and multi-level governance to embed sustainable transitions' strategies.



1. WORKING GROUP SUSTAINABLE MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT

Moderated by: *Ángeles Marín, Director of the Technical Office of the Mobility Strategy, MITMA*

As a result of the restrictions on travelling and changes in transport modalities, sustainable mobility has become somewhat of a buzzword in the pandemic era. One of the key challenges identified by this working group relates to the **unquestionable impact mobility – in its broader sense – has on urban health**, especially due to the transversal nature of this policy sector. When it comes to the governance of mobility and transport infrastructure, in fact, multiple interests might be at stake. **Fragmentation of prerogatives and responsibilities** among different areas and levels of the public administration, as well as the agendas of powerful private stakeholders, can often result in inertia and isolated (thus ineffective) actions. **Aligning priorities and promoting an integrated, multi-level approach to recovery** is challenging, yet fundamental.

Solutions:

Political will to rethink mobility

Alternative modes of transport

Exploiting digital services

Designing cities of proximity and low emissions zones

Challenges:

Governance fragmentation & inertia

Health risks of public transportation (requirement of 1,5m distance)

Aligning actions (integrated & multi-stakeholder approach)

Moreover, in order to truly promote citizens' *common good*, it is important for decision makers to **distinguish between real needs and comfort demands**, and to re-shape policy based on changes needed during, but also after COVID-19.

According to this working group, real **progress is inextricably dependent on political will**. Luckily, throughout the pandemic, this has not fallen short. Many cities in Spain and across Europe have been able to **rethink mobility paradigms** in a healthier and sustainable way. One of the trending solutions identified was the **promotion of mobility alternatives** vis-à-vis traditional forms of transportation, e.g., vehicle sharing; design of new bike lanes; enlarged pedestrian paths; etc. **Digitalisation** was also highlighted as an important trend to be capitalised on, which could help to ensure a more democratic and user-centred transport. Additional measures to promote healthy environments mentioned by participants include the **establishment of low emission zones** and **designing cities of proximity**, thus de-incentivising individual and unnecessary car transport, e.g. avoiding the unnecessary use of transport.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATIONS (!):

- To **promote behavioural change** by raising awareness of the health and socio-environmental externalities of traditional mobility paradigms as well as on the opportunities provided by healthier alternatives (i.e. cycling, walking, etc.);
- To **review tax and costs incentives** for sustainable forms of mobility and transport;
- To **actively involve citizens** in the design of new mobility plans;
- To **align financing and public investment** with local, national, and international sustainability agendas and frameworks (i.e. with the Spanish Urban Agenda; the Urban Agenda for the EU; the 2030 Agenda; the New Leipzig Charter; etc.);
- To **integrate (city-to-city) peer learning** into urban recovery strategies;
- To **map and use financing instruments** available at different levels (national, EU, international) to facilitate sustainable mobility transitions.



2. WORKING GROUP HEALTH AND URBAN PLANNING

Moderated by: *Nuño Mardones, Associate Professor, Dept. of Architecture, University of Navarra*

Challenges:

Health remains a marginal urban planning priority

Socio-spatial segregation

Exacerbated socio-environmental and therefore health inequalities

Climate change impacts

Despite evidence and lessons learned from the pandemic, the importance of integrating **health as a transversal priority** in urban planning remains marginal. **Socio-spatial segregation** poses another major challenge for cities. As highlighted by the working group, handling these historical trends calls for the development of an understanding of cities as heterogeneous systems of people, flows, spaces, functions. When cities' heterogeneity is overlooked, the result can be worsened inequalities, including unequal access to health and care services, green spaces, leisure, and thus to healthy urban environments. **Attending vulnerable citizens** (e.g. people with disability or with reduced mobility) during the pandemic also requires local administrations to extend their social functions in a massive way. Moreover, along with social inequalities, **environmental injustices** within cities can also negatively affect citizens' health. In this sense, in order to promote health via urban planning a holistic approach which combines the environmental, social and economic dimension is needed. Especially when it comes to environmental concerns, **climate change** is bound to exacerbate socio-economic inequalities dramatically.

As possible medium- and longer-term solutions, the working group envisages the **rethinking of the urban model**, for example, via the design of **cities of proximities**, where it is services that revolves around citizens and not the other way around. In this context, services include not only accessible socio-economic infrastructures, but also green and leisure areas. In fact, urban planning could help valorise the built environment while **restoring, protecting, and enhancing ecosystem services and biodiversity** within cities, e.g. via nature based solutions and the repurposing of unused public space or buildings. Enhancing cities' green heritage, the group contends, can effectively contribute to facilitate healthier lifestyles and the creation of new 'green' jobs and skills, by stimulating local employment and a culture of care of public space. Moreover, it can also serve to address climate change and biodiversity loss, thus **merging green and social agendas** on the road to recovery. The experience of **small- and medium-sized cities in Spain** can offer **inspiration** to apply a people-centred proximity approach to larger cities as well.

Solutions:

Design proximity cities

Revalorise public space/buildings

Combine social and green goals via planning

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATIONS (!):

- To advance **health as a holistic and integrated concept in planning** which encompasses the health of all living beings (human and non-human);
- To make **urban health as a priority** of all urban policy and planning processes;
- To align **urban planning and architecture** in a way that helps us rediscover healthy and lovable environments;
- To design **polycentric cities of proximity** while reinforcing citizens' sense of identity attached to places;
- Using spatial planning **to ensure more balanced and inclusive/accessible urban spaces**.



3. WORKING GROUP INEQUALITY AND THE SOCIAL DIMENSION

Moderated by: Isabel González, Professor, Dept. of Urban Dev. and Spatial Planning, Polytechnical University of Madrid

What does a more 'just normality' look like? As noted by this working group, COVID-19 has acted as a magnifying glass on existing inequalities, **deepening exclusion and marginality of certain urban groups**. In fact, in spite of more media attention given to the 'social question', public efforts to actually reduce urban poverty and inequality are still insufficient, incomplete or inadequate at best. In part, the group notes, this is the result of commodification and privatisation of public space at the expense of the common good. The challenge here is not only to rethink urban spaces in a way to reduce inequalities, but also to make sure that these processes are participatory and inclusive. In other words, to make sure that **'marginalised groups' and traditionally excluded voices** are also part of decision-making. While some cities, including in Spain, have experimented with co-creation processes and participatory methods to inform planning, a large part of the most vulnerable societal groups remains unreachable. **Limited financial resources** of local governments to mainstream and expand these processes are also a key barrier.

Solutions:

Experimentation

Capacity building and investment in the youth

Create more evidence-informed policies

Challenges:

COVID-19 has exacerbated inequality

Inclusion of 'unusual suspects' in decision-making

Limited resources to mainstream new methods

Proposed as a key to unlock more inclusive citizenship, the **creation of pilots** experimenting with new modes of civic engagement and participation could help vulnerable and marginalised groups have a voice in the design and use of public space. Pivotal to this transformation is **collective capacity-building** towards improved communication to and engagement of citizens. **Investing in the youth** was also mentioned as a success factor in ameliorating neighbourhoods' compactness and just regeneration. From a policy perspective, there is also a need for better evidence to inform decision-making. In this direction, the **establishment of transdisciplinary working groups** representing different public and private interests to advise municipal administrations on social competences could contribute to better informed policies. For example, considering the compelling housing crisis in Spain, revising the current regulatory framework in favour of repurposing vacant buildings and space could help address the needs of housing-vulnerable communities.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL ADMINISTRATIONS (!):

- **To give more prominence to social questions** via coordinated strategies for the local implementation of the Spanish Urban Agenda;
- **To encourage multi-level dialogue** to scale up those questions across governance levels, i.e. via SUA mechanisms;
- **To experiment with new methods of engagement** that can support the participation of marginalised and vulnerable communities in decision-making process, e.g. via scalable pilot projects; via digitalisation; etc.;
- **To build capacity** of both public officials and the public towards the implementation of participatory and inclusive approaches;
- **To introduce a comprehensive scheme of redistributive policies** to help mitigate the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on the most vulnerable;
- **To review the regulation of vacant / unused public buildings and land** in the service of citizens in need.



4. WORKING GROUP NATIONAL URBAN POLICIES

Moderated by: Martin Grisel, Director, EUKN

Challenges:

Fragmented urban governance

Unbalanced territories (e.g. peri-urban areas)

Lack of technical coordination (silo-approach)

Need of better regulation, knowledge, finance and participation

Notwithstanding cities' leadership and proactivity during the pandemic, lessons gathered so far confirm that better results are achieved when local action is supported by an adequate national urban policy framework. As encoded in the recently adopted *New Leipzig Charter*³⁰, it is through **integrated, multi-stakeholder and place-based policies** that national authorities can empower cities to transform. The need for multi-level governance is also evident from the fact that many of the socio-economic and environmental **wicked problems faced by cities fall under regional or national competences** and thus call for multi-level action, i.e. unemployment, health infrastructure and services, to name a few. On the other end, it is not always easy for national urban policies to be informed by and balance the different realities and needs of the local level, highlighting **the need for better knowledge, regulation, financing** and in general of more participatory policy-making process. In the Spanish context, this is all the more complex given the **separation of technical prerogatives** across policy sectors and levels of government. Moreover, national urban policy needs to give specific weight to **rebalancing territories** and regions, including peri-urban areas and small and medium sized cities.

Part of the solution is a shift towards more collaborative, place-based, integrated and multi-level governance via the **localisation of strategic frameworks** such as the Urban Agenda for the EU and its Spanish correspondent, the Spanish Urban Agenda. This transition also necessitates **governmental reform** to assess and review the distribution of powers across national, regional and local levels in favour of both vertical and horizontal alignment of urban policymaking. The group also mentioned **capacity building** as key towards a **new culture of the urban administration**, where municipalities are empowered by the national level to act as enablers of change, including of citizen participation, valorisation of urban space, etc.

Solutions:

Locally adapt national and EU strategic frameworks

Build local admin. capacity

Promote horizontal and vertical policy alignment

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ALIGN LOCAL-NATIONAL POLICYMAKING (!):

- To move past the **siloed approach** to policymaking by harnessing the mechanisms for multi-level, multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral collaboration provided by the Spanish Urban Agenda
- For the national level **to support local administrations accessing (recovery) funds and financing schemes** in the development of local action plans;
- To avoid the **excessive politicisation of the crisis** and promote evidence-informed responses;
- To **facilitate peer-learning** among cities, ensuring existing lessons and good practices inform the development of new policies and regulations.

³⁰ As a by-product of intergovernmental cooperation on urban matters, the Charter underscores the fundamental role of multi-level governance to unlock the transformative power of cities towards a more sustainable future. To do so, it provides a non-binding strategic policy framework tracing the principles for good urban governance, together with the dimensions and scales to which these principles should apply. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/brochures/2020/new-leipzig-charter-the-transformative-power-of-cities-for-the-common-good.

CONCLUSIONS

The COVID-19 crisis has certainly magnified certain urban trends, in many cases exacerbating inequalities and several of the socio-economic wicked problems cities already faced across Europe. However, it is not all bad. The pandemic has also offered much scope to reflect on and rethink current unsustainable urban paradigms, often offering momentum to accelerate positive change.

As underscored by EUROCITIES' investigation of cities' actions and policy responses to the COVID-19 outbreak, **urban areas are at the frontlines of the crisis** and have stepped up to provide a safety net to citizens in need. Their strategic responses, whether in the short-, medium- or long-term, are **offering a testbed for wider scale implementation**. If one was to take the example of Barcelona's Provincial Deputation, urban experimentation and the delivery of replicable pilot projects to mainstream **health as a transversal priority** in urban planning were already under way before COVID-19 shook Spain. If anything, the pandemic made it ever more clear how a **people-centred approach** to urban health could help cities recover – faster and better. In the case of Torrent, efforts put by the administration to digitalise municipal services, based on bureaucratic simplification and iterative monitoring and evaluation, put the city in a prepared position to deal with the virus and the necessary lockdown. Moreover, the impacts of COVID-19 on mobility and accessibility of goods and services made it ever more relevant **to rethink the urban model and its social functions**. Learning from Paris' 15-minute city plans, one can immediately appreciate how crucial **'proximity'** becomes. Not simply in terms of physical access, but also in terms of inclusion, participation, health and ultimately citizens' love of place. Nevertheless, as Milan teaches us, reshaping cities' transformation narratives towards a sustainable future and a 'new normality' cannot be done without citizens' participation. To truly **leave none behind**, the path to recovery needs to be designed, implemented, monitored and assessed for and most importantly with the people.

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