

## Decarbonising cities: Assessing governance approaches for transformative change (Inception report)

### Executive summary

Cities account for 75 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions and are at particular risk to climate change. Especially in light of the growing urban population, a radical transformation of cities towards zero carbon emission is required. Urban governance is key for this transformation. Our research question therefore is: **Which governance approaches facilitate successful transformative change towards zero carbon in cities?**

**Transformative change** is a non-linear process of systemic change that ultimately leads to zero carbon emission. Our comprehensive understanding of successful transformative change includes three success dimensions:

- **CO2 reduction:** CO2 emissions have decreased over a given period of time.
- **Dynamics of transformation:** The transformation process has been spatially expanded, systematically integrated into the city's institutional framework, accelerated, and is generating impact beyond the city.
- **Acceptance:** Decarbonisation enjoys acceptance among the population.

In our project, we focus on three aspects of **transformative urban governance** that leads to this kind of successful transformative change:

**Actor constellations and processes:** Based on the assumption that more inclusive governance approaches increase the success of transformative change processes, our main questions are: **How do cities involve stakeholders? Which approaches are best for urban transformation?** We are going to investigate the impact of the range of actors involved, the degree of continuity of their involvement, the modes of involvement, and outreach to non-public actors on the success of transformative change.

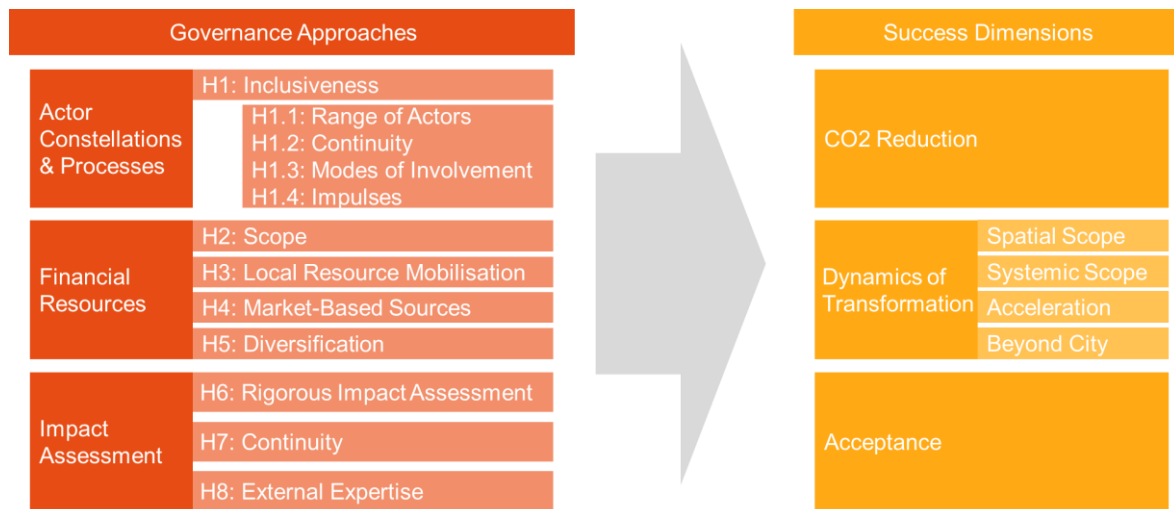
**Financial resources:** Based on the assumption that cities with larger fiscal space are more successful in transformative change towards zero carbon, our main question is: **Can additional financial resources foster transformative change of cities?** We are going to investigate the impact of additional finance through local revenue mobilization and market-based financing options on transformative change and analyse the effects of diversified funding sources.

**Impact assessment:** Based on the assumption that more effective impact assessment increases the success of transformative change, our main question is: **How do cities measure impact?** We are going to investigate how the degree of rigour, the continuity, and the degree to which external expertise is included impacts the success of transformative change. Figure 1 summarises our research framework.

To investigate these hypotheses, we will draw on a **database of cities worldwide** that we have developed which include cities that are either members of international urban sustainability networks (up to 100 member cities) or have participated in international urban sustainability award competitions since 2015. This database contains 875 cities from 126 countries, 64 per cent of which are in the Global North and 36 per cent in the Global South.

In addition, we work closely with ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (more than 1700 member cities) and other larger international sustainability networks with more than 100 member cities to reach out to cities worldwide that are particularly involved in socio-ecological change.

Figure 1: Research framework



Our research approach is two-pronged and includes an international survey and case studies of four selected cities. In an online-based self-administered **international survey** we will ask city government officials questions about all our aspects of interest and will use statistical methods to analyse the data.

In a second step, we will select four cities that we will study in more details as **case studies** through online-based interviews with a broader group of stakeholders such as representatives of community groups, NGOs, universities, private business actors, international organisations in addition to city government officials. In these interviews, we will deepen our insights into successful transformative urban governance approaches. Survey and case studies will be conducted and analysed throughout **March and April 2021** and the **final report will be available in June**.

With our project, we hope to contribute to both **academic debates** about urban sustainability governance towards zero carbon emission as well as to **practical exchange** between city governments and urban sustainability networks.

In particular, our project will provide conceptual and empirical input for a multi-year long project that will begin in 2021 as part of the International Climate Initiative (IKI) for which accompanying research will be conducted by the German Development Institute (DIE). This project, ***Transformative urban coalitions: Catalysing urban partnerships to drive systemic transformation towards sustainability (IKI-TUC)***, will focus on new urban coalitions and governance for transformative urban change towards zero carbon emission in five Latin American cities.

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**Research team:** Christina Grohmann, Maria Elisabeth Gronen, Anne Laible, Johanna Orth, Michael Roll (project co-lead), Christian von Haldenwang (project lead), Florian Wengel, Lisa Zumegen

**Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik / German Development Institute (DIE)**

Tulpenfeld 6, 53113 Bonn – Germany

Phone: +49 (0)228-949 27-0

Project website: [www.die-gdi.de/en/56-postgraduate-course/decarbonising-cities/](http://www.die-gdi.de/en/56-postgraduate-course/decarbonising-cities/)

Contact: [Decarbonisingcities@die-gdi.de](mailto:Decarbonisingcities@die-gdi.de)

Twitter: [@CO2FreeCities](https://twitter.com/CO2FreeCities)