



Rethinking Multilateralism

THE CASE FOR ENGAGING CITIES IN THE NEW MULTILATERALISM

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a think and do tank

DECEMBER 2021

Summary

Introduction	3
Empowered cities, the protection of the local commons and securing of basic needs and access to services are key to strengthening the social contract, bolstering trust and reinforcing multilateral action	4
Effective urban leadership and financing can help cities drive a green recovery and localize the SDGs	5
A new generation of legal and policy frameworks based on the “right to the city” can drive inclusive urban growth	5
Inter-city collaboration can fast-track climate action and a range of other challenging global public goods issues.....	6
Scale-up city diplomacy and test out new forms of micro-multilateralism	6
References.....	12

THE CASE FOR ENGAGING CITIES IN THE NEW MULTILATERALISM

New forms of micro-multilateralism are required to accommodate the two thirds of the global population residing in cities by 2030. Cities concentrate wealth, innovation and capital. When governed effectively, cities can help renew the social contract by fostering greater inclusion and trust, not least because their leaders and services are closest to where citizens live. Working in partnership with national and regional governments as well as the private sector, cities can also co-design and rebuild greener, equitable and more resilient economies. Moreover, there are already 300 inter-city networks that are engaging in diplomacy, forging consensus and delivering results on climate action, the protection of migrants, and public health.

Introduction

The world is urbanizing. There are at least 33 megacities with over 10 million people and over 10,000 cities of various shapes and sizes. At least [half of these cities](#) didn't exist 50 years ago. With more roughly [two thirds of the global population](#) expected to move to cities by 2030, urban leaders need a seat at the global decision-making table. Cities account for 80 percent of global GDP. Yet they are also responsible for roughly 80 percent of all carbon emissions. As such, cities are central to resolving some of the biggest challenges we face. If they can foster inclusion, renew trust, and drive circular economics, cities will help energize multilateralism for the twenty-first century.

The new multilateralism must be decentralized and engage at the national-regional-local scale. To be effective and legitimate it should be “community-driven” and “collaboratively designed”. A number of strategic priorities set out by cities are articulated in the [New Urban Agenda](#), and can serve as a guide along

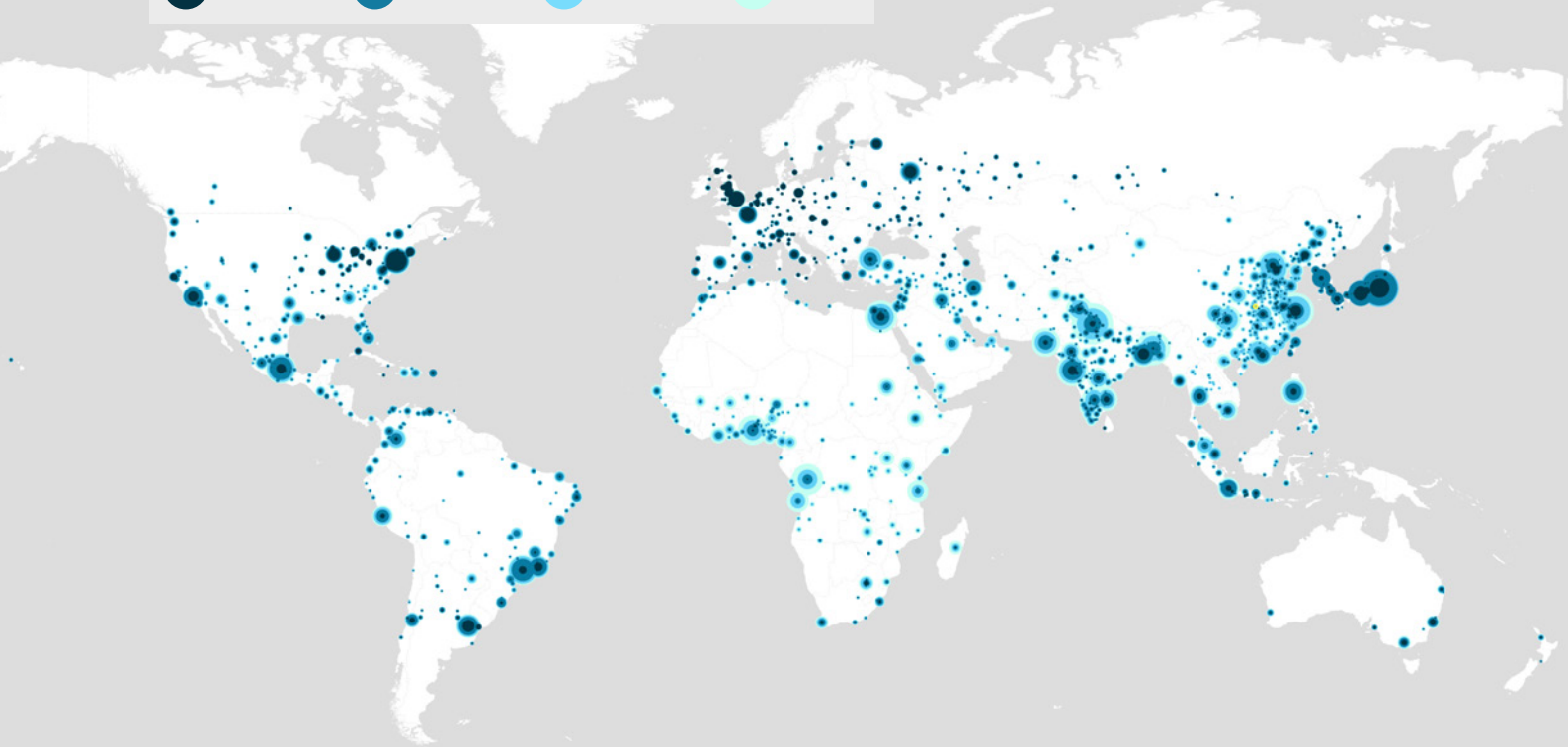
with the SDGs, Paris Declaration and new Global Biodiversity Framework. At the top of the urban agenda is [a vision](#) that blends society, nature and the environment, together with principles of fundamental rights, social justice and sustainability. Cities are committed to ambitious climate targets, especially net zero emissions targets.

COVID-19, much like previous disease outbreaks, is reshaping cities in the short- and long-term. On the one hand, it is deepening spatial, socio-economic and digital [inequalities](#) between haves and have nots. The pandemic is underlining weaknesses in public service provision, challenges with housing affordability and deepening city deficits and liabilities. On the other, COVID-19 is precipitating innovative [new thinking](#) about how to [re-design cities](#) and strengthen resilience. COVID-19 will not kill cities, but it will profoundly reshape the way they are built and operate in many parts of the world.

World City Populations 1950 – 2035*

Circle areas proportional to populations in:

1950 1990 2015 2035



Data: [United Nations 2018](#) Design: [D.A. Smith, CASA, UCL](#) Source: [luminocity3d.org](#)

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The ambition and intensity of international cooperation often comes down to domestic politics. Where leadership is weak and trust in local government is low, the inclination to support multilateral action wanes. As a UN [global task force](#) shows, local governments are closest to citizens and key to building a sense of common purpose. Cities are clear expressions of local democracy, constantly wrestling with issues of equity, fairness, solidarity and inclusivity. What is more, a growing number of cities big and small are driving new forms of international diplomacy and cooperation - working on issues of security, peace, climate action, cyber norms and climate action.

*For maps of individual regions, see pages 7-10.

Effective urban leadership and financing can help cities drive a green recovery and localize the SDGs

Cities are calling for the localization of the SDGs. They are also rethinking patterns of production and consumption. Around the world, cities are experimenting with sharing and circular economy principles. This includes closing loops on water use and recovery, adapting buildings to green principles, designing nature-based solutions, enhancing renewable energy and mixed energy matrices, investing in zero-carbon transport and electric vehicles (EVs), promoting cycling and walking alternatives, and investing in digitalizing services. These actions are aligned with the principles of decentralization, subsidiarity and accountability. They are also increasingly aligned with a rights-based approach that puts human rights at the center of urban design.

A new generation of legal and policy frameworks based on the “right to the city” can drive inclusive urban growth

Cities can draft a new template for the right to the city, one that has human rights at its center. This should be accompanied by investment in capacity building, peer-to-peer learning, security- and privacy-by design and participatory place-making design principles that strengthen urban-rural linkages. The development of these frameworks could be accelerated with clear directives from the UN and member states. They would also be bolstered by acknowledging city governments as public institutions recognized in international policy making with the opportunity to represent themselves globally. This will require the creation of enabling environments that ensure sharing of powers, competencies and resources and access to markets to finance capital investments.

Inter-city collaboration can fast-track climate action and a range of other challenging global public goods issues

The modern international order is state-centric: it was built to accommodate the needs and interests of nation states. It was designed at a time when less than 1 percent of the world's population lived in cities. Today, over 55 percent of the global population is urban and cities are the nodes of the international economy. New networked multilateralism can be super-charged by productively engaging with cities. Cities are preoccupied with solving practical problems with innovative solutions. Today, over 10,500 cities have forged a covenant to drive climate-related targets. Over 300 inter-city networks are incentivizing action across the SDGs. The C40 is also helping propel climate action, while others ranging from the UCLG, ICLEI, GPM, MMC, GRCN are helping shape new forms of cooperation. These city coalitions – if strengthened and scaled – can help resist assaults on international treaties, such as the Paris Climate Change Agreement or the Geneva Refugee Convention, and bolster international cooperation.

Scale-up city diplomacy and test out new forms of micro-multilateralism

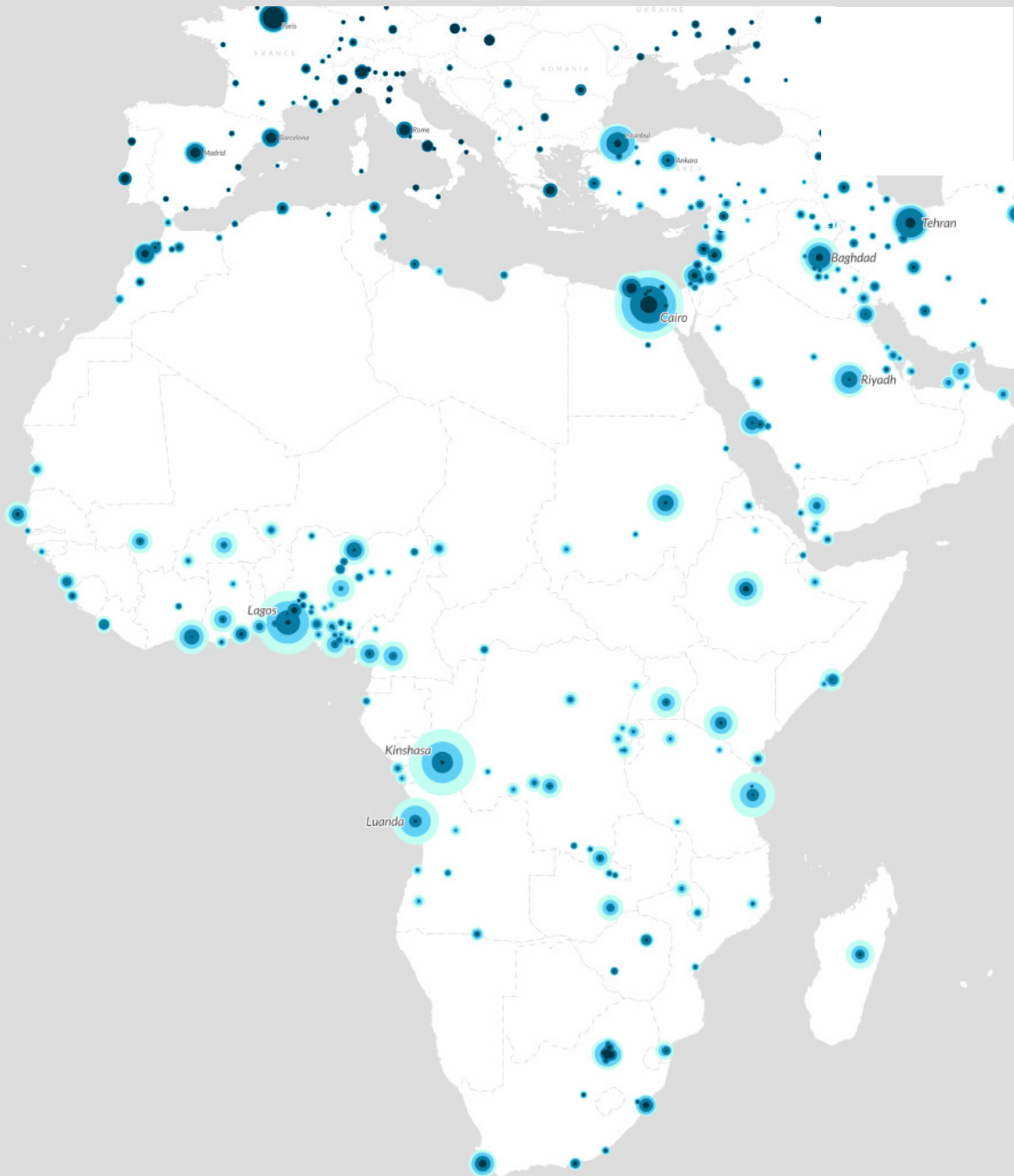
Cities are busily redefining the parameters of international statecraft, pursuing ever more entrepreneurial forms of [city diplomacy](#). For one, cities are growing more assertive as diplomatic agents. From China and India to Nigeria and Brazil, cities are setting-up trade and investment promotion offices and commercial ventures to attract investment. They are also forging municipal foreign policies, strengthening bilateral relations, and launching city networks on everything from cultural and scientific exchanges to welcoming refugees and providing humanitarian relief. On the other, cities are forging collaborative networks, pooling their resources to make the voices heard on the global stage. This is not surprising: cities tend to embrace global opportunities in waves and cycles and instinctively take advantage of new conditions as they emerge. As enduring anchors and nodes of globalization, cities have always played a central role in the global economy. Unprecedented urbanization has augmented city power: in 1950 there were just over 80 cities with 1 million people compared with roughly 550 today.

Stepping-up city power in a fragmenting world

While offering enormous promise, city diplomacy and micro-multilateralism does not occur spontaneously. It requires municipal governments to work collaboratively, and actively engage with international, national and subnational partners to leverage the assets of cities. At the outset, it is based on shared values of cooperation, inclusion, and pluralism. It also requires that cities big and small adopt an international-oriented strategy and invest in the basics to engage globally. This is not easy at a time of soaring deficits and overwhelming budgetary pressures. It is also made difficult by the difficulties of international entities like the UN to engage productively with cities, though the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda are promising developments. To be sure, city leaders will need to ensure that appropriate staff receive training, and also convince tax-payers that involvement in global activities will benefit local interests.

In contrast to nation-states, cities and mayors are stepping up to the global challenges of the twenty-first century. Growing numbers of city leaders are taking action to reduce their carbon footprints, scale-up renewable energy solutions, harness the digital economy, absorb and protect migrants, and reduce inequality. Cities concentrate the majority of foreign direct investment and are the drivers of innovation and productivity. As a result, cities are rivalling nation-states - in terms of their economic clout, diplomatic influence and international connectivity. Nation-states are not about to go away, but they are giving way to alternate networks and distributed forms of power. In an interdependent world, cities need a permanent seat for cities at the global decision-making table. Local and regional governments require a seat at the table to help shape global decisions from the point of definition and design to implementation.

Projecting Africa's accelerating urban future: 1950 – 2035

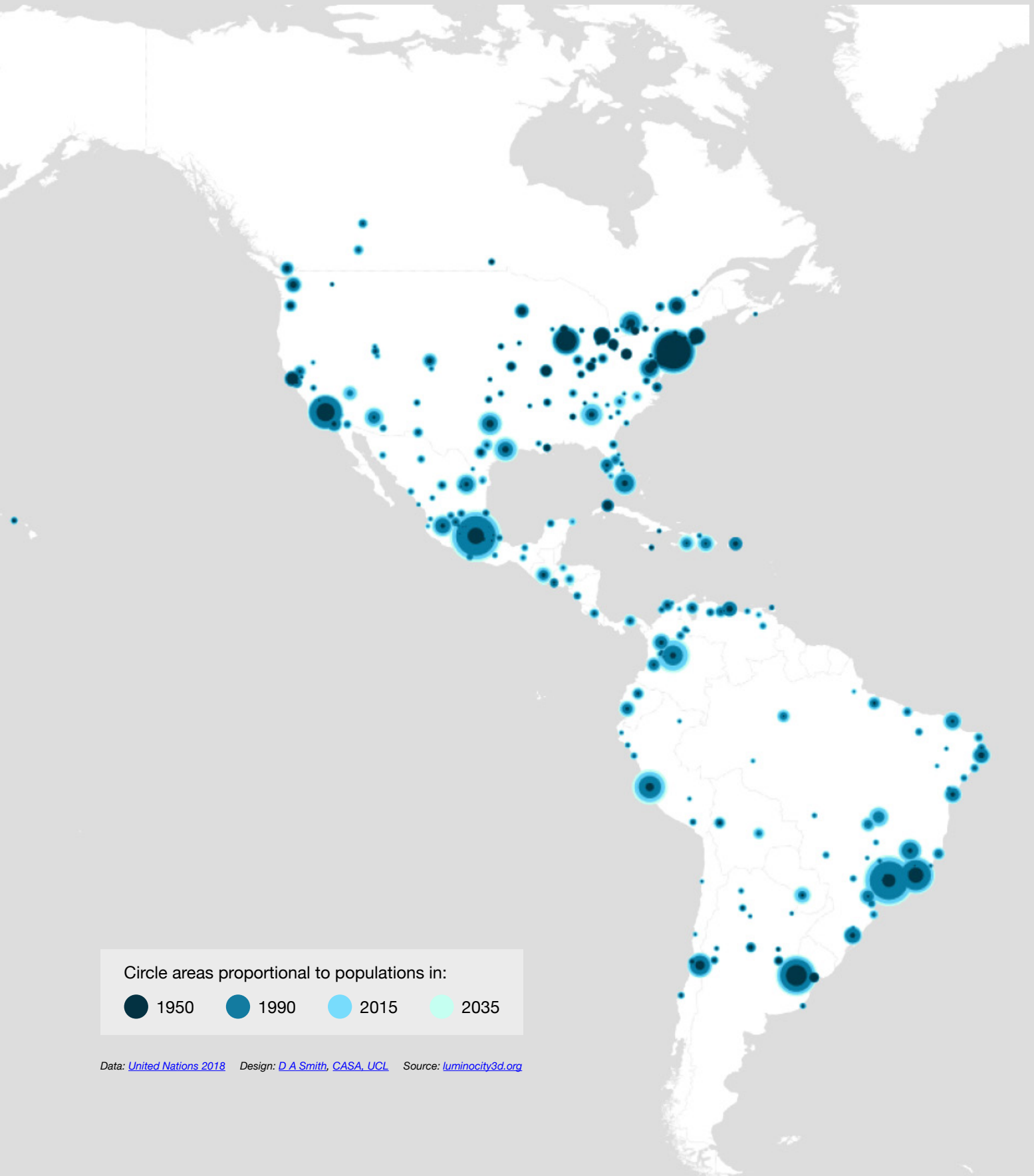


Circle areas proportional to populations in:

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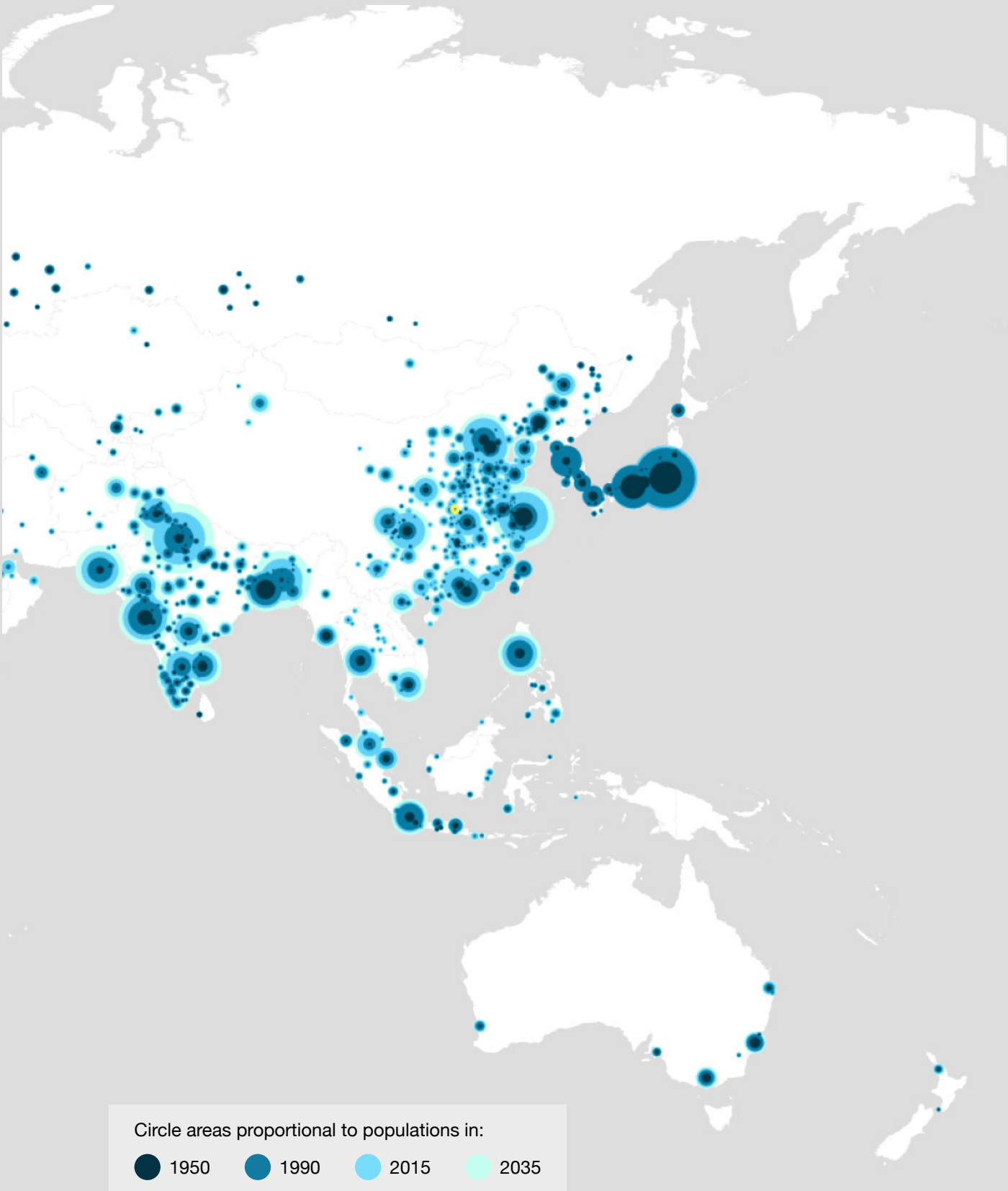
Data: [United Nations 2018](#) Design: [D A Smith, CASA, UCL](#) Source: [luminocity3d.org](#)

Predicting urban growth in the Americas: 1950 – 2035

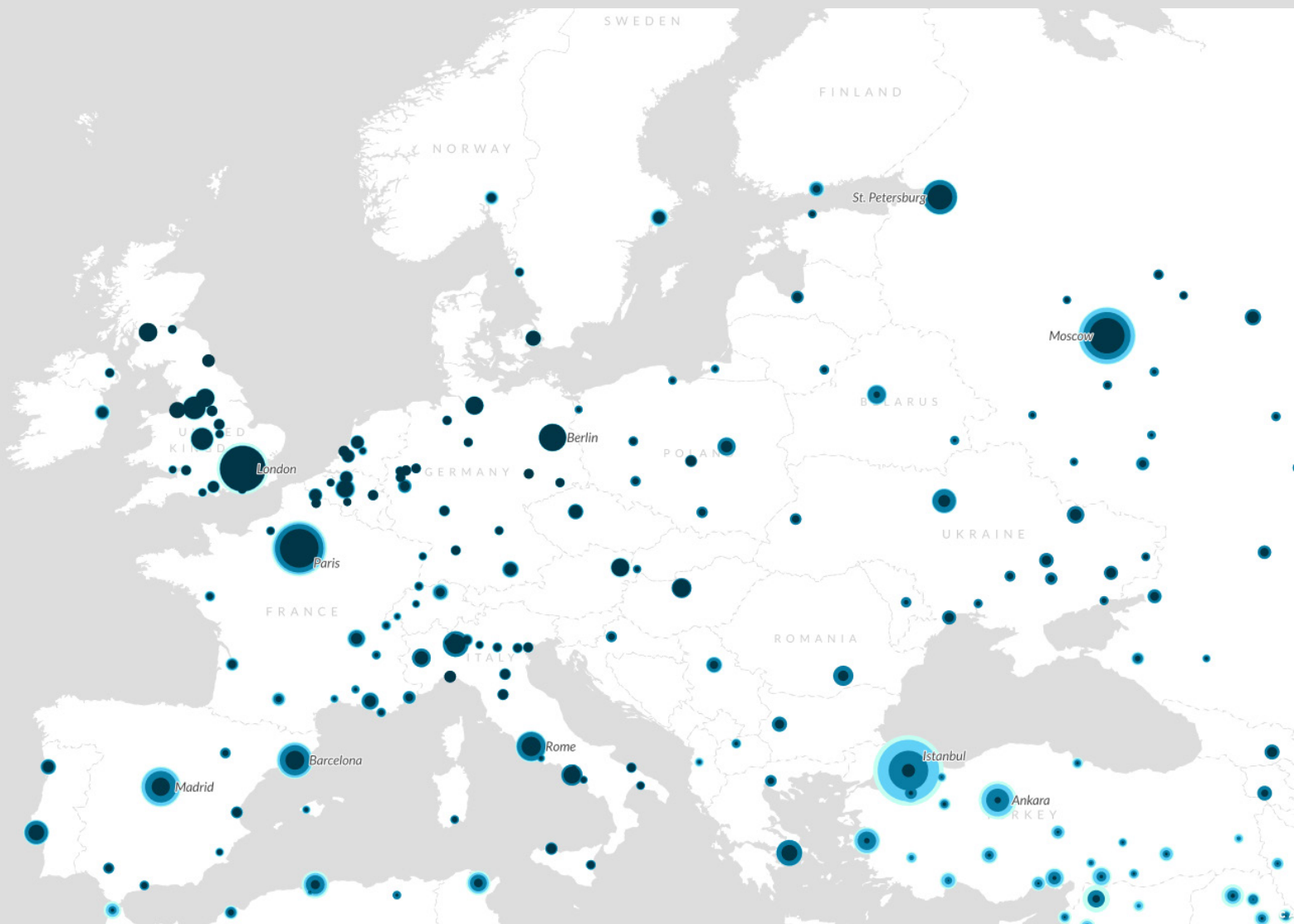


Data: [United Nations 2018](#) Design: [D A Smith](#), [CASA](#), [UCL](#) Source: [luminocity3d.org](#)

Mapping the Asian-Pacific urban boom: 1950 – 2035



Charting the slow-down of urbanization in Europe: 1950 – 2035



Circle areas proportional to populations in:

● 1950 ● 1990 ● 2015 ● 2035

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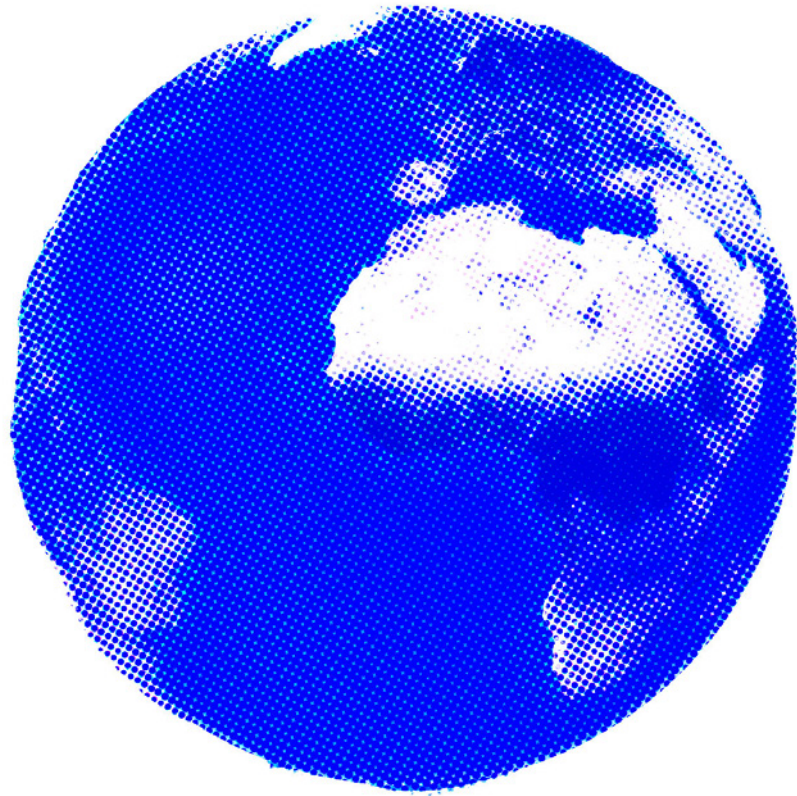
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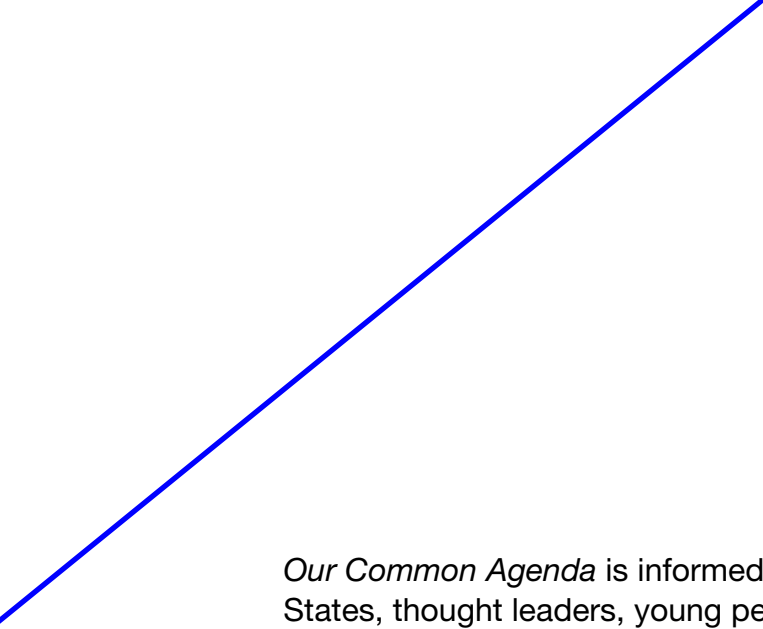
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Our Common Agenda

The world is contending with multiple interconnected challenges ranging from global health threats and geopolitical tensions to massive digital transformation and accelerating climate change. These complex risks threaten to overwhelm existing multilateral institutions. New thinking is required. To this end, the Igarapé Institute is supporting the United Nations Secretary-General craft [*Our Common Agenda*](#). The Agenda is committed to delivering on the promise of the United Nations Charter by refocusing investment in international cooperation.

Our Common Agenda is intended to accelerate a new kind of multilateralism. It is mandated by a UN Member States Declaration commemorating the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. The Secretary-General was explicitly requested to report back to Member States with recommendations to address current and future challenges to the UN General Assembly before the end of the 75th session in September 2021. 1,759 participants from 147 countries.



Our Common Agenda is informed by consultations with Member States, thought leaders, young people, civil society, and the UN system. It is led by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General with support from the [UN Foundation](#) and [Igarapé Institute](#), along with a network of partners from around the world, including ACCORD (South Africa), [Southern Voice](#) (a network of 50 think tanks from Africa, Asia, and Latin America) and the [Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy](#) of the National University of Singapore.

Our Common Agenda proposes a series of very practical measures to advance the 12 themes set out in the [UN75 Declaration](#). Among other things, it calls for a reimagined social contract, greater solidarity across generations, reinvigorated protection of the global commons and more rapid and inclusive delivery of global public goods.

During 2020 and 2021, the Igarapé Institute helped backstop the Executive Office of the Secretary-General in its development of *Our Common Agenda*. The Institute conducted research, reviewed recommendations and coordinated a global digital consultation with support from a diverse range of partners.

Research: The Institute produced analytical papers on ways to accelerate inclusive and networked multilateralism and developed data visualizations of international cooperation on issues such as global vaccination, nuclear non-proliferation, and climate finance.

Consultations: The Institute led a global consultation involving non-governmental organizations, impact investors, philanthropists, parliamentarians, city leaders, academic institutions, and under-represented groups. The process generated 523 proposals from 1,759 participants from 147 countries.



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The Igarapé Institute is an independent think and do tank focused on public, climate and digital security and their consequences for democracy. Its objective is to propose solutions and partnerships for global challenges through research, new technologies, communication and influence on public policymaking. The Institute works with governments, the private sector and civil society to design data-based solutions. Prospect Magazine named Igarapé Institute the best Human Rights NGO in 2018 and the best think tank on social policy in 2019.

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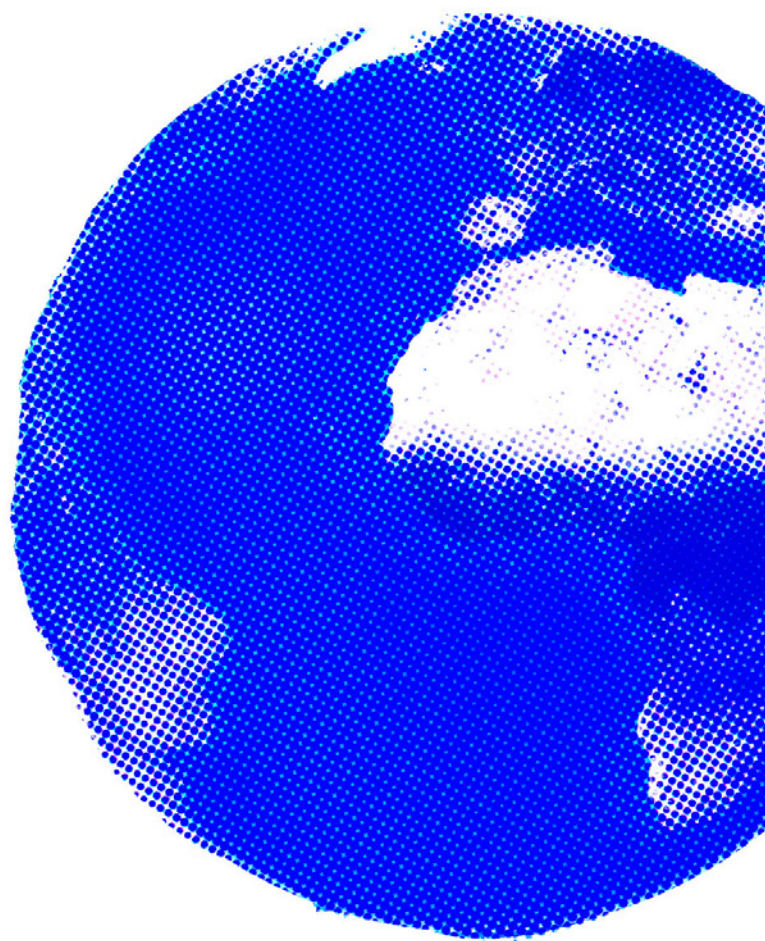
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