

# Summary

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/71/313) was launched in 2015 by the United Nations (UN). It has been increasingly gaining momentum as vehicle for a transition towards new ways of producing, consuming, and living since ever. Nevertheless, halfway there to 2030, there is evidence that the influence the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have had on political agendas, governance, and paradigm shifts has been limited so far and implementation gaps are seriously hampering the achievement of most targets worldwide. Besides, the European Union's (EU) commitment to the 2030 Agenda mainstreaming was strengthened by the European Green Deal (EGD) (2019), the "irreversible" policy initiative designed to turn the EU in the first climate-neutral continent and deliver on most SDGs. The EGD also sets mid-term binding targets (e.g., -55% greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, enshrined by the 'Fit for 55') to support the 2050 climate neutrality ambition timely. In this process, the role of EU cities, where more than 70% of EU citizens live, will be crucial as they are both responsible of most of the SDG and EGD targets implementation.

However, cities struggle to operationalize the SDGs due to their underlying complexity, often poor system-thinking and monitoring capacity, lack of prioritization and harmonization with the local, national, and EU policy systems. Conversely, implementing locally the EGD green transition policies is challenging due to several behavioural, institutional, technological, knowledge and financial constraints. Operational approaches are needed for leveraging cities' climate mitigation potential as envisaged by the SDGs and the EGD, ensuring ambition alignment and policy coherence for sustainable development while acknowledging site-specific priorities. This Doctoral Thesis explores at the intersection of the 2030 Agenda and EGD to provide actionable knowledge for cities to deliver the urban green transition, achieve binding policy framework and UN voluntary-based goals, and strengthen policy coherence in a mutually reinforcing perspective.

By employing a novel mixed-method approach that combines desk research with experts' and stakeholders' feedback, novel applications of Multi-Criteria Decision Making tools, serious games, network and social-media content analysis, this Thesis, made up by six papers and two monographic chapters, seeks to explore the state of the art with respect to approaches and tools to localize the SDG and EGD targets as well as research gaps (Section I); unveil implementation and policy gaps as well as barriers hampering transformative change in EU cities, reinforcing the status quo of (unsustainable) urban development (Section II); highlight enabling conditions to boost the urban green transition under the EGD policy framework and relevant SDG targets (Section III). Key methodological and operational novel contributions regard the development of a framework matching the EGD to the SDG targets, identifying 22 'priority' SDG targets among the initial 169 and allowing for tailored harmonization, implementation and monitoring at local level; unveiling of structural conditions hampering transformative change for the urban green transition; understanding EU cities' policy priorities and key challenges in specific policy domains by the first EU-level local policymakers' consultation on the EGD; identifying vertical (policy-specific) and horizontal (crosscutting) policy enabling conditions. Overall, this Thesis advocates for empowered cities as critical agents in the EU green transition, emphasizing the need for tailored, locally responsive strategies that harmonize global ambitions with contexts' specificities and resources while fostering transformative change through inclusive, actionable, and coherent policymaking.