

TRANSPONDER



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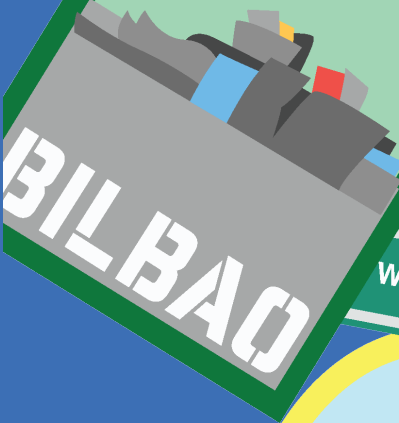
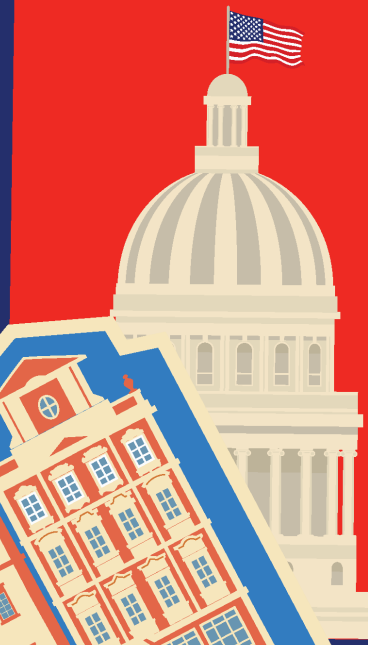


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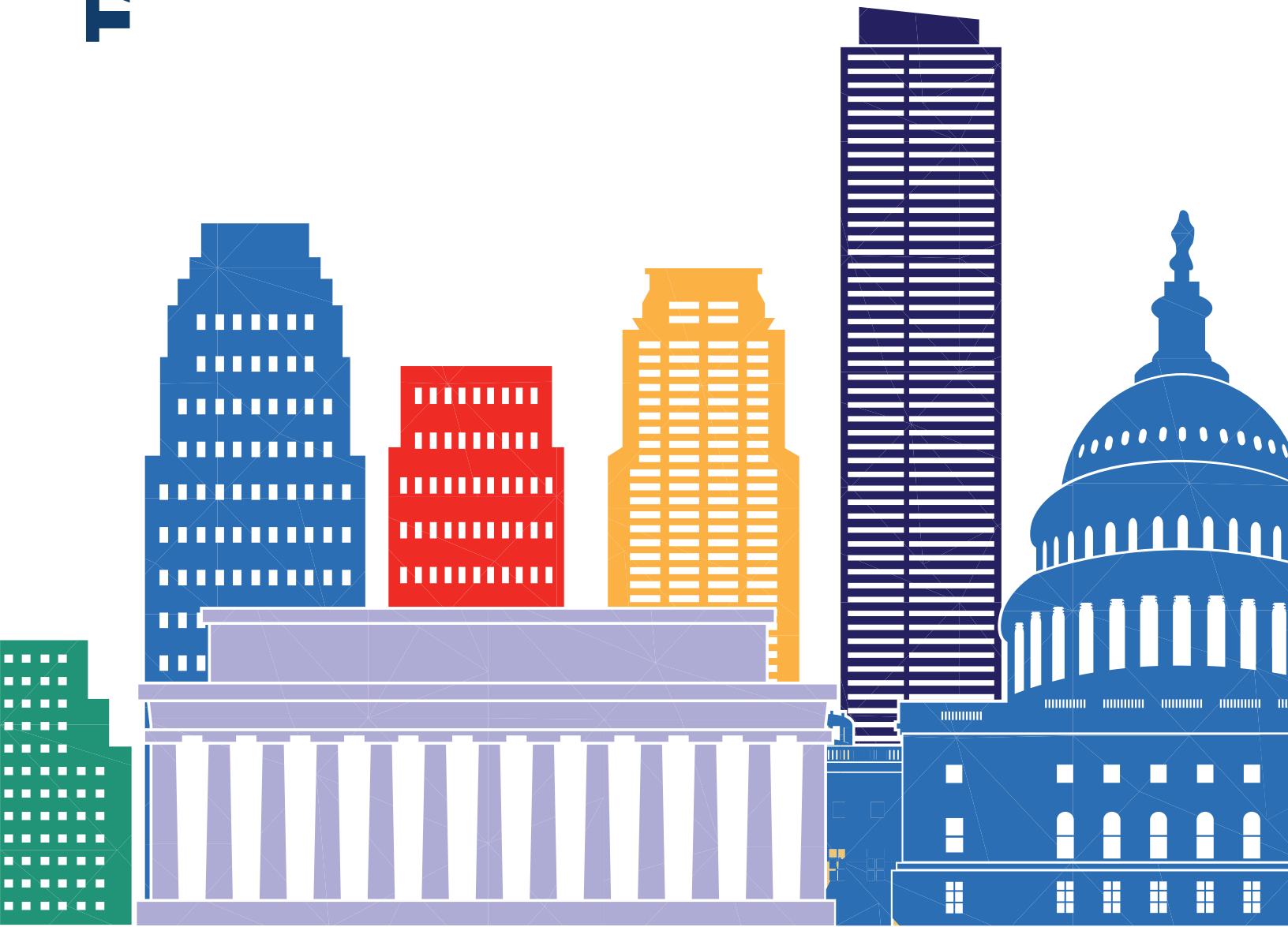
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TWO ISSUE ABOUT

In this second issue of the Transponder, we explore how transatlantic cities confront global challenges. With a growing number of cities and towns around the world focusing their energies on actionable objectives, cities are becoming the epicenter of change. They are at the forefront of political, economic, environmental, democratic, and social change.

As more than half of the world's population currently resides in cities, a figure that is projected to rise to 68% by 2050, we see many local governments working to address societal challenges, ranging from climate change, inequality, migration, technological change, and democratic governance. Cities have increasingly become places to test policy and implement change in a ground-up approach rather than relying on the trickle-down method previously set on the world stage. With city officials hoping to improve their residents' lives, they are implementing concrete policy initiatives over diplomatic pledges to meet future benchmarks.

While national politics may seem to be at an impasse in many countries, if we take a closer look at certain cities, we'll see there is a determination to create long-lasting policies for the benefit of future generations. Please enjoy this second issue which offers a variety of articles and interviews highlighting cities and their policies on both sides of the Atlantic.

Happy Reading!
The Bertelsmann Foundation

10 QUESTIONS FOR THE TRANSPONDER

DR. RALPH HECK

CEO OF THE BERTELSMANN STIFTUNG



What is your motto?

There is always a solution.

What is the hardest lesson you have learned?

Being disappointed by people you trust.

Who is your most admired influencer regarding the transatlantic relationship?

All institutions and individuals that bring people from both sides of the Atlantic into a deep personal exchange resulting in mutual respect and appreciation.

What is your proudest moment?

To see my children graduate.

Who is your favorite US president/chancellor?

All the presidents and chancellors who put people at the center of their work and pursue their political goals consistently.

What is the biggest challenge facing the transatlantic relationship?

To make sure that the US and Europe are not primarily concerned with their respective issues, but develop democracy together as partners.

What is your favorite quote?

A German saying: "Wenn Du glaubst, es geht nicht mehr, kommt von irgendwo ein Lichtlein her, dass Du leichter trägst des Alltags harte Last und wieder Kraft und Mut und Hoffnung hast."

"When you think you can't do it anymore, a little light comes from somewhere, that you may bear the burden of everyday life more easily and have strength and courage and hope again."

If you could implement a policy to improve the transatlantic relationship, what would it be?

A policy that really supports all the institutions and encourages individuals to pursue deep mutual respect and appreciation.

How does your work impact the transatlantic alliance?

Our goal is making clear and reinforcing the need for strong transatlantic relationships and shaping the future to the benefit of both sides.

What does democracy mean to you?

In brief: Everything.

In two words: Freedom and values.

CITIES STARTED DEMOCRACY.

NOW, THEY WILL SAVE IT.

By Steven Bosacker

We all learned in high school history that democracy started in the city of Athens. But not all of us learned that the term “democracy” derives from “demos”, meaning “common people”, and “krátos”, meaning “force” or “might”. The force or might was that of common people who collected in a place they called home and determined a preference for governing themselves collectively. There is huge power in such a collective, especially when those common people are part of a shared community, such as a city.

For decades, conventional wisdom said that cities filled potholes, picked up the trash, enforced building codes and performed other mundane tasks necessary for their community. These are not unimportant tasks, just unglamorous ones, the day-to-day monotony delegated to local governance. The best and brightest cities did these things well, and their residents’ daily lives were better for it.

Our common consciousness changed in the 21st century. We now have much more expansive expectations of what cities do.

They still must perform all their regular tasks — licensing drivers, enforcing parking, fighting house fires — but emergencies small and large force cities to assume new responsibilities. When hurricanes or floods wash away neighborhoods, or terrorism causes horrific and inhumane suffering, local leaders and residents are largely responsible for putting devastated and traumatized communities back together. Nowadays cities are called on to fix climate change, house the homeless, and stop a global pandemic. Cities are also moving to rectify disasters of their own making, such as unjust policing or running highways through marginalized neighborhoods. These challenges test local officials’ strength to admit mistakes and course correct.

“...CITIES PROVIDE MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CREATIVE PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT FIELDS TO INTERACT INFORMALLY AND EXCHANGE IDEAS,

WHICH CAN LEAD TO MORE DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION.”

Cities rarely complain about the weight of these added burdens, even if they often arrive without the financial resources needed to address demands. But scarcity can contribute to creativity. Accomplishing a lot with a little is one reason cities tend to be hubs of invention and policy innovation. Another is the critical mass of people and ingenuity concentrated in a tight geography. A recent Ohio State University study¹ found that cities — through their typical responsibilities, the intensity of being organic communities and the lofty, even global, problem-solving we’ve come to expect from them — have built the muscles needed to land them in the lead, again, on their next really big task: furthering and fortifying democracy.

DEMOCRACY IN CRISIS

In the past year, we’ve seen



hundreds of stories about the demise of democracy in the world, including among “Western” nations that many thought were so stable that they took democracy and the freedoms it offers for granted. National policymakers and think tanks are on the job, talking endlessly about the dangers of democratic backsliding. Raising the warning flag is indeed important. But rebuilding confidence in democracy

will require crisis managers and builders, not simply scaremongering. Cities are ready for the job. Solving problems from the miniscule to the massive is at the heart of community governance, and cities have strengthened their relevant skills. Although we all could use more exercise, especially with respect to meaningful resident engagement and broad civic literacy, the values of liberal

democracy are at the very core of what cities are. They are the bones of democracy’s body, and their instincts will be essential to strengthening democracies worldwide.

WHAT’S STANDING IN THE WAY?

Disunity and divisions are at the top of city leaders’ minds as they search for policy



solutions. This is evident in the German Marshall Fund's "Cities Fortifying Democracy" project, part of the GMF Cities program that I direct. The project strengthens local democracies by regularly convening representatives of twelve cities (six from Europe, and six from the US) to consult on four areas: the importance of competent governing, the integrity of voting and elections systems, confidence in public safety and justice issues, and the role of local journalism to create an informed and trusting populace. The democratic values that must be brought to bear on all these

matters is also a core focus.

During the project's launch, with twelve mayors, their staffs and community representatives participating, one surprising and overriding theme stuck out: their ability to be effective leaders in deeply polarized communities. Demonstrating authenticity and vulnerability, the mayors questioned whether they had the charisma and strength to keep their communities united in a way that democracy demands. It wasn't just a matter of doing the right things to address the worst problems. It was, rather, the hostile tenor of their deeply

divided constituencies from which any mandates or policy solutions would derive. My team and I consequently placed polarization atop the list of issues that cities must address going forward.

Participants also identified a potent generational division: Today's youth is disenchanted with current political and governing systems. Some criticized young people for not understanding how local government systems work, but that masks the real issue, which is that many young people seek entirely new systems. The next

generation looks at the set of problems that they will inherit and blames old systems for climate collapse, racial injustice, and severe economic inequality.

A third issue (of at least fifteen) that bubbled to the top is how cities can advance multiracial democracy in which equity, inclusion, and belonging are central to all that they do. Like policymaking at every level of government, cities' solutions to this challenge will first require an acknowledgement of the perpetuation of inequitable systems that have neglected or excluded so many. Unlike most larger governments, however, cities continue to tussle with integrating newcomers, migrants and refugees, and residents of every ethnicity, color and class. Cities are learning from their mistakes as they rapidly grow more diverse.

NO ISSUES ARE INSURMOUNTABLE

The mayors and their community partners must address these issues to fortify democracy, and to restore their citizenries' trust and faith. Cities are fortunately well-positioned to do this. Local leaders' innate proximity advantage provides them with opportunities for daily physical contact with their constituents. Mayors and city managers may literally have to walk through protests to get to their offices, or they may have to answer questions in the produce aisle of the local supermarket when approached by residents (even if they wanted only a

bunch of asparagus). For cities, community engagement is more than a concept or aspiration to talk about from the stump. It's daily business.

These common interactions help explain why local governments have enjoyed historically high levels of trust. Officials are forced to be transparent in their actions and to work in true partnership with their communities. For decades, local governments' trust ratings topped by a wide margin those for their state or national counterparts. Trust is central to a strong democracy and critical for addressing the polarization we now witness. And cities' practical nature — not partisan nature — helps ensure that local problems lend themselves less to strict partisanship than inherently state or national issues do, even at a time when politics pervades most controversial issues that arise.

This is especially important to the “next generations” to whom local leaders should look when implementing policy. For European cities, understanding policy impacts on young people is, in many places, a matter of course. Meanwhile, American cities are finally awakening to the disenchantment and unconventional demands of new generations of voters, including their impatience with using the same, tired systems that created our biggest crises. Democracy will succeed only if the next generations believe it should. Cities are well positioned to instill that belief.

From serving as the first democracy's founder to now fortifying threatened democracies, cities have been up to the job. Respecting residents' rights and responsibilities and using the collective, organic energy of those residents is what makes cities tick. It is in their DNA. It's not that they haven't made many mistakes since Athens' democratic start in 507 B.C., but the seduction of standing as free and self-governing communities powers them onward.

Steven Bosacker is the director of the German Marshall Fund's GMF Cities program. He previously served as principal for public sector and partnerships at Living Cities, as city coordinator for the City of Minneapolis and as chief of staff to former Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura.

GMF Cities, with the support of Germany's Federal Foreign Office, is leading a two-year, transatlantic multi-city cohort to explore and advance city practices for strengthening democracy.



GLOBAL CHALLENGES MEET LOCAL SOLUTIONS:

INTERVIEW WITH METE COBAN

Interview conducted by Anthony Silberfeld on February 16th, 2022 with Mete Coban, councilor for Stoke Newington in the London Borough of Hackney.

INTRO: Mete Coban is an elected councilor for the Stoke Newington district in the London Borough of Hackney. He serves as the borough's cabinet member for energy, waste, transport and the public realm. Coban is also the founder of My Life

My Say, a nonpartisan charity that encourages democratic participation among young people. Reflecting his wide-ranging interests and activities, he talks in this interview about the ways in which climate change is sparking innovation on the local level and his efforts to mobilize the next generation for political engagement.

QUESTION: You represent a fascinating neighborhood in one of the world's most dynamic cities. What makes Hackney so special?

COBAN: Hackney is a very interesting place. I always refer

to Hackney as the world-in-one-borough because it's probably the most diverse municipality in the whole of Europe. It's got a huge Orthodox Jewish community, Turkish and Kurdish communities, and a huge African Caribbean community. Hackney used to be one of the worst places to live in the United Kingdom. It was actually ranked as the worst place in 2006 out of 434 local authorities. When my family came from Cyprus, Hackney had one of the highest rates of crime in the UK and one of the highest rates of poverty. This was particularly so among children, with 36% of children in Hackney living under the

poverty line. Fast forward 16 years, Hackney has massively transformed. We've got Tech City, which is basically where all the tech companies and fintech companies are based. And we've now got the best schools because we had a big investment after all the schools were failing. In a nutshell, what I'm trying to say is it's massively changed. It's gone through major transformation in terms of the dynamics of the economy and its people.

QUESTION: That is quite a leap in a relatively short time. What were the factors that drove and sustained this evolution?

COBAN: We got here because of a number of factors. The first is the 2012 Summer Olympics, which were held in the east London area and cut across four London boroughs, one of them being Hackney. That brought

a lot of investment. The other thing that massively transformed the area was the government at the time. The local council went into administration, so the government intervened and that brought waves of investment. Since Hackney is on the cusp of the City of London [London's financial district], and the City was too expensive for this growing world of tech, a lot of these companies coalesced around Hackney. You had this new community that was being formed and bringing nightlife and businesses. So, Hackney has become this very trendy place to live.

QUESTION: Rapid growth often comes with significant challenges. What issues are residents confronting?

COBAN: The top three concerns they have are a cost-

of-living crisis, a housing crisis in terms of more than 50% of our housing stock being public housing, and then the third issue is sustainable transport. 87% of people in Hackney either walk, take public transport or cycle. It has the lowest car ownership levels in London. People take the environment very seriously in Hackney.

QUESTION: Public interest in Hackney in environmental issues seems to have created space for the local government to innovate. Can you tell us about any novel approaches you've taken on these issues?

COBAN: One problem that we have in Hackney is really bad air pollution, one of the highest levels in London. Hackney is a very centrally located borough. It's surrounded by north London, east London and central London,



and people are driving through Hackney to get to where they need to go. Navigation apps have made a lot of residential roads, which weren't designed for heavy traffic, more accessible because the apps offer them as shortcuts. We've seen 40 million miles more driven on residential roads in the last 10 years, which is obviously a huge problem. One of the things that we've been experimenting with recently in Hackney, and this is part of my role, is low-traffic neighborhood schemes that are designed specifically to reduce the amount of external traffic using Hackney as a through route. We know that 40% of traffic that comes through Hackney never stops in Hackney, so it has no benefit to our economy.

We've now put 70% of our roads within low-traffic neighborhood schemes, which basically cuts access for cars. If you drive through, you'll pay a fine. It is designed to encourage more people to walk, cycle, take public transport, but then also tackle toxic air pollution and to protect the lungs of our children.

QUESTION: Do your constituents see that politics can deliver results and improve their quality of life?

COBAN: They very much notice it. The most recent scheme I launched started on a major road, which has more than 10,000 cars driving on it every day minimum sometimes more than 15,000 cars. We've now introduced a policy where there are no through routes between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m., meaning

that if you are in a car, it's very noticeable. If you're driving through... it's very noticeable. It's a big political issue. It takes a lot of bravery to bring it in because you know undoubtedly that you're going to get a lot of people who are going to push back, whether it's people who are in the trades, or people who need to drive. Anyone who owns a car understandably is going to push back because they've invested in a car, and they don't want to spend more time in traffic.

QUESTION: Are there other neighborhoods or boroughs that look at what Hackney has done and try to replicate it?

COBAN: Yeah, we're the beacon of London. We've been leading the way in this, and we're ranked number one in terms of what we call healthy streets.

QUESTION: Many politicians say they prefer serving in local government because they can see tangible results of their work. How do you view your role?

COBAN: I got into being a councilor because I took the view from a very young age that I didn't want to complain and not be part of the solution. It was a clear choice for me. Either I was going to stop complaining, get on with my life, or I was going to try to be involved and try to make a difference for my community. Being a councilor is part of that. But I also wanted to go one step further, and I wanted to make sure that we can empower people who had similar experiences to me when

I was growing up. You often felt neglected, and you often felt powerless, and you often felt that you didn't have a voice. That's why we established My Life My Say. We knew that lots of young people across the country often felt politicians didn't take them seriously when it came to policies, and didn't consider their voices when it came to some of the biggest issues of the day.

QUESTION: Is it a heavy lift to convince young people to engage in politics?

COBAN: I think young people do care about issues. I think, of course, they care about whether they've got a decent roof over their shoulders. They care about whether they've got a job that gives them basic respect and dignity. The problem is whether they see traditional forms of politics as a vehicle to address the issues that they care about. And partly the reason why they don't is because we're not educated about how democracy works in the UK. Another problem is that our politicians are not representative of society. There aren't a lot of people who look and sound like me who are in politics. When you look at the number of women in politics, it's still very low. I mean it's ridiculous. And when you look at the number of people from LGBTQ+ backgrounds, or people with disabilities, or minorities, or people of different classes, their representation is still low. I think that's a big barrier.

QUESTION: What do you think the UK would look like if parliament were more

representative of the population?

METE COBAN: I think if the parliament was much more representative, we wouldn't be in such a mess that we are now, where we haven't had any legislation on some of the biggest challenges that we face around the education system or the health system, the National Health Service. We take the NHS very seriously, but it's on the brink of collapse because the people at the top don't understand how it works. They've never used it. They've never needed it. Nor do they understand the importance of it. We haven't had any major reform or legislation in this country for decades. We haven't had any serious investment in terms of infrastructure. We're not serious about climate change. You know,

we have a huge issue around energy prices right now, but there's no plan to retrofit homes in this country.

QUESTION: It sounds like the problems you're currently facing are insurmountable in the current political climate. Do you remain optimistic, or are we doomed?

COBAN: We're not doomed yet, and the reason why we're not doomed is that sometimes you need big issues to really wake people up. What I've seen over the past few years, particularly when you look at the Black Lives Matter movement, when you look at the youth movement around climate change, you sometimes need bad things to happen to wake up a lot of people to understand what we had and also

to really understand how to get us to think about what the future of the world could be. There's a whole lot of people who are now very motivated to make change more than ever. Even through my own work, through My Life My Say, for example, I see it. There's much more demand for the type of work we do. There's much more interest in the type of work we do. Generally speaking, more people are now motivated to make change. What we need to do now is really tap into that energy and really channel it in the right way to build a system that is much more inclusive, and create a different type of world that we can live in.

I think there's an appetite for change. If we don't capitalize on this moment, then it'll be such a missed opportunity.



BARRY FARM, LIBERTY CITY, AND URBAN EQUITY

PHOTOGRAPHY AND ARTICLE BY SAMUEL GEORGE

In summer 2020, Detrice and her mother, Ms. Belt, walked down Stevens Road, one of the main corridors of the old Barry Farm housing complex. Detrice had grown up in this small neighborhood of two-story houses that overlooks the U.S. Capitol from across the Anacostia River. Most of the units she had known, however, were long gone, demolished in anticipation of new development backed by millions of dollars of public and private investment. “That was Ellen’s house right there,” Detrice said wistfully, pointing to one of many nearby empty fields.

Over the last three years, the Bertelsmann Foundation has

researched two former public housing projects: the Barry Farm neighborhood in Washington, DC, and Liberty City in Miami. The municipalities may have little in common, but the trajectories of the projects share certain remarkable similarities. And they offer critical lessons about U.S. public housing and a warning for the future of cities on both sides of the Atlantic.

BARRY FARM AND LIBERTY CITY: BORN IN SEGREGATION

Both housing projects arose in deeply segregated environments. Liberty City opened in 1937 and initially stood as one of the first

housing projects specifically for Black Americans.¹ At that time, Miami was a segregated city, and African Americans lived primarily in present-day Overtown. The homes were “shacks” in which “the living conditions [were] inconceivable.”²

The Southern Housing Corporation developed Liberty City, whose location reflected the injustice of the time. The 252-unit complex was built far from Miami’s tony beaches, where African Americans were (and sometimes still are) unwelcome. The units were built inland, on high ground, on the land considered least attractive for the city’s wealthy residents and vacationers. An eight-foot wall was

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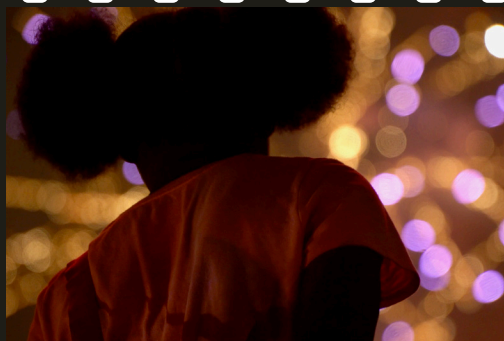
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erected along 12th Avenue, a formal demarcation between Black and white neighborhoods. “You cross that line,” Samuel Latimore, a 1940s resident of Liberty City recalled in an interview with the Bertelsmann Foundation, and “that would be an ass-whooping.”

The Barry Farm Dwellings, another public housing complex, was also a product of America’s segregated history. As the name implies, the territory on which the complex was built had been farmland owned by the Barry family. What the name does not convey is that the family owned slaves, some of whom toiled where the housing units were built. Following the Civil War, thousands of formerly enslaved individuals moved to the Washington, DC area, where life was a bit easier. As historian Derek Musgrove told the Bertelsmann Foundation, “After the Civil War, one city where the pullback from Reconstruction was perhaps the least violent and the least disruptive to African Americans was Washington, DC. Life was freer there. It wasn’t free, but it was freer.”

The city needed land to accommodate the expanding African American population, and for help, it turned to The Freedmen’s Bureau, a government agency established in 1865 to “provide relief and help formerly enslaved people become self-sufficient”.³ Led by Union

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General Oliver Otis Howard, The Freedmen’s Bureau purchased the Barry farm in 1867 for US\$52,000. The land was then divided into parcels and made available to African Americans for purchase, thus creating one of Washington, DC’s first African American neighborhoods.⁴ Over the next 70 years, the neighborhood established itself as a “prosperous and stable working-class community”.⁵

In the 1940s, however, Barry Farm faced major upheaval. Washington, DC was again expanding and confronting the same need for public housing that led Miami to build Liberty City, but whites were adamant that no such construction take place in their neighborhoods.⁶ Ultimately, 33 Barry Farm houses were demolished and 26 families displaced so that the city could erect public housing. The buildings opened in 1942 and 1943.⁷

THE RISE AND FALL OF AMERICAN PUBLIC HOUSING

Initially, Barry Farm and Liberty City were beloved facilities. For families that had been living in the overcrowded shanties of Miami’s Overtown, or migrating from the rural south to Washington, DC, the new housing was a sight to behold, and the community to join. Interviews with early residents of both bear this out.

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“We compared it to Coral Gables, it was just that beautiful,” Jean Carroll Morley told the Bertelsmann Foundation, recalling Liberty City’s early years. “We never locked our doors,” remembered Phillip Walker, speaking alongside his wife Hattie, whom he met in Liberty City. “You could just walk in and out.” Residents of Barry Farm in the 1940s and 1950s shared similar memories. “Wherever you were when dinner time came, that’s where you ate,” one said. “The families all knew each other, and they looked out for each other.”

In those early years, Liberty City and Barry Farm functioned in practice as they were meant to in theory. Some residents could use the government housing as a stepping stone, saving money to purchase their own property. But as conditions in and around the complexes began to deteriorate, so did the opportunity for upward mobility.⁸ In fact, fatal flaws that stifled a better standard of living were embedded in early American public housing efforts.

While post-war programs offered many Americans access to home equity for the first time, many African Americans were excluded because the federal government decentralized the administration of benefits to local officials who were often “committed to preserving white racial hierarchy over Blacks”.⁹ Thus, while the GI Bill of 1944

is “often described in universal, celebratory tones as the ‘magic carpet’ to the middle class, this was only true for white veterans, their families, and their heirs. Chiefly because of the racist administration of the [GI] Bill’s housing benefit, white veterans were able to purchase homes, while [B]lack veterans were denied access to real estate purchases.”¹⁰

Millions of African Americans were, therefore, moving into Miami, Washington, DC and other American cities at a time when home ownership programs were administered in large part along racial lines. This pushed many Blacks into public housing, and the complexes that emerged in the 1930s, ’40s, and ’50s reinforced segregation in increasingly multi-racial cities.¹¹ As the units remained publicly owned, residents lacked the opportunity to build equity in home ownership, a staple of American intergenerational upward mobility.¹²

By the second half of the 20th century, decades of white flight from urban areas had left public housing communities isolated and vulnerable to the influx of drugs that flooded U.S. cities. Urban infrastructure deteriorated with little public investment to replace it, and little political appetite existed to address the situation.¹³ The chronic underinvestment would make stricken neighborhoods ripe for redevelopment, but only after three decades of neglect.

AN ERA OF GENTRIFICATION

As Barry Farm and Liberty City degraded, Miami and Washington, DC, underwent rapid gentrification. Both cities had become magnet locations, especially for young professionals for whom rural America offered few to no career prospects. The Bertelsmann Foundation has written about this

trend: As the American economy has transitioned over the last 40 years to knowledge- and service-based activities, jobs have become concentrated in certain larger cities. Smaller communities nationwide have suffered.¹⁴

Washington, DC emerged as the most rapidly gentrifying city in the country, according to a 2019 study by the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC).¹⁵ The same research showed Miami was not far behind the capital.¹⁶ As both cities experienced profound redevelopment, the municipal land used for public housing quickly soared in value. Washington, DC soon eyed the Barry Farm Dwellings, which sits just a 15-minute drive from the White House, and by the late 2010s the city’s plan to repurpose the land had wended its way through the courts. Residents were given vouchers to facilitate moving, along with vague, non-legally binding promises of a right to return. By 2021, the entire Barry Farm community was gone, and developers broke ground on new construction.

“They told us all sorts of things to get us to move out,” said Sugar, a Barry Farm resident displaced by the development. “They wanted to build up Barry Farm¹⁷ with a new class of people, and not low-income people.” Paulette Matthews, another displaced resident agreed. “The plan was to move us out, and the plan was to not get many of us back. And we should be able to live there, because we endured hell. So, if there is going to be a piece of heaven that they are building, we should be able to be a part of it,” she said.

Liberty City had a similar trajectory. But Miami’s gentrification coincided with the effects of climate change. The most desirable beachfront land began to lose some of its luster as the Atlantic Ocean encroached.

As local activist Valencia Gunder wrote, “Miami is ground zero for the climate crisis and sea-level rise that comes with it. The city sits just six feet above sea level, and studies estimate that the city will see two feet of sea-level rise by 2060 and 6 feet by 2100. Little Haiti sits about 7 feet above sea level, meaning that residents of the neighborhood are likely to notice these impacts later than their coastline counterparts.”¹⁸ Little Haiti is adjacent to Liberty City.

In a twist of history, Miami’s African American population, which was pushed in the mid-20th century inland to a less desirable area, now lived in a location of interest to developers. And residents were being pushed off, again. In 2015, developers and the city agreed to a US\$300 million development project for Liberty City. Residents were slowly but surely moved out of the dilapidated public housing, much of which was then razed. “Mixed housing” units, high-rises and stores are currently under construction.¹⁹

Like their Barry Farm counterparts, Liberty City residents remain ambivalent about the transition. No one doubted that the old homes had dilapidated over time, but there is sadness about the impact on the historic neighborhood. “It’s a tragedy,” James Bush, a Florida state congressman, told the Bertelsmann Foundation. “People have been restricted and confined to a community. And to see it now, slowly but surely being invaded by big-money developers. And then they charge rent that the people that were there all their lives can’t afford.”

Those developers have given their own vague promises to be “inclusive”, but doubt abounds. “When it comes to money,” Hattie Walker noted, “people start to act funny.” Meanwhile, activist Valencia Gunder has some straightforward

advice for residents. “Don’t let them hustle you! If a developer approaches your family and says we’ll buy your house [with] cash for \$100,000, that means it’s worth \$300,000, so tell your mother to ask for a higher price,” she said to a group of neighborhood teenagers.

A TRANSATLANTIC LESSON

In an increasingly globalized world, the stories of relatively small public housing projects such as Barry Farm and Liberty City offer an important warning for the transatlantic community. The profound redevelopment of magnet cities is not unique to America; major cities in Europe face similar challenges and dynamics. Entire working-class neighborhoods of Barcelona have been redefined as tourist zones, with new Airbnb units, managed by companies, eating away at the local housing stock.²⁰ An estimated 135,000 families in London have been displaced from public housing over the last two decades in a process one researcher calls “the social cleansing of... council estates”.²¹ In the Berlin district of Kreuzberg, locals have responded to new developments and rental increases in a neighborhood known for migrants and artists with an “Unser Kiez, nicht ihr Profit!” (“Our neighborhood, not your profit!”) campaign.²²

But Europe also offers models the U.S. might follow. Vienna, Austria’s elegant capital, maintains a global reputation for a strong public housing program that accounts for 40% of the city’s housing stock.²³ Supporters note that it does not reinforce pre-existing inequalities by being located only in lower-income neighborhoods.²⁴ The construction is also of high quality and has not been left to atrophy over decades.²⁵

Such an extensive program would be a difficult sell to American voters,

but Vienna demonstrates that it is possible to maintain social housing in the 21st century, and even to integrate it into the fabric of a city. This can help avoid creating the pockets of poverty that have marred the US urban landscape.

TOWARD URBAN EQUITY

In the months following the 2020 protests for racial justice in the U.S., the concept of equity came into fashion as Americans grappled with notions of justice and inclusivity in a country with a long history of racism and inequality. Equity, though, also has a long association with home ownership, and both topics are at the root of concerns about urban development in the transatlantic community.

Hundreds of thousands of families in cities such as Washington, DC and Berlin have lived in their neighborhoods for generations. They built and have played key historic and cultural roles in the cities as we now know them. Yet these families did not always have the opportunity to build equity. As a result, they and their communities, in a time of spiking land values in magnet cities, can be brushed aside to make way for the latest high-rise condominium. The building may well be architecturally stunning and herald the arrival of new businesses. But these ventures are unlikely to

cater to longtime residents who are priced out of their neighborhood by the modern construction. Some may benefit with new jobs, but the employment opportunities often will be insufficient for them to reap many of the benefits of development.

As Detrice and her mother walked down those streets of the old Barry Farm neighborhood in summer 2020, those empty fields lay where slaves had worked farmland, one of Washington, DC’s, first communities of African American homeowners had blossomed and a mid-20th century historic public housing complex had stood. Construction workers were taking down the few remaining houses.

One paused to listen to the conversation. After hearing Detrice talk about family cookouts of years past, he interrupted and spoke of the beautiful new neighborhood that would soon arise. “And that, over there”, he said, pointing to an empty lot, “that will be a brand-new supermarket.”

Detrice was unconvinced. Even if she were able to move back to the neighborhood, she would not have any equity in the development. “Yeah,” she said, “but it won’t be ‘Detrice’s Supermarket’”.



GREEN-LIGHTING GLOBAL URBAN PARTNERSHIPS: THE C40 INITIATIVE

By Chloe Laird

In the fight against climate change, the European Union leads the transatlantic community by example. Its all-encompassing European Green Deal aims to tackle everything relevant to creating a carbon-neutral continent, from preserving biodiversity to promoting sustainable finance. Yet recent debates about the pros and cons of nuclear energy highlight internal disagreements that have impeded progress towards a green transition.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the United States, on the federal level at least, is moving even more slowly towards becoming green. Though the Biden administration scored a major win by gaining Congressional

passage of its infrastructure package, which designates \$50 billion towards climate resilience and weatherization, other, similar efforts, such as the Build Back Better Act, have foundered. In both cases, however, activists are dismayed by the sluggish pace of such supranational- and national-level climate initiatives. The spotlight for movement has consequently been put on others, and cities increasingly find themselves becoming green-transition trailblazers.

The C40, a global network of more than 100 mayors whose cities represent 27% of the global economy and a population of more than 800 million, was born out of this necessity. The group was inaugurated in 2005

as a transatlantic-led effort after the mayors of New York and London decided they needed to cooperate to fight climate change. Today, the C40 is at the forefront of providing support for and facilitating progress in cities. As innovation hubs, with traditionally less bureaucracy than national governments, cities are well positioned to rapidly become trailblazers and have the potential to be centers for sustainable solutions.

The C40 offers local policymakers myriad tools to enact systemic change. They range from providing a comprehensive City Action Planning Framework that lays out a blueprint for urban planning to organizing



workshops that facilitate peer-to-peer exchange.

The organization has scored some successes, especially in some of the larger member cities, but its worthy aspirations go well beyond them. C40 pledges must translate into more action. One way to do this is exploiting for further gains the progress already achieved. But true achievement would make the C40 a model for communities worldwide, especially as the global policy agenda increasingly turns, as it must, towards a successful green transition.

TESTING THE C40 MODEL

Former Toronto Mayor David Miller led the C40 between 2008 and 2010. His platform reflected the belief that “when national governments fail to act, cities can, and must, act.” This is, in fact, the foundation of the C40, which emphasizes that “member cities earn their membership through action.” And since the beginning of 2021, the C40’s “Leadership Standards” make action an explicit criterion for membership. The standards include delivering a concrete climate action plan by 2024 and adopting other policies in line with the Paris Agreement, which aims to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The standards are designed for ultimately ensuring a path to a zero-carbon future.

The C40 has evolved in line with the increasing role climate change plays in international

policy debates. When Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo became the first female C40 chair in 2016, she established a Women4Climate program that aims to empower a new generation of women to tackle climate change-related issues. Such a program responds to the reality that the effects of climate change are more pronounced for women. As droughts increasingly and disproportionately affect the global south, women there are forced to make longer journeys to obtain food and water, exposing themselves to higher risk of sexual assault. This is a particular danger for girls, who are often taken out of school to perform these chores and ensure their families’ survival. A lack of education and worsening climate conditions combine to give these girls a long-term prospect of a lower quality of life. Many must eventually relocate to overcome the dire circumstances. According to the UN, 80% of climate refugees are women because they can no longer fulfill the responsibility of being the main providers of water and food for their families.

Underserved populations as a whole are drastically affected by climate change. Disease and mortality brought on by air pollution, for example, disproportionately affects poorer communities. Former Chair and current Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti understood this reality when he launched in 2019 the C40’s Global Green New Deal. This holistic effort brings together the challenges of



tackling climate change, social issues and economic disparities.

A central goal of Garcetti’s initiative provides a regionally diverse approach to climate transition to spur inclusion. Critical to the program’s success is representation of and benefits for a wide range of communities. And, in an effort to determine the chances of that success, the C40 has created an Implementation Pilot Program. Nine cities were selected as test cases for the program Accra, Barcelona, Los Angeles, and Warsaw, and South Africa’s Cape Town, Durban, Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, and Tshwane. Barcelona is building climate-resilient communities in marginalized neighborhoods, while Warsaw is tackling energy poverty to ensure that the green transition includes the most vulnerable. Garcetti’s own Los Angeles has been pushing to create green jobs within the renewable energy and low-carbon construction sectors.

FOR THE CITY OF ANGELS, THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAIL

Los Angeles has been a C40

member since 2006, a year after the group was established. With a population of more than four million and \$353.5 billion in GDP, the city participates in a number of C40 initiatives that pool resources to address environmental challenges. But Los Angeles' most important contributions to the C40 are its successfully implemented Climate Action Plans, among them one that integrates a chief sustainability officer and a sustainability plan into every city department. Such efforts are part of a broader, 20-year strategy aiming to position California as a global leader on climate.

Los Angeles is a C40 heavyweight given its economic importance. One of the two largest American ports in terms of container traffic, the Port of Los Angeles, is within city limits. The other, the Port of Long Beach, is a mere four miles away. Both ports accounted in 2017 for \$398 billion of economic activity and 37% of all waterborne containerized cargo entering the U.S. That same year, the mayors of Los Angeles and Long Beach signed a monumental agreement that established targets for zero-emission cargo-handling equipment by 2030 and zero-emission trucks by 2035. Garcetti called the pact "brave new territory" and an ambitious challenge. It is also one that sets a precedent for smaller ports worldwide.

Garcetti is right when noting that the zero-emissions goal will not be easy to achieve. The

shipping industry emits about 3% of the world's greenhouse gases. That's more than aviation, although shipping accounts for 90% of the global trade. But current supply chain crises are expected to reverse a decade of progress on reducing the sector's carbon intensity as efficiency is prioritized over sustainability. A decrease in the industry's carbon footprint means ships must travel at relatively slow speeds, which wouldn't accommodate current demand for goods.

In January, Garcetti's zero-emissions objectives took a significant step forward when the Port of Los Angeles, the Port of Shanghai, and the C40 announced the creation of the first transpacific green shipping lane between the U.S. and China. The corridor is the world's busiest for container movement, giving the deal outsized importance for the future of sustainable shipping. "By convening international coalitions of the willing and creating a scalable and replicable model for other cities to follow, we hope this groundbreaking green shipping corridor initiative will catalyze action on a global scale," noted C40 Cities Executive Director Mark Watts. An implementation plan that includes phasing in low-, ultra-low-, and zero-carbon-fueled ships throughout the 2020s and the first zero-carbon transpacific container ships in 2030 is expected by the end of the year.

The transpacific shipping corridor aligns well with the

objectives announced at last year's COP26, particularly the gathering's Clydebank Declaration that pledges at least six green shipping lanes by the middle of this decade. The corridor also complements the C40's Green Ports Forum, an association launched in 2020 by Los Angeles to link cities and ports in a common effort to lower emissions. The Forum, which comprises more than 15 cities with some of the world's largest ports, seeks a universal definition of "green port". Finding common ground on such definitions is one of the largest obstacles to transatlantic cooperation on climate action. The Forum provides a channel for overcoming the challenge.

IN DAKAR, AN ENVIRONMENT FOR THE YOUNG

Great potential for progress also exists in developing countries. They, too, have been frustrated by the slow pace of global multilateralism and have discovered municipal diplomacy as an efficient and attractive alternative. More than ten African cities have joined the C40 network since 2005, Dakar among them. The Senegalese capital, with a population of more than 1.4 million and a GDP of \$11.9 billion, is part of the C40's Land Use Planning Network and Food Systems Network. The former strives to make cities more livable and to incorporate sustainable policies into urban planning models. The latter, an initiative led by the city

of Milan and the nonprofit EAT, aims to tackle food insecurity, in part by limiting food waste and promoting regenerative agriculture. Dakar reaps benefits in these areas through the C40's network mechanism, which delegates responsibility to cities and broadens their reach by forging relationships among municipal officials. Cities lead their own policy development but have peers for exchanging knowledge and for support and guidance.

Championing efforts to complement Dakar's participation in the Land Use Planning Network is the C40's Students Reinventing Cities initiative. This effort draws together academics and students worldwide to develop plans for a new generation of green neighborhoods. One group charged Senegalese participants with proposing upgrades to their capital city. Focusing on the downtown area, they put forward plans for incorporating natural cooling systems and adding greenery.

Dakar is home to 25% of Senegalese aged between 15 and 29 (60% of all Senegalese are actually under 25), and engagement with this demographic is another benefit

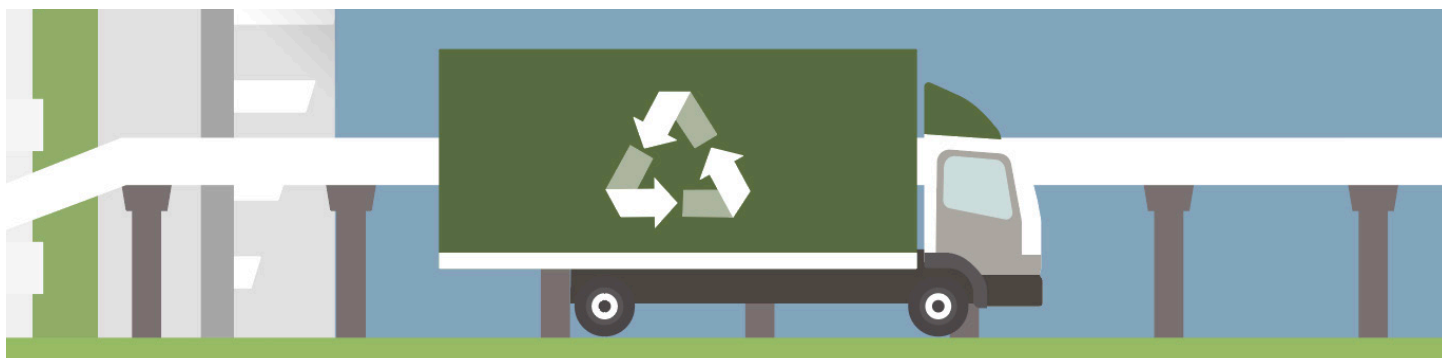
of C40 membership. The city, therefore, is an important contributor to the organization's Global Youth and Mayors Forum. This body aims to groom the next generation for a successful green transition by bringing together young climate activists with mayors to enact change by discussing ideas and innovative solutions, and building wider networks. Forum membership offers a unique opportunity for policymakers to strategize and learn best practices for engaging with youth leaders while advancing climate ambitions. At the same time, youth activist participation in such initiatives is crucial as the younger generation increasingly assumes important and public-facing roles in the fight against climate change.

In November 2021, Forum members released their "Youth Engagement Playbook for Cities", a publication meant to inspire younger generations to achieve meaningful climate action. Readers are encouraged to "lead the way" by establishing youth climate councils, meeting with high-level officials, and advocating for a municipal representative to oversee youth engagement, among other goals. Sixteen-year-old Maureen Damen represents Dakar in the Global Youth and Mayors

Forum. She is also a co-founder of Fridays for Future Senegal and founder of Rise Senegal, part of the larger Rise Up movement that seeks to amplify the voices of African climate activists. Her fellow Forum participant, Juliet Oluoch of Nairobi, also works to counter the disproportionate effects of climate change on developing nations. Both contributed to the playbook, bringing their insights and those of younger Africans as a whole into consideration. Africa's population is younger on average than that of any other continent, and this offers a significant opportunity to bring a large number of next-generation climate activists to the table. The C40 exploits that potential by providing a platform for young people, such as Damen and Oluoch, to reach a wide audience that just may be receptive to their calls for climate action.

DEMOCRACY IS ALSO AT STAKE

The struggle to confront climate change is assuming increasingly important political dimensions. The University of Cambridge's Bennett Institute for Public Policy released in 2020 an analysis of more than 3,500



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surveys of publics conducted in more than 150 countries on people's satisfaction with democracy. The most recent data showed the "highest level of democratic discontent" since 1995, when pollsters first asked about the issue. Why the rise in dissatisfaction? The "most likely explanation is that democratically elected governments have not been seen to succeed in addressing some of the major challenges of our era, including... providing a credible response to the threat of global climate change," the Bennett Institute report stated. To change that, some point to eco-authoritarianism, a drastic approach that endangers fundamental democratic values. It permits a government of "eco-elites" to single-handedly formulate policy that prioritizes saving the environment over a potential suspension of civil liberties. Renowned environmentalist James Lovelock compared climate change to combat more than a decade ago when he argued that "[e]ven the best democracies agree that when a major war approaches, democracy must be put on hold... I have a feeling that climate change may be an issue as severe as a war. It may be necessary to put democracy on hold for a while."

This strategy to fighting climate change has become an attractive alternative for a younger generation who believes national governments are acting too slowly to defend their future. This generation sees lengthy democratic processes

that require civic deliberation as hindering radical solutions for quick change. The C40's work to embolden city-level multilateralism consequently serves as a way to circumvent authoritarian tendencies by restoring a withering faith in elected government. Cities are perhaps "the most important institutions that can play a role in strengthening the belief in democracy."

THE WAY FORWARD

The benefits of the C40 are clear. Thanks to the group, Los Angeles is reimagining the future of shipping. Dakar is elevating youth engagement on an issue of great concern. And at the same time, democracy is getting a boost.

The need for the C40 is also clear. But it now must concentrate on translating worthy ambitions into action. It must take care to avoid falling into the trap of meaningless declarations, or drowning "hopes and dreams" in "empty words and promises", as Greta Thunberg prominently noted during COP26.

In May 2021, the C40 employed, despite substantial growth, a staff of only 250. That is a small number for an organization tackling a wide range of global issues, from food waste to social injustice. The C40 has no plans to stop expanding, and additional resources could provide opportunity for more-rapidly implemented solutions. Cities should view the C40 as

an accessible resource that can facilitate and accelerate change through its member cities' experimentation and knowledge sharing networks. The group has proved to be a luminary in assimilating environmental concerns into urban development. Zachary Tofias, director of the C40's Food and Waste Program, has emphasized that his organization is a unique platform that offers interwoven top-down and bottom-up approaches for climate solutions. But translating these proposed solutions into policy action requires myriad actors on the local, federal, and global levels.

Ultimately, a concerted effort is key to encouraging individual citizens to be active stakeholders in our common future. The EU and the U.S. would do well to keep municipal accomplishments and C40 lessons in their sights as the transatlantic partners develop their respective green policies and coordinate joint action.



SMART CITIES ACROSS THE ATLANTIC

BILBAO AND AUSTIN ARE AMONG THOSE LEADING THE WAY



**INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY
DANIELA ROJAS MEDINA ON
FEBRUARY 16TH, 2022 WITH
OIHANE AGIRREGOITIA
MARTÍNEZ.**

INTRO:

Bilbao, the capital of northern Spain's Basque country, is the world's tenth smartest city, according to the Smart City Index (SCI). The ranking, issued by Switzerland's International Institute for Management Development and the Singapore University of Technology and Design, recognizes Bilbao's successes in providing public transportation, basic sanitation, internet speed and reliability, and medical services.

Oihane Agirregoitia Martínez is Bilbao's councilor for public services, civic engagement, and internationalization. She spoke with Daniela from the Bertelsmann Foundation about Bilbao's smart-city initiatives.

QUESTION: How does Bilbao define a smart city?

AGIRREGOITIA MARTÍNEZ: We understand a smart city to be a model of urban governance that uses technology to improve the quality of life of people, stimulate the economy, and protect the environment. People are at the center for us, improving the quality of life and well-being of our citizens are our primary objectives, and we understand that technology is a tool we can use to achieve these objectives.

QUESTION: What role does

technology play in the development of a smart city?

AGIRREGOITIA MARTÍNEZ: We see technology as an accelerating tool. In terms of a smart economy, we think about how we can use technology to improve the city's capacity to generate economic activity and job growth. When we talk about smart mobility, it's how we are able to reduce congestion, and promote public transportation options that are faster, more sustainable, greener, and cheaper. If we talk about smart governance, it's how technology can help us improve our ability to manage public resources efficiently and to execute public policies based on principles of transparency, open government, accountability, and citizen participation. For smart living, we focus on ways to promote health and welfare for citizens, which has become important in the past two years of the pandemic. In terms of smart environment, it's all about how we become more sustainable and

use technology for analyzing the environment, for developing clean energy sources, and for urban planning.

QUESTION: Bilbao rose to the 10th position in the 2021 SCI from 24th the year before. What led to Bilbao's improved performance?

AGIRREGOITIA MARTÍNEZ: This improvement in the SCI is important for our city because it recognizes that we are doing a good job. Bilbao is positioned in the top 10 of 118 cities worldwide and in first position nationally, ahead of cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, and Zaragoza. This recognition carries great value because the SCI measures our residents' perceptions of using the city's technology and services. As I mentioned, a smart city for us is one that has an impact on improving the quality of life of citizens. If we analyze the ranking, what stands out in Bilbao is public transportation, sanitation, and internet speed relative to connectivity needs. For several

years now, we have been deploying a project to extend free Wi-Fi to all citizens. Bilbao is also doing well in recycling services and garbage collection, which we believe are important areas, as well as in providing medical services. Residents perceive that the ability to arrange medical appointments online has improved access to medicine. Overall, the SCI tells us that for Bilbao residents the

SMART CITY INDEX 2021

SINGAPORE
ZURICH, SWITZERLAND
OSLO, NORWAY
TAIPEI CITY, TAIWAN
LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND
HELSINKI, FINLAND
COPENHAGEN, DENMARK
GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND
BILBAO, SPAIN

use of technology improves the community.



QUESTION: What does becoming a smart city mean for Bilbao? What are your priorities in this regard?

AGIRREGOITIA MARTÍNEZ: For us it is important to have a good-governance model from a holistic and integrative perspective, and to have a series of principles on which we base the entire smart-city strategy. Bilbao has a unique project called the Bilbao Charter of Values, for which residents established a list of 17 values that should support the city's present and future development. Based on these values we have determined that, as a digital society, we have major challenges related to privacy, ethical data usage, and cybersecurity. The principles and future challenges impact our actions for implementing smart-city technology.

The first principle is that everything must be citizen-centric. Security must be built into our design. Privacy, inclusion, transparency, and sustainability are non-negotiable, and everything we do must be done responsibly. We are also working on modernizing our government. We have to prepare ourselves for the digital citizenship with which we must interact in the future, while considering inclusion. We provide a public service so we must be able to participate in this digital revolution, while taking into account that there is a part of our population that still does not have the capacity to interact with the public administration in digital formats.

Then there are a number of priority areas that are strategic and linked to supporting the city's commercial sector: sustainability, mobility, and energy efficiency. These are trending issues worldwide, so Bilbao cannot shy away from them. It is also important for us to focus on caring for our elderly because we are an aging population. Europe is an aging continent, and Euskadi (Basque country) is, in particular, an aging community. We face a demographic challenge and, therefore, everything relevant to services that improve the quality of life for the elderly, and services that improve the conditions of caregivers, is strategic.

We believe that we face three major challenges: the public health challenge linked to the pandemic, sustainability, and the challenge of digital transformation. Supporting local businesses addresses the digital transformation challenge. Instituting a digital transition is important to us.

QUESTION: How do Bilbao's efforts compare to those in other cities in Spain or Europe?

AGIRREGOITIA MARTÍNEZ: Each city has its own competitive advantages, and we each develop our policies accordingly. At the national level, there are cities that are doing well, such as Barcelona or Malaga. What we do is try to analyze other cities and adapt what is relevant and what can be of use to us in Bilbao.

QUESTION: What short- or long-term goals has Bilbao established to continue innovating and growing as a smart city?

AGIRREGOITIA MARTÍNEZ: At the moment we are preparing a 2030 digital transformation agenda with a medium- and long-term plan. Even though technology is evolving fast, we believe we need to have that long-term vision to figure out where we want to go, what kind of population we may need to serve in 2030, and how to adjust. The EU marked the 2020s as the digital decade and outlined a series of priorities with which we are closely aligning ourselves. They are linked to cybersecurity, quantum [research], and 5G and 6G technologies.

Right now, we are working with the structuring of data. We have approved a data manifesto with participation from the private sector, universities, and residents to generate an environment of trust. We understand that the city's use of data analytics and artificial intelligence must be with the sole objective of improving public services. We have also developed 10 IT principles for a technology development policy model and a project prioritization model, which should help us to establish a roadmap for the short, medium, and long term.

QUESTION: What other smart cities inspire you?

AGIRREGOITIA MARTÍNEZ: We tend to focus more on European cities. While there may be more

modern cities in Asia or the U.S., we are aware that there are a lot of cultural differences, and sometimes what works on other continents may not be transferable to our city. In Europe, we have analyzed cities such as Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Stockholm, and Helsinki. Vienna is also a city that inspires us a lot because we think it is orderly and advanced. We have also looked at other cities outside Europe, such as Tel Aviv or Vancouver, because they work a lot with entrepreneurs or because they have advanced e-government. We are constantly evaluating different cities that we believe can contribute to our work in Bilbao.

This interview was conducted in Spanish and translated by the interviewer.

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY DANIELA ROJAS MEDINA ON FEBRUARY 24TH, 2022 WITH DANIEL CULOTTA AND CHARLES PURMA.

INTRO:

On the other side of the Atlantic, Austin is a city on the rise, which was ranked the third smartest city in the U.S. by Digi International in 2020. The Texan capital has been making much

DIGI INTERNATIONAL TOP 10 U.S. SMART CITIES

DALLAS, TX
CHICAGO, IL
AUSTIN, TX
SEATTLE, WA
CHARLOTTE, NC
SAN FRANCISCO, CA
WASHINGTON, DC
BOSTON, MA
PITTSBURGH, PA
BOULDER, CO

progress in smart mobility, open data, and virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) trainings for municipal employees.

To learn more about Austin's smart-city initiative, Daniela spoke with Acting Chief Innovation Officer Daniel Culotta and IT Project Manager Charles Purma, both from the city's office of innovation.

QUESTION: How does the City of Austin define a smart city?

CULOTTA: Smart cities are, in essence, cities that thoughtfully adopt technologies that are advanced or leading in order to better serve residents. In Austin, our official definition is that we are a city that becomes increasingly efficient in solving real problems for real people by: a) engaging stakeholders and users; b) leading collaboratively; c) working across disciplines, departments, and city systems; and d) using data and integrated technologies to transform services and improve quality of life with and for all Austinites, businesses, and visitors.



QUESTION: What role does technology play in the development of a smart city?

CULOTTA: When we start to think about different challenges, we focus on the first three elements of our official definition and solving real problems for real people. Then, of course, we use the appropriate and most advanced data and technologies to help solve those challenges. The important point is that we don't say "Here's this new gadget, where can we put it?" We start by asking: What are the challenges? What are the opportunities? How can we work together across our disciplines and departments to think about it? And then, finally, what are the tools we can apply to some of these [technologies]? Technology is a solution and endpoint rather than a starting point.

QUESTION: What does becoming a smart city mean for Austin? What are your priorities in this regard?

CULOTTA: What we have tried to focus on a lot is equity. How can we use smart solutions and smart thinking to deliver services and address challenges more equitably, and improve equity outcomes in places where they are not great? Some of that certainly involves transportation, digital access, and infrastructure, and some of it involves energy and many other applications of technology. While our base mission is to deliver those services in the best way possible now and in the future for all our residents, becoming more

equitable across those services is where we try to invest in smart solutions.

PURMA: Another big part of our smart-city initiative that we focus on is Austin's open data program. It includes an open data portal, where we publish several thousand data sets. We have specific applications built off of the open data platform, such as a way for residents to visualize and monitor all our capital improvement projects and to look at the city's budget. There are also ways for residents to look at code compliance issues and cases in their neighborhoods. It goes beyond putting data out there just for transparency's sake. We try to make it as applicable to decision makers and residents as possible.

QUESTION: Why did Austin decide to start developing a smart-city initiative?

CULOTTA: When everyone started talking about smart cities we saw it as an opportunity for us to build up our engagement around this topic. We had done it on a department-by-department basis before. But now we could add a level of governance on top that allows us to advance and create a shared orientation towards smart development.

One of the decision support tools we have for smart cities is a maturity model, which allows us to look at our maturity levels in, and across the spectrum of, the four parts of our smart-city definition. We can use the maturity model to see where we

are, what our next step is, and we can understand if we are trying to skip way ahead when we are looking at a solution. The maturity model helps the organization and departments advance more equitable and sustainable outcomes, and operationalize strategic principles.

PURMA: It took internal and external collaboration. A lot of the pressure that was coming externally was technology focused. What the city had to do was bring the human aspect to smart cities and assess what is really possible. We have a good understanding with our external partners that smart cities are not just technology and data analytics, but there also has to be a human and personal consideration because our primary job is to deliver services and support our residents. Austin did a pretty good job at tempering the excitement and the hype around smart-city technologies with the human element and ensuring there was a foundation in place. That way, we can get down the road and not have a lot of starts and stops or big catastrophes like we have seen in other cities that maybe got ahead of themselves. We have taken a careful and intentional approach with our smart-city initiative.

CULOTTA: With a human-centered approach, you have to be open and smart. Those go hand in hand. When we talk about open data and transparency, you cannot enact that human-centered smart-city definition

without being open, transparent, and collaborative. That is why the open data portal, and the solutions and engagement that it engenders, are such vital parts of what we do with the smart-city initiative.

QUESTION: Where does Austin stand compared to other cities in Texas or the U.S.? How is Austin a leader in the implementation of smart-city technology?

CULOTTA: We do a good job of being innovative and on the forefront with our transportation technologies, and we are thorough and systematic in how we think about the technologies and test them. Our transportation department has a robust prototyping and testing program. We are also strong on our human- and resident-centered approach to smart cities.

PURMA: When it comes to internal and external engagement with the community, Austin is doing a lot more than other cities. Our smart mobility program is leading the country, and we are doing great work with our drones and autonomous robotics, as well as our open data program. We had one of the first major open data programs in the country starting back in 2010, so we have always been seen as leaders in this area.

We also do a great job with the city's strategic direction and priorities. Austin has a set of strategic directives set by the city council that outlines all our priorities. What we have done is

make sure that each one of those priorities is mapped directly to outcomes, and that each one is supported with performance metrics and data. All that data is then released to the public so that it's fully transparent. A resident, journalist or student can check our work and make sure that what we're saying we're doing, we're actually doing. Our technology department does a good job of making sure that when we engage with other departments, that we're focusing on the strategic direction and trying to enable [those departments] with technology as much as possible.

One more place where we have done a good job is our VR and AR projects. We were one of the early adopters of this technology in cities. A few years ago, we partnered with Texas State University to develop VR and AR trainings for our emergency management personnel. That project was so successful that the team that built the trainings at the university went off and started their own company. We've also had several internal projects like virtual tours and immersive experiences for the general public.

QUESTION: What short- or long-term goals has Austin established to continue innovating and growing as a smart city?

CULOTTA: When it comes to our smart-city planning and roadmap, we focus on a long-term vision and governance, moving towards our definition

of a smart city, and referencing the maturity model. The transportation, energy, water, and other departments all have that foundational definition, maturity map planning, and governance, and apply it across their operations. Each one of them has specific goals and milestones that they operate under.

QUESTION: What does the ideal smart city look like?

CULOTTA: One that effectively fulfills their own definition of what a smart city should be over time since there isn't a finish line for this type of initiative. It is a city that effectively operates within and adheres to principles of equity, sustainability, resilience, and innovation.

PURMA: One that is transparent and promotes better quality of life, happiness, and prosperity for residents. But it shouldn't do so in a dystopian way where you have robots, cameras, sensors, and drones flying everywhere. You need those things, but there should be a cost-benefit analysis by which the city measures how a certain technology will lead to more happiness, economic development, equity, or sustainability. You need to have a rubric that you hold yourself accountable to and the technologies should be intentional, careful, and collaborative. The city should be doing these smart-city projects with the community, partnering with local institutions, universities and academic entities to hold each other accountable and in check.

A TALE OF TRANSATLANTIC TRADE

THE GERMANS OF CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA



By Brandon Bohrn

A walk along Charleston, South Carolina's Battery is a step back in time. The fortified seawall and promenade stretches out alongside antebellum mansions, horse-drawn carriages, and

sweetgrass basket stands. It also offers views of the city's two main waterways, the Cooper and Ashley rivers, flowing in from the Atlantic. As viewers look out to the vast ocean, other sights stand out. They start as small dots on the horizon and

grow progressively larger—giant merchant vessels entering the city harbor. As the ships draw near, names like Hamburg Süd and Hapag-Lloyd appear, displayed across the massive hulls or containers stacked sky-high across the decks. These are

the names of Germany's leading shipping lines, carrying goods from port cities like Bremen and Hamburg across the world. Like Charleston itself, the very sight of these German giants entering port is historic, a tradition that dates back over two hundred years. The story, however, is a complex one. It is a history that involves a once-strong, yet flawed, German community in Charleston that set the foundation for the robust trade relationship that flourishes today.

LOW COUNTRY, HIGH HOPES

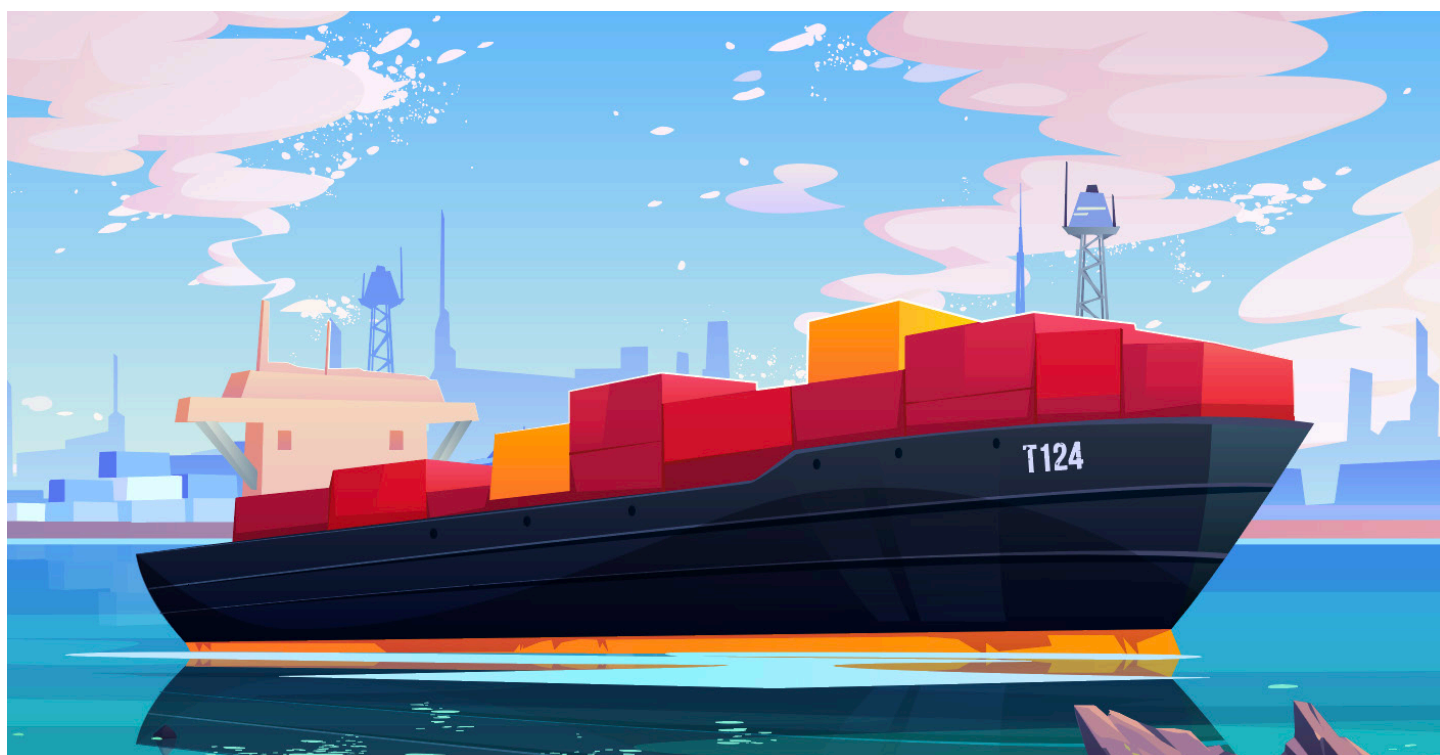
In 1830, the ship of Captain Heinrich Wieting entered Charleston harbor for the first time. The triple-masted sailing vessel, far different from the ships of today, was bringing

German settlers and goods from Bremen, Germany to the South Carolina Lowcountry. Later known by Charleston's German community as the "father of immigrants", Wieting eventually made 45 trips between the two cities over a 30-year period. German-speaking groups had once thrived in Charleston for decades, but shipping advancements of Wieting's day generated a safe and consistent flow of goods and settlers into the city. With each voyage, Wieting brought between 140 to 300 people. By his last, an estimated 75 percent of all Germans in the city had journeyed aboard his ships. By the 1840s, Charleston's Germans comprised one of the city's leading ethnic communities. The group built its own Lutheran church, St. Matthews, established a German newspaper, *Die Deutsche Zeitung*, and founded a German bank. Three mayors, from Bremen originally, led the

city during this era.

With migration on the rise, increased trade followed close behind. Demand for German goods was especially high. Wieting transported meats, tobacco pipes, and even beer, a product so desired that he opened his own brewery in Bremen. The cargo hold of his ship also contained collections of German-language books that later were used to establish Charleston's first German library.

Trade between Bremen and Charleston flowed in both directions. The goods that left Charleston's port for Germany, however, were closely tied to slavery; cotton and bricks from nearby plantations were top exports from South Carolina at the time. While Wieting was not a slaveowner himself, he profited from the practice, a dark fact that tarnishes his legacy.



The institution of slavery sparked the outbreak of the American Civil War, the first shots of which were fired in Charleston harbor after South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union.

Consequently, German trade and migration fell as U.S. naval forces blockaded the city's port. Some Germans returned home, while others joined the Confederate cause. A select few attempted to maintain trade as so-called "blockade runners", smuggling goods in and out of the city. Shortly after the war, as the period of Reconstruction began, Wieting passed away in Charleston, the city that had become his second home. With him, the movement of Germans to Charleston also died. But as the city's German community slowly faded away, trade with Germany expanded. Today, Charleston and Bremen are among the cities that underpin the strong U.S.-German trade relationship.

TRADE LIVES ON

Chicago's O'Hare International Airport became the leading gateway for U.S.-German trade in 2019, but Charleston's port held that distinction for nearly a century before then.¹ Every month, Charleston still processes a wide range of German goods, with Hamburg Süd and Hapag-Lloyd among the leading transporters. Both companies maintain a consistent flow of ships from Bremen to Charleston. The ships then sail on to other destinations in

the American Southeast, the Caribbean and Mexico, moving on to cities like Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, Freeport, and Veracruz, before returning back to Germany.^{2,3}

While goods have long traveled between Germany and Charleston, other South Carolina cities like Greenville and Spartanburg have welcomed German companies in the meantime. According to the South Carolina Department of Commerce, more than 200 such businesses now operate across the state. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that, as of 2020, Germany is South Carolina's largest international trading partner in terms of combined imports and exports, beating out China and Canada.^{4,5}

In 1992, BMW built its first full manufacturing facility outside of Germany in the Greenville-Spartanburg area. As cars leave the assembly line, about 75 percent of them are shipped from Charleston's harbor to more than 125 countries around the world.⁶ The massive Cooper River Bridge, lurking above the Charleston peninsula, offers a view of thousands of vehicles awaiting transport by German vessels. In 2021, the Port of Charleston and BMW celebrated the shipping of three million cars.

A LEGACY LOST?

The German influence on Charleston virtually disappeared by the late 1800s. Those who

stayed gradually assimilated and lost most of their connections to Germany. Still, some cultural elements remain. St. Matthews, the Lutheran church that Charleston's Germans established in 1840, stands tall in the city center and remains an iconic fixture of the skyline.⁷

Hidden away on the northern side of Charleston's peninsula lies Bethany Cemetery. It was opened in 1856 by St. Matthews following a series of Yellow Fever outbreaks in the city. The remnants of the once-strong German diaspora are visibly present. The elaborate ironwork surrounding burial plots was designed and built by a local German blacksmith of the day, but one burial plot in particular stands out. Captain Wieting lies in its center, encircled by members of 12 prominent German families he brought from Bremen to Charleston. A plaque on his tombstone recognizes his role in establishing Germany's connection to Charleston, albeit one sullied by a dark chapter in South Carolina's history.

Just to the east of the cemetery, merchant vessels of today continue to dock in Charleston's port. Huge cranes from the harbor rise above the sprawling marshland as they load and unload containers from ship decks. Germany's cultural connection to Charleston may be a shadow of what it once was, but the dynamic trade between the two still spurs growth and change on both sides of the Atlantic.

“GERMANY’S CULTURAL CONNECTION TO CHARLESTON MAY BE A SHADOW OF WHAT IT ONCE WAS, BUT THE DYNAMIC TRADE BETWEEN THE TWO STILL SPURS GROWTH AND CHANGE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC.”



DECODING SUCCESS: HOW BARCELONA USES TECHNOLOGY TO INTEGRATE MIGRANT WOMEN

By Sara Leming

Over the past decade, the European Union (EU) has faced multiple crises that have tested its solidarity and durability. The 2011-15 migration crisis, however, stands out as a particularly difficult challenge. During those years political turmoil drove millions to make perilous journeys by land, air, and sea to reach the EU. Events such as the Arab Spring, the post-Gaddafi era chaos in Libya, and the Syrian civil war sent waves of people north. Some fled political upheaval while others sought employment and opportunities to raise their standard of living. The European Statistical Agency (EUROSTAT) reports 1,321,560 asylum seekers in the member states in 2015. The influx unleashed security and fiscal crises that polarized the EU and sparked nationalist movements in many member states. In 2018, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel acknowledged that migration was a “make or break” issue for the EU. To this day the integration of migrants remains a major challenge throughout the EU. The European Commission has itself noted that a successful integration process is essential for social cohesion and a dynamic, inclusive economy. In her 2020 State of the Union address, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said, “We will make sure that people who have the right to stay are integrated and made to feel welcome. They have a future to build skills, energy, and talent.”

A TRIPLE DISADVANTAGE

Migrant women joining the EU labor market face particularly high hurdles. A 2018 Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD) study concludes that migrant women face a “triple disadvantage” from gender inequality, significant childcare duties, and the difficulty of employer recognition of existing skills. In 2021, the European Commission responded to the situation by launching its Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion, which seeks to increase employment opportunities and promote skill recognition. It opens the way to cooperation with local NGOs and migrant-led organizations on training schemes and increased access to education. The plan notes that migrant women are the least employed group within the EU and that 40.7% of those employed are overqualified for their jobs. The rate is about twice that for native women. The OECD also calculates that 26% of migrant women work in low-skilled jobs.

On the member-state level, existing integration programs have typically offered a one-size-fits-all approach that has failed to meet the needs of migrant women. A 2018 EU Agency for Fundamental Rights report recognized this and suggested that member states and the EU collect evidence from municipal initiatives that have developed and implemented promising programs. Barcelona offers one such example.

A CITY OF SOLIDARITY

While some member states closed their borders during the European migration crisis, many cities and their residents supported inclusive and welcoming policies. In February 2017, more than 160,000 people came out on the streets of Barcelona to show support for migrants and protest Spain’s slow response to

accepting them. Chants of *Volem acollir* (We want to welcome) rang out during the demonstration, which Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau joined. “They aren’t quotas, they’re human lives. And if the states are reluctant to understand that then we, cities and citizens, are ready to move into action. Because we can... and we have to,” she proclaimed.

OECD statistics show the number of foreign residents in Barcelona has quintupled since 2000 and now accounts for approximately 23% of the population. The city’s council has long moved to accommodate them. It launched in the late 1990s measures to assist migrant integration, including affordable housing, minimum living allowances, and employment opportunities. The city doubled down on its strategy during the European migration crisis, and the OECD recognized Barcelona for the cooperation it fostered among other municipalities and non-state partners to advance sustainable migrant integration.

The city council recently launched another initiative in Barcelona, Refuge City to assist arriving migrants. The plan has four focal points: a welcoming strategy, care for migrants already in Barcelona, citizen participation, and action abroad. The last pillar includes Solidarity Cities, a new Barcelona-led European network that promotes the sharing of best practices for intervention strategies and for mutual support in emergencies. The effort aims to strengthen the influence of cities at the EU level to ensure their eligibility to receive emergency funds as member states do. The action abroad pillar also includes a newly implemented

City to City program that provides assistance and expertise to specific municipal projects in communities with the densest populations of refugees in transit. Its main goal, however, is to open lines of cooperation among cities that support migrants and to tackle policy paralysis at the national level. Other participants in the program include Amsterdam, Athens, Gdansk, and Hamburg, and the islands of Lampedusa and Lesbos.

TECH SAVVY

Barcelona offers more than an inclusive and welcoming society for migrants. It is also a budding European hub of digital innovation. With its favorable climate and manageable cost of living, Barcelona is home to more than 1,900 startups. The regional trade and investment agency reports an 11% increase in that number in 2021 alone, making the city the EU's fourth-largest startup hub, behind Berlin, Amsterdam, and Paris.

The prevalence of technology firms and migrants has created a unique opportunity for Barcelona. Open Cultural Center has found an innovative way of combining the mayor's pro-migration initiatives with the need for skilled tech workers. The nonprofit, established in 2016 just after the height of the European migration crisis, provides

free web-development and coding training for migrants seeking employment opportunities in the tech sector. The program, dubbed MigraCode, has 135 graduates, a high percentage of whom have found jobs. Cultural and social activities such as weekly soccer matches are also offered, as is free mental health counseling to help tackle problems that arise during the integration process. Funding comes from the Erasmus+ program and the European Commission.

Another MigraCode initiative, CodeWomen, focuses on assisting migrant women seeking to enter the STEM fields. Lead Manager Henriette Hettinga says that the program is designed to help such women reach their full potential by overcoming the challenges of entering the male-dominated worlds of science, technology, engineering and math. CodeWomen was launched in 2020 and has already evolved into a community of more than 120 participants, volunteers, and established software developers, all of whom are women. Hettinga adds that participants view many volunteers and software developers as role models, sources of inspiration for a STEM career, and potential networking partners. All this helps participants struggling with impostor syndrome to overcome their fears. CodeWomen provides

a safe and inclusive environment for trainees to share their plans, ambitions, doubts and questions about their professional futures.

The hands-on training by female developers takes place twice monthly and is hosted by local tech companies and startups. There is also a monthly speaker event or workshop on relevant skills or career building. Topics include self-marketing and salary negotiation. The second event is a hands-on coding session with developers who can help and coach the program participants.

For some migrant women fortunate enough to be in Barcelona, the benefits from collaboration among EU-funded programs, local government initiatives, and NGOs are clear. The prospect of integrating and joining the labor market increases self-confidence and optimism for a brighter future. Hettinga of CodeWomen emphasizes that career prospects for newcomers to the city depend on a supportive community and a network of volunteers. "The training is creative, it challenges you to solve problems, and the feeling of victory you get when you solve something after hours or days of frustration... that feeling is the best," stated one enthusiastic program graduate.



TOMORROW'S FUTURE LIES IN TODAY'S CITIES:

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. DALE MEDEARIS



Interview conducted by Chloe Laird on March 30th, 2022 with Dr. Dale Medearis.

Cities are increasingly becoming catalysts for innovative approaches and policies relevant to issues of global importance. In the Washington, DC metropolitan area, the Northern Virginia Regional Commission (NVRC) is taking advantage of that trend to import ideas and best practices to address local societal challenges. Transponder Magazine sat down with Dale Medearis, NVRC senior regional planner, to explore his organization's work

to strengthen the transatlantic network and facilitate an exchange of knowledge.

QUESTION: *Please introduce yourself and talk about the work you do.*

DR. MEDEARIS: My name is Dale Medearis. I am a senior regional planner for the NVRC. The NVRC is a regional council of governments representing the 13 counties, cities and towns of the Northern Virginia region. We are a political entity of the Commonwealth of Virginia with a board of elected officials representing our local governments.

My portfolio deals with promoting sustainability in general but with a unique international focus. NVRC's international programs involve transferring and applying policy and technical innovations from metropolitan regions of Europe, such as Stuttgart or Hamburg, to Northern Virginia. The work is special because of the focus on outcomes that benefit our region's economic development, environment, and communities.

QUESTION: *What makes NVRC's work with transatlantic partners unique?*

DR. MEDEARIS: NVRC's

international programs are unique because of the prioritization of applying lessons from overseas that help the communities of our region become more sustainable. NVRC tries to undertake a process of global engagement that sets boundaries to what we do by setting goals to attain, but also limits to what we will not undertake or avoid.

A novel aspect of NVRC's international work is the active and unilateral transfer to Northern Virginia of policy and technical innovations from countries that are pioneers. A second unique element of NVRC's international work is the effort to use global economic interconnectedness — foreign investment, trade, tourism — to filter and help keep our engagement focused. In other words, NVRC works most closely with countries such as Germany or the Netherlands because they offer our region lessons about pioneering renewable energy or climate resiliency planning. And these two countries are among the three largest investors in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Finally, NVRC's international work relies on the active support and involvement of our region's governmental, science, academic, research, commercial, and civil society partners. It is impossible to imagine NVRC's international programs without the technical, political, financial, and personnel support from our local governmental members, academic and research institutions such as Virginia

Tech and George Mason University; commercial partners such as Dominion Energy and VW; or NGO and civil society partners such as the Local Energy Alliance Program. These organizations not only have roots or strong relations in countries in Europe such as Germany, but they actively help with the adoption of innovations from abroad.

QUESTION: *Could you expand on the organization's relationship with Germany?*

DR. MEDEARIS: Germany is by far one of our most important partners. For more than 22 years we have worked closely with German metropolitan regions such as Stuttgart. But we also have worked with cities and regions such as Hamburg, Bottrop, Berlin, Munich, and others. There are many metropolitan regions in Germany that are exceptional examples of integrated land-use and transportation planning, green infrastructure management, climate mitigation and resiliency planning, and waste recycling planning. German cities and regions also offer Northern Virginia many lessons about workforce training, education, public health, social inclusion, affordable housing, and emergency response, among other programmatic areas. The hand of 22 years of cooperation with Stuttgart is seen all across our region, from watershed restoration in Alexandria to "green" buildings in Arlington or renewable energy policies in Fairfax County.

Moreover, several NVRC local governments have sister-city partnerships, such as Arlington County and Aachen, or Loudoun County and the Main-Taunus district. We enjoy working through these relations as well.

QUESTION: *How can local governments best position themselves to engage on a global level and enact meaningful change?*

DR. MEDEARIS: Today, local governments owe it to themselves to think and act more strategically about how they engage globally. This means local governments need to focus intensely on the ways that international work supports and promotes core domestic environmental, social, and economic priorities. At the end of the day, it is vital that international work by cities, counties, and towns be seen supporting the job of a city manager, fire chief, school superintendent, public health director, wastewater plant engineer, chamber of commerce, or any activity on Main Street. Purposeful global engagement at the local level will benefit from creating a plan that steers local government activities towards outcomes that benefit its work and directs resources towards attaining goals. Far too often, international engagement by local governments lacks purpose, outcomes, and support, and is done in a vacuum that lacks coordinated planning, funding, personnel, and other resources. Sadly, global work by towns, cities, and counties in the U.S. tends to be viewed cynically

as irrelevant or wasteful.

QUESTION: *What can local governments in the U.S. learn from their European counterparts?*

DR. MEDEARIS: Since the 1970s, local governments of Northern Virginia have drawn lessons about light-rail planning from cities such as Hamburg, Stockholm, and Rotterdam. They also have looked to cities in Europe for lessons about waste management, recycling and waterfront planning. Since 1999, NVRC has picked up on this and focused on transferring lessons about stormwater management, renewable energy planning, climate resiliency, and mitigation programs. NVRC's international work now involves the transfer of workforce training, education, public health, emergency response, and social inclusion innovations, such as adopting lessons from German cities' experiences with interpreting the Holocaust.

QUESTION: *Could you speak more about transatlantic exchange on historical memory?*

DR. MEDEARIS: Several years ago, Alexandria created the Community Remembrance Project to help the city understand its history of racial terror and hate crimes. The project evolved as an extension of the work of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama. Bryan Stevenson, the project's

originator, has spoken often and frequently about how German cities interpret the Holocaust. He has applied these experiences to his work through the EJI and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice. Planning the reception and placement of a duplicate column from the National Memorial is a piece of the Alexandria's Community Remembrance Project. This April, NVRC partnered with Alexandria, Virginia Tech's Washington-Alexandria Architecture Center, and the Germany-based Goethe Institute to orchestrate a symposium that looked at ways that this conversation of historical interpretation in public space and reconciliation can be carried further.

QUESTION: *Are cities best positioned for implementing effective, globally impactful policies?*

DR. MEDEARIS: Absolutely! Local governments in the U.S., and especially in regions such as Northern Virginia, are at the center of global engagement because of phenomena such as global climate change, immigration, trade, and investment. Local governments are not just affected by these phenomena but compelled to respond. The need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality propelled many of our region's local government members to pioneer clear air, renewable energy, and comprehensive climate programs. Moreover, the presence of so many global businesses and diverse

populations positions the region to act effectively on the global stage.

QUESTION: *How do you raise awareness of the importance of these city-to-city exchanges among citizens?*

DR. MEDEARIS: I'm struck by how little is publicly available across the country about global economic engagement at the local level, such as foreign investment, trade, and tourism. I sense that global engagement could be more purposeful... were a local government more clearly aware and had access to data about dollar flows and job creation from investment, trade, or tourism with Germany, the Netherlands, or Canada.

QUESTION: *What do you believe should be on the transatlantic to-do list regarding encouraging city-to-city exchange?*

DR. MEDEARIS: I sense it would be enormously beneficial for local governments aspiring to engage internationally to develop a publicly transparent, data-driven, problem-focused, and goal-oriented plan for engagement that factors in outcomes that benefit the economy, ecology, and community as a whole. I sense it would be helpful if think tanks and governments engaged in transatlantic relations looked beyond international engagement as a boutique issue and as something profoundly relevant and vital.



TRANSATLANTIC TRAVELER:

A RESEARCH ANALYST'S STORY ACROSS THE ATLANTIC



Sara Leming joined the Bertelsmann Foundation in November 2021 as a research analyst on the transatlantic team. In this interview she describes how her academic background and prior work experience in the European Union shaped her professional and personal interests.

HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS?

As an undergraduate student, I studied political science with a primary focus on domestic



U.S. politics. But when I had the opportunity to spend a semester in Rome, I took a class in Italian politics. I found the class fascinating and it sparked my interest in European studies. A few years later I decided to apply for graduate school. I was drawn to the European Union Policy Studies program of James Madison University, which is based in Florence, Italy. The program offered an interesting curriculum focused on the transatlantic relationship, a picturesque location, and a graduate assistantship to publish the biannual campus newsletter. In addition the lure of eating authentic Italian pizza and gelato for a year made the choice easy. So, in late August 2017, I set off on my adventure, excited to learn about the other side of the Atlantic. Little did I know then what an impact that experience would have on my career and on shaping me into the person I am today.

Shortly after I began my studies in Florence, with little prior knowledge of the EU, I was overwhelmed by the institution's intricacies. Learning how it functioned, the principle of subsidiarity, and which competencies had been expanded by various treaties was challenging. I remember struggling one evening while preparing for an upcoming exam to understand the differences among the European Council, the European Council of Ministers and the unaffiliated Council of Europe. I wondered how anyone kept them straight. Still, I pressed on with a challenging master's program.

As the semester wound down, and I completed my final exams, I realized that I had developed a passion for the European project. The international component of the member states, combined with the policy studies aspect, merged my interests in culture and government.

HOW DID STUDYING ABROAD SHAPE YOUR PERSPECTIVE OF THE U.S.'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EU?

While pursuing my master's degree, the Trump administration was implementing its "America First" agenda. U.S. politics were extremely polarized, and I noticed parallel developments in the EU. With an ongoing battle over Brexit and heightened tensions from the 2015-2017 influx of migrants, the EU was also facing nationalist movements that were challenging democratic norms. Added to this the transatlantic relationship was an all-time low. Former President Trump repeatedly made disparaging comments about the EU, at one point even referring to it as a foe. While on an academic trip to Brussels, I vividly remember visiting the European Parliament and listening to speakers diplomatically addressing this situation unprecedented in post-World War II history. Although they emphasized that the transatlantic relationship would eventually recover, there was no dodging that much political repair work would be necessary.

As a developing young professional, I had the opportunity to listen to prominent EU leaders and to be taught by professors of various nationalities. This gave me an appreciation for diverse perspectives, especially regarding the U.S.'s global role and its role as an EU ally. I learned to view and understand geopolitical events through a European lens.

YOU WORKED IN BRUSSELS FOR A TIME. WHAT DID YOU GAIN FROM THAT EXPERIENCE?

As my master's program came to an end, I pondered the path ahead. I wanted to stay in the field of transatlantic relations, so I applied and was accepted for an internship at the U.S. Mission to the European Union (USEU). During the internship I enjoyed working in a diplomatic setting and observing the transatlantic relationship from the inside. One observation that struck me was the importance of compromise and maintaining open dialogue in a politically turbulent time. My education gave me the knowledge to recognize areas of common ground and potential collaboration between the U.S. and the EU. I tried to focus on alignments at a time when the Trump administration was fixated on amplifying differences.

After my USEU internship I was hired by the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies in Brussels as one of

two American employees. I saw this as an opportunity to further my understanding of the transatlantic relationship from the European perspective. This was my first experience in an international work environment, and I was intrigued by my colleagues' nationalities and cultural experiences. My team came from all over the EU from the Mediterranean, Britain, Scandinavia and Central Europe. Although I was familiar with the concept of European integration, seeing it in action was a meaningful experience that made me realize that the EU has created many opportunities to bring Europeans together. For example, I learned about Erasmus, a program that funds student exchanges across the EU. Several of my flatmates had participated in the program, and I was impressed by the culturally diverse friendships that they had formed as a result. I also saw the benefits of the freedom of movement that EU citizens enjoy and that has expanded work and living options for many Europeans. A majority of my colleagues attributed their career success to the EU, which created opportunities for them outside their home countries. Mostly, I admired the EU's success in bringing together so many nationalities through a shared vision for the European project. My international work experiences in Brussels, coupled with my academic background, gave me a strong understanding of the EU and the importance of the transatlantic alliance.

HOW DOES YOUR WORK

AT THE BERTELSMANN FOUNDATION (BFNA) HELP ADVANCE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS?

I have the opportunity in my current role as a research analyst to examine and evaluate the transatlantic relationship on a daily basis. BFNA's mission, which is to strengthen transatlantic relations through educating and engaging its audiences on the most pressing economic, political and social challenges facing the U.S., dovetails with my values as a convinced transatlanticist. My work is intellectually stimulating and enlightening.

My time is generally split among projects focused on the bilateral relationships between the U.S. and EU member states. For one of my current projects, the "Transatlantic Barometer", I conduct policy research and communicate regularly with European embassies in Washington, DC to find areas of transatlantic alignment. For another project, the "Transatlantic Periscope", I curate multimedia materials that provide in-depth and trustworthy analyses of those bilateral relationships. My work means I am often engaging with like-minded partners in or from the EU. I am always learning, and I enjoy hearing diverse perspectives on the state of transatlantic relations. I hope both projects further Americans' understanding of those relations and the EU.

I particularly admire BFNA's ability to tell stories from both sides of the Atlantic. Although the Foundation is located in Washington, DC, it believes strongly that the transatlantic relationship goes much deeper than the latest headlines. Our research focuses on building bridges across the Atlantic, whether that be by comparing green-city initiatives or sharing the unheard stories of economically disadvantaged coal miners in rural towns. These are areas in which the experiences of Americans and Europeans are strikingly similar. Exploring them can help establish new connections from which we can all learn.

WHAT IS YOUR PERSPECTIVE OF THE CURRENT STATE OF U.S.-EU RELATIONS?

The EU is strategically, culturally and historically the U.S.'s most important partner. Areas of divergence will always exist in the transatlantic relationship, but there is a natural alliance based on a shared commitment to fundamental values such as democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law. The transatlantic relationship is important not only bilaterally but also as a global actor. The U.S. and EU together play leading geopolitical roles by being among the world's biggest economic and military powers, and setting standards for global trade.

Since the transatlantic

relationship was formally established with the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951, it has experienced periods of friction. But it has also proved its strength and durability. In fall 2021, after the announcement of AUKUS, the enhanced trilateral security partnership agreement, some questioned whether the transatlantic alliance was outdated and if the U.S. was signaling a pivot towards Asia. The Biden administration quickly made an effort to make it clear that the EU is the U.S.'s top ally and has worked to resolve

areas of friction. In early 2022, the transatlantic relationship faced a new challenge following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Although President Putin sought to weaken the transatlantic alliance the EU and the U.S. have stood together firmly united. Given current, heightened geopolitical tensions, democratic backsliding, and the impact of climate change, I believe that a robust transatlantic relationship is more critical than ever. Although ongoing global challenges are difficult and arguably unprecedented, a

unique opportunity exists for the U.S. and the EU to continue to stand united and confront these challenges together. When it comes to the importance of the transatlantic alliance in 2022, I believe that former European Commission President José Manuel Barroso summed it up best: "Europe needs the U.S. and the U.S. needs Europe. When we speak with a common voice, no challenge is too great. When we speak with a common voice, we are truly an indispensable partnership."



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FOOTNOTES

Cities Started Democracy, Now They Will Save It.

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Barry Farms, Liberty City, and Urban Equity

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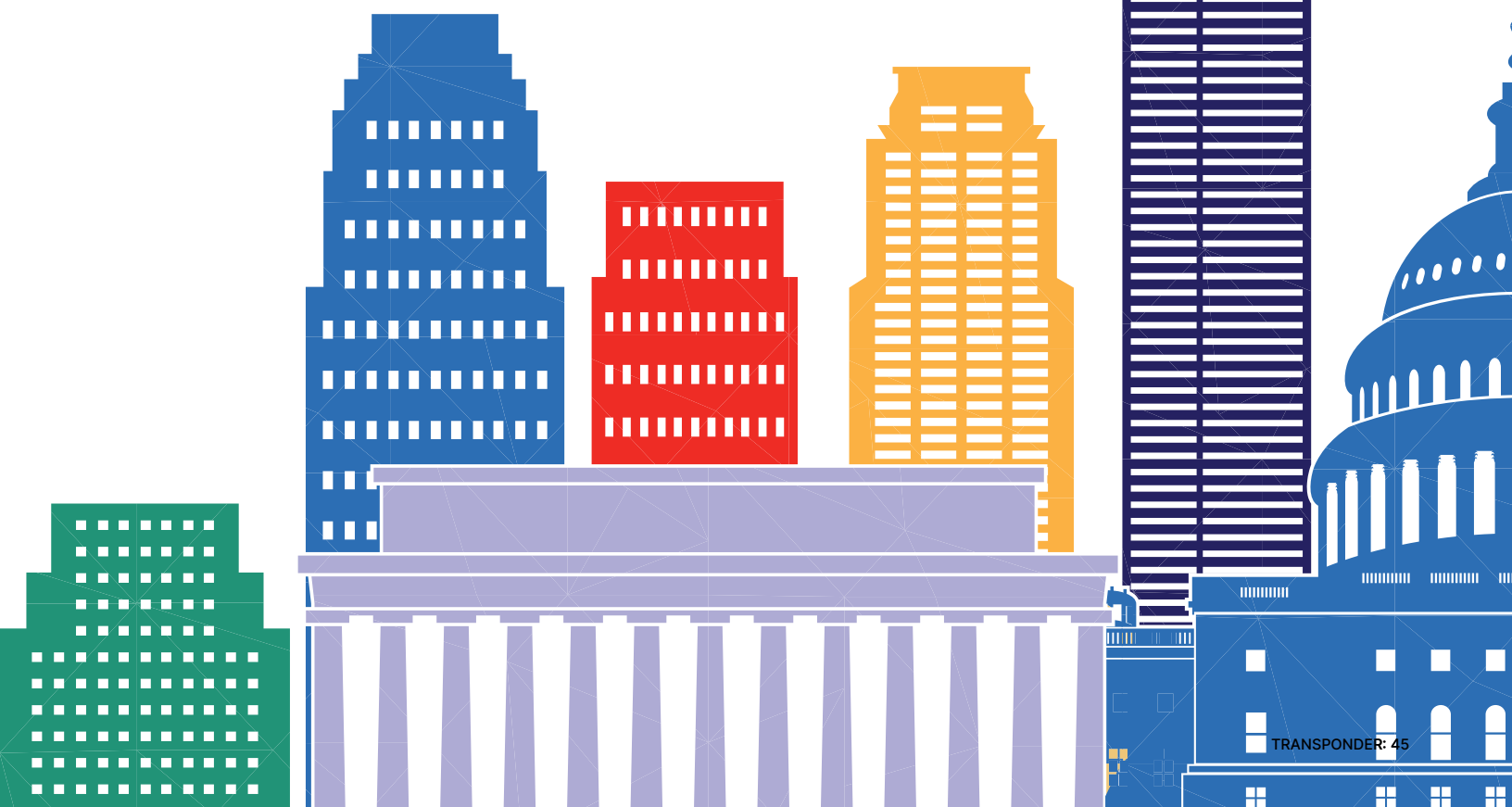
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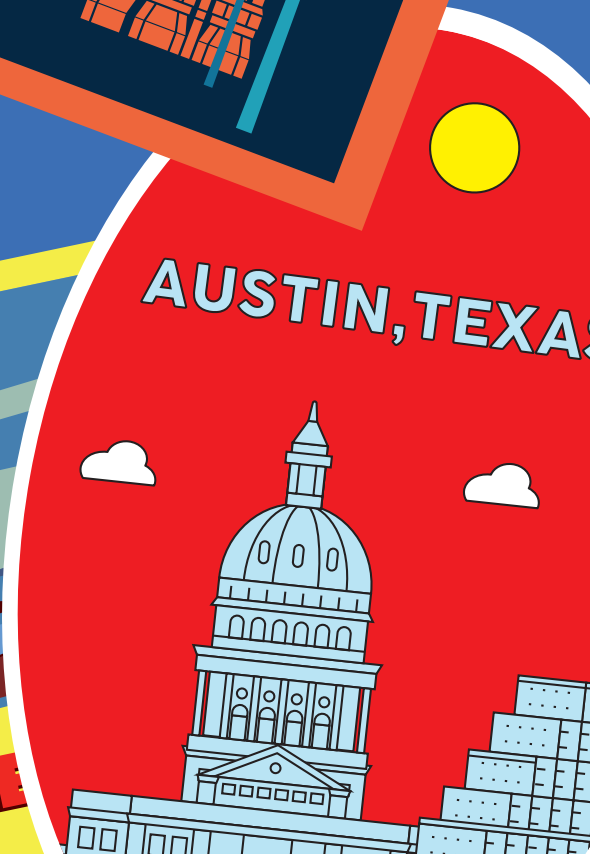
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