



Module 1

Understanding
your starting point
for integrated
action planning
using SDGs



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Understanding your starting point

There is no single, one-size-fits-all approach to SDG localisation and integrated action planning contributing to the SDGs. The way cities go about the process depends on many things, such as:

- **Timing.** For example, a new strategy is just being developed or renewed, and there is an opportunity to use the SDGs as the main framework for its development.
- **Political priorities.** The “big thing” occupying the attention of local politicians will shape how the SDGs can be used.
- **Existing policy landscape.** Some steps may already be taken around localising the SDGs or other frameworks.
- **Interest and motivation in the city.** There may be champions willing to use the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs as a framework.
- **Partnership opportunities and bottom-up initiatives.** Another actor, like a regional authority, university or civil society, may offer support to kickstart the process.
- **Interest in applying the SDGs to concrete challenges.** For example, there may be a strong existing momentum for working on leaving no one behind or climate action, and the SDGs can bring added value.

When working with a holistic topic like the SDGs, **finding the right “use case” for developing an integrated action plan contributing to the SDGs can be challenging.** Above all, it takes time to define the best scenario, especially when working in a participatory way with a wide range of stakeholders and sometimes with changing political leadership.

On the next page, we consider some **different approaches based on the Global Goals for Cities (GG4C) partners’ experiences** with localising the SDGs through integrated action planning.



Photo Credit: Patrik Vamosi, during the GG4C Transnational Meeting in Veszprém, November 2022



SDG action planning scenarios: three use cases

From the work by the GG4C partners, three broad approaches to integrated action planning using the SDGs were formulated and tested.

These can be useful to present and discuss with the city leaders or project partners before starting the action planning process, to set the scope and objectives of the journey.

Localising the SDGs often include a mix of these three but understanding the most feasible scenario for the local context can help to get started and keep on track along the way.

Questions to ask at this stage include:

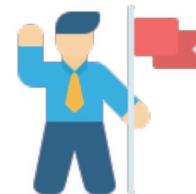
- Are we looking to develop a holistic strategy using the SDGs, or do we want to identify and focus on one or more concrete challenges?
- Do we want to work mainly with improving management processes like data, reporting, and communication, or do we want to co-create concrete solutions with stakeholders?



Strategise. There is an opportunity to develop a comprehensive new strategic document for the city or organisation. Using the SDGs as a policy-making tool helps to ensure that the strategy aims at transformative change and is coherent with the global goals. In this scenario, the SDG framework is used to design a strategic plan that respects all dimensions of sustainable development.



Enable. Existing strategic documents may already be in place, providing the overall direction for integrated sustainable development in the city or organisation. In this scenario, actions are designed to enable and/or strengthen an “SDG culture” and sustainability governance using the SDGs. This can involve building mechanisms and tools that help to include the SDGs in planning, monitoring and communication processes (internal and external).



Experiment. Focusing on one or more concrete challenges is another good way to start localising the SDGs, while raising awareness and building capacity among city staff and local partners to work towards the goals. Using the SDGs to analyse and co-create solutions to concrete challenges helps to ensure that actions are planned in a holistic way, considering all dimensions of sustainable development. The SDGs can also help to monitor and report on those efforts using metrics and a ‘shared language’ that can be compared internationally.



Diagnosis: Processes and Tools

After having identified the potential scope and scenario for localising and developing an integrated action plan or strategy using the SDGs (the “use case”), it is time to analyse the situation more in-depth.

There are many tools and processes available to help the diagnosis phase. In the GG4C Learning Kit, we describe three main tools and methodologies that were used by GG4C partners (see Acknowledgements and Credits for more details):

- The “5 Ps” (People, Planet, Prosperity, Partnership and Peace) photo essay depicting challenges and strengths (p. 9)
- The RFSC online self-assessment tool (from the Council of European Municipalities and Regions) (p. 11)
- The Problem Tree (from the URBACT toolbox) (p. 17)

We also introduce other examples from the network partners and the network’s Lighthouse cities.






Let the SDG targets be your guide

The SDGs – read at the goal level – do not say much about the actual scope of what is to be achieved. By [looking at the 169 targets of the goals](#), we can really understand how to localise the goals and contribute to their achievement.



Some guiding questions to start analysing the targets are provided below. In Module 4, you will find more details on how to adapt the SDG targets to the local level.

Guiding questions to compare existing strategies, plans and areas of responsibility (e.g. services) with the SDG targets

-  Is the target relevant to any of the areas of responsibility of the municipality / organisation?
-  Is the target corresponding to a local development challenge or priority? Is it already captured in existing strategies and plans?
-  Is the target relevant or does it need to be adapted to fit the local context?
-  Is the target relevant if thinking about the wider territory? Could it be achieved through inter-municipal cooperation or working with another level of government?
-  Are there other players in the city significantly impacting – or that could impact – the target through a multi-stakeholder partnership approach?



The 5 Ps photo essay

The 2030 Agenda includes 5 core dimensions of sustainable development, often referred to as the “5 Ps”: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, Partnership.

The five pillars are often helpful to introduce the 2030 Agenda before going into the details of the SDGs. In the GG4C network, partners showcased one challenge and strength per P to start analysing their starting point.

The photo essays were presented by GG4C partners online using the tool Miro (miro.com). Participants were taken on a virtual tour to look at the different cities’ photo essays. Viewers could leave emoji reactions or comments to make it more interactive.

Examples from two photo essays are presented to the right.



Bratislava – Prosperity



Strength: the bright side of prosperity. New construction, creation of a modern city centre, as an alternative to the historical one.



Challenge: the prosperous population prioritizes its individual comfort over the common good. This is most evident in individual car transport.

Photo Credit: GG4C partner cities

Solingen – Partnerships



Strength: this picture symbolises the urban society both as a network of offers and as a network of providers and actors who, with a high quality of trusting cooperation, is the engine of our vibrant urban society.



Challenge: Climate change is a huge global challenge with uneven consequences, which Solingen seeks to tackle – inter alia – through partnerships with countries in the Global South.



The RFSC online tool: SDG Priorities and Gaps analysis

The Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFSC) online tool promoted by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) is designed to support cities to plan and assess actions regarding their potential impact on the SDGs.

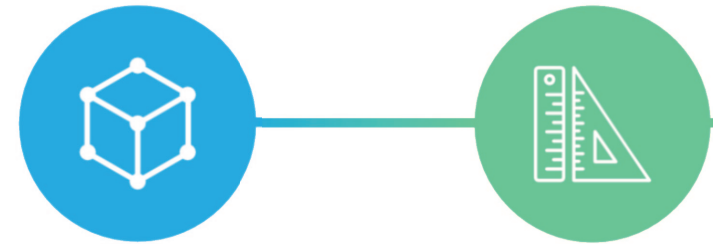
In the GG4C network, partners used the tool to carry out an SDG Priorities and Gaps analysis, following the first two steps of using the tool:

1. Rate how much each SDG is prioritized in the local context, giving a score from 1 to 4 for each goal.
2. Assess how local actions contribute to the different SDGs and rate their estimated impact, from 1 to 4. Potential negative impact can also be measured from -1 to -4, taking into account possible trade-offs.

The result of the self-assessment is a first view on how the current priorities match (or not) existing actions. In cases where the priority is high, but actions are not seen as impactful, there is a “gap”.

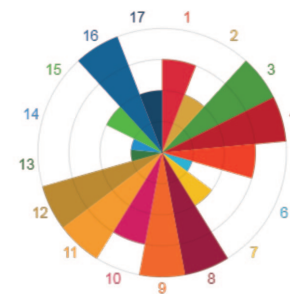
The tool also offers a monitoring function, with a useful library of indicators matched to the SDGs.

In a nutshell, these are the results of the **Priorities and Gaps Analysis** using the RFSC online tool:

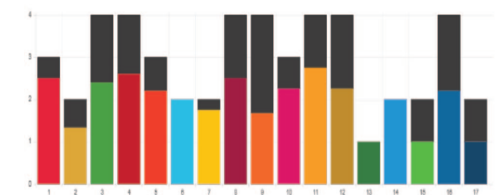


ASSESS YOUR STRATEGY OR PLAN

CHECK YOUR ACTIONS



The RFSC reveals the **sustainability profile** of your strategy or action plan



The RFSC helps you visualise **potential gaps** to improve your actions

[RFSC online tool](#)





Highest ranked SDGs, on average, among GG4C partners using the RFSC online tool

Average level of priority for each SDG among the 19 cities

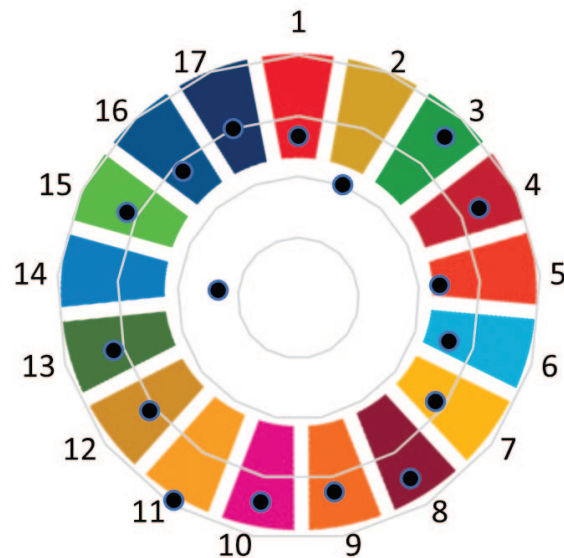


Image Credit: GG4C baseline assessment



Largest perceived gaps between priority SDGs and the impact of local actions among GG4C cities using the RFSC online tool

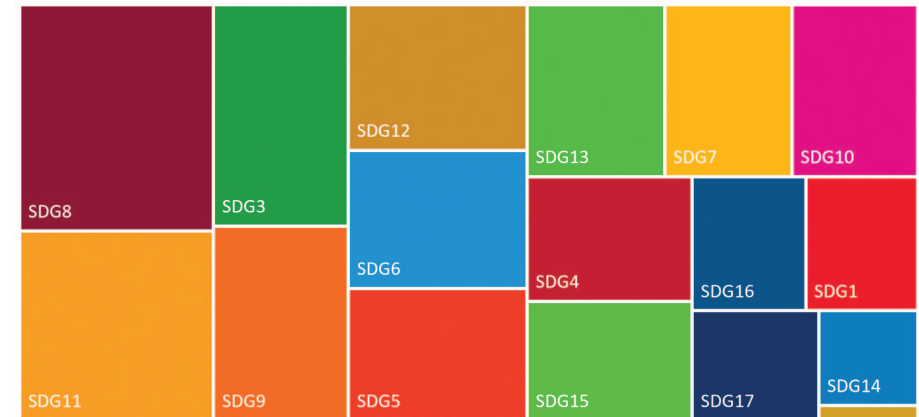


Image Credit: GG4C baseline assessment



The RFSC online tool: an example from Veszprém

When using the RFSC tool to carry out the Priorities and Gaps analysis, each GG4C partner city had to find an approach suited for their own local context and process.

The tool does not prescribe exactly how the rating of priorities and actions should be done, but rather lets the user define the criteria. This is both a challenge and an opportunity to be creative and innovative when using the tool.

Some cities made the scoring of priorities based on whether the SDG and its relevant targets is addressed in one or several of the city's main strategic documents. For example, a score of "4" was granted when the goal was addressed in several strategies and plans, and a score of "1" if it was not explicitly addressed anywhere, or only weakly addressed.

Veszprém (Hungary) elaborated a participatory method to include local stakeholders in the process of rating priorities and actions, explained to the right.

In Veszprém, the local team developed a participatory approach to assess the level of relevance and importance of the SDGs in the local context. They invited local stakeholders to rate their perceived importance of the SDGs in a survey, assessing the following aspects:

1. Overall importance of the SDG according to the respondent
2. Local importance of the SDG according to the respondent
3. Ability by the city of Veszprém to influence the goal and improve the current situation.

Based on the survey results, the SDGs were clustered by the scores given on the three aspects. The cluster with the highest score got a "4" in the RFSC assessment tool, the next group a "3" and so on. The 7 SDGs with the higher priority were the below:



Next, ongoing actions were assessed in the tool to identify gaps to be addressed in the action plan. Results were presented and discussed with local stakeholders.

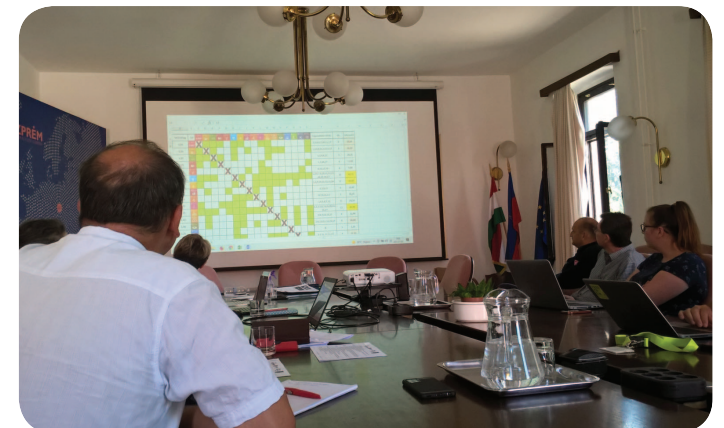


Photo credit: GG4C partner city



Analysing the policy landscape in Jihlava

The city of Jihlava (Czech Republic) aimed to address the SDG on a strategic level by localising SDGs in the new Strategic plan *Jihlava 2032*. As part of the diagnosis phase, the city needed to understand how the SDGs and sustainability are currently addressed in municipal sectoral strategies and documents. As a result, Jihlava gained an understanding of current sustainability trends and shortcomings in strategies as well as in the process of developing them.

Each sectoral strategy was evaluated from the perspective of:

- The SDGs and their targets
- The Strategic framework *Czech Republic 2030*
- Alignment with EU priorities in European Green deal (primarily in transition towards energy decarbonization and circular economy)
- The degree to which strategic documents address the concept of Planetary Boundaries
- Strategy management including participation and involvement of stakeholders in the development process

SDG traffic light system

Each local objective/action was linked to a relevant SDG and assessed on its impact and contribution – good (3), satisfactory (2), not good (1).

SDG targets that were relevant, but not or only partially covered were assigned evaluation – covered (3), covered to some degree (2), not covered (1).

The score was used to evaluate strategies contribution to SDGs as well as overall coverage of SDGs in municipal strategic documents, and assigned with a colour: green (good), orange (satisfactory) or red (not good) and grey (not applicable). The results are shown below.

Summary of evaluation of sector documents

TOPIC	RESULTS
SDG 1. End poverty	Orange
SDG 2. End hunger	Orange
SDG 3. Health and quality of life	Green
SDG 4. Quality education	Green
SDG 5. Gender equality	Red
SDG 6. Drinking water and sanitation	Green
SDG 7. Affordable and clean energy	Red
SDG 8. Decent work and economic growth	Red
SDG 9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure	Orange
SDG 10. Less inequality	Red
SDG 11. Sustainable cities and towns	Orange
SDG 12. Responsible production and consumption	Red
SDG 13. Climate action	Red
SDG 14. Life in water	Grey
SDG 15. Life on land	Grey
SDG 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions	Green
SDG 17. Partnerships to achieve the goals	Orange

Image credit: GG4C partner city Jihlava



Problem Tree: analysing thematic challenges in Dzierżoniów

The Problem Tree in the URBACT toolbox helps cities explore the root causes of a challenge. The problem tree is well suited for use cases where a specific problem can be clearly stated (as opposed to analysing a holistic topic).

This tool was chosen in GG4C partner city Dzierżoniów (Poland), to better understand their problems linked to different “Ps” of the 2030 Agenda.

See example for the analysis made for the “People” pillar to the right.

A full explanation of the Problem Tree methodology – including a video walk-through – can be found in the URBACT toolbox.

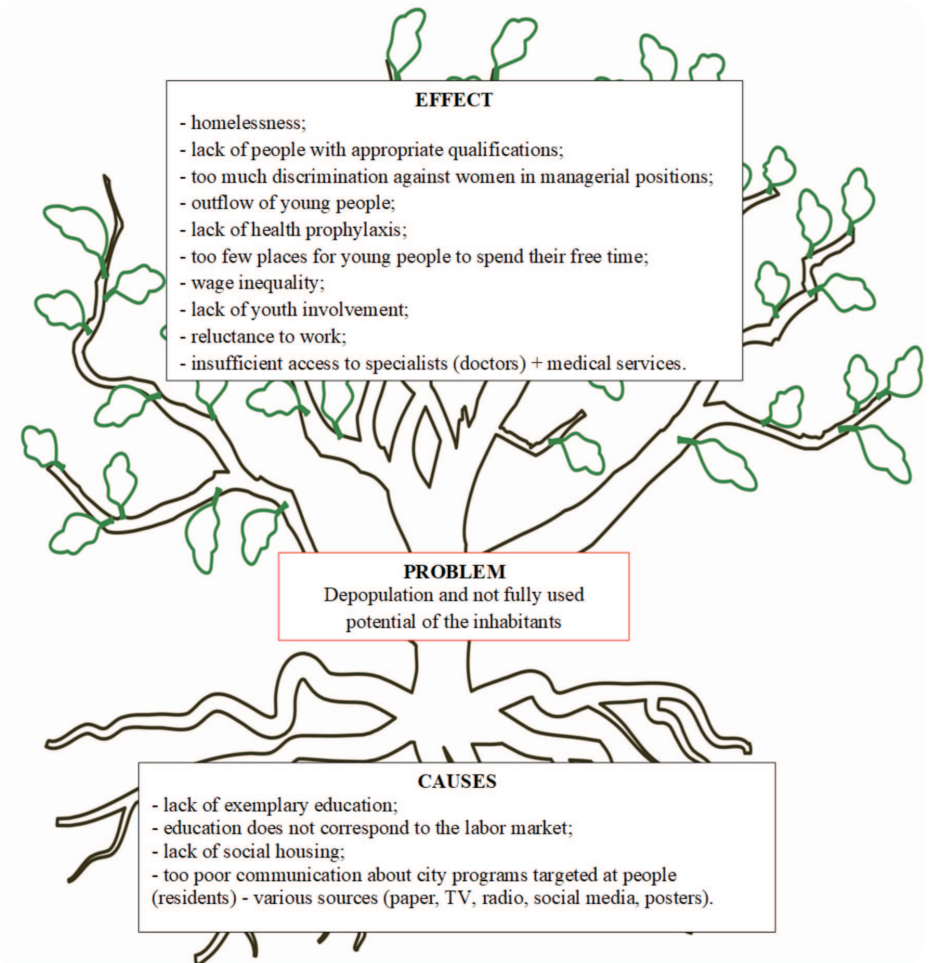


Photo credit: GG4C partner city Dzierżoniów

[URBACT Problem Tree tool](#)



The picture shows the Problem Tree analysis made in Dzierżoniów on the “People” pillar of the 2030 Agenda. This became one of the main themes tackled in their SDG integrated action plan.





Engagement Matrix: a tool for analysis from Braga

In Braga (Portugal), the municipality analyses the importance of different topics comparing the relevance for the municipal management to the views of local stakeholders. This is part of preparing for their sustainability strategy, which is aligned with the SDGs. Through a survey with the local community, they identify the priorities ranked the highest, as shown in the matrix to the right. The current priorities are: Mobility, Waste management, Energy and Water.



Photo credit: GG4C partner city Braga

Braga's Engagement Matrix showing top priorities by local stakeholders and municipal management

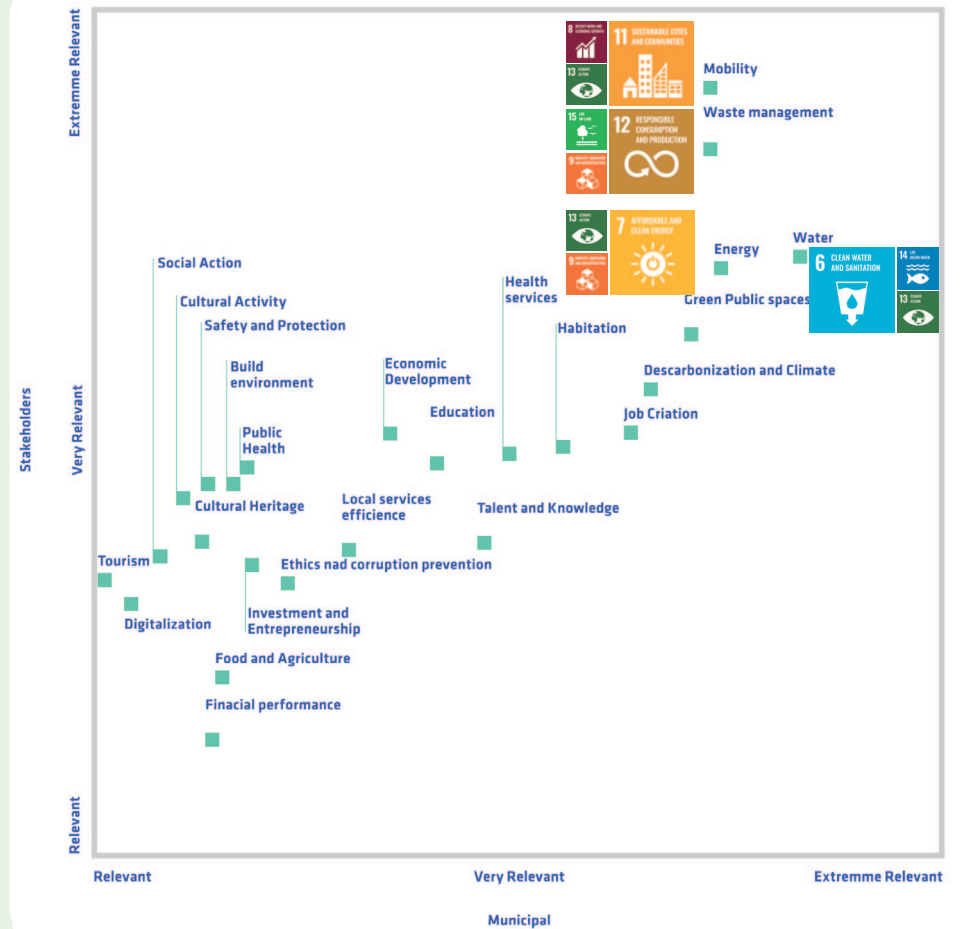


Image credit: GG4C partner city Braga



SDG Analysis Process: an example from six Finnish cities

In spring 2022, Finland's six largest cities – Espoo, Helsinki, Oulu, Tampere, Turku and Vantaa – developed a tool to support the analytical and strategic process around SDG localisation, as part of an SDG network conducted by the six cities and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities (SDG46). Espoo, one of the lighthouse cities for the Global Goals for Cities network, was part of leading its development (See Acknowledgements and Credits of this Module more details).

The [SDG Analysis Process](#) is suited for analysing a pre-specified topic and can help colleagues from a municipality – together with partners and stakeholders – to identify the key impact of a project or field of activity on the SDGs.

The method is designed as a workshop of 3-3.5 hours and instructions are published in a handbook for facilitators available in English, Finnish and Swedish.



[The SDG Analysis Process](#)



The six phases of the SDG Analysis Process

- **Phase 1: Specification of the topic.** This step requires participants to identify a topic in advance of the workshop, and to share with facilitators.
- **Phase 2: Sustainable Development Goals.** In this step, the concept and scope of the SDGs is introduced to participants (if needed).
- **Phase 3: Dimensions of the SDGs, their operating and impact environment.** This phase involves analysing the local, regional, national, and global operating environment of the topic analysed, as well as its social, environmental, economic and cultural sustainability relevance.
- **Phase 4: Agenda 2030 and the role of the Sustainable Development Goals.** This step is linked to analysing which of the SDG targets are relevant to the topic analysed, and to reformulate them into local language and relevance.
- **Phase 5: Role of actors and stakeholders.** Here workshop participants identify which stakeholders are contributing to the topic, who is leading and who is only lightly involved.
- **Phase 6: Group dialogue and next steps.** In this final step, participants discuss the implications of the analysis: what needs to change?



Acknowledgements and Credits for Module 1

Most of the content in this module is based on the URBACT Method and URBACT Toolbox.

- Links: <https://urbact.eu/> | Toolbox: <https://urbact.eu/toolbox-home>

Additional tools and methodologies included in this Module are:

- The Reference Framework for Sustainable Cities (RFCS) online tool promoted by CEMR. Link: <http://rfsc.eu/>
- The SDG Analysis Process developed by the six largest cities in Finland and Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. Link: <https://www.localfinland.fi/recent/2022/new-tool-promote-sustainable-development>
- A peer-reviewed article has been the basis for development work: Taajamaa, V., Joensuu, M., Karanian, B. & Bettencourt, L. 2022. Seven Steps to Strategic SDG Sensemaking for Cities. Administrative Sciences 12: 33. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci12010033>

Examples from Global Goals for Cities partners are based on the results from their participation in the URBACT project. For a full list of names by city, please see the Acknowledgements in Module 0.





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