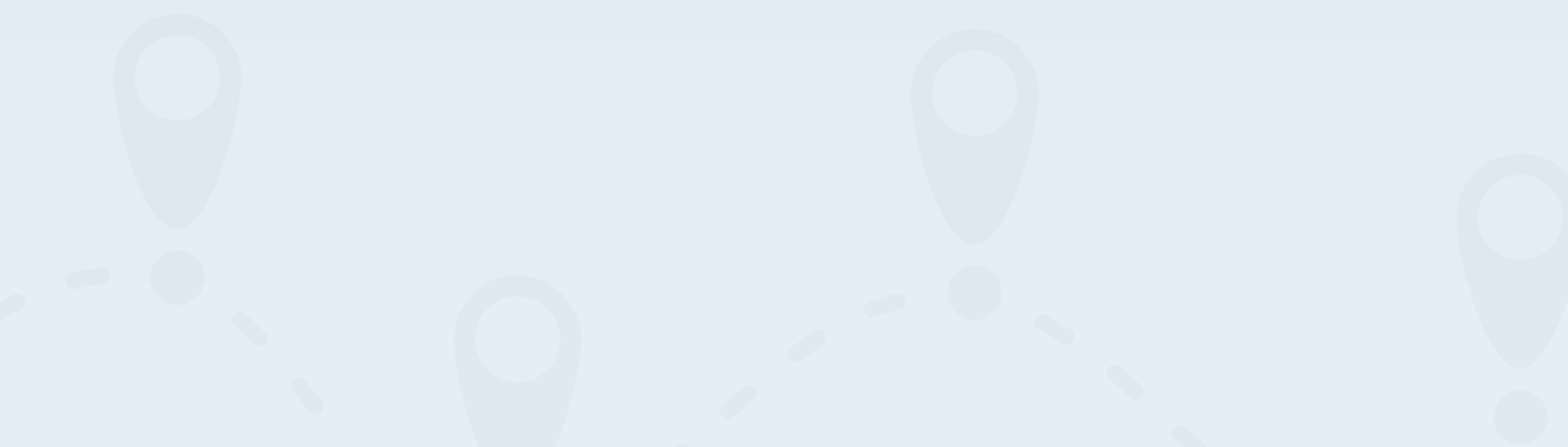




BUILDING THE GPM FURTHER ON FOUR PILLARS

**GPM ROADMAP
2025 - 2027**



Strength in Unity

1. A historical introduction

There are many city networks in the world. Some are comprehensive, most are thematic. Membership is in most cases at random, based on characteristics of the city or via personal contacts and encounters. They mobilize some departments in the city, offer the opportunity to travel, host mostly the same format of conferences and summits, and speak a very generic language to express consensus. They sometimes offer services but are very dependent on cyclical and personal interests. The back offices of the networks are mainly concerned with maintaining network sustainability and searching for local support to continue activities. The dynamics of the urban networks are more often than not fuelled by thematic contents, not by their real territorial or interactive connectivity. In most cases networking does not directly affect the local development projects.

The world-system has changed as the great majority of humanity now lives in cities and the big planetary challenges are concentrated in the metropolitan areas. But there has not been a governance re-equilibration between the three global systems: the global market, the system of nation states and the system of the urban spaces of flows. There are some global institutions (World Bank, IMF, WTO, etc) and there is the structure of nation states and intergovernmental collaboration (UN, UNESCO, continental institutions, etc). There is no global political representation of the urban networks as there is no representative global urban institution. From the urban side there is no partner for a multilateral governance system. At the political level (WUF, Habitat, COP, etc) the world-system remains led by an interaction between global actors and national governments. At best cities are invited as observers.

How to empower cities?

That lack is the origin and motivation of GPM. Building the project for more than ten years in the existing urban ecosystem has not been easy. The specific missions are indeed difficult. A “Global Parliament” does not yet exist. It remains a project. GPM is a platform for mayors, for the political leaders of cities, to carry our message and that requires a clear engagement. But GPM is not really a “network” oriented to internal affairs, but a platform, a speaker for a global voice for urbanity. Our results lay outside our own structure, in convincing other networks, in contacting global and intergovernmental institutions, in influencing the global discourse. It is not easy to convince cities and especially their mayors to engage and invest in such a mission that is not primarily motivated by tangible local interests in an existing order, but to strive for a reshuffling of global governance.

One of our main assets is having a clear argument for our mission. The 2013 “If mayors ruled the world” by Benjamin Barber was the starting point. Why do we absolutely need a revised world order? Because of “Dysfunctional Nations and Rising Cities”. Because the way planetary challenges (relationship with nature, social inequality and multicultural societies) formatted through national discourses does not fit the complexity and reality of the urban agendas. Not only mayors are more pragmatic than national leaders, urban problem-solving lies outside the national silos and categories. A city is not a country.

So, to convince of the necessity of another global governance structure we need to work on different levels and scales. (i) We need to make the argument clear and forceful. (ii) We need to convince “the urban” (the cities, the networks, the think tanks, etc) to take over that narrative. (iii) We need to introduce the argument at the two other levels (the global institutions and the national bodies) as a complement to their own weaknesses in global governance.

In search of the right narrative

Over the last ten years, we have concentrated and clarified our narrative.

During a *first phase* we have worked with thematic approaches dependent on expertise within our network and advisory board: health, security, climate, migration, art. The transversal theme was: empowering cities. We had to strengthen the organisation, focusing on recruitment and retention of existing members searching for ambassadors and regional secretariats. That first phase was mainly kept together with the strong personality and outreach of Benjamin Barber.

In a *second phase* (under the leadership of chair Kurz, mayor of Mannheim) we have worked on formulating a more transversal narrative as “frontrunners in empowering cities” through (i) road maps and action planning, (ii) concentrating on reinforcing the ExCo and the secretariat and (iii) recruiting and securing financial sustainability. The COVID-pandemic illustrated the weaknesses of the global governance system (no global leadership, resurgence of the nation-state and hardly any inclusion of the urban).

We wrote an open letter to the UN Secretary General at the occasion of the UN 75th anniversary and got a positive response. We drafted two successive “Road maps” synthesising our argument: *Towards new cities in a new global order* (Deepening democracy, recognizing interdependence and increasing empowerment, renewing health policies, promoting a more effective green deal, envisioning a new economic regime, implementing inclusive social policy, imagining the future, data sovereignty and the smart, rewriting processes and procedures, mayors for the future).

With very concrete action proposals we thought to be able to position ourselves in the expected big post-covid reshuffling and balance sheet debates. But the structural changes many expected did not occur. The world went back to business as usual. (Even with increased climate change effects, with new wars and armed conflicts and a new geopolitical context there has hardly been an intense debate on global governance). GPM was not suited to systematically carrying on the same discourse at different summits and meetings and did not have the logistical means to support such a debate.

Then an opportunity came together, and the GPM opened a *third phase* under the leadership of chair Rio (Mayor of Braga). We worked to specify the profile of GPM as a “*lobby for empowerment*” and carry that message especially in global discussions with the global institutions and with the most important city networks. To do that (i) we developed focuses on four central “political” questions, (ii) broadened support amongst “fellow travellers” in academia and civil society to expand our audience and (iii) fortified the organisation at the level of finance and recruitment.

We decided to stick content wise to the four chapters: delivering urban democracy, caring cities, art and culture at the centre of the urban project and empowering cities for a multilateral world. The four have been developed in position papers as the basis for discussion at the summits. They structured the very high-level conversations at our Braga Summit in June 2025. It is now important that these narratives are taken over by our membership and made available to other discussions. How to envisage the next steps from these four pillars?

2. Specifying the four pillars

To avoid the generic empty consensus of other networks it might be a good idea to “radicalise” our four pillars a bit by translating them into concrete action plans and to prepare the agenda for the next summit(s) in that sense. We do propose to discuss within the upcoming leadership the personality of GPM within the broader ecosystem of urban networking as an expression of a *transition planning towards formulating the structure of an urbanised world*. That would mean to organize our summits around a few focal questions within the four domains and to discuss that with other networks, partners and with our fellow travellers. What if we see our next summits as a (friendly) confrontation with, let’s say each time two other networks or institutions, on our four theses? Let us try to open the conversation to propose a number of these questions starting from our four pillars approach.

A. Rendering urban democracy

Democracy is still in the making in most parts of the world and under threat in other parts of the world. The complexity and urgency of the challenges in the urban system, such as climate collapse, biodiversity, social inequality, poverty, housing, migration, cultural and ethnic diversity, and so on cannot be tackled without consent, support and collaboration of the population. Urban democracy is about institutions, but also about practices.

Our position contains two main focuses to be developed:

- **The defense of the rule of law and human rights:** These are under threat of interpretation and local political conditions. We are developing in good collaboration with the Human Rights Cities Network a monitoring device for human rights in cities. That project must be accompanied by a good communication in relation with our “democracy pillar”. We see in many parts of the world a tendency to authoritarian vertical politics, based on ethnocentric or religious fundamentalism. Resistance comes from the urban, as a more diverse and multiple type of society, in need of another more democratic vision on socializing. In authoritarian states the tension with cities might increase.
- **Increasing local democracy:** we have in the paper clearly indicated what can be done on city level to implement democracy: **(i) democratizing institutions (ii) democratizing society implementing different forms of participation and coproduction** and **(iii) democratizing the urban spirit** which is clearly linked with our pillar on arts and culture. If such a vision is really shared by our membership, then we could try to help our mayors to develop these three policies based on a local diagnosis and planning.

B. Organizing caring cities

This chapter is an attempt to synthesise the many different position papers of GPM on different themes (health, security, climate, migration) into a concept of urban model of development reacting to globalisation and the demise of the welfare state. National states, metropolitan areas and cities have been continuously pushed to sustain global competitiveness. In many cases that has been accompanied by austerity and reshuffled budgets. As many other planetary challenges, the social agenda lands in cities. We need to develop new concepts of “welfare cities” as a complement to welfare states.

Most cities are confronted with the shortage of state provisions, with the many social demands (housing, education, childcare, health, mobility, newcomers, etc.) producing visible deterioration of social inclusion. We thus need a localized social policy. Studying the foundational economy, those economic activities oriented to local services, to regenerating and sustaining the city, to reproducing daily life, to provide for basic needs that shows that almost half of the urban economy is driven by these local needs and not necessarily “in competition” with the rest of the world. It is the development of this local integrated policy, caring for urban inhabitants and users, based on local talents and resources and oriented towards a more sustainable, circular economy that we aim for in the notion of caring cities:

C. An art and culture to imagine urbanity

Art and culture as a central field of attention have been added to the first three pillars. The existing paper is mainly a justification of that choice: we need that focus because imagination is central to the software of any urban project. The arts or cultural sector should not be an add-on or afterthought. Five aspects were underlined: The ways culture behaves; the underlying values (like more closed or open minded); how the city is physically put together; the economic, political, religious and social institutions the city has nurtured and finally the social structures that have evolved. The importance of culture increases because of the necessity of creativity in urban problem-solving. And there the arts are in the first line.

It is now important to specify and elaborate on this rather principled first paper. We do propose to work alongside three lines and to turn them into more operational approaches for urban policies.

- *Urban culture is of a specific kind! A city is not a country; the urban is not the national. Countries are built on an idea of a common history, on an identity and tradition, on representation and repertoire, on bounded territories but a city has a mixed population, a hybrid culture. Its unity comes from a common destiny, from a future project, a destination. And that needs new ideas, new images, new solutions. Let's focus on these new insights and new forms of urban cultures, exchange them, document them and network them.*
- *Invest in a strong cultural sector, documenting diversity and producing transversal platforms! Arts and science are important creators of new insights, of innovation, of changing perceptions. They install new cultures, new practices, new ways of living. In an urban world arts and cultural workers must be put in the center of the urban project, they are not just reproducers of an existing repertoire. Cities and metropolitan regions understand the vital importance of maintaining a vibrant artistic and creative activity.*
- *These activities fuel an ever-evolving urban imagination, a narrative of social development. That must be actively transmitted to education, media, cultural centers, festivals and events. An urban population cannot only survive within communitarian traditions, within the formats of diversity. To make city together it is also necessary to work on bridging, on transversal communication, on hybridity and cross-fertilization, on creative innovation. That is why innovative culture becomes a core element of urban development. Mayors and city leaders need to invest in developing the urban narrative. Urban culture is the product of its diversity, of living together with strangers, of daily meetings with others. Developing a common imaginary is basic to developing local solidarities and collaborations. Living together, respecting diversity and difference, needs openness and awareness of our interdependence. That spirit must continuously be demonstrated in our artistic and cultural practices.*

We do propose to search for all these areas partnerships within the cultural sector and to become the ambassadors of the specific features of urban culture (as opposed to the more generic or the more sectoral approaches usually present in arts and cultural conferences). To develop that field, we need to connect to two types of organizations:

- *Specific arts or cultural networks like the European Festival Association and especially their network of Festival Cities (see our working paper on a typology of festivals in city imaging) or Unesco Creative Cities Network with a very classical disciplinary approach.*
- *The more general city networks or venues to carry our emphasis on the importance of the narrative, the software, the storyline in urban policies. Like Eurocities, UCLG-Committee on culture, Creative Bureaucracy Festival, etc.*

D. Empowering cities

That pillar remains at the core of the GPM's origin and history, but it is maybe the most difficult to translate in concrete action planning.

"Empowering cities" has been developed alongside four necessary dimensions:

- **Building true multi-level governance.**

Multi-level governance is now widely recognized as a prerequisite for more effective policy. However, real progress has been rare. True multilevel governance requires the systematic involvement of the local level in decision-making and policymaking. In terms of a learning system, this must above all mean that decisions can be readjusted based on local experience. The result and prerequisite at the same time is a higher degree of agility. The topic must be placed more firmly on the international agenda, especially in the given formats of the nation states. COPs, G20, UN Habitat - none of these events must remain without local voices at the core of the negotiations now!

- **The expansion of competencies and resources.**

The prerequisite for an effective municipal policy is the competence and ability to decide and regulate everything that can be regulated locally. The right to plan, the responsibility for building permits, the internal organization, the sole access to own personnel and the right to build cooperations are basic requirements. Responsibilities and rights alone, however, are empty shells if there are not sufficient financial and organizational resources to fill them. For a more successful policy, it will also be crucial to rapidly develop the collaborations between the core city and its hinterland into a systemic, transformative eco-system. There is a need for metropolitan governance.

- **Building competencies and capacities**

Organizing the necessary fundamental changes requires skills from cities that are almost nowhere already sufficiently developed. As new value chains, new collaborations within civil society, changes in public space and its use, new community service activities, awareness raising and behavioral change are at stake, local governments have a broad new role to play as catalysts, facilitators and drivers.

In addition, not only must the necessary investments be described, they must be translated into portfolios that can also be invested by private capital. For this, there is usually a lack of methodological knowledge, expertise and capacity. This gap is proving to be a key obstacle to decisively accelerating and broadening the transformation.

- **Preserving and maintaining urbanity**

Urbanity is an attitude and civilizational achievement. It enables people to live together in diversity. It is not exclusive. Mayors represent all the people of their city, regardless of their origin. It is growing nationalism, division and exclusion that threaten the very essence and identity of our cities. The innovative strength and adaptability of cities are based on diversity and the interaction of the different. Cities preserve their heritage and their future when they nurture their capacity for communality in diversity.

3. What are the next steps?

- There is a lot to do. Too much maybe for a small organisation that lacks the means. But at the same time our agenda is set by our goals, by our mission. The legitimization of maintaining the project alive is exactly the ambition to fill in the lack of the existing representation of cities in the global system. So, how to structure our focuses?
- Working at clarifying our positions towards a very transparent list of urban demands. We should not limit the analysis to developing contents but also integrate context analysis (where are our allies, where are our opponents?). That kind of work should be accompanied by developing our intellectual capacities in the frame of our “projected” network of academic fellows, our global summer school for city administrators, our “supporters”, etc. Our series of monthly webinars should be able to help us spread our themes but also clarifying them in conversation with experts and other thematic networks.
- We need to develop better materials to communicate our positions: developing a communication plan involving a revision of the website, the regular webinars, printed material, better and more visible presence at other conferences (stand, leaflet, etc).
- More explicit partnerships. We think the signing of memoranda of understanding is a good practice. I would suggest discussing and selecting like two (or three) preferential partners or objectives for each pillar and to develop joint agendas and activities. Each of the four can then be followed up by a GPM subcommittee (a coordinator, some members of the AdCo, external partners). But we also must understand that the four pillars and the arguments have been developed in such a way as to sustain a transversal and comprehensive logic. So, we, as a small organisation, must emphasise keeping the four chapters together in one narrative.

- Towards an extended membership. We must go on recruiting alongside a plan and making our membership ambassadors for regional expansion. I do think that a well thought “welcome package” could help to further the process after a first introductory contact.
- Unfortunately, most membership is not only (not mainly) motivated by ideological reasons. Therefore, we must develop some tools that might interest members for internal reasons: (i) international contacts = good summits for mayors and (ii) an initiative to be developed for administrators (summer school, webinars, formation, expertise) and maybe a form of aid in making a local analysis in line with our above developed pillars. Developing the chapters “urban democracy”, “caring cities” and “culture at the centre of the urban project” into a vision for local development might be interesting to our membership (even if it may seem to be too invasive).



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