



USC Price

Sol Price School of Public Policy

Frank V. Zerunyan, J.D. LL.D. (hc)

Professor of the Practice of Governance

Director of Executive Education Forum

Director and University Liaison to ROTC and Nautical Science Programs

Direct Dial: (213) 740-0036

Frank.Zerunyan@usc.edu

“Enhancing Innovation to Building Resilient and Responsive Public Administration to Support the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – An SDGs Mid-Term Review Perspective”¹

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New York

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda (Agenda) was adopted to protect the planet from degradation, ensure prosperity for all, foster peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, and mobilize global partnerships to ensure effective and timely implementation. Its transformational vision contemplates a world free of poverty, hunger, and disease, with equitable and universal access to quality education, health care, and social protection, where physical, mental, and social well-being are assured. The Agenda is the culmination of extensive negotiations among multiple intersectoral actors. Implementing the Agenda will require continued negotiations to always search for optimal solutions to what I call “wicked challenges” in my next book about negotiating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this short paper, I borrow from some of our research and literature to share with my colleagues possible topics of discussion during our Expert Group Meeting.

¹ I submit this paper to highlight my interventions and contributions to this Expert Group, with some of whom I began to work at the Public Service Innovation Branch (PISB) starting in 2013. I also hyperlinked several published articles of mine to illustrate my conclusions. I am looking forward to our collaboration.

Background and Orientation of my thesis

I teach governance, negotiation, and law in one of the premier public policy schools in the United States. I often reflect on the value of local governments as the antidote to many wicked challenges we face today.

Several years ago, I shared the podium at Fordham Law School, New York, with Professor Benjamin Barber, who wrote a book entitled, "If Mayors Ruled the World." I spoke at Fordham about my then-forthcoming journal article, ["The Evolution of the Municipal Corporation and the Innovations of Local Governance in California to Preserve Home Rule and Local Control."](#) Professor Barber and I observed that the "city," always the human habitat of first resort, has, in today's globalizing world, once again become democracy's and sustainability's best hope.

The former mayor of Denver, Wellington E. Webb, said, "The 19th century was a century of empires; the 20th century was a century of nation-states. The 21st century will be a century of cities." This perception is so accurate today, as a coalition of business, government, and academic colleagues have joined together to survey cities with diverse populations and economies to design an evidence-based roadmap to post-pandemic urban resilience and sustainability. I was a member of the board of advisors for this endeavor. In this short paper, I share some of our findings which confirm my appreciation for local public service and the critical importance of leadership. I recently wrote an article about ["The value of local public service,"](#) published in Western City of California League of Cities.

Public service is not about collecting a paycheck from the government. Helping humanity is an activity beyond self-interest. For over a decade, I have collaborated with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and, specifically, the Public Service Innovation Branch. My primary function has been to explain the value of local public service and collaboration in typically centralized governments where hierarchical bureaucracies tend to create public bureaucrats rather than servants.

In a world of constant competition for power and influence, we govern through values of collaboration and compassion. These values are more focused locally, where we are the closest to the people we serve. We serve to facilitate neighbors, helping neighbors without the divisions imposed on us by political interests and the media, which thrive on accentuating differences.

As competitive as we are, humanity is about an impulse to lend a helping hand to our fellow men. This impulse exhibits itself at the local level, often during disasters. I recently wrote an article on ["Why you need a strong disaster management plan in governance, published in Apolitical.co,](#) where I highlighted the importance of a local "facilitative platform for a limitless number of actors coming together for the greater good." This collaboration is not just a theory but a reality we witnessed in Florida and Texas in the aftermath of hurricanes, where neighborly acts of human kindness were displayed for all to see and experience.

A research-based conceptual framework

In our research, we use “collaborative governance” to frame our subject matter in addressing the advancement and negotiation of SDGs. This governance requires a different mindset and collaborative effort to search for the common good.

As we approach 2030, our research in our upcoming book highlights the importance of effective institutions and negotiation skills for implementation. This comes at a time when citizens locally, nationally, and globally are demanding better governance, equity and inclusion, greater sectoral participation in public affairs, and enhanced integrity and accountability of their leaders in all institutions and organizations. This demand for accountability we describe is a new framed-based perspective on normative theory but suggestive of areas for empirical analysis written for all disciplines covered by the SDGs. Most of our research points to needs at the local level for better education, support, mentoring, best practices, and leadership. The United Nations (UN) is uniquely positioned to provide this general education and support.

In 2019 and 2021, I led a group of graduate students to focus on SDGs implementation. We researched and developed an applied conceptual framework of an effective public institution to be used as a teaching tool for local entities working to advance SDGs. The framework highlights values and ethics, transformational leadership, strategic planning, innovation, co-creation, and best practices for application.

The framework's outcomes include good governance through increased transparency, accountability, and responsiveness. The framework is for a more efficient public institution where the provision and delivery of services are predictable, timely, and consistent. In this context, we learned from our research that increased public trust, where constituents are satisfied with services and confident that they will continue to receive them, increases public participation, which aids in prioritizing equity and co-creation. In addition, we found resilient institutions where the institution's capacities are safeguarded, especially in the face of crisis and changing circumstances. The most significant impact is the advancement of the SDGs through the development of effective, accountable, and transparent public institutions.

Through case study analysis of exemplary UN projects across the globe, we highlighted the pressing need to teach more robust policymaking processes at the local and grassroots levels to ensure that the 2030 Agenda can be achieved on time.

Our research was further validated by the survey and study conducted by ESI Thought Lab, where I served on the board of advisors. The work entitled [“Smart City Solutions for a Riskier World”](#) surveyed 167 cities across the globe to analyze cities’ use of smart technologies, data analytics, investments, outcomes, and returns to categorize their progress in SDGs implementation plans. 22% of cities surveyed had already made “fast progress” on a wide range of SDGs. 58% advanced some SDGs, while 20% planned to advance SDGs.

In that research project, I am quoted to say and still believe, “The importance of cities to advance SDGs policies cannot be understated. Smarter cities will lay the groundwork for collaborative governance in dealing with the world's most wicked problems. This research goes to the heart of the resiliency of 21st-century cities, which we labeled Cities 4.0.” With the expectations of citizens and businesses gearing up for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the most prosperous cities will be those advanced in using smart technology and data to drive the SDGs.

When smart and sustainable meet: Cities 4.0

To analyze the impact of smart city solutions on sustainability, we identified a subset of SDG sprinters that also lead in using advanced technology and data analytics.

The pandemic has been a catalyst for remarkable technological, business, and social change, which will continue after the health crisis ends. With the expectations of citizens rising, and businesses gearing up for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the most successful cities will be those that are advanced in using smart technology and data and deploy them to drive the SDGs. Such cities will be far along in their digital transformation, fully sustainable, and skilled in the new ways of doing business.

We call these cities, Cities 4.0.

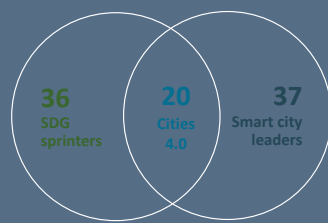
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Frank V. Zerunyan, Professor of the Practice of Governance, University of Southern California

What sets Cities 4.0 apart?

- They are further ahead in smart city initiatives**
On average, they widely deploy 14 smart city projects vs. an average of seven for others
- They have superior infrastructure**
Better public transportation, roads, parks, healthcare, and digital connectivity
- They have made the greatest progress on nearly all SDGs**
On average, 86% have made progress across all SDGs vs. 62% of all cities

Smart meets sustainable: 20 cities



Cities 4.0

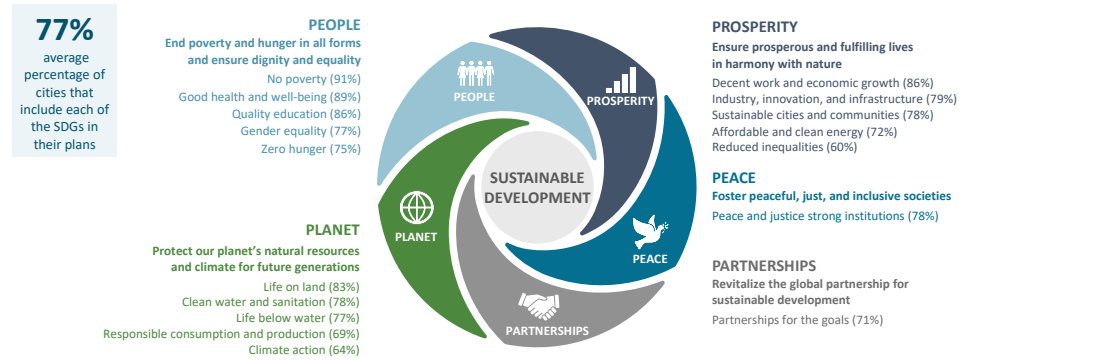
- Aarhus
- Los Angeles
- Athens
- Madrid
- Baltimore
- Moscow
- Barcelona
- New York
- Berlin
- Orlando
- Birmingham
- Paris
- Boston
- Philadelphia
- Copenhagen
- Singapore
- Helsinki
- Tallinn
- London
- Vienna

Appropriately cities focus on their constituents, well-being, and quality of life. These characteristics align with the UN's categorization of SDGs into five P's: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships. 77% of cities surveyed included these five Ps in their plans. Topping the list of SDGs in cities was ending poverty, followed by good health and well-being, quality education and jobs, clean water and energy, world peace, and partnerships to support sustainability.

Cities are focusing on the SDGs around people and prosperity

The UN categorizes the SDGs into five Ps: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships. Most cities include SDGs under each of these Ps in their urban development plans. Cities are doing the most with SDGs relating to people: 91% include no poverty, 89% include good health and well-being, and 86% include quality education in their plans. Cities are also focusing on prosperity, with 86% including decent work and economic growth in their plans, and 78% incorporating sustainable cities and communities. The SDGs around planet, peace, and partnerships are included slightly less often.

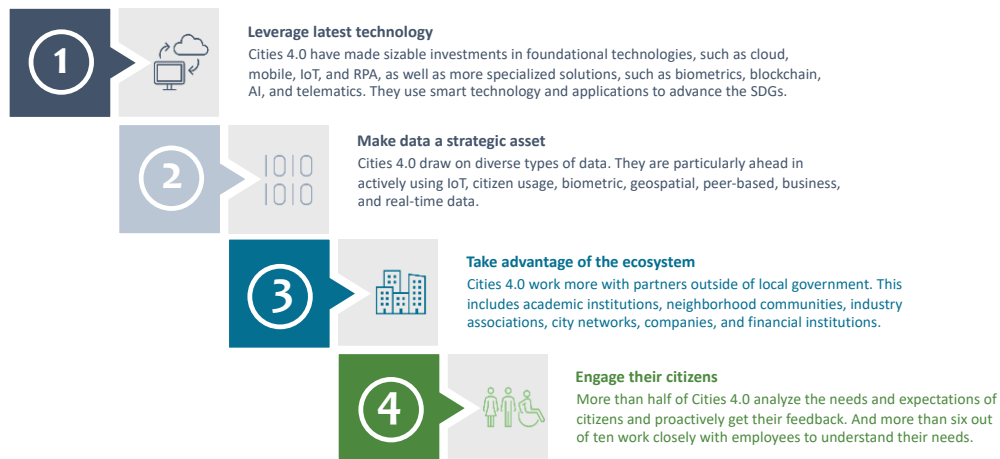
% of cities including SDGs in their plans



Q6a: Which of the SDGs are included in your city's plans and on which of them has your city made considerable progress?

Some of the key takeaways of this survey and analysis were the validation of our researched framework highlighting co-creation, partnerships, and ecosystems to achieve SDGs, governance and leadership through values and ethics, strategic planning with data and analytics, innovation, and best practices for application.

The four steps to becoming a City 4.0



Conclusion

1. Continue education of stakeholders on the value of SDGs. Our survey respondents noted that most stakeholders working closely with the local government still need to familiarize themselves with the substance of SDGs. They also fail to understand the value of SDGs to society.
2. Create a knowledge base about the value of SDGs at the local level, curated for the specific needs of a locality. Include SDGs in urban plans. Share the plans. A central repository for practitioners about the value of SDGs that tailors to regions and localities is essential. The repository should contain actionable items on SDG leadership and implementation concerning negotiations and other actions that help pass SDGs. The inventory of best practices and examples should come from similar cases either in the SDG goals they are achieving or similarity of the regional contexts the state occupies.
3. Deliver toolkits to local officials—value human capital. Toolkits are crucial to collaborative negotiation processes. In our case studies, which we highlight in our book, toolkits took the form of strategic plans, expertise, steering committees, physical infrastructure, strong relationships/social infrastructure, and regulation. Equipping local government leaders striving to pioneer sustainable development with these tools will clarify and amplify

their solution strategy, allowing them to take their ideas across the finish line.

4. Promote best practices that enhance trust in government. Our research concludes that there are three critical ways for governments to promote trust-building through cooperation. First, they can create an inclusive decision-making environment before the project starts. Second, they can be transparent about decision-making throughout the entire process. Third, they can establish an internal mechanism to hold public officials accountable; be ethical. Lists of desired traits of ethical public servants and moral leaders are abundant and typically include honesty, integrity, credibility, fairness, equity, and inclusion.
5. Inculcate leadership qualities in workshops practitioners conduct in localities. Inculcating leadership qualities, such as benevolence, foresight, and competency, does not happen overnight; however, in our professional experiences, workshops that reflect on these capacities through real-world applications, like creating a strategic city plan or business plan, can stimulate leadership growth. By providing guidance through developing a project with these qualities in mind, aspiring leaders or leaders looking to improve their performance will have the opportunity to consciously enhance their behavior and mindset, which will help formulate a foundation from which they can work in the future.