

“Traditional approaches in the historical field of infrastructures often focus on the achievements of individual masterminds. But if one looks beyond individual pioneers, the emergence of corresponding expert cultures would appear to signal a much more essential and qualitatively significant leap.”

—Christoph CORNELISSEN, Giacomo BONAN, and Katia OCCHI

Quote from the article “Infrastructures and the Environment: Learning From Long-term Cycles. Reflexions From the Early Modern Period to the Present” in *Intersecting Vol. 6* by Christoph Cornelissen, Giacomo Bonan, and Katia Occhi (Italian-German Historical Institute ISIG, Fondazione Bruno Kessler, Trento, Italy). Image Source: ‘Landschaft mit Bergwerk’, Herri met de Bles (1485/1510 – 1555), oil on wood, Inv.-Nr.: 55 - Alte Galerie, Schloss Eggenberg, Graz. Photography by Fondazione Bruno Kessler, LXII study week | environment and infrastructures from the early modern period to the present: challenges, knowledge and innovation, Sept. 2021 ©.



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The Impossible Infrastructure Consensus?

Over the past fifteen years, the issue of infrastructure investments has always been in the picture when it came to reigniting global growth. This peaked in 2014, during the G20 Australia and the creation of a designated ministerial Infrastructure Working Group and a collateral infrastructure hub. Yet, the G20 approach has long overlooked how much the production of new infrastructure “for growth” did not necessarily mean corresponding projects would contribute to the reduction of inequalities.

Besides, the question remained: How can we reconcile the production of more infrastructure with other goals, such as the reduction of CO₂ emissions or the effective protection of biodiversity?

The G20 established the Seoul Consensus for Shared Growth in 2010, after it was transformed into a forum of government leaders in order to respond to the 2008 global financial crisis.¹

The Seoul Consensus included a set of six principles meant to support the achievement of the then Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Following the peak of the global financial crisis, the issue of infrastructure investments was included for the first time in G20 main documents as part of the corresponding multiyear action plan to restore growth. In the following years, until the outbreak of the pandemic and of the war in Ukraine, the annual G20 leaders’ declarations have regularly outlined the fragility of the restoration of global growth, with infrastructure investment and financing meant to play a supporting role.

The paradigm of “infrastructure for growth,” including mobility, energy, or digital infrastructure, has prevailed unilaterally not only since 2010, but since the early 1990s and the aftermath of the Cold War. It has been a driver to support the global integration of trade and supply chains and a catalyst for the emergence of interconnected urban hubs or global cities. Meanwhile, developed and emerging countries alike have faced a significant decline in social infrastructure, whereas the negative – and cumulative – environmental spillovers of connected planetary infrastructure systems have been assessed only recently within the G20.

In 2022, the G20 presidency of Indonesia and the G7 Germany tried to introduce innovative policy options to strengthen the case for climate finance and deliver on effective low carbon pathways. This new direction includes the just energy transition partnerships (JETP) initiated during the COP26 in

Glasgow and the proposal of a climate club. This could be a turning point to reshuffle infrastructure investments, but achieving a reform of infrastructure finance in the G7 and G20 in the context of 2023 means addressing a fragmented geopolitical landscape where infrastructure plans, such as the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment or the continuation of the China led Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), might no longer connect.²

The G20 presidency of India has set up a new overarching priority for infrastructure investments to target sustainable and inclusive urbanization, in India, in the Global South, and even beyond. This innovative systemic approach to urban development that also builds upon a new vision of rural-urban balance was echoed in the Urban X Manifesto introduced at the Global Solutions Summit in Berlin in May 2023. In parallel, we acknowledge the relevance of the model of digital public infrastructure (DPI) experienced in India, providing large-scale and affordable access to digital banking services, which could serve as a credible, operational alternative to profit-based IT companies. At last, the T20 India is pushing for the “LiFE Economy,” another denomination for an agenda combining sustainable development, climate action and climate justice, across sustainable consumption and production patterns embedded in the T20 Bhopal Declaration³ from January 2023. According to the Fourth Sector, a research consortium supporting the LiFE Economy, this approach could greatly benefit the 2030 Agenda, whereas converging assessments, including from the T7 Japan, show an urgent need to reignite

the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Contrary to what the open competition between infrastructure plans such as the G7 Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment or the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative looks like, fostering policy coherence across the G7, G20 and beyond is not mission impossible. Alongside national governments and the governance of international financial institutions, contributions at the intersections of the private sector and civil society, including research organizations and think-tanks, could well leverage a much-needed consensus across various “green deals” or their equivalent, for which the continued presidency of the G20 by major emerging economies between 2022 and 2025 could play a critical role. We therefore call for an enduring dialogue between the T20 and T7, as initiated in 2023 by the T20 India and the T7 Japan with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. In light of the INTERSECTING paradigm, we also call to integrate a fourth infrastructure component in global policy talks, that is, alongside physical (including energy, agriculture and food production), digital, and social infrastructure, the issue of research infrastructure as highlighted by the T7 Japan 2023 Communiqué, to improve our shared ability to measure, monitor and drive systemic, cross-sector policies. Such a vision infuses the evolution of the INTERSECTING model, showcased in the present volume 2, and will nurture the exploration of renewed policy-paradigms at the core of the subsequent volume 3 of this global editorial project.

References

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