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WORLD ALLIANCE OF INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL CENTERS

The Next Generation of Financial Centers

How to measure the performance of international financial centers in a dynamic global economic landscape, and how to make financial centers future-proof.

VIETNAM FINANCIAL FORUM · DA NANG · 09 JULY 2026

We organize collaboration among leading financial centers around the world

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OBJECTIVES

Why the Alliance exists

The World Alliance is the leading global platform of international financial centers, as a catalyst for collaboration, fostering financial innovation, and cooperating with international organizations.

01 **Promote financial centers**

Advance international financial centers on a global scale via media and partners.

02 **Share best practices**

Enable cross-fertilization and joint communication between members.

03 **Partner on knowledge**

Work closely with consulting firms, universities, and research institutes.

Source: https://waifc.finance

CONTENTS

Three questions

What is a Financial Center?

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> Financial centers are cities with an intense concentration of financial activity, serving as dynamic clusters where finance, expertise, and data converge to drive economic growth.
>
> Their future success depends on being green, smart, innovative, inclusive, and offering an excellent quality of life to attract and retain the best talent.

Source: financial-centers.org

Many new financial centers have emerged …

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New breeds of IFCs with **ecommerce** roots

New IFC projects in **Asia** (besides VIFC)

Newest trends: AI-native financial centers?

CBDCs, Tokenized Deposits, Stablecoins: The future of payments?

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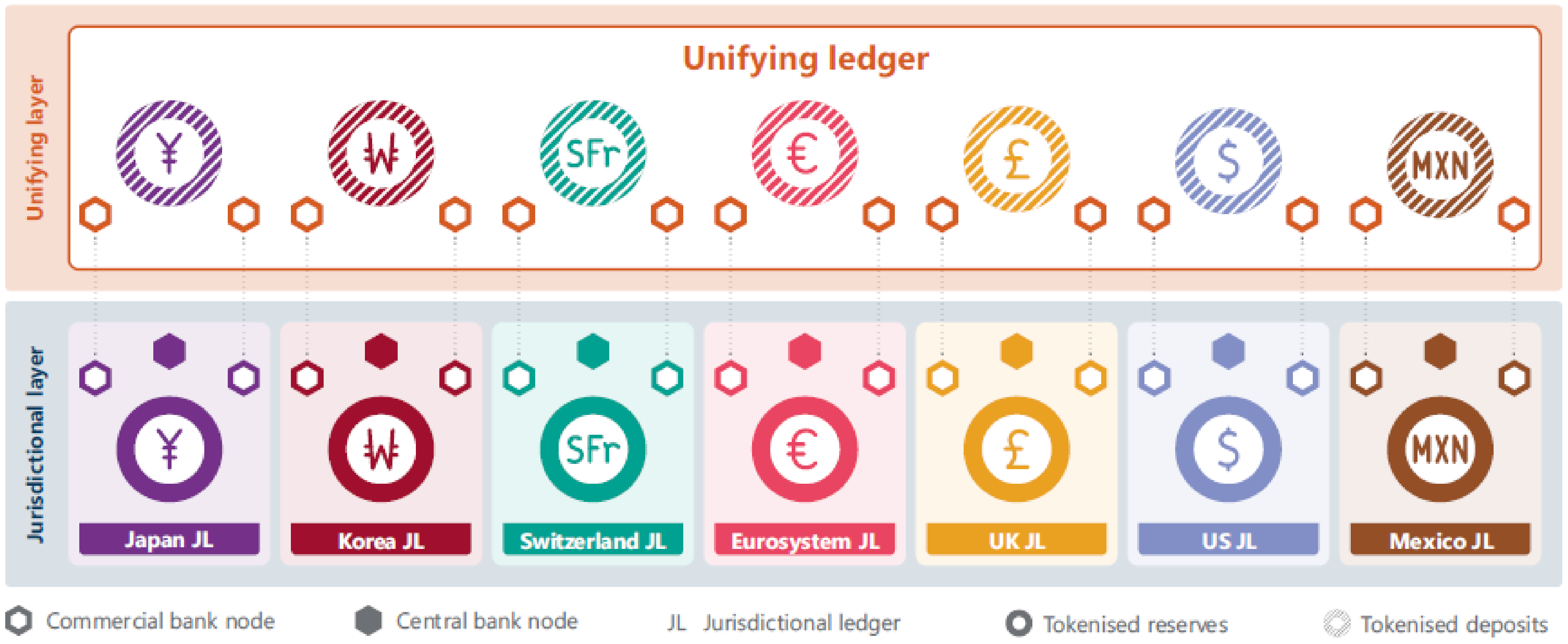
The Project Agorá layered architecture



Source: Project Agorá / BIS

Open Finance as the global norm?

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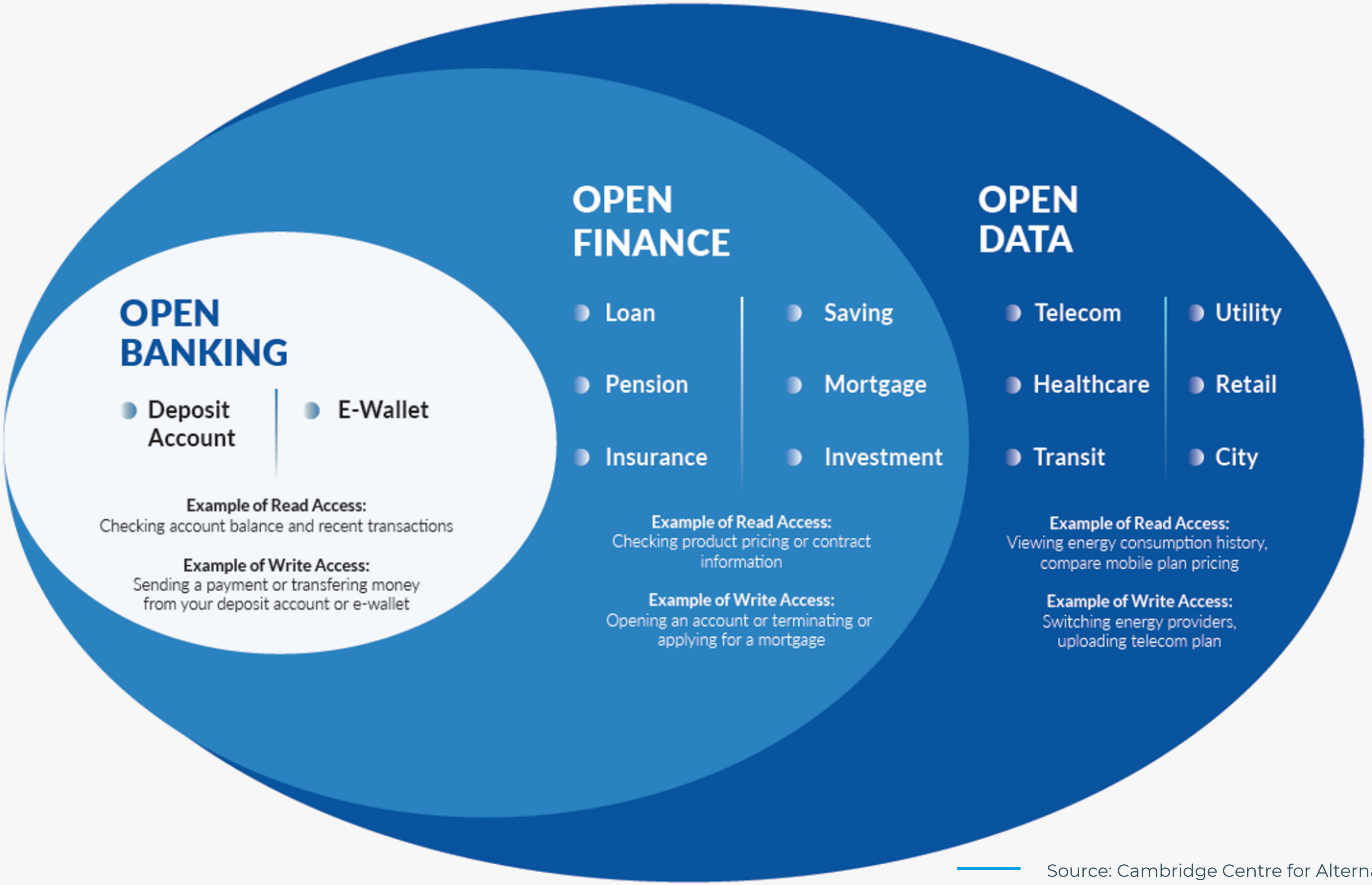

Source: Cambridge Centre for Alternative Finance

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02

MEASURING PERFORMANCE

How to measure the performance of a financial center?

Financial center rankings

Five leading indices broadly agree at the top — but the same city can rank very differently. **Tokyo** and **Beijing** are highlighted.

#	GFCI 38 · 2025	GFCI 37 · 2025	OFEX · 2025	GPCI-FC · 2024	FCCI · 2025
1	New York	New York	New York	New York	New York
2	London	London	Chicago	London	London
3	Hong Kong	Hong Kong	London	**Tokyo**	Singapore
4	Singapore	Singapore	Paris	**Beijing**	Hong Kong
5	San Francisco	San Francisco	Frankfurt	Hong Kong	**Tokyo**
6	Chicago	Chicago	Shanghai	Toronto	Shanghai
7	Los Angeles	Los Angeles	**Tokyo**	Mumbai	Paris
8	Shanghai	Shanghai	Shenzhen	Singapore	Seoul
9	Shenzhen	Shenzhen	Singapore	San Francisco	Zurich
10	Seoul	Seoul	Zurich	Shanghai	**Beijing**
11	Dubai	Frankfurt	Hong Kong	Paris	San Francisco
12	Frankfurt	Dubai	Seoul	Taipei	Abu Dhabi
	…	…			
	15. Tokyo	**20. Beijing**			
	…	…			
	22. Beijing	**22. Tokyo**	~~**Beijing**~~		

One-Size-Fits-All?

MEASURING PERFORMANCE

Are there better ways?

Rankings give a single score. A functional view asks what a center actually does, and for whom, across multiple dimensions.

01 **No one-size-fits-all**

Centers differ widely in size, structure, regulation, and stage of development.

02 **A functional approach**

Examine not what makes a center attractive, but what it *does* — and for which stakeholders.

03 **A multi-dimensional framework**

Separate domestic and international impact — and include future-readiness in its own right.

Source: https://financial-centers.org/publications/financial-center-performance/

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Enabling conditions — the bedrock

The foundations every international financial center is built upon.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

- Regulatory & legal framework
- Rule of law & judicial effectiveness
- Anti-corruption environment
- Political stability & governance

ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

- Macroeconomic stability
- Tax
- Cost of doing business
- Capital-account openness
- Market-access architecture

INFRASTRUCTURE & CONNECTIVITY

- Digital infrastructure
- Physical infrastructure
- International transport connectivity
- Data governance & digital regulation
- Time-zone positioning

TALENT ENVIRONMENT

- Human-capital stock
- Education & training infrastructure
- Immigration & talent mobility
- Quality of life
- Qualification recognition

Source: https://financial-centers.org/publications/financial-center-performance/

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The 4 functional dimensions

DOMESTIC IMPACT

- Strong & growing domestic market
- Center for national monetary policy transmission and financial regulation
- Demand for sophisticated financial services
- Sufficient financing for economic growth

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

- Gateway for domestic firms to access international financial services
- Strong network of internat. partners
- International offices strategically located
- Well-connected to international payment infrastructure

INTERNATIONAL CONTRIBUTION

- Focus on exports of financial services
- High amount of cross-border activities
- Decent share in global financial services (e.g., FX and derivatives, M&A, global IPOs, asset & wealth management, re-insurance)
- Many foreign financial institutions

ATTRACTIVENESS

- Flexible regulatory environment
- Attractive tax regime for foreigners
- Ease of doing business
- Availability of talent
- Quality of life (e.g., climate, healthcare, international schools, cultural & recreational options)

TODAY → SHORT-TERM →

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+3 complementary factors

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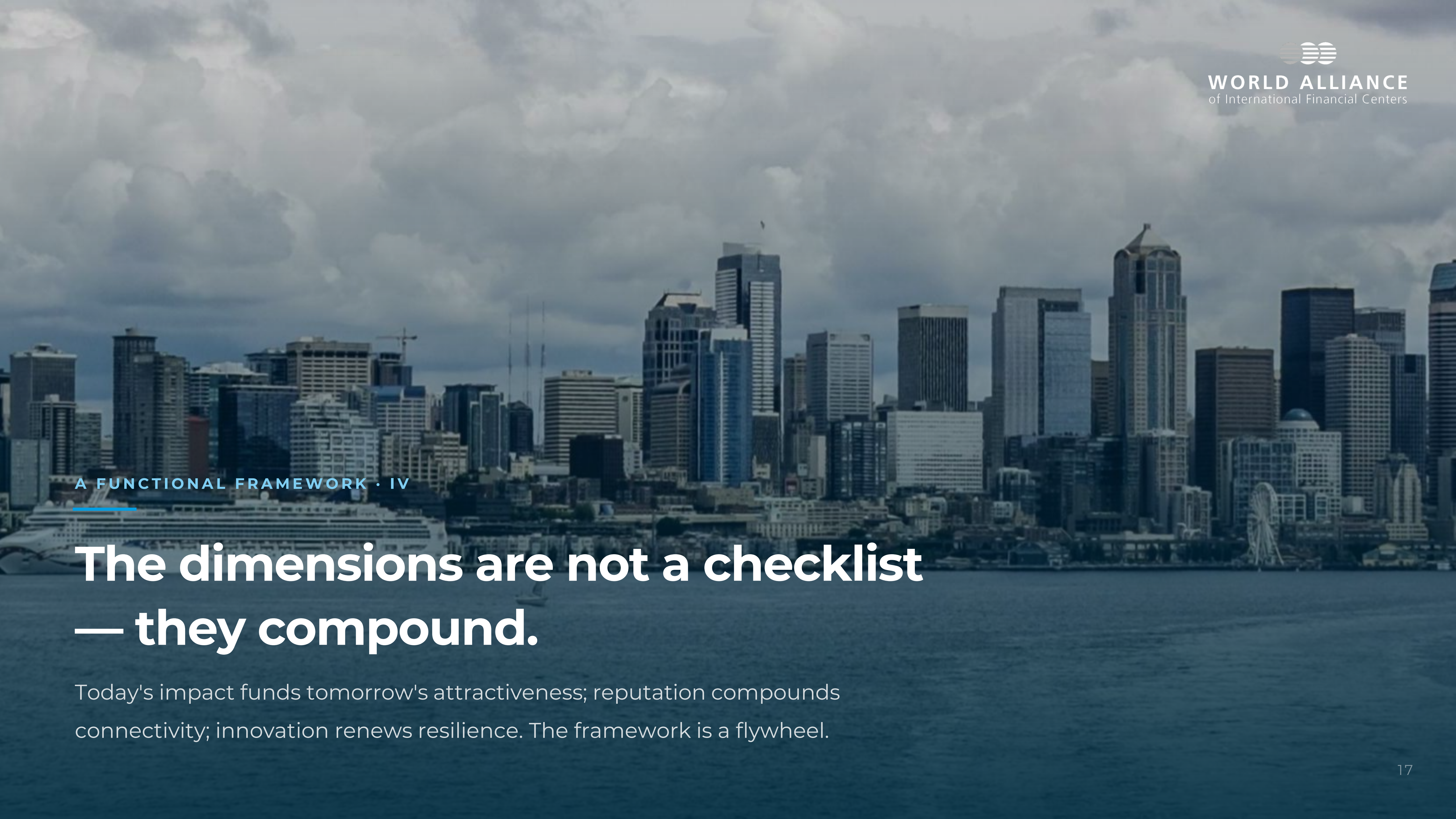
INNOVATIVE CAPACITY
- Successful FinTech startup ecosystem
- Active hub for corporate innovation
- Close collaboration with startups
- Leading academic research
- Source of financial innovation
- Internat. standard-setting influence
- Open infrastructure and interoperability

REPUTATION & TRUST
- Regulatory independence & competence
- Fair and predictable legal environment
- International standards compliance
- Political commitment
- International visibility and voice

RESILIENCE
- Diversification
- Agility
- Institutional depth (e.g., professional services, markets, education & training, industry associations)
- Crisis-response track record

TODAY — SHORT-TERM — LONG-TERM



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A FUNCTIONAL FRAMEWORK · IV

The dimensions are not a checklist — they compound.

Today's impact funds tomorrow's attractiveness; reputation compounds connectivity; innovation renews resilience. The framework is a flywheel.

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Reinforcing Cycles and Dependencies

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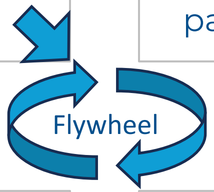

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TODAY SHORT-TERM LONG-TERM

The diagnostic dashboard

Not a ranking — a strategic diagnostic. Its value lies in the *discrepancies* between dimensions, not a single composite score.

Performance profile

01 A structured **self-assessment** across all dimensions

02 Identifies a performance profile — **strengths, gaps, opportunities**

03 Diagnostic value lies in the **discrepancies between dimensions**

04 For regulators, development agencies, associations & policymakers

Development Typology

Stage 1
National Service Centers

Domestic impact dominates. International dimensions are weak. Financial sector exists because the national economy needs it. Enabling conditions may still be developing.

DOM	7.0
INT	1.5
CON	2.5
ATT	2.0
INN	3.0
REP	4.0
RES	4.0

Stage 2
Regional Gateways

Bridging function emerges. Either attractiveness or connectivity grows first. Regional role develops alongside a strong domestic base. Reputation becomes more important.

DOM	7.0
INT	3.0
CON	5.0
ATT	5.0
INN	4.5
REP	5.0
RES	5.0

Stage 3
International Specialists

Disproportionate international significance in specific segments. Strong niche in international contribution. Attractiveness and reputation are sectorally pronounced.

DOM	6.0
INT	7.5
CON	6.0
ATT	7.0
INN	7.0
REP	7.5
RES	6.5

Stage 4
Fully Integrated Global Hubs

All dimensions strong and mutually reinforcing. Systemically significant for the global financial system. Inherently small group due to agglomeration effects.

DOM	8.5
INT	9.0
CON	9.0
ATT	9.0
INN	8.5
REP	9.0
RES	8.5

VIFC →

Scores are indicative (1-10 scale). Stages describe functional profiles, not rankings. Not all centers should aspire to the next stage.

03

FUTURE-PROOFING

How to make a financial center future-proof?

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The frontier is shifting

Finance is being rebuilt in three layers. The technical floor for every center has risen.

THE COGNITIVE LAYER
AI in Finance

Adoption now systemic across banks and FinTechs

Embedded in compliance, risk, fraud, and service

$35bn → ~$97bn

AI spend in financial services, 2023 → 2027

THE SETTLEMENT LAYER
Tokenization

Real-world assets moving on-chain

Stablecoin rules converging: EU MiCA, US GENIUS Act

~$2 trillion

Tokenized assets by 2030 (est.)

THE DATA LAYER
Open Finance

Customer-data access drives FinTech entry

Value shifts to the interfaces between actors

Brazil leads

US Dodd-Frank Section 1033 and EU FIDA in flux

A financial center that sits out the frontier loses relevance, even if its other dimensions stay strong.

Sources: WEF / Cambridge CAF; McKinsey; IOSCO & FSB.

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FinTech: a capability, not a department

Six interdependent pillars. Weakness in any constrains the whole.

01 Actors

FinTechs, incumbents, infrastructure providers, enablers

02 Capital

Angel to seed to growth equity; FinTech-dedicated funds

03 Talent

Financial plus technical skills; universities; visa pathways

04 Demand

Digitally engaged consumers, businesses and government

05 Enabling infrastructure

Digital identity, instant payments, open data, cloud

06 Regulation

Proportionate licensing, sandboxes, supervision — **the differentiator**

Diagnose before prescribing: Find the binding constraint before you intervene.

Source: https://financial-centers.org/publications/fintech-ecosystems-and-ifc-performance/

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The AI agenda: five strategic choices

Each is a real trade-off. The right answer varies by stage, strengths and risk appetite.

01	**Positioning**	AI-native or AI-positioned?
02	**Scope**	AI focus vs. a diversified technology agenda
03	**Control**	Infrastructure ownership and stack sovereignty
04	**Financing**	How much to invest — and who pays?
05	**Regulation**	First-mover or fast-follower?

No single owner — future-readiness needs aligned choices across the financial center, institutions, government, and regulators.

Source: https://financial-centers.org/publications/ai-financial-centers/

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What “future-proof” actually means

Three disciplines, mapped to the complementary factors that make every dimension durable — AI reaches them all.

INNOVATION CAPACITY

- AI as the integration layer: it multiplies existing strengths
- Most financial centers opt for AI-positioned, not AI-native
- Embrace the frontier, but carefully

REPUTATION & TRUST

- Principled-early, prescriptive-later regulation
- Treat regulation as competitive infrastructure
- Lead in international standard-setting

RESILIENCE

- Diversify revenue model, providers, and technologies
- Map AI sovereignty domain by domain
- Plan for concentration, correlation & cyber risk

Future-proofing is not a new identity. It is strengthening what already makes a financial center durable.

I hope I was able to demonstrate this to you.

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Let's shape the future of finance, together.

waifc.finance

WORLD ALLIANCE OF INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL CENTERS AISBL

International non-profit association

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