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City Diplomacy

Academic Foresights

How do you analyze the present status of city diplomacy?

Local authorities are significant actors in global politics. Increasingly, what was a monolithic agency of the state is being disaggregated into sub-units, be they national authorities, ministries, courts, and indeed local authorities. By local authorities here I refer to cities, provinces, regions, or states within federal systems: all those sub-units through which public administration is locally exercised. These local authorities are increasingly engaged in innovative forms of conducting international affairs through what is called "para-diplomacy". Among them, cities present the most interesting example.

Today's global politics are shaped significantly by a number of global cities. They are increasingly active internationally. They develop networks and twinning projects, share information, sign cooperation agreements, contribute to the drafting of national and international policies, provide development aid, enact refugee assistance, and do territorial marketing through city-to-city or district-to-district decentralized cooperation. Cities do what the "*comuni*" used to do many centuries ago. In some areas, this is particularly evident. As put by the current regional policy commissioner of the European Union (EU), the Austrian Johannes Hahn: "Cities, not nations, have been the main players during most of our civilization's existence, and cities may again overtake nations as the primary building blocks of Europe. Cities have to be at the heart of our plans to create a Europe that is prosperous, environmentally sustainable, and where no citizen is marginalized." Currently the cities' role in social transformation has been stressed by the priorities set through the Commission.

Different reasons account for the re-emergence of city diplomacy. From the inside-out perspective, clear political opportunities for local politicians can be identified in terms of visibility and electoral gains. Para-diplomacy can, however, originate also from the bottom-up pressure of citizens' activism, as in the case of the nuclear free cities. City diplomacy may also serve as a functional substitute for national diplomacy in case the country lacks official international recognition: this is the case of Taipei for Taiwan, Palestinian cities for Palestine, or Barcelona for Catalonia (especially when Spain was not yet a member of the EU). Finally, para-diplomacy might simply be an instrument to serve city interests better: Amsterdam is active in Ghana, Surinam, and Turkey because they are the countries of origin of its migrants. In similar ways, cities engage in conflict resolution in other countries to prevent migration inflows. When the state is unable or inefficient in serving citizens' interests, cities are called to complement or substitute the state. Barber, and with him a number of mayors, even argue that cities have a right and a
duty to respond to the sovereigntist dysfunctionality/default of the states, have a right to

duty to respond to the sovereigntist dysfunctionality/default of the states, have a right to govern themselves in the true spirit of self-determination and perhaps of democracy itself. There are, however, also outside-in reasons for the boom of para-diplomacy. Global politics is increasingly marked by the presence of intrusive transnational networks which push and force cities to react at the global level for both globalist and local motives. Similarly, local authorities go international because they are asked to do so by international organizations: a typical case of this is, as mentioned, the strong push given by the EU for the europeanization of the European regions' activities that by now receive funding from the EU, contribute to drafting official EU documents (famously the EU convention), and have permanent offices in Brussels.

Para-diplomacy tends to be more likely under specific conditions. When a certain political culture is spread among citizens and political elites, so much so that they are ripe for extracting the benefit out of transnational politics, para-diplomacy is a likely occurrence. Of course, other conditions need to be present too, including material resources (money, human resources etc.), geographical proximity to borders or hubs (such as big harbors), and a relative degree of autonomy from central government or alternatively a relative degree of representativeness of local interests in central government so much as that the latter is induced to foster alliances with the former.

Different actors take part in city diplomacy, including mayors, aldermen, councilors, municipal civil servants, and municipal advisors. In terms of activities, we can differentiate between intercity relations, actions within global governance, peace-building, development, human right promotion, and economic promotion.

Among intercity relations are included twinning programs, assistance provided to other cities in less developed contexts, but also city networking such as the Association of Palestinian Local Authorities, Mega-Cities project (18 of the largest cities worldwide), M4 (London, Paris, Berlin Moscow), Euro-Cities (130 cities), Merco-Cities Network (160 cities in Merco-Sur), and the most important network the United Cities and Local Government (UCLG)—a global network aiming at securing status at the UN

In terms of cities' activism in global governance, we might mention the cases of cities lobbying the European Commission, the advocacy of the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP), the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), and the partnership between cities and philanthropic foundations such as the network "What Works Cities" supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the unique case of the city of Rotterdam joining the Clinton Climate Initiative, and the Rockefeller network on resilient cities. Cities are active within the UN system in many different ways.

For peace-building and conflict prevention, cities play a significant role insofar as conflicts are often local, cities are perceived as more neutral and are de facto unarmed. As a consequence, good local governance is often perceived as a response to conflicts. Before conflicts, cities can put pressure on governments not to act. Typical is the unsuccessful case of the coalition of US cities for peace in 2003 that urged President Bush not to wage war against Iraq (it included 70 cities, 13 million people) or the anti-nuclear network of the Mayors for Peace, led by Hiroshima (which includes 1553 cities

from 120 countries). During conflicts, cities can help alleviate the costs of violence. This is the case of the Canadian and European support for the Palestinian Territories Municipal Management Program. Finally, after conflicts, cities can provide assistance as in the case of the Canadian cities in the Philippines for multi-stakeholder participation or the Dutch cities in Bosnia for inter-ethnic participation (case of Fojnica).

Cities are also active in the field of development. They provide humanitarian assistance, international loans, activate technology-sharing and democracy-promotion programs. However, cities are also engaged in emergency assistance as in the cases of the post-2004 tsunami or the many cases of earthquakes. Also significant is the Millennium Towns and Cities Campaigns for the MDGs.

Human rights promotion is a part of city diplomacy. Cities are engaged in youth exchange under a human rights agenda. Famous is the network of the Cities for life against the death penalty, or the individual cases of Amsterdam lobbying Riga for the gay parade in 2006 or Barcelona supporting Lampedusa and Lesbo for the reception of the refugees in 2016 under the program *De ciutat a ciutat* [From city to city] which included technical, logistical, and social support, economic-promotion programs for reflating the internal economy, and advice in waste management on the island. Cities are also committed to the HR agenda set by international organizations such as the UN Agenda 21 on urban regeneration, human rights, and quality of life.

The economy constitutes a last but certainly not least component of city diplomacy. They are keen on expanding their local budget which in some cases is already huge (think of the global cities of New York, Tokyo, London with a budget equivalent to GDP of a middle-size country). As a consequence, cities are active in attracting tourists, firms, events, and international organizations. Typical are the cases of the negotiations between cities and MNCs for the establishment of a new headquarter or the city bidding to host the Olympic Games. City branding is a common marketing activity as in the cases of Dubai as a hub and gateway to the world, or the new city logos such as «I AmSterdam», «Washington-The American experience», «Joburg-A world class African city». Cities are keen on export services and knowledge individually or reciprocally as in the case of the harbor partnership between Rotterdam and Shanghai.

A final component of any city diplomacy is the relationship with public institutions at the national level. This interaction may be either cooperative or competitive. In cooperative terms, more and more governments are calculating the opportunities provided by the partnership with local authorities in terms of wide-reaching foreign policy. Many constitutional reforms have been passed granting foreign rights to regions. Much less is granted to cities, but it is foreseeable that the same kind of concession will be granted in the future also to cities. However, the typical relation remains competitive. Often local authorities find themselves in vertical competition and disintegration with national governments.

In your opinion, how will the situation likely evolve over the next five years?

When we observe the international dynamism of city diplomacy we are forced to revise the traditional IR historical account. In IR classical terms, international affairs proper begin with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. It is in that year that the new institutional form of the sovereign state is first created. From that also derives the traditional mode of inter-state diplomacy. Too often, IR students only concentrate their perspective on the last few centuries. But, in fact, diplomacy has a much longer history. A history that is strongly marked by the presence of city states. When we think about Classical Greece, we think about the diplomacy of Athens and Sparta. When we think about the Italian Renaissance, we think about the diplomatic activities of cities such as Venice or Florence (Niccolò Machiavelli was a diplomat for the Republic of Florence). All of this comes to an abrupt stop with Westphalia. With the diffusion of national sovereignty, the system becomes state-centered and cities marginalized.

Today, cities are returning to international affairs, together with many other non-state or sub-state actors. Cities are the center of the world economy with 85% of global GDP (e.g. NYC's budget is 1/7 of Chinese GDP, but also 4 times that of Iran and 10% of Russia's), are the places where most people live (since 2007 more people live in urban rather than rural areas, i.e. 52% of the world population. In 2070 there is an estimate of 70% of world population living in cities, in 1800 only 3% did, in 1900 only 14%), are the sources of global pollution (80% of carbon emissions come from the cities), are the loci of political contestation and revolutions, are the hotbed of pandemics and the targets of violence and terrorist attacks, are the areas in which social innovation is developed, are the points of encounter among cultures, religions and differing identities.

And yet, we are still far from a full recognition of the international role of the cities. City diplomatic practices are, for instance, in a sort of legal vacuum: there is no equivalent for city diplomacy of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, despite the fact that many regions are constitutionally warranted with the *ius tractati*, i.e. the right to sign international agreements with other regions or with other states.

In the next five years, I expect cities and local authorities to continue to play a growing role in international affairs. The process of internationalization of the cities will go on, more resources will be devoted to it, and more political attention will be focused on it. Also, we might expect more constitutional reforms in several countries enhancing city internationalization by regulating city diplomacy.

City diplomacy will be particularly significant in a number of specific cases, including:
- Export oriented cities
- Cities in quasi-sovereign polities such as Taiwan, Catalunya, Quebec etc.
- Mega cities
- Immigrant Gateways, cities with large number of foreign born residents (more than 1 million)
- Cities within highly decentralized countries
- Cities with ties to diasporas abroad

What are the structural long-term perspectives?

The dynamics of globalization have accentuated the diminishing exclusivity of the states

as actors of international relations. Globalization ties far away communities and de-territorializes the relations of power, while extending contemporaneously their reach beyond the traditional national borders. Diminishing the exclusivity of states as international actors, this process of globalization has opened up space for new social players. Beyond the states and the intergovernmental organizations that have occupied a central place in international life since their origin (let us think of the United Nations), the system of global governance is currently populated by a variety of other international and transnational actors that have a strong say on international affairs. To understand today's global politics we cannot certainly limit ourselves to observe states' or intergovernmental action, but we have necessarily to take into consideration also the action of other non-state actors. Among these, four typologies are particularly relevant: the profit-oriented transnational enterprises, the non-governmental organizations of civil society that tend to have public goals, the local authorities, including both regions and cities, and the private or hybrid organizations that regulate specific sectors through the formulation of standards (the so-called standard setting bodies). While they are not exhaustive of the variety of actors of global governance, these types represent, however, an important and innovative component of the new world politics.

Non-state players have acquired an increasingly large role inside world politics by playing an increasing number of functions. They contribute to bringing to the attention of the public new issues and in so doing they participate in the formulation of the political agenda (just think of the recent campaign by civil society for abolition of the death penalty). They lobby policy-makers (let us think of the decision to waive the debt of the most indebted countries at the end of the millennium). They offer technical assistance to governments and to intergovernmental organizations (let us think of the example of the legal help provided by many NGOs during the conference that led to the Charter of the International Criminal Court of 1998). They provide funds for both private and public players (let us think, for the former, of the considerable resources allocated by the Bill and Melissa Gate Foundation for sanitary projects on a world scale, for the latter, to the incomes, fundamental for the functioning of the WIPO, which originate for the most part from the taxation of enterprises on their patents and trademarks). They formulate regulatory decisions (let us think of the various codes of conduct and to the Kimberly Process providing guidelines for the trade of diamonds). They implement programs and public policies (let us think of the whole sector of development aid, but also of conflicts and the role played by mercenary troops). They provide services (let us think of the private centers for the release of visas, in the past a sovereign prerogative of embassies). They monitor the respect of international agreements (let us think of the files compiled by the most important NGOs on human rights, files that are then received by the most important intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations). They resolve disputes (let us think of the numerous chambers for arbitration that resolve international litigation in a totally privatistic way). They also apply the decisions, the so-called enforcement (let us think, for instance, of the strategy of numerous NGOs to enhance the respect of rules through campaigns to discredit governments and multinational corporations).

Cities are influencing globalization, but are also heavily influenced by it. From this

perspective, the importance of cities is even higher than that of states because the level of overlap between cities and all of these phenomena is more precise. Increasingly, key socio-economic-political dynamics will take place in cities, hence the future trends in our societies will be heavily shaped by city-level processes.

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