: Conference Report

Berlin Summer Dialogue 2023

Can Cities Save the World?
The Impact of City Networks and City Partnerships for Peace and Development

Nora Witt

Cities generate wealth, but they also concentrate poverty and inequality. The issue of urban peace is becoming increasingly urgent as more than half of the world's population is already residing in urban areas - a figure expected to reach 70 percent by 2050. This year's Berlin Summer Dialogue brought together international experts from the Global South and the Global North to discuss how city networks and city partnerships can contribute to peace and sustainable development.

Opening of the Conference

CONFLICT IN MOTION – SUSTAINING URBAN PEACE

In his keynote, Dr Achim Wennmann, Director for Strategic Partnerships at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, captured the attention of the audience in a heartbeat by sharing the inspiring story of Doris Barreto, a local woman in Venezuela who facilitates encounters between mothers of murdered teenagers and their killers. Finding solutions to conflict through dialogue and negotiations, engaging various parties and interests, bridging divides and nurturing joined visions for the future - even under the most difficult circumstances – is at the heart of what urban peace means, Mr Wennmann explained.

Dr Achim Wennmann, Director for Strategic Partnerships of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva

Conflict is commonly associated with interstate or civil wars. However, by viewing conflict through this restricted perspective only, much of today's conflict and violence, which is increasingly affecting cities, remains overlooked. Acknowledging the scope and scale of the problem at hand is essential to building new approaches and finding solutions to a highly diversified landscape of conflict. Mr Wennmann emphasized that city diplomacy will be an important avenue to achieve this goal.

We live in an era of radical uncertainty, shaped by manifold challenges and converging crises. Therefore, capabilities for problem solving and adapting systems, especially in territories where most of humanity now lives – in cities – is of utmost importance. Due to rapid urbanization, the number of cities, which can be seen as "urban political entities" will rise to 2,243, thus dwarfing the number of 193 "state entities" by a factor of more than 10. This trend raises the pressing question of which systems need to be developed to ensure that city networks and city partnerships function effectively at a global or regional scale.

While attempts to securitise our way out of the web of interlocking crises are likely to fail, there are tools and practices for sustaining urban peace. Pointers for practice include: Using the appropriate level of coercive law enforcement, paying attention to local agency, applying carefully tailored processes, creating trusted spaces, and understanding that peace and security 'for all' means engaging all actors, including perpetrators of violence. Given the complexity of local politics, Mr Wennmann asserted that no single actor will be able to achieve peaceful and inclusive societies in cities alone.

Solutions lie in the coproduction of urban spaces with different actors taking on different roles to work towards this goal. To meet the complex challenges ahead, Mr Wennmann drew the attention to the potential of "urban political settlements". Urban political settlements provide an alternative to comprehensive nationwide peace agreements by involving all relevant political stakeholders in city politics to establish a shared objective. Developing a shared understanding of the future is an essential first step towards achieving urban peace.

Session I: Opportunities and limitations of city networks in adressing globale challenges

To enhance the visibility of urban needs, cities increasingly organize in formalised networks. Currently, approximately 300 active city networks exist worldwide, working on a wide range of topics, including employment, digital transformation, migration and mobility, climate change, protection of natural resources, democratic participation, and civic involvement. The initial session of the day featured Dr Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi, the Founding Director of the City Diplomacy Lab at the Columbia Global Centers in Paris; Alfredo Malaret Baldo of Peace in Our Cities (PiOC) and Urban Violence Program Officer Peace at the Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice of the University of San Diego, and Laura Valdés, Head of Policy at metropolis in Barcelona.

Mr Kihlgren Grandi emphasised that multi-level dialogue is crucial when working on urban issues.

First panel round with Dr Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi, Alfredo Malaret Baldo, Laura Valdés and Chair Nora Witt (Chair) (l.t.r.)

The City Diplomacy Lab thus advises all actors, including city networks, municipalities, intergovernmental organisations, and national governments to unfold the added value of city diplomacy. However, a particular challenge arises when cities hold an outdated view of city diplomacy, limiting the concept to economic development only. Value-based city diplomacy involves preventing conflict and promoting reconciliation, providing development aid and solidarity, addressing global challenges such as climate change, and promoting regional integration.

Another challenge arises when national governments try to guide cities towards national politics. Cities engaging in city diplomacy should not consider themselves as secondary diplomatic actors, as they are legitimate representatives of local interests. Global challenges have a direct impact on cities and their populations. To successfully address these challenges, cities require resources and recognition from national governments. Thus, cities need to join forces to achieve this goal, said Mr Kilgren Grandi.

Enhancing the visibility of cities and their needs in a multilateral environment is a complex and time-consuming task, Laura Valdés explained. Metropolis aims to support cities in this endeavour by cooperating with other stakeholders, e.g. through the Global Taskforce. The Global Taskforce, facilitated by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is a mechanism that brings together major international networks of local governments to undertake joint advocacy regarding international policy processes. Local and regional governments are the only UN non-state stakeholder to have a mechanism to develop and coordinate inputs into all policy processes. The Global Taskforce amplifies the voice of the local and regional government constituency on the global stage. A second approach to strengthen cities' voices is the World Metropolitan Day that raises awareness for urban issues beyond geographical and institutional divides.

To ensure a lasting impact that goes beyond individual commitment or legislative periods of local governments, Alfredo Malaret Baldo pointed out the need to consider cities as complex entities with equally important actors beyond city governments. Plans of continuity, he explained, should include other actors such as universities, civil society, or religious organisations to ensure sustainable impact. Exchange between cities has been proven to be an effective tool in tackling pressing issues such as violence reduction. To half urban violence by 2030, PiOC creates concrete, participatory, and evidence-based exchanges to reduce violence levels in member cities, while also building a global movement of urban violence reduction advocates. To enable cities to implement innovative projects, PiOC provides micro-grants (Peace Incentive Fund) to its members. Palmira, one of the PiOC member cities, has managed to reduce violence to a historic low. After a decade of ranking among the 50 most violent cities in the world, Palmira has reduced its homicide rates significantly.

The panellists urged political decision makers to avoid working in silos, but to work and thrive together. Mr Kihlgren Grandi emphasized the need to make long-term commitments and to engage with the entire city ecosystem to avoid reinventing the wheel. Laura Valdés supported this point by noting that innovation often means building upon what already exists. She also highlighted the importance to invest in data collection to understand the underlying local dynamics like inequality or violence, in order to address them effectively. Malaret Baldo noted that reducing violence is achievable, as demonstrated by many cities, and urged political decision-makers to utilise organisations such as PiOC to drive change.

Session II: Local solutions for global challenges? The impact of city-to-city partnerships to foster peace and development

Against the backdrop of current global crises and the weakening of multilateralism at the intergovernmental level, city partnerships are becoming increasingly important. Together, municipal partners seek solutions to global (urban) problems and share best practices on crisis prevention, social cohesion, and sustainable development. The second panel of the day brought together experts working in and on city partnerships to discuss the potential of bilateral partnerships in addressing global challenges. Special emphasis was given to the question how partnerships between cities in the Global North and Global South can be conducted on a fair and balanced footing.

Exchange of ideas in session II

There was general consensus that bilateral partnerships should be embedded in a wider international strategy. While many cities participate in city networks or have various formal and informal partnerships, a significant number of cities lack an explicit strategy. Jörn Hendrichs, Coordinator for International Cooperation at the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen, emphasized that Bremen prefers a limited number of partnerships. By focussing on a select few sister cities, Bremen ensures the maintenance of active and intense partnerships. Giving insights into Bremen's partnership with Windhoek, which focusses on waste management and climate adaption, he pointed out that Bremen had a lot to learn from this partnership, e.g. regarding wastewater management. Nambian cities have far more expertise in dealing with droughts, an issue, still new to Bremen.

Mr Hendrichs and Dr Sandile Mbatha, Senior Manager of Research and Policy Advocacy for eThekwini Municipality (South Africa), agreed that the relations between Bremen and Durban were an exemplary partnership of equals. However, they also acknowledged that the term 'eye-level' is often used as a buzzword. Mr Mbatha explained that North-South partnerships have historically been characterised by philanthropic generosity on the part of the Global North, while cities in the Global South have been perpetual aid recipients. However, there is ample funding for this type of partnership. This is particularly the case when working on issues such as migration, refugees and IDPs (internally displaced persons). While the issue is of utmost importance to cities, there is hardly any government funding available, Mr Mbatha explained. But city partnerships do provide the opportunity to apply for third party funding, e.g. from the Migration Mayors Council. Partnerships between cities within the Global South are more challenging to fund due to the financial constraints of local and national governments. Exchange and establishing meaningful partnerships based on programming

Session II: Marianne Kreuzig

within the global South therefore remains challenging. As North-South partnerships often come with funding, they are much more entrenched and much more attractive compared to South-South partnerships. Looking at South-South partnerships, it also has to be taken into consideration that the colonial narrative, which suggests that the world must learn from the so called "first world" still persists. Changing this narrative is a very difficult task, Mr Mbatha said.

Enabling dialogue and cooperation between municipalities in Germany and cities in the Global

Panelround with Jörn Hendrichs, Marianne Kreuzig, Dr Sandile Mbatha, and Chair Dr Marcus Kaplan (l.t.r.)

South as well as in Ukraine is the basic idea behind the Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW), Marianne Kreuzig, Project Manager at SKEW explained. This starts with matchmaking and providing assistance to overcome language barriers. But it also includes supporting and funding very complex projects. Since the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine, the number of German-Ukrainian partnerships has risen from 73 to 179. This demonstrates that local cooperation is possible even in crisis situations, as Ms Kreuzig noted. However, to transform emergency aid-based partnerships into long-term sustainable cooperation, certain key factors must be considered. According to SKEW's experience, this not only involves having a shared vision or similarities between partner cities, but also necessitates concrete projects. Creating sustainable partnerships requires interlinkages between various departments, actors, and areas of work. It is important to avoid basing partnerships solely on the work of a single department or individual. However, trust-building on an individual level is also crucial, which can be achieved through regular meetings, effective communication, and feedback mechanisms. In city-to-city partnerships, Ms Kreuzig pointed out, participation is key, involving municipalities, civil society, academia, and corporations.

Session III: In focus - Innovative communal approaches to foster peace and development

Urbanization is an ongoing trend, and as cities grow and expand, conflict and violence are urbanizing as well. To prevent the "urban century" (Kofi Annan) from becoming an era of urban violence, municipalities worldwide are developing innovative solutions to tackle the challenges lying ahead. The final session of the day facilitated the exchange of best practices by showcasing promising initiatives from municipalities in the Global South aimed at resolving conflicts, preventing violence, and promoting social cohesion.

Panelround with Pamela Reducindo Pérez, Daniela Reina, Kariem El-Ali, and Chair Nora Witt (l.t.r.)

Daniela Reina, Cooperation Commissioner at the Mayor's Office of Palmira in Colombia, introduced the PAZOS (Peace and Opportunities) strategy, developed by the city of Palmira to address the historically high juvenile homicide rate. Since the introduction of PAZOS, Palmira has successfully

Session III: Daniela Reina

reduced homicide rates to an all-time low by moving away from military approaches that have previously dominated Colombia's response to violence. This achievement was recognized with the UCLG Peace Prize in 2022. PAZOS applies tools such as sports and art, psychosocial support, and income generation, integrating them into a comprehensive municipal security policy. The strategy combines crime prevention with surveillance, the articulation of public, private, and community efforts, data analysis, technology, and community management. Ms Reina emphasized that PAZOS has the potential to be replicated by local governments worldwide, eager to serve vulnerable population groups.

As an integrated expert, Kariem El-Ali, Senior Policy Advisor and Team Lead at Smart Change Jakarta, is assisting Jakarta in growing the partnership with Berlin. The smart change project aims to foster innovative solutions for sustainability, focussing on internal and external digital solutions for the public sector. Additionally, the project aims to establish a sustainable support system for start-ups in the field of innovation and Smart City. By collaborating and exchanging experiences, the cities improved their capacity for good urban governance in relation to digitalization and urban innovation. The outcome of an enhanced institutional framework for more efficient administration

was achieved through a range of programs such as multi-stakeholder and policy dialogue series, peer-to-peer exchanges, and annual online conferences. To create synergies between the public and private sectors, the cities created sustainable structures such as the Jakarta Future City Hub, a collaboration innovation space to facilitate ongoing dialogue and cooperation.

Mexico City, already one of the ten largest cities in the world, may see up to five million climate migrants join its population by 2050. Recognizing this reality, the city has taken action through early planning and local investments. In 2021, Mexico City was selected as a grantee of the Global Cities Fund for Migrants and Refugees (GCF), the Mayors Migration Council's instrument to channel international funding directly to cities to implement inclusive projects of their own design. Mexico City took the chance to expand its income protection program to provide direct cash assistance to over 450 migrants, refugees, returnees, and IDPs. The program also connected them to support services related to employability, obtaining personal identification, public health, and social services, Pamela Reducindo Pérez, Deputy Director for International Cooperation of Mexico City explained.

All panellists agreed that cooperation with partner cities and through city networks not only benefited their own work but also provided valuable opportunities to pass on positive experiences and lessons learned. Taking up the discussion of the first panel on how to ensure a sustainable impact beyond the life span of a project or legislation periods, the panellists highlighted three important mechanisms: First, putting lasting structures in place, such as legal frameworks or agreements. Second, applying a bottom-up approach, involving a variety of local actors, including civil society, to obligate the next government to continue the work. And, last but not least, involving third parties (allies) such as partner cities or city networks to apply outside pressure.

Summary and Outlook

The conference brought together academic and practical perspectives and managed to showcase examples from all around the world on how cities manage to improve the lives of its inhabitants and to foster peaceful societies. The conference also demonstrated that cities do have the power to have their voices heard on a national and international level, especially by joining forces through city networks and bilateral partnerships, said Nicola Humpert, Consultant for Communal Development Cooperation at the Senate Department for Economic Affairs, Energy and Public Enterprises, Berlin. A recurring theme across all panels was the importance of trust and honesty as a fundamental aspect of city partnerships. This includes acknowledging colonial legacies and narratives in partnerships between cities in the Global North and Global South. Taking up the overarching question of this conference, Mr Malaret Baldo said that the question is not weather cities can save the world, "cities are already saving the world. They are tackling the most [crucial] challenges that we face. And we should be proud and say it loud and take ownership of that".

More information on the Berlin Summer Dialogue conference series is available here: https://www.sef-bonn.org/en/events/berlin-summer-dialogues/

Lively debate after Session I

Summary and outlook with Alfredo Malaret Baldo, Nicola Humpert and Marcus Kaplan

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