



Call for Papers

Cities as Global Actors in International Politics:

Patterns, Processes, and Impacts

Workshop

December 5 & 6, 2024, in Heidelberg, Germany

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Statement of aims

Globalization processes, complex interdependencies, and mounting international crises (i.e., polycrisis) have contributed to greater visibility and relevance of *cities as global actors* in international politics (next to other sub-state authorities such as regions or federal states). The increasing diffusion of global governance authority has led to various interstate, trans-governmental, and transnational interconnections, alongside varied forms of global actorness. As a result, the international agendas of national governments and international organizations have expanded to include topics and items that also fall under the jurisdiction of local governments and municipalities, contributing to the diffusion of political, administrative, and fiscal authority.

Particularly, cities and city networks stand out. Cities have been active in the realms of global public health, climate politics, migration, or rule of law, amongst others. In response to pressing issues like the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis, cities leverage their unique position to form alliances, share expertise, and foster cooperation with international counterparts. Through these initiatives, cities not only contribute to shaping the global public agenda but also showcase their ability to address shared challenges on a collaborative, cross-border scale, thereby redefining their role in the broader landscape of global governance. Cities are in a unique position to respond to global challenges. On the one hand, due to agglomeration effects and stark inequalities they are often the focal points of global crises and the arena where federal and regional policies are put into practice and often felt more promptly, affecting the lived reality of the constituency. On the other hand, they have valuable resources and networks to

forge alliances between private and public actors, both locally and globally, to combat crises and act more swiftly than nation states or even contrary to federal trends. Cities can thus promote their agendas in responding to global crises and grand transformations. This makes them incremental during the policy implementation phase of global governance efforts and allows them to utilize their particular expertise, competencies, and resources to enact global roles vis-à-vis the international community. As a result, cities have, to varying degrees, developed a global actor identity, co-constituted by individual city characteristics and international social structures, incentivizing cities to consider their international role, reputation, competition, social norms, or modes of agency.

International Relations (IR) scholars have long overlooked the role of cities as actors in global affairs. Yet, international organizations have increasingly involved cities in global forums, particularly networks of cities. In addition, global city networks have created independent synergies across national borders, connecting city governments with other actors to confront global challenges. Through networks, cities can achieve a balance of political power with states, share knowledge, and learn how to best rally support to build their capabilities and achieve common goals. By engaging in paradiplomacy, for example, cities conduct diplomatic activities with other states or constituent units to pursue their interests. Scholars note that cities often partake in paradiplomacy for economic, cultural/identity-based, and political reasons, utilizing foreign engagements to construct and reinforce their regional identity abroad.

Against this background, it is unsurprising that in areas such as migration, public health, security, climate change adaption, or economic development, cities have become global political hubs as they are particularly exposed to and need to respond to the impact of coinciding crises, managing social cleavages, and associated public policy challenges. Yet, we still lack *comparative insight* into (1) how cities' global actorness is shaped by diverse material, political, and institutional features, (2) how the nature of issue areas conditions the potential for cities to strive for global actorness, especially with regard to international and transnational relations; (3) how the interplay between global and local identities influences cities' global actorness, its legitimacy and power; (4) and how cities as global actors impact systems of global governance and world order.

Addressing these gaps in the study of cities as global actors, this workshop explores *patterns, processes, and impacts* of cities in international politics and invites more substantial attention to *interdisciplinary research* from urban geography and political science.

Building on the global city literature from sociology and economics is helpful in conceptualizing cities as global actors. Global cities are urban centers that play a pivotal role in the global economy because they concentrate on advanced and specialized services, including finance, law, technology, and other professional sectors. These cities serve as key nodes in transnational networks and contribute to managing and coordinating global economic activities. Characteristics of global cities include their involvement in outsourcing central functions to large global firms to specialized service providers, the formation of agglomeration economies in highly specialized and networked service sectors, and the

consequent rise in spatial and socio-economic inequality within these urban environments. The term also implies a city's participation in transnational networks and its capacity to attract and retain high-level professionals and specialized service firms. In essence, a global city is a dynamic hub that influences and is influenced by the interconnectedness of the global economic system.

Urban geographers, however, criticize global city concepts for their focus on urban economics and underscore the diverse interconnections of cities globally. Due to their global integration, global cities carry a particularly high potential for political actorness. Yet, this is not only true for those cities that were once regarded as "alpha" global cities, according to Saskia Sassen, namely Tokyo, London, and New York City. Rather, this puts many cities in the global South and mid-sized cities on the map that Sassen's original model would not cover. Those cities have developed expertise in specific policy areas and are thus seen as flagships on the world's stage. In order to tackle climate politics, smart city agendas, or public health challenges, cities thus develop their own international relations and practice diplomacy beneath the level of the nation state to learn from best practice models and benefit from international exchange.

We thus argue that global city-ness can no longer solely be measured in material terms. Rather, we need to pay attention to the culture, identity, and political mentality that a city represents. While global city as a concept is still helpful, it needs to be broadened, and its indicators need to be adapted to account for the complex interrelations of cities and their central role in shaping the contemporary landscape of global governance.

While IR scholars and urban geographers have studied these phenomena independently, there is a lack of interdisciplinary work. We believe that bringing IR and urban geography scholarship into conversation can promote a more profound understanding of the patterns, processes, and impacts of cities as global actors. The IR perspective enables us to think systematically about the diffusion of authority and the opportunities that arise when power is no longer centralized in international politics and, consequently, to reflect on how cities use the spaces opening up to act on specific policy fields and to connect with diverse actors globally. Urban geography provides insights into the diversity of cities and related actors, the inequality within and between cities, their identity traits, and the socio-economic landscape that shapes and is reflected in their role on the global stage. These material and immaterial characteristics of cities are constitutive factors of their global actorness (i.e., smart cities, partner cities, resilient cities, etc.).

We see a particular added value in bringing together perspectives from scholars of International Relations, Foreign Policy Analysis, Global Governance, Urban Geography, Urban and Regional Planning, and Sociology to study the global actorness of cities in international politics. Overall, we want to pursue three objectives regarding this timely and important topic:

- 1) Outlining different cities' international and transnational activities across issue areas.
- 2) Understanding and explaining the patterns and processes of cities' global actorness.
- 3) Studying the impacts and feedback loops of cities' global actorness on global governance.

Our research is driven by a keen interest in exploring diverse conceptual, empirical, and methodological perspectives that aim to address two overarching questions: Firstly, we seek to understand the nature and extent of global actorness exhibited by cities in international politics. Secondly, we are intrigued by cities' manifold impacts on various facets of global governance. We thereby conceptualize global actorness through the prism of *relationality* to better understand cities' interests, capacities, practices, and identity, including their impacts on areas of global governance, such as public health, migration, and the rule of law. We refer to relationality in terms of city actorness as co-constituted by relations and interactions with external others.

We invite contributions that focus on cities' global actorness and broaden the empirical and theoretical basis of the arguments and findings. Paper contributions can encompass a broad spectrum of topics, including but not limited to single-city case studies, analyses of international city networks, comparative studies investigating the global actorness of cities (whether medium-sized or large in scale), methodological approaches to examining cities' global actorness (whether quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods), and conceptual or theoretical discussions surrounding the global actorness of cities. Additionally, we encourage investigations into how cities influence global governance across crucial fields such as climate politics, migration, public health, rule of law, and security. This multidimensional approach ensures a comprehensive exploration of the roles and impacts of cities in the complex landscape of international politics and global governance. We plan for the papers collected for this workshop to be published as a special issue in a highly regarded journal. The special issue will provide cutting-edge research of interest to academics, practitioners, and students in each discipline.

Timeline

We kindly ask for a working title of your paper and a 250-word abstract by **April 12, 2024**. Please send your abstract alongside a short bio to Judith Keller (judith.keller@uni-heidelberg.de) and Gordon Friedrichs (friedrichs@mpil.de). Selection notifications will be sent out in late April/early May at the latest. We will discuss early paper drafts at an authors' workshop in Heidelberg on **December 5 & 6, 2024**. To ensure a productive exchange, we ask for early draft working papers of *7,500 words* by **November 25, 2024**, to be discussed at the workshop and later published in a special issue.

We are actively seeking external funding to offset travel and accommodation expenses.

Editing Team

Judith Keller is a postdoctoral researcher at the Heidelberg Center for American Studies and the Geography Department at Heidelberg University. In 2021/2022, she was a visiting research scholar at the University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign. As an urbanist, Judith applies a socio- and cultural-geographic perspective to urban space, focusing on questions of social and spatial justice such as access to housing and infrastructures. She is most interested in right to the city and housing rights movements, their effects on urban politics, and their international interrelations. Further, Judith enjoys thinking about the representation of urban space and the soft factors that mark cities on the global stage. Since 2022, she is a member of the editorial collective of the Radical Housing Journal.

Gordon Friedrichs is Senior Research Fellow in the MAGGI Research Group at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law in Heidelberg. Previously, he was a Fulbright Schuman Visiting Research Fellow at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame and a postdoc at the University of Freiburg. He specializes in international relations and comparative foreign policy analysis. His research has been published in *International Studies Review*, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, *International Politics*, *Journal of Global Security Studies*, *International Relations*, *India Review*, and *The Korean Journal of International Studies*.