

Cities in the World

Drivers of international relations



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**Position paper of the Association of German Cities –
adopted by the Executive Committee on
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Foreword

It is no longer true to say that foreign policy is the domain of the nation-state. Nowadays, cities and regions are commanding an ever-stronger role in international relations. Both the German Government and the European Union are increasingly calling on German cities to help them further their international relationships. And they do so with good reason: Cities are key drivers of international understanding that advocate a liberal democratic social model. And in municipal development cooperation, they are committed to the goal of global justice.

But that's not all. Cities worldwide are places of diversity and exchange. They build global networks and work together to represent their positions vis-à-vis national governments and international organisations. Cities develop local solutions to address global challenges, that include climate action, migration, fair procurement and, most recently, the coronavirus pandemic. They stand up for human rights and for global sustainable development in line with the 2030 Agenda.

Cities worldwide profit from international labour, which allows them to expand their knowledge, grow their experience, exert international influence and sharpen their city profile.

All of these aspects are an expression of urban diplomacy. Cities worldwide are moving closer together. We too support this development and understand that cities need to engage in open exchanges and be bold in their cooperation. We trust our publication will be one contribution to this.



Helmut Dedy
Executive Director, Association of German Cities

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Executive summary

Cities are taking on global responsibility. They are working for a better understanding between peoples, for global justice, for the protection and integration of refugees, and for respect for human rights. They advocate a liberal democratic order and devise solutions for joint challenges. As drivers of global sustainable development in line with the 2030 Agenda, cities' international work covers the following action areas:

1. Global sustainable development: Cities and the 2030 Agenda
2. Urban diplomacy
3. City-to-city and project-based partnerships
4. International professional exchanges
5. Municipal development cooperation
6. Multilateral networking and interest representation
7. International community of cities
8. Internationalising city governance
9. International location marketing
10. Funding acquisition and offers of support
11. Protocol and prestige

Besides overlapping and mutually influencing each other, these action areas also include EU activities at the local level. As cross-cutting tasks, they impact all departments, offices and divisions. The international affairs units organise and support cities' global activities.

Five approaches are key to strengthening international engagement by cities:

1. Acknowledge the importance of cities as actors in international relations
2. Involve cities in tackling global challenges
3. Implement cooperation across departments within the city administration
4. Develop and adopt overarching international strategies within cities
5. Offer cities support and cut red tape

This position paper showcases the benefits that cities generate through their international work and offers them guidance. As such, this paper is mainly directed at city councillors and administrators. Moreover, it is also intended to provide governments and organisations with a valuable guiding framework.

Introduction

Around the world, a growing number of people are now living in cities. At the same time, the major challenges of our age, such as climate action and environmental protection, the coronavirus pandemic, securing economic prosperity, as well as migration and displacement, are of a global nature. Yet these challenges must also be addressed at the local level. This means that the agreements or legal directives adopted by the United Nations or EU have a large impact on cities. Consequently, it is becoming increasingly important for cities to network and represent their interests internationally. However, to shape international developments, cities first have to be in a position to act – financially, administratively and politically.

This publication is designed to encourage city decision-makers and administrators to organise and align their international engagement and showcase the benefits thereof. Compiled by the Association of German Cities' working group on International Municipal Cooperation and Global Sustainability (AK IKON), this position paper is designed for cities that are already extensively globally engaged, as well as cities that are still intensifying their engagement efforts.

International engagement by cities refers to all the resources and measures that cities in Germany and abroad leverage in order to actively position themselves on global social, economic and environmental issues. This also includes European work at the local level, although this is not dealt with as a separate field of activity here. Instead, the publication refers to the European Union and Europe elsewhere, where relevant. Depending on the city, international engagement is based in divisions, offices, professional departments or directly in the mayoral office. For simplicity's sake, this publication speaks of international affairs units.

The individual chapters are broken down into three sections that describe, illustrate and offer suggestions for a given action area. The benefits of each action area are discussed in two separate sections featuring two best practice examples from members of the Association of German Cities. The penultimate chapter sets out five solutions for strengthening international engagement by cities. Finally, the "Outlook" chapter outlines options for taking the international engagement of cities forward.

¹ Extensive publications already exist on European work at the local level as an independent field of action (see e.g.: Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) [2013] or CEMR [2020]).

Action areas of international engagement by cities

Global sustainable development: Cities and the 2030 Agenda

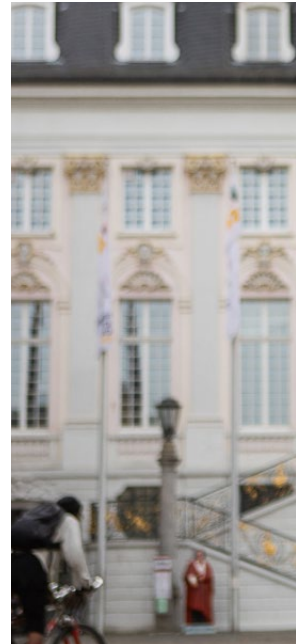
As the overarching framework for sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda sets out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Whether and how these SDGs are to be achieved will be decided in cities. This is because sustainable development targets the places where people live and work. In many cases, local sustainability measures actually have a global impact – for example, in the case of climate action or sustainable procurement – which is why we speak of global sustainable development.

Today, more than half the world's population already lives in cities. By the year 2050, this figure is set to rise to around 68 per cent.² Some 80 per cent of global economic output is generated in cities. At the same time, cities emit more than 75 per cent of global greenhouse gases and consume 66 per cent of energy worldwide.³ Above all, the 2030 Agenda's SDGs 11 "Sustainable cities and communities" and 17 "Global partnerships" underscore the importance of cities for sustainable development.

Cities base their activities on the 2030 Agenda. Other international framework agreements, such as the Paris Climate Agreement, the New Urban Agenda (NUA) or the New Leipzig Charter, all tie in directly with the 2030 Agenda. The project initiated by the Association of German Cities – SDG Indicators for Municipalities – is a useful tool for measuring sustainable development on the ground⁴. When a city council commits to the 2030 Agenda, this serves as a basis for stronger engagement in the field of global sustainable development. One way of doing this is to sign the model resolution "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Building Sustainability at the Local Level", which the Association of German Cities crafted jointly with the German Section of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)⁵.



- Cities are adopting a holistic response to the challenges of the 21st century.
- Cities are taking on local and global responsibility.
- Cities have extensive options for monitoring and communicating their own work in an internationally recognised framework.



² United Nations – Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2018)

³ United Nations (2019): p. 84

⁴ www.staedtetag.de/themen/sdg-indikatoren-kommunen-nachhaltigkeitsmanagement

⁵ www.staedtetag.de/themen/nachhaltige-stadt/agenda-2030-musterresolution-staedte

Think globally – act locally: The City of Eisenach and the 2030 Agenda

Upon signing the model resolution on the 2030 Agenda by the Association of German Cities and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the City of Eisenach officially acknowledged its commitment to the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, under the project Municipalities for Global Sustainability (GNK) Thuringia⁶, the city council also voted to develop a sustainability strategy. This decision led to a broadscale process that brings together actors from business, academia, politics, administration and civil society to identify thematic fields and map out concrete measures. By documenting its steps in an action programme, the city is now an enabler of long-term global sustainable development at the local level⁷.

ZIELE FÜR NACHHALTIGE ENTWICKLUNG



The 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations

The 2030 Agenda as a framework for municipal action in the City of Bonn

When it signed the model resolution on the 2030 Agenda and formulated a sustainability strategy, the City of Bonn laid the foundation it needed to systematically anchor the 2030 Agenda in local action. In its 2020 Voluntary Local Review (VLR), Bonn published its first interim evaluation and made its contributions to SDG realisation internationally visible. As part of this process, eleven new “SDG indicators for municipalities” were added to Bonn’s long-standing list. The many different events organised as part of Bonn’s annual SDG Days enable its citizens to learn about the SDGs and about local initiatives for implementing them.⁸



SDG Wheel of Fortune in front of Bonn’s town hall (Photo: Giacomo Zucca/Bundesstadt Bonn)

⁶ <https://skew.engagement-global.de/global-nachhaltige-kommune.html>

⁷ www.eisenach.de/leben/klimaschutz-nachhaltigkeit#c26672

⁸ <https://bit.ly/36jU25A>

Urban diplomacy

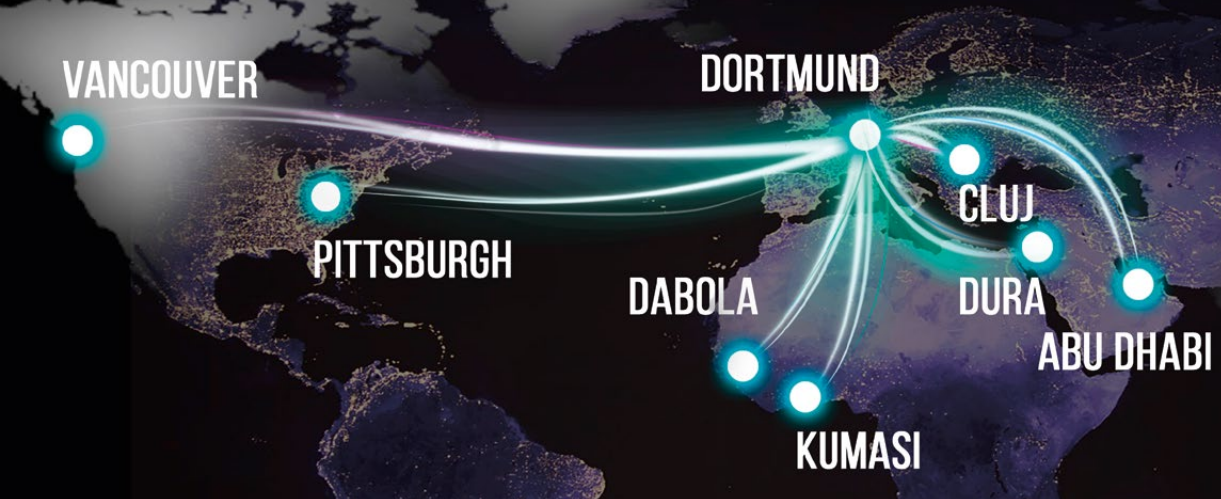
Urban diplomacy is when official city representatives engage in foreign relations, in particular with other cities, nation states, government organisations and non-governmental organisations or companies. These relations can be bilateral or multilateral and cover all aspects of a city's international engagement. Urban diplomacy gives cities leverage to help tackle global challenges. They bring to the table expertise, responsiveness and space for action.

Cities are advocates of a liberal democratic order and key drivers of intercultural understanding. They address violations of human rights and take a stand on international conflicts. Mutual respect and recognition amongst cities worldwide strengthen their position as pillars of democracy. Moreover, when tensions between nation states arise, exchanges at the municipal level often remain viable.

Tact and sensitivity along with sound arguments are of decisive importance in international relations. Cities can essentially align their actions with the positions and assessments of the German Federal Foreign Office (AA). The political situation on the ground can make it difficult to maintain contact with a partner city. However, in such cases in particular, it is important for cities to maintain dialogue so they can continue to act as bridge-builders; if all else fails, dialogue with civil society can always be continued. As requested by the Association of German Cities, Germany's Federal Foreign Office (AA) has set up a contact point for municipalities which is useful when tensions mount. Furthermore, cities are committed to protecting human rights, the rule of law, and democracy within the institutionalised framework of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.



- Cities advocate a liberal democratic basic order, sustainable development and the protection of human rights.
- Cities are key drivers of intercultural understanding.
- Cities offer expertise, responsiveness and space for action when managing foreign relations.



Map of the world showing Dortmund's twin cities
(Image: City of Dortmund)

Urban diplomacy in Dortmund

Dortmund's international relations strategy is a driver of innovation and prosperity and strengthens democracy and rule of law. Dortmund is the first German city to create a new coordinator position specifically for global city diplomacy. The job profile encompasses steering the growth of international strategic partnerships, managing the city's membership in international networks and committees, coordinating cooperation with the United Nations, and positioning the city at global conferences. The position's remit also extends to organising visits by foreign delegations and ambassadors. For example, trilateral climate cooperation between Pittsburgh, Vancouver and Dortmund is strengthening the "Transatlantic Climate Bridge" initiated by the German Government.⁹

Hanover: Mayors for Peace – active networking for a world without nuclear weapons

The state capital Hanover has been actively engaged in the global Mayors for Peace alliance since 1983. The goal: a world without nuclear weapons. Hanover is Germany's vice-president city, executive city and lead city for this initiative. Extensive outreach campaigning, discussion events on security topics, regular exchanges with the German Federal Foreign Office (AA), international youth encounters, participation in international conferences, and intensive networking in the European Chapter of Mayors for Peace are all ways in which Hanover engages in advocacy at the national, European and international level. By being part of this network, more than 700 municipalities in Germany are making an important contribution to preserving peace in the world.¹⁰



Mayor Belit Onay gives a speech in front of the new town hall in Hanover on the occasion of the 2021 Mayors for Peace Flag Day (Photo: : Landeshauptstadt Hannover)

⁹ www.dortmund.de/de/leben_in_dortmund/internationales/buero_fuer_internationale_beziehungen/dortmund_und_globale_staedte_diplomatie/index.html

¹⁰ www.mayorsforpeace.de

City-to-city and project-based partnerships

International city-to-city and project-based partnerships as well as city friendships¹¹ enable cities to organise trips or exchange formats for council representatives, citizens, school students, companies and administrative employees. To this end, cities work with civil society, schools, academia and businesses within their own municipality. It is quite common for city-to-city partnerships to be initiated by civil society. In addition, cooperating with another city provides for stronger social cohesion within the respective cities themselves.

Individual cities in Germany have up to 22 international city-to-city partnerships. In total, the direct member cities of the Association of German Cities alone boast some 1,400 international city-to-city and project-based partnerships as well as city friendships.¹² Many German cities are also partnered with other German cities.

Formal partnerships backed by a council resolution can be used to advocate the rollout of joint activities. Following the Second World War, city-to-city partnerships in both East and West Germany were instrumental in achieving reconciliation with Israel, Russia, all parts of Europe and with the United States of America. As an expression of German-to-German solidarity, cities in East and West Germany were also partnered. City-to-city partnerships are also a vehicle for coming to terms with historical legacies, such as Germany's colonial past.



- Cities bring relevant actors together and foster intercultural understanding.
- Cities worldwide support and enrich each other – culturally, socially, environmentally and economically.
- Cities leverage formal and established structures when engaging in international cooperation.

¹¹ Official city-to-city partnerships are based on a written agreement and have no set timeframe. While city friendships and project-based partnerships are also based on a formal agreement, they are only concluded for a limited timeframe. Project-based partnerships offer a platform for implementing a joint project (see www.rgre.de/partnerschaft/datenbank/).

¹² The database of municipal partnerships maintained by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions/German Section (CEMR) lists around 6,700 partnerships and friendships involving German municipalities worldwide.

City-to-city partnership Bremen-Danzig



Hans Koschnick, Bremen's former mayor, President of the Bremen Senate and, from 1971 to 1977, President of the Association of German Cities, talking to a couple from Gdańsk. The man on the right was born in Bremen in 1909 as the son of a Polish weaver; the family relocated back to Poland in 1919 (Photo: Landesbildstelle Bremen).

Founded in 1976, the Bremen-Gdańsk city-to-city partnership was the first between Poland and West Germany. From its outset, its salient features have been solidarity and joint engagement for peace, democracy and human rights. In 1981, for example, a delegation of Gdańsk port workers on a trade-union exchange found themselves stranded in Bremen following the declaration of martial law back home. Forced into exile, they founded the first foreign-based Coordinating Office for Solidarność in Bremen with the city's support. Today, public discourse by Bremen's mayor and Gdańsk's Senate President focuses on topics such as the rule of law, citizen participation and women's rights. A partnership between Bremen's Christopher Street Day (CSD) organisation and the LGBTQ group "Tolerado" is the most recent initiative helping to promote liberal values.¹³

Klimapartnerschaft zwischen Greifswald und Pomerode in Brasilien



Company parking facilities in Pomerode, Brazil. Support for cycling is a key priority of the climate partnership between Pomerode and Greifswald (Photo: Stadt Greifswald).

The friendship between the two cities of Greifswald and Pomerode dates back to 2001. In 2015 they entered into a climate partnership. With support from the Service Agency Communities in One World, both cities are raising local awareness and making the local infrastructure more amenable to sustainable mobility, such as through exchanges between their technical departments. In keeping with the motto "Switching from car to bike – everyone can help protect the climate", project activities are underway to promote climate-friendly decisions about the choice of transport. Pomerode is also benefiting from more local bike routes and bicycle parking facilities. The tangible impacts of climate change in Pomerode demonstrate the importance of climate protection.¹⁴

¹³ www.rathaus.bremen.de/partnerstadt-danzig-2269

¹⁴ www.greifswald.de/de/verwaltung-politik/rathaus/staedtepartnerschaften-und-internationale-kontakte/Staedtefreundschaften/Pomerode/

International professional exchanges

International professional exchanges are opportunities for local government departments worldwide to share their experiences. Given the common challenges that cities now face, these exchanges are becoming increasingly important.

As a cooperation project between the Association of German Cities, the Service Agency Communities in One World and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Connective Cities fosters professional networking between German cities and municipalities around the globe. Since 2014, more than 100 German municipalities and over 50 German municipal utilities have been involved in “Connective Cities”. In total, over 500 municipalities from 66 countries have participated since the initiative’s founding. The “Dialogue for Urban Change” (D4UC) project of Germany’s Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) provides an international platform where cities can share their expertise on social and integrated urban development.

In the medium to long-term, professional exchanges lead to cooperative projects, such as project-based and city-to-city partnerships. Experts from civil society, academia and the business sector often coordinate on these projects. Cities also leverage existing partnerships and specialist working groups to organise professional exchanges. Relevant working groups can be found, for example, in international city networks and associations such as Eurocities, Platforma, the Climate Alliance, ICLEI or United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG).



- Cities pool international knowledge and resources.
- Cities develop joint solutions for overcoming local and global challenges.
- Cities promote language skills and build intercultural competence as well as country-specific knowledge, also with respect to human resource development and retention.

Local knowledge transfer: partner cities Wolfsburg (Germany) and Jendouba (Tunisia)



Professionals from the cities of Wolfsburg and Jendouba plan a district park in Jendouba, Tunisia (Photo: Stadt Wolfsburg).

Wolfsburg and Jendouba kick-started their development partnership by co-designing a neighbourhood park in a district of Jendouba. The professional exchanges and official meetings that ensued between the two sides saw the district park completed by January 2020 and a city-to-city partnership underway.

The follow-on project aims to enable both sides to gain a deeper insight into the respective local structures, and ultimately identify joint waste management solutions. The project forms part of the “Municipal Knowledge Transfer Maghreb-Germany” programme, which is being co-implemented by Engagement Global’s Service Agency Communities in One World and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.¹⁵

International professional exchanges on digitalisation strategies with the City of Nuremberg



In October 2018, the City of Nuremberg and Connective Cities jointly hosted the dialogue event “Strategies for a Digital City – Opportunities and Challenges”. During the event, representatives from 11 cities in six countries shared best practices for digitalisation strategies, digital urban mobility and digital services, along with the challenges thereof. These international professional exchanges also explored many different approaches, ranging from a formalised strategy process in Nuremberg to iterative smart city development in Taipei. Thanks to Connective Cities’ support for an expert mission to Nablus in December 2019, the City of Nuremberg and its Palestinian project partners in Nablus were able to further intensify their exchange on the digitalisation of public administration.¹⁶

¹⁵ www.nuernberg.de/internet/hochbauamt/digitalcity.html

¹⁶ www.wolfsburg.de/entwicklungspolitik

Municipal development cooperation

In Germany, municipal development cooperation refers to all resources and measures leveraged by municipalities to promote global sustainable development both, at home as well as in their partner municipalities in the Global South.^{17 18} Support can either be direct (e.g. fair procurement) or indirect (e.g. development cooperation), with projects being implemented jointly by municipalities in the North and South to promote sustainable local development in the South. Examples include climate partnerships, joint projects to improve local basic service delivery or support for school-building projects. Municipalities also support the latter through the joint initiative “1000 schools for our world”, which is run by the Association of German Cities, the German County Association and the German Association of Towns and Municipalities.

Municipal development cooperation has evolved greatly in recent years. With more than 1,000 municipalities already involved in Germany, this work is characterised by its professional expertise and responsiveness. Not bound by national interests or directives, municipalities can provide assistance where help is most urgently needed. As pivotal actors, cities also strengthen development engagement beyond their own municipality.

Sustainable municipal development cooperation is a source of self-help and cooperation between equal partners that embraces mutual respect and equality and that avoids creating new dependencies or reinforcing existing ones. Despite their differing circumstances, cities in the Global South possess valuable experience, e.g. in climate adaptation projects or in the use of digital technologies. Municipal development cooperation also allows cities to reflect on the work they do. Engagement Global's Service Agency Communities in One World has made a name for itself as a reliable partner in this field. The world's biggest donor for municipal development cooperation is the European Union.



- Cities contribute to global solidarity and justice. They also help fight deprivation and poverty, which drive displacement.
- Municipal development cooperation is not bound by national interests or directives. It can deliver assistance wherever it is needed most.
- Cities are a source of help for self-help and cooperation between equal partners.
- Cities foster processes of learning amongst all stakeholders.

¹⁷ Cf. Resolution of the Federation-Länder Committee on Development Cooperation of 7 June 2010 concerning implementation of the resolution agreed by the Conference of Minister Presidents of the German Federal States of 24 October 2008.

¹⁸ Municipal development cooperation should be sustainable. Conversely, not all sustainability measures have an effect on the Global South, which means they do not automatically count as municipal development cooperation.

Countries of the Global South

More than 200 of the approximately 1,400 international city-to-city and project-based partnerships and city friendships maintained by direct members of the Association of German Cities are with countries of the Global South. The term “countries of the Global South” refers to countries which the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) defines as partners of official development assistance.

The term “Global South” is intended to replace the evaluative term “emerging economies and developing countries”, but nonetheless still shows the disadvantaged status of certain countries within our globalised world. It is thus to be understood politically and not geographically.

1000 schools for our world: Kaufbeuren is supporting a school-building project in Tanzania

Encouraged by its civically engaged citizens and backed by Kaufbeuren’s mayor Stefan Bosse, the City of Kaufbeuren joined the local government association’s outreach initiative “1000 schools for our world”. By council order, the city requested donations to renovate and extend Samaki Primary School in Sanya Juu, Tanzania. Thanks to the concerted efforts of local citizens, businesses, and the Evangelical Church community, the donations for the initiative were collected within just a few months. The renovation and extension work on this school for around 200 pupils was completed in July 2021.¹⁹



Eine Initiative der kommunalen Spitzenverbände

As part of the joint initiative “1000 schools for our world”, municipalities solicited donations for a project to build schools in countries of the Global South.

Eco-fair procurement conference in the City of Münster

Münster became a Fairtrade city in 2011. Since then, the city has organised many different events under the guidance of a dedicated steering group. Working with representatives from politics, administration, business and civil society, it is committed to making the local population as well as public authorities more aware of their global interconnections. The rationale for this is to demonstrate that what and how much we consume has a global impact. In 2020, the City of Münster held its symposium on “Eco-fair procurement – Of course! – but how?“, Once again, the intensive exchanges and networking showed that the Fairtrade agenda is a key component of a good future.²⁰



Documenting a conference on eco-fair procurement in the City of Münster (Photo: Stadt Münster)

¹⁹ www.1000schulenfuerunserewelt.de/

²⁰ www.stadt-muenster.de/ratsservice/politik-und-verwaltung/beirat-fuer-kommunale-entwicklungszusammenarbeit/kampagne-fairtrade-stadt.html

Multilateral networking and interest representation

For cities, multilateral networking is about exchanges, coordination and engagement across multiple national frontiers. This can be at the political or professional level and involve non-governmental actors such as civil society, academia or business. While multilateral cooperation between nation-states repeatedly fails due to geopolitical rivalries, cities cooperate flexibly and in a targeted manner. To underscore the importance of sub-national actors in multilateral cooperation, a new term has been coined: “micro-multilateralism”²¹.

Cities network multilaterally in order to represent a united position vis-à-vis the EU or United Nations (UN) and to formulate solutions for global problems. They call on national governments and organisations to step up their efforts and support for global sustainable development. Through multi-level governance, cities co-shape agreements made at the international and supranational levels, which they implement locally. While the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) gives local and regional authorities a say in EU legislation, the United Nations does not yet have such multi-level arrangement in place.

At the national level, the main networking platform that cities in Germany use is the Association of German Cities. In turn, this association represents its members in municipal umbrella organisations like the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). Through UCLG’s Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, mayors from several countries represent the interests of local and regional government in the run-up to UN Climate Change Conferences, in connection with UN-Habitat and vis-à-vis the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF). The Association of German Cities also leverages European and international networks to get the European Union and United Nations to acknowledge cities as full partners.



- Cities exert international influence and shape laws and agreements at the European and international level.
- Together, cities have a stronger voice vis-à-vis state and international organisations.
- Cities benefit from the diversity of strengths that partners bring to the table in multilateral networks.

²¹ See e.g. Ashbrook, C.C. & D. Haarhuis (2019)



Leipzig's mayor Burkhard Jung and the teams of the Leipzig Division for International Cooperation and Europe Direct Leipzig standing in front of the EU presidency flag (Photo: Stadt Leipzig/Thomas Rötting)

The city of Leipzig and the EUROCITIES network

The City of Leipzig is an active member of EUROCITIES²², the leading network of major European cities. Operating as a supra-national advocacy body, the network gives cities and their citizens a voice at the EU level. Its special importance derives from its active shaping of European policy, pooling of professional experiences, and concrete project cooperation. Leipzig's contributions focus in particular on inclusive, socially just urban development, environmental and climate-related topics, the elaboration of future-oriented mobility strategies and the development of cultural projects.²³

City of Mannheim: Virtual summit of mayors

2020 marked 75 years since the foundation of the United Nations (UN), spurring Mannheim to invite its partner cities to discuss the future role of cities in multilateralism. The summit culminated in a joint declaration calling for an institutional reform of the UN that would formalise participation by cities. When addressing the UN General Assembly, the then German Federal Chancellor, to whom the declaration was delivered, spoke about the importance of cities' international engagement for resolving global challenges. In addition, the UN Secretary-General championed a more inclusive UN system.²⁴



Mannheim's partner cities (photo: City of Mannheim)

²² Alongside Leipzig, another 21 other German cities (Berlin, Bochum, Bonn, Bremen, Chemnitz, Cologne, Dortmund, Dresden, Düsseldorf, Essen, Frankfurt, Hagen, Hamburg, Hanover, Karlsruhe, Kiel, Mannheim, Munich, Münster, Nuremberg and Stuttgart) are actively engaged in EUROCITIES.

²³ www.leipzig.de/buergerservice-und-verwaltung/internationales/eurocities/

²⁴ www.mannheim.de/de/stadt-gestalten/europa-und-internationales/partner-und-freundesstaedte/virtueller-buergermeisterinnen-gipfel

International community of cities

Cities are places of national, cultural, religious and societal diversity. This diversity shapes the public sphere and coexistence within cities. It is a manifestation of history, and of international relations and interconnections. At the same time, this diversity in cities is both a strength and a challenge. It prompts debates on identity, and enriches cultural, social and economic development.

Migration movements clearly demonstrate the importance of international integration for cities. Germany is home to more than 21 million people with a migration background, and more than eleven million of its residents are citizens of another country. In addition, the number of people who are coming to Germany to study and work continues to increase.²⁵ Local and international developments are also directly interconnected: over the course of the war in Syria, the percentage of Syrian nationals living in Germany rose significantly between 2010 and 2019.²⁶

International conflicts can be mirrored in urban communities. Likewise, cities are also called on by consulates or civil society to state where they stand on political issues. Cities are actively committed to upholding human rights, such as the right to asylum or freedom of opinion and assembly. At the same time, intercultural communication and services for migrants strengthen integration and global awareness. Together with migrant organisations, international affairs units thus have access to valuable skill sets, knowledge and networks. They assist new arrivals with integration and advise on the best way forward regarding colonial legacies in cities.



- Cities promote diversity and global awareness.
- Cities foster the intercultural skills needed to overcome societal challenges.

²⁵ German Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community (BMI) (2020)

²⁶ cf.: Federal Statistical Office (2021)

Frankfurt, Germany – an international powerhouse on the Main River



Impression of Frankfurt's annual Newcomers Festival
(Photo: RELATIONING GmbH)

Frankfurt am Main has always thrived on exchanges with other countries and cultures. Today, the city is home to around 180 nationalities. This diversity is reflected in the city's 13,000 or so foreign companies and approximately 100 consular representations. Frankfurt supports the consulates on a wide range of matters, including information about pre-school places or election procedures. The city hosts multiple networking and information services for all new arrivals, such as the meet&mingle event known as the "International Stammtisch", receptions for new residents, and the Newcomers Festival. Germany's very first Office for Multicultural Affairs (AmkA), which deals with matters of diversity, integration, migration and anti-discrimination, has been fostering intercultural cohesion since 1989.²⁷

"8 May 1945. Our history matters": Exchanging perspectives with Cologne's African community

The City of Cologne organised several events in 2020 to mark the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. All too often, events of this kind fail to acknowledge those victims and other people affected by the war in the Global South. To address this, Cologne's Office for International Affairs planned and organised a commemorative event together with representatives of the city's African community and other civil society actors. This resulted in an experimental film collage and installation by Marie Köhler and Lionel Somé, which directs attention to the way in which Africa was affected. The film's première was followed by an online discussion with the two artists.²⁸



The film "8 May 1945. Our history matters" invites audiences to consider the Second World War from various perspectives (Photo: Lionel Somé / Marie Köhler)

²⁷ www.internationalesreferat.frankfurt.de

²⁸ www.stadt-koeln.de/politik-und-verwaltung/internationales/der-8-mai-1945-gedenken-zum-kriegsende-der-blick-auf-afrika-im-zweiten-weltkrieg

Internationalising city governance

International developments and agreements are important for all areas of local governance and are a source of challenges and opportunities alike. The specialist departments benefit from international professional exchanges and international experts. The international affairs units assist by providing information, facilitating contacts and planning meetings, as well as overcoming linguistic and cultural barriers between and within the cities.

Moreover, in several cities, the international affairs units are tasked with promoting global sustainable development in line with the 2030 Agenda. The cities' international affairs units develop the overall sustainability strategy and concept. The corresponding city departments, in turn, implement each of the sustainability measures on-site to ensure proper execution of the strategy. These units present sustainability reports at the international level, e.g. to the United Nations in the form of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs). These VLRs document local implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Including, leveraging, and co-shaping topics that tie in with Europe and the EU demonstrates a city's integration into the EU administrative and regulatory framework.²⁹ An internationalised administration also looks at topics that extend beyond Europe. It promotes language and intercultural skills within the administration that enable it to communicate and actively participate internationally, but also, above all, to respond to the societal diversity within its own city. Here, the experience and knowledge of people with a migration background is an asset that can be mobilised.



- Cities that internationalise and diversify their governance make themselves more attractive as employers.
- Cities promote and use intercultural skills in response to social diversity and to engage internationally.
- Cities work cross-departmentally on international topics.

²⁹ Cf.: Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) (2013): p.10

The state capital Düsseldorf gets involved in the EU public administration internship programme

Since 2019, trainees from the state capital of Düsseldorf can now take part in the ERASMUS+-backed “EU-Zubis” public administration training programme, which promotes internships in other European countries. To a limited extent, internships outside Europe are also eligible for support. One objective is for trainees to get an insight into foreign approaches to governance, and to hone their language, professional and intercultural skills. Another aim is to build a network of internationally experienced and interculturally competent city officials. Stays abroad can last from several days to several weeks. The programme is strengthening Düsseldorf’s internationalisation efforts and its transnational networks.³⁰



A poster by the city of Düsseldorf advertising internships under the EU-Zubi programme (Photo: iStock/franckreporter)

Osnabrück exchanges city ambassadors with its partner cities

The City of Osnabrück exchanges city ambassadors with five partner cities. Young people aged between 18 and 30 live for a year in their respective partner city where they work for the city administration. During this year, they experience the full spectrum of twinning tasks: liaison, preparing and implementing exchange programmes, evening get-togethers, project days, art and cultural encounters, cross-cultural readings, citizen trips and partnership days as well as the co-organisation of internships, city tours, PR work and plenty more. The cities provide them with the necessary financial and material resources.³¹



City ambassadors from Haarlem, Twer, Çanakkale, Derby and Angers in front of the Town Hall portal in the City of Osnabrück (Photo: Stadt Osnabrück/Jens Koopmann)

³⁰ www.duesseldorf.de/die-stadt-als-arbeitgeberin/ausbildung-studium-weiterqualifizierungen-praktika-freiwilligendienste/eu-zubi-auslandspraktikum.html

³¹ www.osnabrueck.de/rat/staedtepartnerschaften/das-etwas-andere-diplomatische-korps

Marketing cities internationally

With cities worldwide increasingly competing for international investments, business, tourists, and experts, international city marketing can help them boost their global business development activities. Alongside “hard” location factors such as the availability of land, commercial property and transport infrastructure, “soft” location factors, such as the local quality of life, international image and cultural offerings, and the cities’ international service orientation, are now commanding greater attention. According to a study by the German Institute of Urban Affairs (Difu), some 66 per cent of those surveyed said that municipalities’ tolerance, i.e. cosmopolitan outlook, was of major importance.³²

Municipal welcoming agencies assist international workers with their professional and social integration. Through international delegations, correspondence and video messages, they praise their city’s virtues as a business location or event venue and involve local companies and business promotion agencies in their networking. A city’s political positioning can impact its economic relations.

Cities are increasingly cooperating with each other to market themselves internationally as a region – be it as a metropolitan region or even a megaregion. Some cities have cross-departmental working groups for coordinating location marketing. Key actors here include local business development services and utilities, as well as their international affairs unit and chief administrator’s office.



- Cities leverage their international networks to compete for international investment and business.
- Cities promote soft location factors, such as cultural offerings. This benefits companies and local citizens alike.
- Cities strengthen local business, for example, by supporting international knowledge transfer.
- Cities make their location more attractive by marketing themselves as part of a metropolitan region or a megaregion.

³² German Institute of Urban Affairs (Difu) 2020): p.30



A wicker beach chair for a Kiel.Sailing.City. experience in San Francisco (Photo: Kiel Marketing).

Local presence in Silicon Valley: Kiel – a member of the Northern Germany Innovation Office, San Francisco

Having first launched their city-to-city partnership in 2017, San Francisco and Kiel have since stepped up their connections in the “Bay Areas”. As well as working together in fields such as sport, culture and sustainability, Kiel’s business and academic communities are very keen to pursue an exchange with the tech and innovation hub San Francisco. In 2018, this prompted Kiel to join the federal states of Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg and Bremen as a member of the Northern Germany Innovation Office (NGIO). As North Germany’s liaison office in San Francisco, NGIO offers local firms, start-ups and institutions opportunities to access and network with one of the world’s most innovative locations. At the same time, Kiel is able to increasingly leverage its international visibility for its own marketing campaigns as a business and science centre.³³

Synergies in Essen’s location marketing

The City of Essen’s international marketing relies on the city’s business development and marketing agencies. The mayoral office coordinates their collaboration with specialist municipal departments and other entities with international operations, such as Essen’s exhibition centre Messe Essen or its utility company Stadtwerke Essen. Together, these municipal actors target specific countries and sectors. Close cooperation with Essen’s partner cities and international municipal networking plays an equally important role, as do thematic project-based partnerships and city-to-city agreements. Ideally, EU third-party programmes will promote and communicate relevant cooperation activities, as the International Urban and Regional Cooperation (IURC) is currently doing.³⁴

Essen’s business development agency EWG took part in the “Renewable Energy Industrial Fair (REIF)” in Essen’s partner city of Koriyama in Japan (Photo: City of Koriyama).



³³ www.kiel.de/de/kiel_zukunft/kiel_international/index.php

³⁴ www.essen.de/dasistessen/international/internationales_interkommunale_beziehungen.de.html

Funding acquisition and offers of support

Though the benefits of international engagement are clear, sufficient funding for demanding projects is not always guaranteed. Nevertheless, a multitude of funding instruments do exist in the field of international municipal engagement and at the international level. A source of opportunity though this may be, it can also prove challenging. The sheer number of funding offers at the regional and national level in Germany, as well as from the European Union (EU), makes it difficult to identify the best fit. Cities are however more likely to explore a funding landscape if it is clearly arranged and flexible to use. The Association of German Cities is therefore committed to making things easier.

Applying to programmes for funding, and implementing the funds approved, requires additional administrative input, especially when the financial resources are earmarked for use in a partner city abroad, but the German municipality is managing the accounts. Within an administration, the international affairs unit often has the experience required to provide information about funding and to support those applying for it. However, obtaining funding takes time and effort.

The German Government's funding database provides an overview of funding programmes run by German federal states, the German Federal Government and the EU in general: www.foerderdatenbank.de. The EU Funding and Tenders Portal lists all EU funding programmes: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/>. Funding agencies and/or their implementing organisations, such as the EU, the German Government or the Service Agency Communities in One World, provide special training to assist with the application process and implementation of the funds approved.



- Cities expand their international engagement through funding and offers of support.
- Cities also benefit from the consultation inputs and networking that comes with funding programmes.
- Cities promote cross-departmental collaboration within the administration.

The City of Chemnitz – a lead city in the EU exchange and learning programme URBACT

The housing agency StadtWohnen Chemnitz helps to re-purpose old, vacant, decaying buildings. Recognised as an URBACT Good Practice in 2017, the Chemnitz model is now being scaled up to other cities through the European ALT/BAU Transfer Network. Over half of this EU project funding totalling EUR 490,000 is going to the City of Chemnitz as lead partner. Thanks to this financial influx, Chemnitz has been able to strategically restructure the way it manages its old residential buildings, boosting the city's reputation across Europe. Having grown its profile locally, the project succeeded in recruiting actors willing to continue collaborating in this field even after the URBACT network shuts down.³⁵



A banner on an old residential building in Chemnitz, lead city for the EU URBACT programme (Photo: StadtWohnen Chemnitz)

EU promoting cooperation between Karlsruhe and India



A delegation from Karlsruhe in Nagpur in February 2020 (Photo: Pflieger)

Karlsruhe in the German state Baden-Württemberg, and the region of Pune in the Indian state of Maharashtra enjoy longstanding close ties. Their aim: to jointly harness their regional markets and growth potential. Since 2018, their cooperation has also been supported by the EU. For example, the International Urban (and Regional) Cooperation (IU(R)C) programme supported a “city pairing” between Karlsruhe and the smart city of Nagpur on the topic of mobility planning and bicycle rental systems. Further cooperation on plans for a sustainable industrial estate with Pune got underway in 2021. By concentrating on the circular economy, this pooling of experience is contributing to the SDGs.³⁶

³⁵ www.chemnitz.de/chemnitz/de/unser-stadt/stadtentwicklung/eu-foerderung/urbact/index.html

³⁶ https://iuc.eu/india-hi/city-pairings/?c=search&pairing_id=68p9ybd7

Protocol and prestige

Referring to the procedures and formats a city uses for its prestigious ceremonies and events, protocol and prestige require a harmonised set of rules for public engagement. Symbolic acts and gestures, special places or gifts are key to relationship management. This applies particularly to international and intercultural events. In these settings, communicating through words alone often has its limitations.

Globalisation is calling traditional societal cohesion into question. With this in mind, having city leaders publicly engage with their citizens is becoming ever more important. Intercultural aspects and international developments play an important role. This is the case for international receptions, joint events with religious or migrant communities, but also for public addresses in general. Protocol boosts a city's international visibility and thus impacts its political and economic relations.



- Cities strengthen international and intercultural relations, also in situations where communication through words alone has its limitations.
- Cities strengthen their international profile.



A made-in-Mumbai Fairtrade cloth bag with the emblem for Stuttgart's ten sister cities (Photo: Kaarina Bauer)

Stuttgart's courtesy gifts speak to solidarity and engagement

The state capital Stuttgart has its courtesy gifts made under fair conditions in a social sewing workshop in its partner city Mumbai. The products tangibly communicate Stuttgart's commitment to localising the global Sustainable Development Goals. Furthermore, they help ensure that the women who make them are both able to access psychological counselling and education, in the case of having experienced prior trauma in life, as well as paid a fair wage for their work. This initiative by the city's international affairs unit was made possible thanks to close cooperation with a Stuttgart fashion label and the city's protocol division. Gifts presented on the national and international stage are chosen carefully and tie in with the guests' cultural and professional background. This makes the gifts an essential component of intercultural understanding and the city's diplomatic relations.³⁷

³⁷ www.stuttgart.de/leben/internationale-beziehungen/



Reception marking the 35th anniversary of Montpellier House, Heidelberg, on 4 September 2021 (Photo: Tobias Dittmer/Stadt Heidelberg)

Heidelberg-Montpellier: a partnership with houses as ambassadors and door openers

The cities of Heidelberg and Montpellier have shared a close and lively partnership for 60 years. A special characteristic of this relationship is the presence of partner houses – Montpellier House and the Maison de Heidelberg – that exist in each of the partner cities and that are funded by them. These not only serve as cultural centres, but also see themselves as official “embassies” of their respective cities. For this reason, both houses are closely involved in any plans and activities that concern delegation visits and partnership anniversaries. Moreover, both help to prepare and organise joint events and iron out any bureaucratic or language issues standing in the way of partner city exchanges.³⁸

³⁸ <https://bit.ly/2VA35Syu>



The Montpellier House in Heidelberg represents a pillar of the two cities' partnership.

Solutions for promoting international engagement by cities

A city's international engagement adds significant value. At the same time, it requires time, tactfulness and adequate funding. Thanks to financial support from state and non-governmental organisations, many cities are now able to considerably step up their work in this field, and could do so even more if the following five key lines of approach were pursued:

1. **Stronger recognition of international engagement by cities.** With some local politicians still sceptical about municipal development cooperation, it is necessary to continue building understanding for city diplomacy. When it comes to sustainability, the German Government already acknowledges cities' decisive role and expertise.³⁹
2. **Cities must play a greater role in tackling global challenges.** This applies to the design and rollout of concrete measures, and to the adoption of international agreements. Both sides stand to benefit if cities and the German Federal Government engage in regular and flexible exchanges. If cities' voices are formally recognised in relevant UN negotiations, international cooperation will be strengthened.
3. **Cross-sectoral cooperation within the municipal administration makes for better international engagement by cities.** The international work that cities do is relevant to all departments, offices and specialist divisions. Cross-sectoral cooperation requires close coordination by all the actors concerned. The international affairs units can structure activities and support them with their professional know-how. The key factor, however, is always the level of engagement by the cities' top officials.
4. **Ideally, political and administrative commitment to any international engagement is rooted in an overall strategy underpinned by a council resolution.** Having civil society on board strengthens local cohesion and boosts political backing for international projects. Civil society also has valuable specialist knowledge at its disposal that can ease pressure on the administration.
5. **The rollout of international projects and cooperation by cities calls for additional support and less red tape.** To manage the many tasks involved in their international engagement, cities require more human resources. In turn, this requires more financial support by the German Government, German states and other organisations. For funding programmes to generate the highest possible benefits, the volume of administrative work and prescriptive regulations needs to be cut back.

³⁹ See e.g. German Government (2020): p. 116 f. or German Government (2021)

Outlook

Cities' responsiveness to local actors enables them to embark on extensive international cooperation and measures. Cooperation amongst cities, academia and industry opens up new ways of promoting global sustainable development. Regional cooperation as a metropolitan region or megaregion raises the economic importance and visibility of the cities, companies and regions involved. The expertise of cities and local firms can be leveraged to manage international labour mobility and migration.

The importance of the local level will continue to grow in the development context. Cities make a major contribution to issues such as human rights, democracy, intercultural dialogue, foreign business relations, displacement and migration, and urbanisation. Decentralisation processes in countries of the Global South often fail because the local level lacks the necessary experience and competence.⁴⁰ German cities can thus offer their support at the political and technical level. In turn, this would make German cities more aware of global interrelations. To pool resources, cities can engage in multilateral partnerships. In the face of development engagement by autocratic states, municipal development cooperation is now becoming even more important.

Different political systems, values, and societal models are competing internationally, but German cities possess key strengths. Local core competencies such as responsive governance and participation are the backbone of international advocacy for democracy and the rule of law. With an eye to the challenges the world is facing, it makes sense for international cooperation to get actors from different political systems on board. As decentralised actors, cities have a pivotal role to play.

Looking ahead, stronger forms of foreign policy cooperation between cities and national governments are conceivable. Maintaining mutual exchanges between cities and the German Federal Foreign Office (AA) would help cities to deal with international conflicts. Based on the AA training model for international diplomats, AA staff and their consuls could be sensitised to cities' international importance. Having cities participate in official German Government delegations is a way of making their experience and contributions more visible.

Cities' demand for more inclusive multilateralism is increasingly being heard. On the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stressed that cities were key partners for the future of multilateralism. If the international contribution made by cities is formally and institutionally acknowledged, it will enable cities to dedicate more of their expertise to overcoming global challenges – to the benefit of everyone involved.

⁴⁰ See, e.g. Platforma (2021): p. 32

Resolution on this position paper adopted by the Executive Committee of the Association of German Cities

Resolution of 28 September 2021 in Heidelberg

1. The Executive Committee of the Association of German Cities welcomes the diverse international engagement by cities. It underscores the benefits of this international work and the cities' willingness to co-shape international developments through multi-level governance. This engagement merits recognition and also increased support from state and non-state actors. The Executive Committee petitions the German Government to establish an institutionalised exchange between cities and the federal government level.
2. The Executive Committee endorses the paper "Cities in the World – Drivers of international relations".

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