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## CITIES EMERGING SOFT POWER: 5 key advantages for improved global governance

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**W**ith the majority of the world's population already urban, people have voted cities as the place to live. This emerging trend is an outcome of the spread of globalization, which generates economies of scale by clustering economic activities -fueled by technological change, international trade, finance and foreign direct investment- in cities.

Urban congregations are nests that attract opportunities -based on accumulation of resources- and act as recipients of hazardous global challenges -climate change, security, immigration or poverty- alike. However, the unstoppable power of cities is underrepresented at a global scale, where cities still have a limited voice in the architecture of international big decision-making. Against this backdrop, what are the influence and implications of cities as a key actor for global governance? What can they bring to the world? Cities' differentiated proposition adds a more efficient model -than nation-states- in dealing with matters of relevant global concern that hinge upon the following five advantages.

**1. Cities are more practical than ideological.** Proximity to citizens make cities more aware about their problems and needs, which is a key feature for engaging citizens in political matters that directly affect their lives. Furthermore, cooperation amongst city networks favours the decentralization of decision-making and political power away from capital cities. This increases the role and influence of secondary and peripheral cities, which enrich the political processes of problem-solving with new perspectives, concerns and solutions that are close and inclusive to more citizens.

**2. Cities are more emotionally intelligent than nation-states.** They allow people to identify with local matters that have a global significance, thereby empowering them in participating and engaging in socioeconomic and environmental activities likely to generate a global impact. Today, when interculturally diverse nation-states and supranational institutions are not appealing to the citizens' attention, engaging people to participate in political processes is more complex than ever. This notwithstanding, cities start from the bottom by connecting with the citizens, responding to local challenges that become global. With the use of the Internet-related social media technologies, micro-politics better engages and channels citizen participation through transnational networks such as in struggles around human rights, environment, decent work, immigration, security and the like.

3. **Cities bypass national sovereignty.** In their global role, city cooperation avoids long-standing national disputes that undermine reaching consensus in matters of big international relevance. At the Earth Summit held in Rio in 1992, when states adopted the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), local governments already made an initial commitment to adopt a framework and action plans for reducing CO2 emissions. Whereas local actors reacted only eight months after the Rio Summit, the UN spent thirteen years before launching the Kyoto Protocol, which is yet not working as expected. In general, cities do not have to reach national consensus through the rigid and arduous process of hierarchies of scale that states and international institutions must. Local initiatives can spontaneously scale up as part of a global network of activism without risking to lose the specific aim and focus of their local origin.

4. **Cities democratize the learning curve.** The horizontal model of city cooperation is shaping a system of open learning at the policy and practical level. Cities have been orchestrating platforms of knowledge exchange geared at solving practical problems on the ground. For example, Curitiba's outstanding success with bus rapid transit or Medellín's profound transformation in addressing crime and insecurity are extended practices that have been exchanged and benchmarked by cities around the world. Cities devote policies and resources to systematically foster cooperation with other cities based on a city-to-city exchange approach that may hold relevant for some global issues and many local issues of global reach. City cooperation represents an innovation in the process whereby knowledge is openly shared, transferred and applied by different cities for the sake of their own development.

5. **Cities are global brands that attract the creative class.** Like iconic magnets, cities have forged an identity and reputation on the way they attract and deal with investors, multinational firms, talented workers and massive tourism. More than ever before, places like New York, London, Paris, Tokyo, Beijing, Singapore or Barcelona leverage their brand reputation to local and national governments that integrate them in the design of economic policies intended to attract resources. There is a new economic geography of centrality that overcomes nation-states by positioning cities at the tip of the world iceberg of decision-centers.

All in all, cities are shaping a new global governance model that has new fresh features –organic, open and handy- that make it more alluring than the limited and old-fashioned nation-state. In view of this trend, voices are raising to give cities the treat they deserve with a more decisive role at the international agenda (as it is the case for the upcoming Sustainable Development Goals). It is true that international law still does not recognize cities as a single institutionalized global actor that can legally and systematically participate in international affairs' dialogues and policy-making (perhaps with the exception of UN Habitat). Indeed, in some instances cities are recalled among the wide-array of non-state actors, which indicates the low-profile level of recognition that international institutions render to them.

A progressive institutionalization of cities as legitimate global actors could contribute in introducing a new governance model more adapted to the reality of a liquid and uncertain society. Citizens demand soft power for counterbalancing the hard power of nation-states' classical politics. However, this new situation opens up the possibility for two future scenarios. First, the upscaling institutionalization of cities could better exploit the benefits of city cooperation for improved global governance. Second, this process would raise cities model's visibility and legitimacy, which could phagocytize the organic benefits that it is already generating for a model of governance that operates behind the scenes of macro politics.

Either way what is for granted is the apparent needs of cities, regions, governments and supranational institutions to thoroughly investigate and study the multilayered repercussion and power of cities as global actors. We cannot ignore that international city cooperation and diplomacy is still in its infancy, and therefore it needs thorough empirical research to shed light on a new space and form of doing politics.