City Leadership – Towards Filling the Global Governance Gaps?

A case study of the city of Geneva

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Since 2007 and for the first time in human history the majority of the world population lives in cities. As the authorities closest to today's citizens, urban governments possess a crucial potential when it comes to influencing world politics. However, only little attention has so far been paid to the role of cities and their leaders in managing transnational challenges. Having mainly taken place in the shadow of the political tug-of-war between states, the rise of cities as forces to unite the top-down world of global governance and the bottom-up activism of civil society has recently found its reflection in the emergence of city networks. City networks are transnational alliances between urban governments aiming at international cooperation, standard setting, and shaping policy decisions. But more importantly, city networks increasingly fill the 'governance gaps' resulting from international deadlocks. In the words of Michael Bloomberg, former Mayor of New York, "while nations talk, cities act."

Against this backdrop, and as the host of a major international arena, the city of Geneva has followed the call for action. Participating in several urban networks, the city is progressively developing capacities to influence global policymaking and establishing itself on the stage of world politics. Therefore, the following question appears central: What kind of city leadership does Geneva currently exercise on global governance?

As the analysis will highlight, cities typically use four major mechanisms of influence to impact international affairs: First, they forge global policy frameworks by promoting regimes for collective action. For example, cities have been the core initiators of several CO_2 regulatory regimes, which, inter alia, contributed to the Paris Agreement. Second, local governments operate as governance facilitators for broader agendas by producing spaces for encounters between different stakeholders in the global governance architecture. A prominent example in this regard is the Geneva Initiative, a model of permanent status agreement between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine. Third, cities function as "normative mediators between the world and the state" when adopting new transnational legal standards, due to their innovative nature. By doing so they become norm pioneers which substantially contribute to the diffusion of international normative frameworks. The fourth mechanism upon which municipal authorities can rely is city diplomacy, i.e., negotiating directly with foreign counterparts and other political actors to influence global decision-making.

Whereas a city can use all four of these mechanisms on its own, their true potential largely unfolds in the context of city networks, which empower cities to pool their resources and amplify their voices. Geneva thus seems well positioned to make use of these mechanisms. While the examination will contend that the city indeed uses all four mechanisms, the paper will also emphasize that Geneva does not take full advantage of its potential in this regard yet. Hence, the paper will argue that in order to effectively (i) leverage its unique position at the heart of international decision-making, (ii) enhance its attractiveness and soft power, (iii) respond to global challenges, and (iv) utilize its city leadership competences in favor of Switzerland's foreign policy, the city of Geneva should:

Institute its own city network addressing a global governance challenge. In this regard it seems advisable for Geneva to focus on the creation of an urban alliance, which (1) addresses problems of global concern that other city networks do not yet focus on, (2) concentrates on a domain of world politics whose relevant international players are located in Geneva, and (3) particularly targets medium-sized cities striving for access to the international arena. Moreover, to ensure that the city network gains as much traction as possible, Geneva **should focus on a mechanism of influence which presents a comparative advantage.** This means that Geneva should first and foremost focus on facilitating **multi-dimensional spaces for dialogue** among the different actors relevant to the city network, as well as engage in related **city diplomacy** activities. Finally, and to ensure added value for Switzerland as such, Geneva should also align its city network with **Switzerland's foreign policy objectives.**

S eit 2007 und zum ersten Mal in der Geschichte der Menschheit lebt eine Mehrheit der Weltbevölkerung in urbanen Räumen. Stadtregierungen als Behörden, welche heute den Bürgerinnen und Bürgern am nächsten stehen, kommt daher zusehends eine zentrale Rolle zu, wenn es darum geht, das Weltgeschehen zu beeinflussen. Bisher wurde der Rolle von Städten jedoch bei der Bewältigung transnationaler Herausforderungen kaum Beachtung geschenkt. Der Aufstieg der Städte als Vermittlerinnen zwischen „top-down" Logiken globaler Regierungsführung und „bottom-up" zivilgesellschaftlichem Aktivismus, hat deshalb weniger überraschend hauptsächlich im Schatten des politischen Tauziehens zwischen den Staaten stattgefunden. Er widerspiegelt sich seit Kurzem aber auch in der Entwicklung von Städtenetzwerken. Städtenetzwerke sind transnationale Allianzen zwischen lokalen Regierungen mit dem Ziel über Grenzen hinweg zusammenzuarbeiten, neue Standards zu etablieren und auf politische Entscheidungsfindung einzuwirken. Vor allem aber überbrücken diese Netzwerke mehr und mehr die „Führungsdefizite", die aufgrund international festgefahrener Debatten entstanden sind. Um es mit den Worten von Michael Bloomberg, dem ehemaligen Bürgermeister von New York, zu sagen: „Nationen reden, Städte handeln."

Vor diesem Hintergrund – und als wichtige Gastgeberin auf internationaler Ebene – ist Genf diesem urbanen Aufruf zum Handeln gefolgt. Durch die Teilnahme an mehreren Städtenetzwerken entwickelt die Stadt schrittweise Kompetenzen, um die globale Politik zu beeinflussen und sich auf der Bühne der Weltpolitik zu etablieren. Daher ist die folgende Frage zentral: Welche Art von Führungsrolle übt Genf zurzeit im Bereich Global Governance aus?

Die Analyse wird zeigen, dass Städte sich in der Regel vier Mechanismen bedienen, um internationale Angelegenheiten zu beeinflussen: Erstens schaffen sie politische Handlungsrahmen, in welchen kollektive Lösungen zur Bewältigung von globalen Problemen umgesetzt werden können. So waren beispielsweise Städte die Hauptinitiantinnen verschiedener CO2-Reduktionsregime, die unter anderem zum Pariser Klimaabkommen führten. Zweitens können lokale Behörden als vermittelnde Instanz für globale Kooperation fungieren, indem sie Räume für Begegnungen zwischen den verschiedenen Akteuren der Weltpolitik bewerkstelligenschaffen. Ein prominentes Beispiel hierfür ist die Genfer Initiative: ein Entwurf für die Lösung des Nahostkonflikts, welcher Vertreter beide Seiten an einen Tisch brachte. Drittens nehmen Städte bei der Einführung neuer

transnationaler Rechtsnormen auch die Rolle von „normativen Brückenbauern zwischen der Welt und dem Staat" ein. Indem sie innovative Standards einführen, nehmen sie ein Vorreiterfunktion ein, durch welche sie substantiell zur Verbreitung neuartiger Massstäbe beitragen. Der vierte Mechanismus, auf den sich Stadtverwaltungen verlassen können, ist die Städtediplomatie, d.h., das direkte Verhandeln mit ausländischen Amtskollegen und anderen politischen Akteuren zur Beeinflussung internationaler Entscheidungsprozesse.

Während eine Stadt diese vier Mechanismen alle im Alleingang nutzen kann, entfaltet sie ihr wahres Potenzial weitgehend im Kontext von Städtenetzwerken, welche es Städten ermöglichen, Ressourcen zu bündeln und damit ihrer Stimme mehr Gewicht zu verleihen.

Als Mitglied mehrerer solcher städtischer Netzwerke scheint Genf gut positioniert zu sein, um die oben genannten Mechanismen einzusetzen. Die Untersuchung wird ergeben, dass Genf tatsächlich alle vier Mechanismen anwendet, doch wird auch betont werden, dass die Stadt ihr Potenzial in dieser Hinsicht noch nicht völlig ausschöpft. Es wird deshalb argumentiert werden, dass Genf, um (i) seine einzigartige Position im Zentrum der internationalen Entscheidungsfindung wirksam zu nutzen, (ii) seine Attraktivität und Soft Power zu erhöhen, (iii) auf globale Herausforderungen zu reagieren und (iv) seine städtischen Führungskompetenzen zur Unterstützung der schweizerischen Aussenpolitik zu nutzen:

Ein eigenes Städtenetzwerk gründen sollte, welches sich einer globalen Regierungsherausforderung annimmt. In diesem Zusammenhang scheint es ratsam, dass sich Genf auf die Schaffung eines städtischen Bündnisses konzentriert, das (1) sich mit einem Problem von globalem Interesse befasst, welches noch nicht von einem anderen Städtenetzwerk behandelt wird; (2) sich auf einen Bereich der Weltpolitik konzentriert, dessen Schlüsselakteure in Genf angesiedelt sind; und (3) insbesondere mittelgrosse Städte zu gewinnen versucht, die den Zugang zur internationalen Bühne anstreben. Damit das Stadtnetz so viel wie möglich an Zugkraft gewinnt, sollte die Stadt Genf zudem **den Einflussmöglichkeiten, die ihr einen komparativen Vorteil verschaffen, den Vorrang geben.** So sollte sich Genf in erster Linie darauf konzentrieren, **Räume für Dialog** zwischen verschieden Akteuren zu schaffen und sich an entsprechenden **Städtediplomatie-Aktivitäten** zu beteiligen. Um schliesslich einen Mehrwert für die Schweiz im Allgemeinen zu gewährleisten, sollte Genf sein Städtenetz **an den aussenpolitischen Zielen der Schweiz ausrichten.**

D epuis 2007 et pour la première fois dans l'histoire de l'humanité, la majorité de la population mondiale habite dans des villes. Les gouvernements urbains, qui constituent aujourd'hui les autorités les plus proches des citoyens, possèdent un potentiel important en terme de leur influence sur la politique mondiale. Cependant, peu d'attention a été portée au rôle des villes et de leurs dirigeants.es dans la gestion des défis transnationaux. Se déroulant principalement dans l'ombre de la lutte politique entre États, l'essor des villes, en tant que forces pouvant unir l'univers vertical (du haut vers le bas) de la gouvernance mondiale et l'activisme du bas vers le haut de la société civile, s'est récemment reflété au travers de l'émergence de réseaux de villes. Ces derniers sont des alliances transnationales entre gouvernements urbains qui visent à la coopération internationale, à la fixation de normes, et à avoir de l'influence sur les décisions politiques. Mais avant tout, les réseaux de villes comblent de plus en plus les « lacunes de gouvernance » qui résultent d'impasses internationales. Comme l'a dit l'ancien maire de New York Michael Bloomberg : « pendant que les nations parlent, les villes agissent. ».

Dans ce contexte, et en tant que ville-hôte d'une importante scène internationale, Genève a suivi l'appel à l'action. La ville, qui participe à plusieurs réseaux de villes, développe progressivement des capacités lui permettant d'influencer la politique à l'échelle mondiale et de se faire une place sur la scène politique internationale. La question suivante apparaît donc comme centrale : comment est-ce que Genève montre-t-elle actuellement la voie en matière de gouvernance mondiale?

Comme l'analyse le met en évidence, les villes utilisent généralement quatre mécanismes d'influence majeurs pour avoir un impact sur les affaires internationales. Premièrement, elles définissent des cadres pour la politique mondiale en promouvant des régimes pour l'action collective. Les villes, par exemple, étaient à l'origine de plusieurs régimes de réglementation du CO_2 qui, entre autres, ont contribué à l'Accord de Paris. Deuxièmement, les autorités locales jouent le rôle d'animateurs de la gouvernance pour des plans d'action plus larges en créant des espaces de rencontre entre les différentes parties prenantes de la structure de la gouvernance mondiale. Un exemple frappant dans ce contexte est l'initiative de Genève, un modèle d'accord permanent entre l'État d'Israël et l'État de Palestine. Troisièmement, les villes fonctionnent comme des « médiateurs normatifs entre le monde et l'État » quand il s'agit d'adopter de nouvelles normes juridiques transnationales. En les adoptant, elles deviennent ainsi des précurseurs en matière de normes, ce qui contribue à la diffusion de cadres normatifs internationaux.

Le quatrième mécanisme sur lequel les autorités municipales peuvent s'appuyer est la diplomatie des villes, soit la négociation directe avec des homologues étrangers et d'autres acteurs politiques pour influencer les décisions politiques mondiales.

Alors qu'une ville est capable de mettre en œuvre ces quatre mécanismes à elle seule, leur véritable potentiel se réalise dans le contexte des réseaux de villes qui les habilitent à mettre leurs ressources en commun pour mieux se faire entendre. En tant que membre de plusieurs réseaux de ce type, Genève semble bien placée pour exploiter ces mécanismes. Tandis que l'examen constate que Genève utilise effectivement ces quatre mécanismes, le document met également l'accent sur le fait qu'elle n'exploite pas encore pleinement ce potentiel. Par conséquent, l'exposé argumente que pour effectivement (i) tirer profit de sa position unique au cœur des décisions de la politique internationale, (ii) renforcer son attractivité et son pouvoir de conviction, (iii) répondre aux défis mondiaux et (iv) utiliser ses compétences en matière de gouvernance municipale en soutien à la politique étrangère suisse, la ville de Genève devrait :

Mettre en place son propre réseau de villes pour relever un défi de gouvernance mondiale. À cet égard, il semble pertinent pour Genève de se concentrer sur la création d'une alliance urbaine qui (1) aborde un problème mondial qui n'est pas encore traité par d'autres réseaux de villes (2) pour se focaliser sur un domaine de la politique mondiale dont les acteurs clés se situent à Genève. Elle devrait également (3) viser en particulier les villes de taille moyenne qui recherchent à avoir accès à la scène internationale. De plus, pour assurer que le réseau gagne le plus de terrain possible, Genève devrait **mettre la priorité sur les mécanismes d'influence qui présentent un avantage comparatif.** Cela signifie que Genève devrait mettre d'abord l'accent sur la facilitation de la création **d'espaces multidimensionnels de dialogue** et sur l'engagement dans des activités connexes en matière de **diplomatie des villes.** Enfin, pour assurer une valeur ajoutée pour la Suisse en général, Genève devrait aligner son réseau de villes avec **les objectifs suisses en matière de politique étrangère.**

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1. Introduction

Since 2007 and for the first time in human history more people live in urban settings than in rural environments. With more than 100,000 people per day moving to cities, over 75 percent of the global population is predicted to live in urban areas by the middle of this century. Clearly, we are entering an Urban Millennium where the future of humankind is inextricably tied to cities.

1.1 The urban millennium

Against this backdrop, the acknowledgement of cities as an influential force in world politics demands attention. Cities are the "level of government closest to the majority of the world's people" and have always been major drivers for innovation and progress. Unsurprisingly, they are therefore also the place where global challenges become the most apparent. When it comes to the handling of these transnational concerns, however, traditional international channels have left many city leaders out in the cold and numerous global governance gaps unfilled. Hence, while nations talk, cities have decided to act – among them, the city of Geneva.

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1.2 Research question and policy relevance

As a major hub of international governance, the city of Geneva bears significant potential to establish itself on the stage of world politics and influence global policymaking. This begs the question: *What kind of city leadership should Geneva exercise in global governance?* The follow-

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ing analysis will demonstrate that Geneva engages questions of global governance on the basis of four distinct mechanisms, namely, through the (i) diffusion of norms, (ii) the support of policy frameworks for global action, (iii) the facilitation of multi-stakeholder interactions, and by (iv) engaging in city diplomacy. The paper will argue that in order to leverage these activities most effectively and in favour of Switzerland's foreign policy, the city of Geneva should found its own city network.

2. City Leadership in Global Governance

2.1 The rise of cities in global governance

The rise of the nation-state in the 19th century, and especially in Europe, progressively eroded cities' freedom of action. The autonomy which cities are enjoying today is thus a rather recent phenomenon. In the past, local authorities had little or no influence on international affairs and cities were considered no more than 'policy takers'; passive implementers of decisions made elsewhere. Yet, at the beginning of the 21st century, the paradigm shifted. The end of the Cold War, as well as revolutions in communication technology and transportation, created a greater scope of manoeuvre for cities to act as transnational forces transcending the top-down world of international politics. Moreover, necessity began to catalyse urban leaders: as many of today's major transboundary challenges materialize in cities, municipal authorities are often required to react before national governments do. In fact, cities

are tasked with the daily management of most global problems, and whereas traditional international actors have run into the brick wall of the collective action problem, cities have morphed from 'policy takers' to 'policy makers'.

In addition, urban leaders do not just deal with topics such as climate change, pandemics, or organized crime, but also have acquired the ability to produce institutions and structures that shape the landscape of global governance. Mayors and other municipal authorities engage in sister-city linkages, seek exchanges with global actors and strive to take action within the international system itself. A prominent example is personified in the former mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg, who during his term in office not only went abroad to seek foreign connections with countries such as Mexico, the United Kingdom, and China, but also participated in meetings of international organizations like the UN Climate Conference in Bali. Beyond that, the new rise of urban centres is also reflected in their characterization as one of today's greatest drivers of change. By benefiting from open borders and free trade through immigration – dynamics which brought along economic growth as well as innovation and socio-cultural progress – cities have become promising progressive actors. As a recently published article from the M.I.T. concluded, innovation in cities grows at roughly the same rate as the population, mainly because the higher density of people living in urban areas raises the chances for interactions and exposure to different ideas. So, in a nutshell, cities are now 'out there' in world affairs, connecting, lobbying, and collaborating; and they are more and more doing all this in formalized groups – city networks.

Urban alliances allow cities to concentrate on concrete and ambitious objectives to get the job done.

2.2 City networks

In the context of this paper, city networks are defined as transnational alliances between urban governments that aim to address global challenges. Today, city networks have become an influential tool for urban leadership to gain access to the international arena. By transcending municipal boundaries and creating a grid of city connections, global leverage can be pooled and the urban voice better heard. These international structures, which address various issue areas of the global agenda, work via peer-to-peer interactions between municipal officials and represent a double-tracked approach to global governance. On the one hand, cities develop a parallel, self-organizing system that bypasses the hierarchical rationale of global politics. On the other hand, cities still engage with national and international fora to address global problems. While this twofold approach gives local governments greater flexibility in how to deal with questions of global concern in the best way, it also exhibits benefits for national authorities. As cities often enjoy more leeway than central governments do, they can advocate national foreign policy objectives where central authorities may have to lay low in order not to jeopardize other policy areas. Urban alliances allow cities to concentrate on concrete and ambitious objectives to get the job done.

Examples of city networks

Urban networking efforts can take various forms: Firstly, city networks may have different purposes. While the *World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty*, for example, addresses a very specific Sustainable Development Goal, *Mayors for Peace* seeks to abolish nuclear weapons. Other city networks such

as *United Cities and Local Governments* (UCLG) have a rather multifunctional orientation: UCLG strives to increase "the role and influence of local government and its representative organizations in global governance." Furthermore, city networks may or may not involve other non-state actors. For instance, the *European Charter for Human Rights in Cities*, led primarily by local governments, cultivates strong partnerships with technical experts, civil society, trade unions, businesses, and academic institutions. Lastly, city networks can be global or regional in scope: while city collaborations like *Mayors for Peace* connect urban centres all around the globe, the focus of networks such as *Eurocities* or *Association internationale des maires francophones* is much narrower, concentrating on specific regions. Today, over 170 city alliances exist worldwide, and in light of their increasing popularity, this might only be the beginning.

2.3 Why cities unite

But what exactly do these urban nodes offer to local governments? Why would a city voluntarily engage in city networks – an activity which often requires a substantial amount of time and resources? The first and most crucial reason for cities to unite is that city networks provide local governments with the opportunity to influence the global governance agenda according to their needs. By joining forces, cities can reach the critical mass needed to bring a certain topic to the table of international decision-making. Second, participation in city networks can boost the economic and cultural attractiveness of urban centres. It promotes their brand and signals interest in international cooperation and an active foreign policy. Third, the

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creation of a city network can be an effective tool for a city government to become a thematic leader on a global issue, providing it with substantial soft power to foster solutions on an international scale. Prominent examples in this regard are the *Istanbul Water Consensus* or the *Mexico City Pact*, allowing both cities to make their mark in the areas of global water management and climate change respectively. Fourth, urban alliances empower local governments to build capacity. They offer a forum for cities to gain access to information and technical expertise, which assists them in formulating policies. For instance, city networks like *Mayors for Peace*, *C40*, and *Eurocities* nowadays come close to matching the knowledge and competences of state-based institutions and services. Fifth, participating in urban alliances opens doors to a multitude of new partners who can leverage decisions in favour of city leaders' goals. As an illustration, the network *ICLEI* alone offers over 1,500 links to cities and towns, as well as to 48 other entities such as Siemens, McKinsey, or the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. Similarly, city networks present an opportunity for local governments to directly interact with international bodies such as the UN or the World Bank. Finally, and with particular relevance in a world in which a new state-driven anti-internationalism seems to be on the rise, alliances of local governments present an alternative dimension for global interaction. When central governments turn their backs on global affairs, city networks allow urban leaders to reach out beyond national boundaries and overcome isolationist tendencies. An interesting example in this regard is the *Cities for Citizenship* initiative in the United States. By increasing

naturalization among eligible U.S. permanent residents, the project expands economic opportunities for immigrants and elevates economic prosperity in urban environments. Analogously, so-called sanctuary cities are currently cutting back on their efforts to enforce immigration laws to encourage people to report crimes and contribute to social services. In sum, the above-highlighted factors serve as powerful imperatives for cities to create and participate in city networks. The next section outlines four concrete mechanisms, which urban leaders can use when teamed in city networks, to shape the management of global challenges in their benefit.

3. How Cities Shape World Politics

3.1 City networks as amplifiers

In their studies on cities and their role in world politics, scholars such as Michele Acuto, Director of the City Leadership Lab at University College London, Noah Toly, Director of the Wheaton Centre for Urban Engagement, have outlined four mechanisms upon which cities and their leaders can rely to influence global governance. While the mechanisms can be utilized by a city on its own, the present paper argues that the real potential of these instruments only unfolds when jointly used by an alliance of cities. By aggregating resources, amplifying their voice, and leveraging political weight in city networks, municipal authorities can extend their reach beyond national borders and access global governance terrain. In the following section, the mechanisms will be discussed and

their use via city networks described.

3.2 Norm diffusions

Firstly, and given that urban centres are drivers for change, cities play an important standard-setting role when their local governments decide to take a stance on a specific global issue and act as "normative mediators between the world and the state." By engaging transnational norms proactively, city networks help to put international standards – which have not yet been adopted by central governments – into practice. Thereby, local authorities can act as national front-runners and substantially contribute to the development and diffusion of international normative frameworks. San Francisco, for instance, consolidated several anti-discrimination provisions in its legislation, such as the right to same-sex marriage, that exceeded the national standards at the time and pioneered the LGBTIQ movement in the United States. If local governments unite via city networks, the dissemination of such norms and standards can be substantially accelerated and a momentum created.

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Policy frameworks

A second type of agency, which cities and their leaders can exercise, consists of creating policymaking frameworks that address global challenges. Policy frameworks can be understood as action plans, resolutions, charters, or any other form of commitment for collective action. By setting up such regulatory regimes and advocating for their implementation in multilateral efforts, city networks can influence global governance, especially when the former are not only implemented by city network members, but also gain traction among

other international players. A good example of policy frameworks tackling a problem of global concern was put forward by the C40, a city network aimed at combating environmental degradation. Founded in 2005 by the former mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, the network encompasses over 80 cities with more than 600 million people and presents itself as supporting "cities to collaborate effectively, share knowledge and drive meaningful, measurable and sustainable action on climate change." C40 has been a core initiator of several CO2 reduction regulatory frameworks, such as the Global Protocol for Community-Scale Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventories, which, inter alia, resulted in over 10,000 climate actions taken.

3.3 Multi-stakeholder interactions

Thirdly, cities can create hybrid structures across the geography of global governance. As urban leaders are increasingly dependent on public-private partnerships for the realisation and funding of their projects, they tend to reach out to the private sector and other transnational actors more frequently, creating spaces for multi-stakeholder interactions. This room for interaction is augmented even more within city networks, which are often already inherently multidimensional. Urban alliances not only involve municipal authorities, but also partner with national governments, international organisations, academia, and NGOs, thus acting as a bridge between the different governance players. The *Cities Alliance* network, for example, encompasses and offers space for interaction between a coalition of governments, NGOs,

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City diplomacy therefore represents an alternative form of diplomacy, which can revitalize international discussions or a periodically regressive diplomatic scene.

municipalities, and international organizations (the World Bank, EU, Asia Development Bank, and UNEP) with the aim of finding solutions to poverty worldwide. Through these kinds of hybrid environments, cities facilitate governance structures that transcend the boundaries of traditional international policymaking, allowing different actors – whose interaction is usually rather restricted – to work together.

3.4 City diplomacy

Fourth, to establish and cultivate municipal relations as well as city network ties, mayors are increasingly demonstrating diplomatic skills and prerogatives that have for a long time been regarded as beyond their reach. Thanks to the fragmentation of global governance, however, city leaders have gradually been allowed to pursue their own interests. Accordingly, city diplomacy can be defined as the capacity of cities to connect across state boundaries with diverse international actors to represent themselves and their needs. These diplomatic activities can take various forms, such as summit diplomacy efforts or participation in city network working groups. For instance, in the run-up to the international consensus reached at COP21, the local authorities of three different city networks (Energy cities, C40 and ICLEI) sat down at one table to agree on a common strategy to ensure accelerated city actions, as well as a legally binding outcome in Paris. City diplomacy therefore represents an alternative form of diplomacy, which can revitalize international discussions or a periodically regressive diplomatic scene.

4. The City of Geneva

4.1 Geneva's strategic position

Before evaluating Geneva's engagement in city networks and its usage of the mechanisms outlined above, the city's special role in international politics, and for Switzerland, deserves some attention. Thanks to the presence of key international actors located on its territory, the city occupies a unique position to push trans-boundary issues and reforms. Having been a major international hub for diplomatic affairs since the 19th century, Geneva is today home to not only the second largest UN Headquarters, but also 40 international organisations, 250 NGOs, and 175 national representations. With some 40,000 international civil servants working in Geneva and 200,000 delegates and experts visiting for meetings

As the world's largest centre in terms of international actors and numbers of meetings, the so-called Genève Internationale is also a Swiss asset.

and conferences on a regular basis, around 4,400 heads of state/ministers and other government officials stay in the city every year. Beyond that, la *Ville de Genève* serves as the world's humanitarian and human rights capital through the presence of key players in the field, such as the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the ICRC, and Amnesty International. The international actors hosted in the city are also world leaders in peace-building and conflict resolution, labour issues, international trade, disarmament, sustainable development, and global health. Hence, as the world's largest centre in terms of international actors and numbers of meetings, the so-called *Genève Internationale* is also a Swiss asset. Due to its pivotal role, it gives the country greater weight in international politics and when advocating for its interests. Accordingly, the city can rely on the strong support of the Confed-
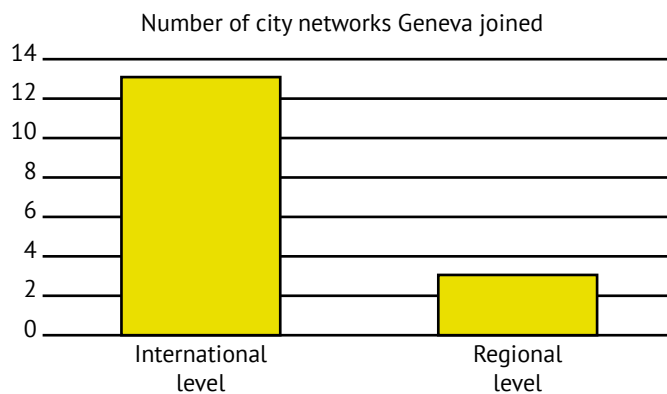
eration, which backs international problem-solving politically and financially in the Lake Geneva region. All this makes Geneva one of the most international urban environments on the planet.

When analysing Geneva as a case study, one must add that the city of Geneva differs from other cities in the way that its governance is intertwined and also partially managed by the canton of Geneva and the Swiss Federal Government. Its urban leaders therefore possess less flexibility when it comes to addressing questions such as health care or security compared to other cities. Nevertheless, the cooperation between cantonal, federal, and municipal authorities must also be viewed as a core enabler for the successful and effective hosting of an international arena.

4.2 Locating Geneva in the city network landscape

To analyse the city leadership displayed by Geneva, a qualitative and quantitative content analysis of the city's engagement in urban networks between 2006 and 2016 was conducted. The online documentation provided by the *service des relations extérieures de Genève*, as well as the urban networks of which Geneva is a member, constitute the basis of the following discussion. Additionally, the analysis was deepened and contextualized through interviews conducted with the local officials tasked with the external relations of the city of Geneva, as well as an expert working on the role urban environments such as Geneva play in international affairs. The subsequent results allow to locate the city of Geneva within the international city network landscape.

Number of city networks Geneva joined

International level	13
Regional level	3

Number of city networks based on topic

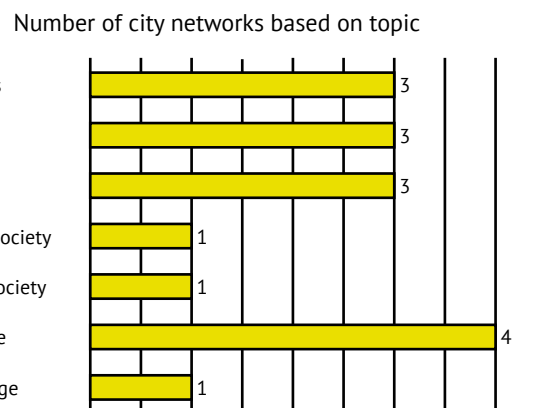| Topic	
Human rights	3
Sustainable development	3
Peace	3
Information society	1
Knowledge society	1
Multi-purpose	4
Climate change	1

Source: author's compilation

To date, the strategic potential Geneva exhibits as an international urban centre translates into a total of 16 transnational city networks. Whereas 13 networks can be classified as having a global outlook, three operate on a more regional level.

Content-wise, several thematic concentrations that help depict the transnational engagement of Geneva can be identified: While three city networks, such as the European Charter for Human Rights in Cities, fall within the realm of human rights advocacy, three others focus on sustainable development topics, e.g., the World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty (WACAP). Furthermore, three urban networks address global concerns related to peace and conflict resolution, an example being the *Association internationale des villes messagères de la paix* (IAMPC), whereas two additional city networks deal with information and knowledge societies, namely, Global Cities Dialogue and UniversCités. Moreover, the city of Geneva contributes to four city networks such as Eurocities and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), which have a rather multi-purpose orientation. Finally, Geneva also supports the work of the widely-recognized World Mayors Council on Climate Change which focuses on environmental issues as the name already suggests. However, priority-wise the conducted interviews revealed that Geneva mainly focuses on its four francophone networks, while being a rather passive member of the other alliances.

Geneva's city leadership also translates into norm diffusion activities, albeit only moderately.

Geneva's policy frameworks

Looking specifically at the mechanisms of influence used by Geneva through its urban networks, the picture becomes more differentiated: Throughout the ten years examined, seven *policy frameworks* have been put forward and supported by the city of Geneva. One of the most far-reaching schemes for action to be mentioned in this context is the Mayors for Peace *Hiroshima-Nagasaki Protocol*. Aiming at the abolishment of nuclear weapons by 2020, the latter was signed in Geneva as a suggested complement to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The protocol has rapidly gained impetus in conjunction with the Mayors for Peace Action Plan and has led to a great number of related activities being carried out, including 91 projects initiated in 2016 alone.

Geneva's norm diffusion activities

Geneva's city leadership also translates into norm diffusion activities, albeit only moderately. In the

period under consideration, five normative standards with global traction were adopted.[1] The analysis shows that although the city adopted international standards, it withheld from endorsing norms that have not yet been embraced by the Swiss Government. One example can be found in the *European Charter for Human Rights in Cities*, which Geneva did approve, but only within the limits of what the central authorities had recognized previously. Likewise, advocating within the UCLG for a 40 per cent greenhouse gas reduction by 2030 does not surpass national commitments either. Hence, Geneva might not appear as a national frontrunner per se. One must, nonetheless, acknowledge that not every national government allows its cities the same legal leeway. While some national governments closely monitor their cities' foreign relations, others give them a greater scope to manoeuvre. A restricted freedom to act was indeed mentioned by the governmental officials of the city of Geneva, although an expansion of the former was not sought either. A greater scope for norm diffusion might therefore be possible, even bearing potential benefits for the central government should Geneva decide to be a driving force for innovative normative action, piloting new standards and leading by example in view of other Swiss cities. For instance, an issue area in which the city's norms might become a benchmark for other urban centres is the district contract (*contrat de quartier*) Geneva has recently introduced in *les Pâquis* as a novel form of conflict prevention.

Geneva does not only benefit from peer-to-peer city cooperation through its urban alliances, but also maintains connections to over 200 third actors.

Geneva's multi-stakeholder interactions

Enabling *multi-stakeholder interaction*, the third mechanism of influence examined, has been taken up relatively frequently by the city of Geneva. 15 out of the 16 city networks Geneva joined work closely with actors of the private sector, international organizations, academia, civil society, and central governments. Accordingly, Geneva does not only benefit from peer-to-peer city cooperation through its urban alliances, but also maintains connections to over 200 third actors. Thanks to these ties and its strategic position at the heart of international decision-making, Geneva can easily create a wide range of multidimensional spaces for interaction between its city networks and other international players. Between 2006 and 2016, the city has facilitated multi-scalar governance structures on at least nine occasions, figuring as a "network for networks". For instance, the 7th European Sustainable Cities and Towns Conference organized by Geneva aimed at "overcoming the gap between environmental, economic, and social objectives"[2] and brought together various national authorities, corporations, and civil society activists to agree on concrete policies targeting the nexus between financial and environmental crises.

Geneva and city diplomacy

Most importantly, in the context of its city networks, la *Genève Internationale* also relied on city diplomacy as a means to impact global governance. As the

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1   See Annex for further details

2   Original quote, "combler le fossé entre objectifs environnementaux, économiques et sociaux."
*The activities forming the baseline of this graph are depicted in more detail in the Annex of this paper. Moreover, the data collected does is not a complete representation of the city leadership exercised by Geneva (as it focuses primarily on the city's engagement through city networks), but it still offers an overview of the priorities and most important activities conducted by the city.

only Swiss city besides Zurich with a foreign affairs department, Geneva has sought to link and represent itself across state boundaries by hosting city network general assemblies and summits, as well as by engaging in city network commissions, working groups, etc. In 2016, the city has, for example, invited and approached a variety of international actors by organizing a UCLG task force meeting on local disaster response, including UN agencies, NGOs, and UCLG colleagues. When looking at the period examined, Geneva has pursued such city diplomacy initiated summits on 15 occasions. It has yet to be mentioned that this number does not entirely capture the city's diplomatic engagement throughout its urban fora as such a qualitative analysis would go beyond the scope of this paper. Be that as it may, the interest and commitment of Geneva in terms of city diplomacy is not to be underestimated and also finds reflection in its involvement in the city diplomacy commission of UCLG, which seeks innovative approaches on how to link global interlocutors.

Overall, Geneva's city leadership through its urban networks can be summarized as illustrated on the right. The graphic clearly depicts Geneva's strong focus on city diplomacy and its moderate use of multi-stakeholder interactions and policy frameworks to influence global governance. Besides, the graph also showcases the city's caution in adopting new international normative standards.

Geneva's use of the four mechanisms of influence through its city networks[3]
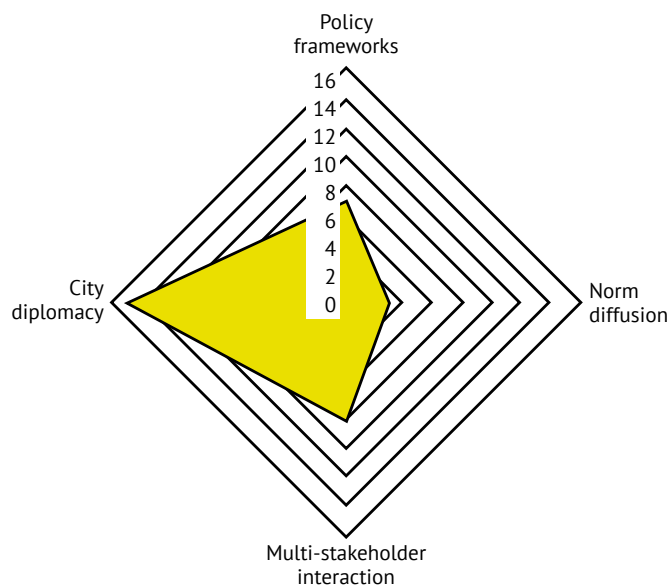
4.3 Filling the gaps of global governance

Having gained an overview of the urban nodes Geneva has contributed to until today, and based on the mechanism of influence utilized by the city, the question "*what kind of city leadership Geneva should exercise in global governance?*" can be answered as follows: While the city currently only participates proactively in four urban networks, its ability to gain attention in the international arena through the discussed mechanisms still has to be considered substantial. Particularly when it comes to city diplomacy and multi-stakeholder interaction, Geneva demonstrates undeniable potential. The greater usage of these mechanisms might be explained by the comparative advantages Geneva enjoys in this respect. With a wide spectrum of international actors on-site, a comprehensive amount of conference infrastructure prevalent, and a full governmental department devoted to its interna-

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3   The four indicators of the graphic are defined as follows: (i) Policy frameworks refer to the number of commitments for collective action developed by Geneva; (ii) Norm diffusion refers to the instances where Geneva has piloted international normative standards; (iii) Multi-stakeholder interaction refers to the number of physical spaces created by Geneva for encounters between different actors of the international arena; (iv) City diplomacy refers to the number of situations in which the city has reached out across state boundaries to represent itself and its interests.

tional relations, the city can engage in both modes of influence way more cost- and time-efficient than other municipalities. Nevertheless, the analysis also points towards the fact that the potential Geneva displays is not fully leveraged yet. Even though the city now and then engages in city leadership, it has never developed a comprehensive city network strategy, let alone aspired to found an urban alliance itself.[4] Some might believe that this is no surprise considering Geneva's relatively small population. However, other small and medium-sized cities, which are way less cosmopolitan than Geneva, have demonstrated that this does not have to be an obstacle. Lyon or Nuremberg, for instance, have each founded three urban alliances in only the past few years.

In fact, small and medium-sized cities are the real urban orphans of the international system today.

This paper accordingly argues that building a city network could considerably enhance Geneva's attractiveness and soft-power, and contribute to solving global challenges. Beyond possessing in-depth knowhow regarding policy frameworks for global action, multi-stakeholder exchanges, and city diplomacy, Geneva exhibits the ideal characteristics to create and lead a city network. Whereas meddling with truly Mega Cities like New York or Rio de Janeiro seems perhaps out of reach, being a leader of small and middle-sized cities through urban alliances is absolutely feasible. In fact, small and medium-sized cities are the real urban orphans

Spearheading a new urban alliance allows the city to ensure that its area of expertise and its comparative advantages, such as location and infrastructure, align perfectly with the network's objective and format.

of the international system today. While their governments also have to tackle trans-boundary challenges on a daily basis, they often miss a direct channel – and the political and economic leverage – to catch the attention of global players. Geneva is in a perfect position to aggregate and provide a platform to these needs. By creating a city network addressing a transnational challenge, Geneva could not only contribute to global governance and accumulate the political and economic weight of small and middle-sized cities for an unmistakable voice in the international arena, but also, thanks to its location at the core of international decision-making, ensure that this voice is heard. Additionally, such international engagement of the city of Geneva would also benefit Switzerland as a whole. On the one hand, the *Arc Lémanique* would be strengthened as a centre of international affairs with more (urban) actors being interested in sustaining the region's success. On the other hand, the city network created could be used as a forum to supplement the country's foreign policy at a different level.

One might finally also ask the question what advantages Geneva would gain by championing its own city network over just increasing participation within existing ones. The answer is threefold: first of all, spearheading a new urban alliance allows the city to ensure that its area of expertise and its comparative advantages, such as location and infrastructure, align perfectly with the network's objective and format. Geneva could make sure that the global governance challenges addressed within the

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4   Although being a founding member of IAPMC, the latter was created and set up by the UN General Assembly; UniversCité (although set up by Geneva in 2015) only indirectly addresses problems of global concern.

network match the relevant stakeholders located in its geographical area, as well as Switzerland's foreign policy imperatives. Second, the city could guarantee that the network's logistics, such as the secretariat and headquarters respectively, are set up within International Geneva so that its unique position can adequately leveraged. Third, heading an urban network finally also brings about the highest benefits in terms of reputation and international recognition. Although many municipal governments join city networks, the latter's achievements and activities are most commonly linked and mentioned in the same sentence as the network's initiator.

Although many municipal governments join city networks, the latter's achievements and activities are most commonly linked and mentioned in the same sentence as the network's initiator.

5. Policy recommendations and conclusion

5.1 Geneva's city leadership

Rather than reproducing the institutional structure of inter-state relations, cities and their leadership have successfully designed novel governance models that have evolved to become viable complements of the state-centric approach to international politics. At the heart of global policy-making, however, Geneva still has some potential to further strengthen its leadership role. Whereas the analysis has shown that the city has been quite successful in translating its exclusive role as the host of major international fora into city diplomacy, governance facilitation, and to some extent policy frameworks initiation, it has not yet made the step to create an urban alliance itself – even though many international challenges such as, for example, conflict prevention or the fight against epidemics could certainly benefit from the collaborative action city networks engender. Of course, it can be argued that if all cities started a network to gain international influence, this could lead to substantial inefficiencies. But not all cities possess the capacity to make their urban alliances truly gain traction. City networks must not only address a common challenge; they also have to convince other cities to rally behind them, and Geneva is in the unique position to make both happen. Besides being a major hub for the management of global concerns, the city already holds valuable soft power, which can motivate other (medium and small-sized) municipalities to unite forces. In other words, Geneva possesses all the necessary ingredients to make a city network not only valuable for other cities to join, but truly impactful in its mandate.

5.2 Policy recommendations for the city of Geneva

Consequently, to reinforce the ongoing Swiss commitment of global problem solving in *la Genève Internationale* and to invest in Geneva's urban relevance in the future, the city must make use of its city network potential more proactively. This paper therefore suggests that the city of Geneva (with the help of the *Canton de Genève* and the Swiss Federal Government) should:

Policy recommendations for the city of Geneva

1.   Leverage its unique position at the centre of international decision-making to found a city network which addresses global governance challenges.

In this regard it seems advisable for Geneva to focus on the creation of an urban alliance, which (1) addresses problems of global concern that are not yet dealt with by other city networks, (2) to concentrate on a domain of world politics whose relevant international players are in Geneva, and (3) to particularly target medium-sized cities striving for access to the international arena.

For instance, a possible thematic area for a city network could be the issue of conflict prevention. In many parts of the world, the dynamics of violence and conflict are changing, with cities becoming major flashpoints for friction. Preventive efforts at an urban level are thus urgently needed. Yet, conflict prevention is still deeply rooted in the classical state-centric paradigm and most of today's go-to instruments reflect this preference for high-level interactions. A city alliance spearheaded by Geneva and attaching an urban prism to prevention could effectively complement current efforts and significantly contribute to a more holistic approach to conflict prevention by giving a voice to local actors. Given the exceptional cluster of peacebuilding and preventive diplomacy actors hosted in International Geneva, with over 25 organizations and associations alone working towards this end, such a city network would

quickly gain momentum among urban peers and beyond. Moreover, to ensure that the network develops as much traction as possible, Geneva should prioritize the mechanisms of influence which present a comparative advantage. This means that Geneva should first and foremost focus on:

2.   Facilitating multi-dimensional spaces for dialogue among the different actors of its city network and those present in International Geneva through city diplomacy activities.

Expanding the example introduced above, one might think of events, such as General Assemblies, that bring together urban leaders of the city network as well as other relevant stakeholders working on conflict prevention with the goal to foster innovative action.

Finally, to secure support and ensure added value for Switzerland in general, Geneva should also:

3.   Represent Switzerland's foreign policy objectives within its city network.

For example, Geneva could advocate for the Swiss Development and Co-operation Agency's approach to water management as a tool for conflict prevention within its city network.[5]

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5   The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2017. https://www.ui.se/english/research/global-politics-and-security/vulnerable-cities.-conflict-prevention-in-urban-planning-urban-generation-and-urban-governance/.

5.3 Final comment

This paper has sought to provide an answer to the question: What kind of city leadership does Geneva exercise on global governance? It has been argued that while the city of Geneva already takes on a leadership role in some areas, it still has untapped potential, especially when it comes to championing and leading city networks. If Geneva wants to remain competitive and at the centre of world politics in the future, the city has to step up its game and proactively seek linkages and exchanges with other urban leaders, particularly by making use of its cosmopolitan nature and the global governance clusters located around Lake Geneva. By implementing the above-mentioned propositions and sponsoring an urban alliance, Geneva cannot only effectively leverage its political agency to overcome gridlocks at the international level and fill the global governance vacuum, but also establish itself as an "obligatory passage point" for international decision-making.

Annex

Geneva's city networks based on level

Networks at the international level	Networks at the regional level
Association internationale des maires francophones – AIMF	Charte européenne des droits de l'homme dans la ville
Association internationale des villes messagères de la paix – IAPMC	Eurocités
Rainbow Cities Network	Conseil des communes et régions d'Europe
United Cities and Local Governments – UCLG	
UnivérCities	
Mayors for Peace	
The League of historical cities	
World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty WACAP	
World Mayors Council on climate change	
Association internationale du développement urbain INTA	
Lighting urban community international association LUCI	
Association internationale des villes éducatives AIVE	
United Cities and Local Governments – UCLG	

Geneva's city networks based on topic addressed

City network	Topic
Association internationale des maires francophones – AIMF	Various
Association internationale des villes messagères de la paix – IAPMC	Peace building
Rainbow Cities Network	Human rights
United Cities and Local Governments – UCLG	Various
UnivérCities	Information society
Mayors for Peace	Knowledge society
The League of historical cities	Peace building
World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty WACAP	Peace building
World Mayors Council on climate change	Sustainable Development
Association internationale du développement urbain INTA	Environment
Lighting urban community international association LUCI	Sustainable Development
Association internationale des villes éducatives AIVE	Sustainable Development
United Cities and Local Governments – UCLG	Human rights
Charte européenne des droits de l'homme dans la ville	Human rights
Eurocités	Various
Conseil des communes et régions d'Europe	Various

Geneva's city leadership based on mechanism of influence

Mechanism of influence	
Policy frameworks	
Hiroshima-Nagasaki Protocol	Mayors of Peace
Déclaration des Maires sur l'élimination des armes nucléaires	Mayors for Peace
Joint Initiative on Climate Change	UCLG
Resolution of Peace	IAPMC
Déclaration du Congrès de Barcelone	AIVE
Charte européenne	Charte européenne des droits de l'homme dans la ville
Agenda 21	UCLG/AIMF
Norm diffusion	
Human rights in cities	Charte européenne des droits de l'homme dans la ville
40% greenhouse gas reduction by 2030	UCLG
Déclaration du Congrès de Barcelone	AIVE
Sustainable development goals	UCLG/AIMF
LGBTI rights	Rainbow Cities Network

Multi-stakeholder interactions	
7th European Conference on Sustainable Cities	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (Geneva recently withdrew from this network)
Séminaire de haut niveau	AIMF
Event during the 33rd session of the UN Human Rights Council	UCLG
2016 Task force meeting on local and regional governmental disaster response	UCLG
International Film Festival and Forum and Human and LGBTQI Rights	Rainbow Cities Network
2006 World Forum on Cities and Quality of Life	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (Geneva recently withdrew from this network)
Second Session Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference	Mayors for Peace
2000 2nd Forum	WACAP
2006 forum changement climatique énergie et mobilité	Conseil des communes et régions d'Europe
City diplomacy	
2006 forum changement climatique énergie et mobilité	Conseil des communes et régions d'Europe
2008 General Assembly Conseil des communes et régions d'Europe	Conseil des communes et régions d'Europe
2008 Gathering	Charte européenne des droits de l'homme dans la ville
2000 2nd Forum	WACAP
Second Session Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference	Mayors for Peace
2008 Gathering	Mayors for Peace
2016 Task force meeting on local and regional governmental disaster response	UCLG
Event during the 33nd session of the UN Human Rights Council	UCLG

2015 Annual meeting	Rainbow Cities Network
2013 Conférence européenne des villes durable	AIMF
2015 Rencontre des villes innovantes	AIMF
60th anniversary celebration European UCLG section	UCLG
7th European Conference on Sustainable Cities	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (Geneva recently withdrew from this network)
2006 World Forum on Cities and Quality of Life	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (Geneva recently withdrew from this network)
Séminaire de haut niveau	AIMF

References

Links to online documentation

Documentation	Online link
Ville de Genève : Les réseaux internationaux de villes	http://www.ville-geneve.ch/themes/geneve-internationale/partenariats-entre- villes/reseaux-internationaux-villes/
Association internationale des maires francophones – AIMF	https://www.aimf.asso.fr/
Association internationale des villes messagères de la paix – IAPMC	http://www.iapmc.org/
Rainbow Cities Network	https://www.rainbowcities.com/
Rainbow Cities Network	https://www.uclg.org/
Global Cities Dialogue	http://globalcitiesdialogue.com/
Mayors for Peace	http://www.mayorsforpeace.org/english/
The League of historical cities	http://www2.city.kyoto.lg.jp/somu/kokusai/lhcs/
World Alliance of Cities Against Poverty WACAP	http://www.europe.undp.org/content/geneva/en/home/ partnerships_initiatives/the-world-alliance-of-cities- against-poverty-wacap--.html
World Mayors Council on climate change	http://www.worldmayorscouncil.org/

Association internationale du développement urbain INTA	https://inta-aivn.org/fr/
Lighting urban community international association LUCI	http://www.luciassociation.org/
Association internationale des villes éducatives AIVE	http://www.edcities.org/fr/
Charte européenne des droits de l'homme dans la ville	https://www.uclg-cisdp.org/fr/le-droit-a-la-ville/charte-europeenne
Eurocités	http://www.eurocities.eu/
Conseil des communes et régions d'Europe	http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/enrd-static/networks-and-networking/eu-organisations/eu- organisations/fr/council-of-european-municipalities-and-regions_ fr.html

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