



Global Parliament of Mayors Annual Summit 2023

“Empowering, Engaging, and Caring Cities: Delivering Democracy and Development with the Next Generations”

Position Paper Empowering Cities

Two basic facts lay at the basis of the initiative of a Global Parliament of Mayors platform: The globalization process delivered an integrated interdependent world system and the majority of humanity lives now in urban conditions. The functioning of political systems - not so much in the sense of their own stability, but in the sense of their ability to solve problems - has an unprecedented global relevance in an era of these extensive interdependencies that shape both near-term and long-term challenges and opportunities.

As the climate crisis worsens and awareness of the finite nature of many resources increases, the inability of the nation-state, and its international system, to alone deliver and implement solutions is evident by the day. Indeed, the trajectory of nation-states and their geopolitical competitions is increasingly limiting the ability of international institutions to act.

Problem-solving requires innovation and effective action on the ground, something that can only be achieved by harnessing and strengthening the municipal and metropolitan level and cities in particular. Accordingly, international and supra-national institutions are increasing their cooperation with cities. As commendable as this is, it does not lead to a genuine necessary strengthening, both in capacity and voice, of the municipal level. The structural prerequisites for such strengthening are rarely specified, and they are not usually the subject of agreements and programs. In the meantime the urban remains at a position of being informed, listened to and allowed to observe, while power and diplomacy remains in the hands of global institutions of nation states.

In our view, such strengthening of the power of cities and the local level is crucial for humanity to be able to effectively confront fundamental crises.

Cities and their regions are key actors in mitigating the enormous risks to human development for the simple reason that societal problems at that local level are structured in a complex, but more realistic way as opposed to thematic silos in national governance. But they cannot do so alone. The prerequisite is that they are supported by national and international levels.

Mayors have the crucial, frequently democratic, mandate to drive the necessary transformative change at the city and regional level. They are compelled to address challenges in a holistic, at least cross-sectoral, manner. What's more, they represent the political level that can forge collaborations with the citizenry, organizations, business and industry, academia, and culture like no other to drive local action with long-term impact. They can be instrumental in building regional transformation alliances that accelerate socio-ecological change by creating positive social tipping points. The international framework of agreements and community commitments can be an important reference point to strengthen the legitimacy of these efforts and build consensus.

“Empower cities” to address global challenges locally has three dimensions:



1. building true multi-level governance.

Multi-level governance is now widely recognized as a prerequisite for more effective policy. However, real progress has been rare. True multilevel governance requires systematic and institutional involvement of the local level in decision-making and policy-making. In terms of a learning system, this must above all mean that decisions can be readjusted on the basis of local experience. The result and prerequisite at the same time is a higher degree of agility.

If awareness of the necessities, but also the requirements, of true multilevel governance is to grow, the topic must be placed more firmly on the international agenda, especially in the given formats of the nation states. COPs, G20, UN Habitat.

The Global Parliament of Mayors will continue to build a much firmer stance around, and support for, democratic governments: Multilevel governance is a major challenge for authoritarian systems, because different perspectives, open communication about results and evaluations, are prerequisites for such governance. On the other hand, they are also coming under increasing pressure to achieve results that cannot be achieved structurally in a purely top-down approach.

2. expanding of competencies, capacities and resources.

The prerequisite for an effective municipal policy is the competence and ability to decide and regulate everything that can be regulated locally. The right to plan, the responsibility for building permits, the internal organization, the sole access to own personnel and the right to enter into cooperations are basic requirements.

Responsibilities and rights alone, however, are empty shells if there are not sufficient financial and organizational resources to fill them. In addition to guaranteed, statutory financial allocations from the national level, municipalities must also have their own revenues that they can shape.

For a more successful policy, it will also be crucial to rapidly develop the collaborations between the core city and its hinterland into a systemic, transformative eco-system. There is a need for metropolitan governance.

Organizing the necessary fundamental changes requires skills from cities that are not sufficiently developed almost anywhere. As new value chains, new collaborations within civil society, changes in public space and its use, new community service activities, awareness raising and behavioral change are at stake, local governments have a broad new role to play as catalysts, facilitators and drivers. In addition, not only must the necessary investments be described, they must be translated into portfolios that can also be invested by private capital. For this, there is usually a lack of methodological knowledge, expertise and capacity. This gap is proving to be a key obstacle to decisively accelerating and broadening the transformation. National and international programs have so far been blind to this challenge, and the international processes on climate protection and biodiversity must act quickly and decisively here.

3. Preserving and maintaining urbanity

Urbanity is an attitude and civilizational achievement. It enables people to live together in diversity. It is not exclusive. Mayors represent all the people of their city, regardless of their



origin. It is growing nationalism, division and exclusion, based on ethnocentric or nationalist premises, that threaten the very essence and identity of our cities. The innovative strength and adaptability of cities are based on diversity and the interaction of the different. Cities preserve their heritage and their future when they nurture their capacity for communality in diversity. That is why our plea for empowering cities in the global system is accompanied by a clear stand in favor of democratic cities, caring cities and culturally innovative cities.

The mayors of the GPM, coming from different continents and working in extremely different conditions, jointly call upon states and international institutions to understand and include as essential elements in all their efforts and programs, including bilateral projects and agreements, the inclusion and strengthening of cities in the three dimensions addressed above.

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