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STRENGTHENING TRANSATLANTIC COOPERATION

Urban and Regional Policy

2017 | No.02

CITY NETWORKS

Evaluating the Next Frontier of International Relations

AARON FISHBONE



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SUMMARY:

International relations, almost by definition, is not commonly associated with cities and towns. However, municipalities the world over — especially but not exclusively, bigger cities — regularly engage in their own international relations. Among other reasons, these municipal international relations have grown more important in terms of partnerships between cities, for cities promoting their unique identity abroad, and when looking to attract talent, investment, and jobs. This paper investigates offices of municipal international relations, primarily in Germany. The paper looks at what they do and how they are structured and compares them to some models in the United States. The goal is to provide a more clear understanding of the actual work being done to create and sustain a municipalities' international relations, and provide communities that are looking to establish such an office, or revitalize their existing approach, some comparative analysis.

Introduction

Walk into City Hall in Stuttgart, Germany or San Jose, California and you will see the shields and insignias of foreign cities on the wall. Seattle, Washington has parks named for Be'er Sheva, Israel and Tashkent, Uzbekistan. What is this all about?

Cities were the original mass human settlement and, despite the 20th century being “the age of the nation-state,” cities have reemerged as a central and vital actor in global affairs. Even as supranational organizations, from the United Nations to the European Union, multiplied and grew in strength, there was a concurrent decentralization and devolution of authority onto more

local jurisdictions. Urbanization has put increasing pressure on municipal authorities to cope with the strains they face from growing populations. The 2008 global financial crisis and subsequent weakening of municipal tax bases and revenue streams pressured cities to “go it alone” to carve out their niche in the global economy and to compete against each other to attract businesses, investment, and talent. Lack of adequate national action on issues such as migration, economic development, and climate change has forced cities to innovate, galvanizing renewed interest in municipal technical exchange and the sharing of promising practices.

One might not expect cities to have staff or an office dedicated to international affairs, but municipal offices of international affairs (OIAs) and their staff are often the people at the forefront of making important global connections and building the day-to-day capacity to support them. The municipal international affairs portfolio includes everything from forging and maintaining relationships with other cities to welcoming incoming delegations, organizing international trips, preparing their elected leadership for international meetings, to maintaining their city’s involvement in international networks.

Very little has been written about this group of people or this body of work, especially from the practical or practitioner perspective. This research draws from my experience as an international specialist for the City of Seattle, Washington, USA and then later as a Robert Bosch Fellow in the Mayor’s Office of International Affairs of the City of Düsseldorf, Germany. During my fellowship, I carried out a research project to gain a deeper, comparative understanding of the work of municipal international affairs professionals. I interviewed colleagues from the OIAs of the German cities of Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Cologne, and

Birmingham in the United Kingdom. This research develops a set of recommendations and promising practices that any city looking to start or reevaluate its own OIA could draw upon. The analysis and recommendations in this paper come from

local interviews, my own work experiences, and a review of the relevant literature.

First, I will look at the history and evolution of municipal international affairs and how the offices have come to have the responsibilities that they do. Second, I will compare and contrast U.S. and German approaches to municipal international affairs. Then I will look at a few cases in greater depth and specificity to highlight some best practices. An initial analysis of the cities reveals that for the OIAs to be successful, the location, priorities, and a public orientation are key. Examples from the offices outlined below offer some guidance to a city that is developing an OIA or looking to reevaluate what their current one does.

As cities re-emerge as international actors with growing influence, capacity, and need to act, it is important to look at the people and offices which actually do the work day-to-day, how it is done, and what it means for a city to have effective international engagement.

“ ***It is important to look at the people and offices which actually do the work day-to-day, how it is done, and what it means for a city to have effective international engagement.*** ”

The Evolution of the European Office of International Affairs

Despite the once great role of cities such as Venice and Rome, modern European municipal international relations can be traced back to the post World War I era, however it did not begin in earnest until after World War II. Due to the devastation wreaked by these wars, the idea of city ‘twinning’ was conceived to create new, constructive connections between communities from formerly combatant countries to provide support and technical assistance to each other as they rebuilt. The first modern twinning relationship was formed in 1920 between Keighley, England and Poix du Nord in France. After World War II, tens of such relationships were formed between cities in England, Germany, and France. Observing this movement taking place in Europe, President Dwight Eisenhower launched the counterpart ‘sister city’ movement in the United States in 1956 at the White House Conference on Citizen Diplomacy. Like in Europe, the early American sister cities were also with former combatants, most commonly Japanese cities. Thus was launched the ‘first generation’ of city partnerships and the new era of municipal foreign affairs.

The ‘second generation’ was the era of decolonization and the early steps toward an ever closer European Union. European cities began developing partnerships with cities in their former colonies and more extensively with other cities throughout Europe as a way of localizing the move towards European integration. The ‘third generation’ of

city partnerships took place after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, between cities in Western European countries (and Western Germany) and Eastern Europe (and East Germany and East Berlin). This was a way of speeding the integration of the former Communist communities into the West, and another example of European communities working towards larger, geopolitical, and developmental goals from the local level. This practice continues to this day, most commonly in the form of municipal climate partnerships.

For Euro-American cities, the current ‘fourth generation’ of city partnerships most often involves ties with cities in ‘emerging’ market countries like India, Brazil, and China, and have a decidedly economic rationale.

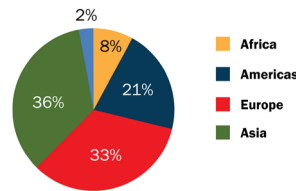
What Municipal International Affairs Offices Do:

Especially in Europe, as the number and density of these partnerships grew, and as local and regional communities played a growing role vis-à-vis the European Union, the professionalism of the staff responsible for them grew too. Until around the 1990s, partner cities were still understood largely in cultural exchange terms and responsibility was held by one or two people in an office of protocol or cultural affairs. As European Affairs emerged as a distinct body of work, it too required specialized staffing, often within the cultural affairs or economic development departments. During the mid 1990s, many European communities also played an increasingly active role in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the Fair Trade movements. Seeing all of this international activity, many mayors of larger European cities consolidated and centralized these portfolios. Thus, the new, modern, municipal Office for International Affairs (OIA) was born in Europe, combining international affairs, European affairs, and international development, and relocated (organizationally, if not physically) into the mayor’s office, where many are today.

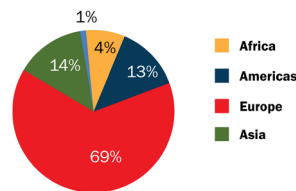
Notwithstanding the focus on city partnerships in the chronology above, modern municipal international relations involve much more. In Europe, the portfolio of an OIA often encompasses most of the following:

- Planning, preparing for, and staffing meetings, travel and inbound and outbound delegations for the elected leadership, especially the mayor;
- Representing their city when the elected leadership (i.e. the mayor) is not available;

U.S. Sister Cities by Continent*



German Partner Cities by Continent*



*USA - 522 participating American cities with 2,012 connections in 143 countries **Germany - 1485 connections

Sources: Sister Cities International and Rat der Gemeinde Regionen Europa Database

- Ties and activities with partner or sister cities around the world and participation in international networks of all kinds;
- Relations and communications with the local Consular or Honorary Consular Corps;
- Sponsoring and/or organizing cultural or national heritage events such as China Day or Europe Day;
- Liaising with local groups involved in international affairs and culture;
- European Union Affairs and fundraising, lobbying, compliance with grants and public education;
- City marketing or branding initiatives;
- Organizing, overseeing, monitoring the progress of and reporting on development cooperation projects; and
- Monitoring and ensuring compliance with Fair Trade City certification

year is a notable event, often leading to discussion in the media and community about the use of time and resources. However, this perception is slowly changing as global forces push mayors to travel abroad to represent the interests of their city and participate in global coalitions. In addition, and particularly in the United States, the scale of a city's global engagement depends on that city's population and overall economic scale.

Finally, and again related to the different role of government in European life compared to that of the United States, municipal international affairs is far more top down and government-led in Europe than in the United States, where

	Population	Partner Cities	Staff in OIA	OIA Budget/Year*
Berlin	3,421,829	17	12 FTEs	~1 million euros
Birmingham	1,000,000	10	14.5 FTEs	800,000 pounds
Diüsseldorf	597,102	6	6 FTEs	250,000 euros
Frankfurt	700,000	16	8 FTEs	280,000 euro
Hamburg	1,746,342	9	9 FTEs	~1 million euros
Köln	1,044,555	24	9 FTEs	120,000 euros (additional 60in 2015)
Stuttgart	593,618	10	6 FTEs	180,000 euros

*This is based on data received from each city during my research in 2014-2015.

Transatlantic Differences in Municipal International Affairs

American OIA staff has an overlapping but more limited portfolio than their European counterparts, reflecting cultural and geographic differences toward municipal international affairs. European cities, despite being in different countries, are still much closer to each other than most American cities are to each other or Mexico or Canada. This proximity, plus the long history of powerful city-states, has resulted in a much greater acceptance of an international role for mayors and communities than in the United States.

Further, because of the much larger role of government in European society overall, Europeans expect and fund their governments to do a lot more than their American counterparts, and greater funding provides for more staff and more governmental attention to this work than in the United States. European mayors also tend to engage in more international travel than their American counterparts. Of the Europeans interviewed, all said that their Mayor travels abroad three to five times a year for various expositions, partner city visits, and more. In the United States, for a mayor to travel abroad even once a

sister city associations play a much larger and more active role in maintaining each partner city relationship. In Europe, full-time staff in each city complete a considerable amount of the day-to-day work, whereas in the United States the staff plays more of a coordinating and advisory role to nongovernmental organizations such as universities and a community's civil society, which tend to pursue independent international activities that are often uncoordinated and unleveraged by government.

Case Studies

Each office and city partnership has its own characteristics, priorities, and dynamics. These case studies help provide deeper insights into three of them.

Birmingham: International Engagement through Civic Engagement

The City of Birmingham has a robust and thriving international program with a particular focus on European Union level affairs. The OIA is housed within the Corporate Strategy Team of the directorate of economy (one of three Directorates, or divisions, of the city). The director of economy reports to the city's chief executive, who reports to the city council. Birmingham was one of the founding members of Eurocities, the European membership association for cities, and it has deepened its engagement in European affairs through a permanent representative office in Brussels, in addition to its team in Birmingham. Between the two offices, 10 of its 14 staff are dedicated to European issues and fundraising from the European Union. The city wisely invested a year in developing a comprehensive action plan for its international affairs office called *Distinctly Birmingham: A European and International Strategy for Birmingham 2013-2016*. The plan was created through a lengthy stakeholder outreach and involvement process which helped the city clarify its thinking and set priorities.

One outcome of that process was the creation of “area associations” as a way to engage and harness some of the existing interest in the community. Birmingham created four working groups focused on geographic regions of the world:

- North and South America
- China and the Far East
- Commonwealth and Countries of Origin
- Europe

Each of these groups were created by a call put out by the OIA looking for interested parties. The office invited key people in the community — not politicians — whom they knew to be active in the relevant areas and who represented institutions with resources to serve on the associations. OIA staff then served as facilitators or project managers for these groups, which developed their own action plans targeted to the regions of the world they

were working on, and in a way that was in concert with the city. This was a powerful way to channel interest and energy in the community to increase the city's global connections.

“ ***Düsseldorf used the imminent signing of the MOU as a way to orient more of its city staff toward the work that was already going on between the cities.*** ”

As of this research, the European Association was focused on winning EU funding and had recently published *The Benefits of Working with Europe for Birmingham*. The North and South America association was working on a number of information, knowledge transfer, culture, and business exchanges relations with its sister city Chicago. The

China and the Far East Association was focused on the Chief Executive's visit to Beijing, Guangzhou, and Chongqing, and on the areas of inward investment, sister city relationships, and securing direct flights to and from Birmingham and Chinese airports, which it succeeded in doing. The Commonwealth Association was focused on improving relations between Birmingham and Jamaica. March 2015 was the one year mark for the existence of these associations and the presidents of the associations and the City held a joint meeting to assess their progress and next steps. They deemed their work thus far a success and pledged to continue.

Düsseldorf: Forming a New Relationship

On March 10, 2016, the mayor's of Düsseldorf, Germany and Palermo, Italy signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) establishing a formal partner city relationship between their cities. This was a meaningful act for Düsseldorf's relatively new mayor, Thomas Geisel, for whom this was a priority. It is also significant because budget conscious cities with increasing avenues for international involvement seem to be eschewing full partnerships in favor of contingent, project-based relationships. Why is Düsseldorf pursuing this strategy?

A number of considerations and factors led to the establishment of partnership ties between Düsseldorf and Palermo. First, Mayor Geisel had a stated desire to internationalize his city, and to do so in a way that the regular community members would recognize and feel. Being “partner cities” is an easily understandable concept and a public statement of internationalism that is unparalleled at the municipal level for medium-sized cities. (In fact, Mayor Geisel has an unofficial goal of adding one

new partner city every two years of his first term). Having a signed partnership between cities is also a statement from the elected leadership that their cities share a mutual commitment to work together on projects and toward shared goals. It is a way to ensure that there is budget and staffing to support that international work and that the OIA staff is in touch with and accessible to one another in a way that is not necessarily the case with other types of relationships. Dating and marriage analogies spring up in the literature on city partnerships, and in this case, before they became partners, Düsseldorf and Palermo were casually dating with occasional encounters with lots of ideas for what to do together but with little follow through. They now have a formal commitment and a formal channel to follow up on their project ideas.

Existing ties between universities and arts organizations in Düsseldorf

and Palermo was the foundation on which the rest of the relationship was built, and the official imprimatur of being partner cities is a way to build off of that to achieve even more. Düsseldorf used the imminent signing of the MOU as a way to orient more of its city staff toward the work that was already going on between the cities. The contents of the MOU show a number of areas where the cities have agreed to work together, most notably on gender pay parity and refugee issues, thereby involving the city staff who works on those issues and not just the OIA staff and elected officials. The goals of sharing of knowledge and promising practices, exchanges, and providing support to each other wherever possible would not have happened without the MOU.

Finally, as is so often the case, it was the good personal and working relationship between Mayor Geisel and Mayor Orlando that led to them to want to deepen their work together. The Sicilian diaspora in Düsseldorf, which Mayor Geisel had gotten to know while campaigning, also supported the partnership and ultimately provided valuable local political support.

Notably, the end of the MOU states that the document is time bound and will only be in effect for ten years. This is a blending of the long term, open-ended city partnership and more time bound types of relationships,

and it remains to be seen how it will play out, especially when getting close to the end. Further, in a globalized world, Düsseldorf's partnership with Palermo shows the effectiveness of building specific, time-bound relationships with other cities.

Hamburg: Ambassadors for a Global City

Hamburg is a thriving city-state in northern Germany, and the second largest city in Germany by population. Being a city-state means that it has the powers and status of being both a German city and one of its 16 provinces (or states), and the lord mayor serves as both the mayor of the city and the governor of the state at the same time. The OIA is located within the Senate Chancery, part of a suite of externally facing offices which also includes Protocol and EU Affairs. The head of the department is a political

appointee of the lord mayor and reports directly to him and his chief of staff. As a member of the Hanseatic League, a northern trade conglomerate which dates back centuries, it has hundreds of years of expertise when it comes to operating internationally. Being such a large metropolis with partner cities all over the world, yet with only nine full time employees in the OIA, it also innovates to extend its reach.

Being an active player in its own North/Baltic Sea region is extremely important for Hamburg (two full-time employees are dedicated to this task), and so the question is how to also give other regions their due. One program of particular note is the Hamburg City Ambassadors, a group of citizens deputized by the city to help it expand its reach. The program is comprised of 35 notable executives and senior level figures that have or had some significant ties to Hamburg and are now living or stationed elsewhere. They are empowered to unofficially represent Hamburg and to organize their own trade delegations and missions to visit the city (in coordination with the city). Once there, the delegations are treated as official delegations, meeting with senior level local figures, visiting sites of interest, and learning about investment opportunities. Once a year, the Hamburg ambassadors are invited to a meeting of all the ambassadors back in Hamburg (at their own expense) to meet with each other and senior level local officials, to

“ ***Being an active player in its own North/Baltic Sea region is extremely important for Hamburg, and so the question is how to also give other regions their due.*** ”

enjoy a reception with the lord mayor, and to receive updates on the latest Hamburg news and priorities. A staff person from the Hamburg Business Development Consortium serves as the project manager and primary point of contact for the ambassadors.

Certainly, there are some risks in this sort of ‘outsourcing’ of international relations outside of city government. However, selection of well-vetted people as the ambassadors minimizes those risks, and the city is able to magnify its presence and brand abroad at minimal expense to itself. In addition, having well-known business and civic leaders vouch directly for a city can sometimes be more persuasive in encouraging other partners to get on board.

Policy Recommendations and Promising Practices

The following section describes some of the most important lessons learned from this research and provides some recommendations that could assist other cities looking to start or strengthen their own OIA.

Location of the OIA

Structures of OIAs vary and reflect the strategic priorities of their city, its budgetary situation, its geographic location, the political importance it puts on international affairs, and the roles of other departments. Additionally, where the OIA is located within the government is of great significance. Being located in the mayor’s office or executive suite of offices provides some critical benefits:

- *Helps OIS raise their profile and ability to act.* By being one of the few offices to be housed directly within the mayor’s office, other departments were aware of OIA and the importance the mayor attached to it. The OIA was then accorded more authority when proposing ideas, reaching out to departments, and giving input.
- *Allows the OIA to look across the city.* International affairs is a crosscutting issue, meaning that many different departments are doing it within their respective fields (meeting with or assisting colleagues from abroad, attending conferences, participating in international projects or collaborations, wooing businesses, etc.). The vantage point and authority of being housed in

the mayor’s office allows international affairs offices the perspective to know what is going on in other departments and how to get involved.

- *Enables OIA staff to effectively represent the mayor.* Business cards and titles matter in the world of international protocol and diplomacy and proximity to the mayor’s office is an asset when representing the city abroad.

Priorities and Strategy of the OIA

Just reporting to the mayor’s office is not enough — it is also critical for an OIA to know what it does and what it does not do. Not all OIAs prioritize the same activities. An office that understands what its priorities are and then orients its staff and resources accordingly is in a far stronger position to be effective at doing those things. Doing everything that has to do with “international affairs” can spread staff too thin, thus preventing them from being proactive or undertaking the follow-up work after meetings or trips which actually yield tangible results.

One way to determine or update those priorities is to organize a strategic planning process, much like Birmingham did. This brings many benefits. It can:

- *Identify goals and priorities that the entire city government can work toward and shows where the OIA can add value.* After that, staff from the OIA can explain how what they are doing rolls up to one of the mutually agreed upon goals.
- *Create connections between midlevel staff in various departments which facilitates ongoing information sharing.* An OIA is well positioned to help other departments if it knows what they are doing. Other departments can draw upon the OIA if they understand what OIA staff do and the value they can bring.
- *Inventory the international activities, network memberships, and projects that other departments are working on.* Through this process the OIA develops a central awareness of the international involvement of the city and how it can best assist and create a baseline of data.
- *Proactively identify the clusters, assets, and gaps within the city.* The detailed information held by planning and economic development departments can be put to good use by the OIA to strategically pick and choose to whom to market the city, what expositions and trade shows to attend, and where to look for interested investors.

- *Create new and deeper connections with key outside groups.* Much like the Birmingham process did, this could be the catalyst for (re)newed engagement with external stakeholders, to assess their interests and engage them in helping achieve the decided goals. By bringing nongovernmental actors in, their activities could be leveraged for city goals.

The OIA Within the Government

As the case studies showed, the work and priorities of OIAs vary. Given its unique portfolio, the OIA has simultaneous internal and external responsibilities. Cities should recognize and use this fact to gain the most value from its OIA staff.

Internally, in addition to their core duties mentioned in the bulleted list above, an OIA can:

- *Function like a strategic planning and education unit within the city government.* While the most important role of the OIA is to prepare their city's elected leadership for meetings with international delegations they can serve as in-house international analysts or consultants to the rest of the city too. They can offer logistical and protocol support to technical departments hosting international visitors (especially in cities where there is no protocol department), provide briefings to help contextualize events in international terms and to avoid cultural gaffes. They can also offer informed input with regards to the city's international positioning and city branding and educate their colleagues about the opportunities that exist and partnerships or exchanges that could take place. Overall, they can strengthen the capacity of their colleagues to see value in and make the most of international opportunities.
- *Coordinate roundtables or advisory group internal to city government.* A regular (i.e. quarterly) meeting of staff from across the city government who are involved in or aware of the international connections and affairs of their department(s) can be invaluable in helping spread awareness and information across the government, keeping departments aware of each other's international

ties and activities, and building relationships between staff working or interested in these areas. Such a group can also help break down silos between departments, fostering more useful intergovernmental relations and international travel.

- *Track international activity involving city government.* Though it may seem tedious and unimportant, tracking the number of city officials who go abroad, why they do so, and the number of meetings/groups from abroad who meet with city officials or OIA staff provides:

- A mechanism to explain the work of the OIA and help community members, colleagues, and elected officials understand the role it plays;
- A baseline and metric for analysis to assist in determining the growing or declining international interest in the city, and in which areas;

- Another way to display the value of the OIA office.

Externally, the OIA occupies a unique intersection, as staff meet both with local community, trade, and diaspora groups (and voters), as well as visiting government officials, businesses, and community groups from abroad. Thus, they influence how their city is viewed locally and internationally. Especially when the OIA is housed in the mayor's suite of offices, the OIA staff is an emissary of the Mayor. The OIA is an external relations office (and an intergovernmental relations office) and should therefore be understood as such. The OIA also plays a crucial role in engaging with the media and framing the international activities of an office so that the public views them positively.

By being actively involved in the international networks their city is a member of, OIA staff meet their counterparts in other cities and can help their city be strategic regarding its involvement in international networks. For instance, they can build direct relationships with staff in other cities. The OIA is often the lead agency for a city's involvement in all but the most technical international networks. OIA staff can help determine the appropriate level of involvement for a city in each network it wants to be involved in, be able

“ Being actively involved in international networks, OIA staff meet their counterparts in other cities and can help their city be strategic regarding its involvement in international networks.”

to take advantage of the opportunities provided by this involvement, and see how the networks relate to each other. When another city is looking for a technical expert or exchange, the OIA staffer can make that contact with the appropriate staff in their technical departments. Finally, there are many grants available for international partnerships, especially from the European Union. As a way to add significant value to its colleagues, the OIA can take the lead on coordinating (especially between multiple cities) and even writing the grant application.

Harnessing Community Interest

As much work as the city government and OIA staff do themselves (and the balance is very different on each side of the Atlantic), working with local community members and groups is vital. The following describes the most effective methods in the researched cities:

Public education. Public education can play a key role in letting the local community know what the city is doing internationally and why international engagement is important. OIAs should support local events to increase awareness within their city about its international ties, partner cities, and other cultures. Under their European Affairs portfolios, these cities host Europe Days and other events designed to promote the idea of “Europe” and their city’s active involvement and engagement with it, including benefits it receives from being within “Europe,” just as the city of Birmingham’s Europe Association did. There is also a special role for educating the local community about the home countries and culture of where their large diaspora communities come from, to create better understanding and tolerance.

High-level community members. As in Birmingham, area associations of community leaders or representatives of organizations with influence and resources interested in international affairs or certain geographic areas can lend valuable weight to international efforts. This model has proven an effective strategy for engaging key community leaders and institutions and ensuring that work is happening and moving in a direction amenable to the city, even when not done directly by governmental staff.

General public. Citizen diplomacy and community relations should remain the bedrock of partner and sister city ties. Groups, whether clubs or advisory councils, designed to engage the general public in the international work of the city are also important. Such groups promote interest in and awareness of international topics, networks,

partner cities, other cultures, and much more. However, it must be noted, when a mayor or city council creates a formal community advisory group, it must be prepared to act on their recommendations, or accept the political fallout from not doing so.

Other anchor institutions in the city. Universities, ports, hospitals, and schools all have an interest in international exchange and similar opportunities. Schools and universities, in particular, tend to have engaged and energetic people looking for opportunities to participate in and are aware they can learn a lot from their peers. These institutions widen the pool of people vested in any given relationship, and provide resources and ongoing ties to keep relations strong and ongoing.

Business and trade groups. The success of corporations often depends on the international relations they are able to build, whether to reach new customers, source new ideas, or to build strategic partnerships. Corporations are therefore often the most willing to reach out internationally and to use the resources they have at their disposal to make new connections.

Conclusion

The importance of municipal international relations has only expanded as cities grow and are increasingly confronted by challenges which transcend borders. Rodrigo Tavares, the head of Sao Paulo, Brazil’s State Government Office of Foreign Affairs, wrote that, “subnational governments can no longer fulfill their constitutional responsibilities in education, sanitation, economic development, transportation, the environment, and other areas without interacting with the world. These local authorities rely on the international flow of capital, knowledge, and people to successfully implement their governmental programs.”

The original peace building work which motivated city twinning and the sister city movement remains operative today too, whether between American and Iraqi cities, German-Israeli-Palestinian ones, and German-Russian ones. When tensions are high at the inter-national level, these contacts between local communities can keep open lines of dialogue and contact, preventing people from drifting too far apart. In the final analysis it is the belief that bonds between people at the less geo-politicized municipal and citizen levels can keep communication channels open and help communities prosper, which motivates this work.

Looking closely at the staff who spearhead so many of these relationships, programs, and initiatives, and how they can best add value to their colleagues and help their city achieve its goals and flourish is therefore important to analyze. These days, intense work on a number of topics is taking place in city or mayoral membership networks, most prominently the fight against climate change. Researching and analyzing these networks would be a rich area for future research. Through investigation of these topics, a much deeper understanding of municipal international relations practice and importance will emerge, and so too a deeper understanding of how cities and communities operate and prosper. Through investigation of these topics, a much deeper understanding of municipal international relations practice and importance will emerge, and so too a deeper understanding of how cities and communities operate and prosper.

Please direct inquiries to:

The German Marshall Fund of the United States
1744 R Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009
T 1 202 683 2650
F 1 202 265 1662
E info@gmfus.org

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About the Author

Aaron Fishbone has lived and worked in the United State, Europe, and Asia. During the four years he worked for the City of Seattle he channeled his passion for international affairs into working closely with Seattle's many international communities and internationally oriented organizations, culminating in serving the city as an international specialist. As a Robert Bosch Foundation Fellow in 2014-2015, Aaron worked in the Office of International Affairs of the City of Düsseldorf, Germany, which gave him a comparative, transatlantic perspective on municipal international relations. Aaron now works as the communications director for Voltia, an electric mobility company based in Bratislava, Slovakia.

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