› Urban Policy and Inequality

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Even when they are islands—and there are surprising few major metropolises among them—cities are not islands. The economic developments and trends that occur in cities are not uniquely determined by urban policy. This was among the fundamental insights of the "Global City" phenomenon. The "Global City," as Saskia Sassen and others outlined it, was not simply a cosmopolitan city of regional and global commercial exchange—new Timbuktus, Jeddahs, Gaos—but a particular form of commercial city, with a particular form of politics, determined by particular patterns of international exchange.[1]

For Sassen, the "tipping point" came in 1970s, when key institutions of the national government—particularly in the executive branch in the United States—began "to function as the institutional home for the operation of powerful dynamics constitutive or critical for 'global capital."[2] For Keller Easterling, the denationalization of economies has been carried out at the city level in the form of Export Processing Zones, Special Economic Zones and their like which have proliferated in the last three decades. "While extolled as an instrument of economic liberalism," writes Easterling, "it trades state bureaucracy for even more complex layers of extrastate governance, market manipulation, and regulation."[3]

The prevailing world order, constructed after World War II and revised, most notably in the 1970s, ever since, has undoubtedly facilitated these trends. It has provided the technocratic expertise necessary to support the economic exchange at the heart of the "global city." It has facilitated the development and sharing of technologies that have altered how we look at cities from above. It has underpinned a period of relative peace and stability that has seen interstate violence diminish but new forms of violence in cities proliferate.

But it is also under intense strain. Global governance institutions such as the United Nations are struggling to adequately address transnational challenges such as climate change and migration (with direct effects upon cities). Autocrats in the global north and south undermine democracy. A populist surge in Britain, the

United States and France calls into question long standing pillars of the post-World War II order such as the EU and NATO. "Donald Trump's stunning electoral defeat of Hillary Clinton marks a watershed not just for American politics," wrote Francis Fukuyama in the *Financial Times*, "but for the entire world order." But even before the recent elections, as Henry Kissinger noted in *World Order* in 2014, new technologies, emergent superpowers, cyber threats, and nuclear proliferation were already challenging the resilience of the world order.[4]

How then, amid a globalized economy but uncertain world order, can urban policy be used to disrupt the income inequality and, in the case of the United States, the stagnate wages that have accompanied the rise of the Global City? This question of course starts with the city, and what policy initiatives can be taken at the municipal level—but it also stretches beyond that. The residents of such cities, Sassen, rightly points out, are uniquely situated to conduct politics across scales: locally, nationally and internationally. The same holds for their mayors—and they know it.

Cities have long been engaging in trade and commercial diplomacy, but over the last decade they have built out robust international engagement on climate change and sustainability. More recently they have added the challenges of inclusivity and income inequality to their international agenda. "The Paris Action Plan for Inclusive Cities," signed by over 50 mayors and supported by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and the Ford Foundation, among others, lays out concrete actions cities can take in the spaces of education, labor markets and skills, housing, and infrastructure and public services, to improve inclusivity and opportunity. Such actions focus on the city-level, and the plan includes the usual multilateral caveat recognizing that "the competencies of local governments in these policy domains differ across countries, and that local initiatives operate within broader regional and national policy frameworks."[5] How might cities and residents go about influencing the shape and form of the wider global

economy beyond merely mitigating or amplifying its developments? Here a number of approaches are at work at once.

First, some local actors are seeking reform within the key international institutions of the post-World War II order in the form of a voice for local actors. Indeed, the gap between the collective economies, populations and reputations of cities and their actual global influence at these institutions is remarkable. In October at Habitat 3 in Quito, mayors and leaders from over 500 cities, organized by United Cities and Local Governments, collectively called for a seat at the "Global Table." For those seeking such reform, the absence of local voices in these institutions undermines the legitimacy of the current order and limits the ability to implement global accords such as Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda.

Another approach seeks more fundamental change, heralding new forms and practices of politics that stretch well beyond traditional political sites. While the playbook for how U.S. cities will resist or adapt to developments in Washington D.C. is still being written, the practical approaches for how cities or citizens can oppose the creaking world order has been developing for some time, from the 1999 Seattle WTO protests, to the 2003 global protests again the Iraq War and the Occupy movement. Leading academics with interdisciplinary approaches are helping outline these opposition tactics. In Vertical, Stephen Graham of Newcastle University outlines "vertical appropriation" techniques that can be used to resist the vertical geographies of power that stretch from the GPS satellites of space to the water wells beneath city streets.[6] In *Extrastatecraft*, Easterling has collected approaches to language, rumor, hoax, and protest that be used as forms of politics. These are not the diplomatic norms of U.N. chambers adapted to new voices, but rather streets, buildings, and even comedic language turned into sites of political opposition.

Finally, while the current world order under is under strain, a simple lesson from American diplomacy in the 20th century remains: reliable partners and platforms for collective action can help amplify influence. But how to organize such collective action in the 21st century and without a preponderance of power? The answer offered by those in opposition to or independent of the world order is the same: networks.

Perhaps recognizing the challenge of legacy institutions, key philanthropies and leaders have seemed more inclined to build new platforms, such as the Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities, the C40 Cities and more locally the Urban Sustainability Directors Network. While also seeking to apply pressure on national capitals and even state, they suggest a fundamentally different approach: they are networked rather than hierarchical. Collective action results from access to resources and knowledge rather than from status or the leadership of a single city or country. Power is dispersed and practical; it is the ability to actually implement policy in some of the world's most important cities. Judged from this perspective, cities are immensely powerful. Consistent with a more networked approach, cities are building their own diplomatic relationships outside of traditional foreign policy channels. Mexico-City and Chicago may provide the most visible example of this, but cities around the world are building boutique bilateral relationships focused around commercial and cultural exchange, some of which are being done in opposition—in tone if not in policy—to national governments.

The world order is under intense strain, and with it the global economic structure that has led to the global city. How much of a say cities have in shaping the emergent or adapted order will depend on the three approaches above. Outlined below is one policy option that could disrupt economic inequality for two of the three approaches.

POLICY OPTIONS

- **Reform or adapt international institutions:** From the municipal perspective, and that of organizing groups such as the UCLG, lobbying efforts should be wisely targeted. The G20, for example, is perhaps the most representative body of world power at the national level. As Michael Cohen of the New School has pointed out, it has yet to fully consider the nexus of the global economy and urbanization. Germany is often at the forefront of global urban diplomacy, and city advocates who want to amplify their efforts around inequality should focus on mobilizing around the G20.

- **Independent Action:** C40 climate Cities and Rockefeller 100 Resilient Cities provide two networked models by which cities can take local action. These approaches share best practices, offer staff to implement them, and perhaps just as importantly, build regional and global political momentum around issues. In collaboration with the OECD or separately, leading foundations must decide to put significant resources behind the chief policy challenges around inequality, including housing, transportation and education. Meanwhile, leading cities actively engage with residents and civil society to formulate engagement with such networks.

ENDNOTES

[1] For background on the concept, and the debate surrounding it, see: Michele Acuto and Wendy Steele, "Introduction," *Global City Challenges: Debating the Global City* (Palgrave: New York, 2013).

[2] Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights* (Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2006), 223.

[3] Keller *Easterling, Extrastatecraft*: the Power of Infrastructure Place (Verson: London and New York, 2016), 27.

[4] Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (Penguin Press: New York, 2014), chapter 9, conclusion.

[5] http://www.oecd.org/about/secretary-general/from-ambition-to-action-the-paris-action-plan-for-inclusive-growth-in-cities.htm. Accessed, 13 March 2017.

[6] Stephen Graham, *Vertical: The City from Satellites to Bunkers* (Verso: London and New York, 2016), 120.