

CONCEPT PAPER ON CITY DIPLOMACY

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1. Introduction

1.1. Why this paper?

Over the past decades, there is a clear tendency showing that maintaining international relations is no longer an exclusive ground for national governments. Diplomacy as a means to defend certain interests in the international community is also used by local governments. Local governments world wide have gained experience in establishing international relations by developing foreign policies, cooperating with local governments abroad, setting up lobby networks to make their work visible in the international community, etc. Furthermore, local governments feel the responsibility and see the advantages of contributing to democratic development elsewhere. Therefore, local governments participate in international cooperation projects and exchange experiences with their colleagues abroad. This kind of reasoning comes from two sides, since more and more, local governments that face a situation of internal conflict or war ask their counterparts to support them in dealing with the accompanying problems. As government tiers closest to the citizens, local governments feel responsible for creating and maintaining a safe and peaceful environment for their citizens.

In 2005, the world organization of Local Governments, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), established the Committee on City Diplomacy. The committee objective is to define the role of local governments in promoting social cohesion, conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction, in a word 'peace building'. This rather narrow meaning of the concept City Diplomacy, is used as a working definition within the organisation.

This paper is written to describe and to explain what City Diplomacy means according to the working definition of the committee (2). Furthermore, it intends to identify the various roles that local governments can play in peace building and the instruments they have to make City Diplomacy actions effective (3). First however, some historical and actual practices of City Diplomacy will be described shortly.

1.2. Some examples from the past

Lack of research

The concept of City Diplomacy has never been described, elaborated upon or defined. Never before, extensive attention has been given to the role municipal governments in other countries can play from the outside, through city-to-city co-operation, in supporting conflict resolution and peace building world wide.

Although there is a lack of research on City Diplomacy, the phenomenon is not new. Examples in the past show that cities have already started some time ago to participate in global peace building activities through the local level. Future City Diplomacy activities will build on these existing examples.

Movements from the past

After the second World War, French and German cities started co-operation programmes to overcome the feelings of deep distrust, followed by many cities all over Europe (and even world wide). This created for thousands of people the framework for reconciliation and co-operation after the devastating second World War.

Later in the 1980's local governments played their role in the protests against the nuclear arms race. Many of them established contacts behind the iron curtain with the purpose of breaking down enemy images, meanwhile insisting on the fact that they wanted to have contacts with opposition groups in Eastern Europe. Many leaders in the democratic movement in Eastern Europe stated after the changes in 1989 how important such contacts with local partners in Western Europe had been for their orientation and motivation.

In 1982, at the 2nd UN Special Session on Disarmament held at UN Headquarters in New York, then Mayor Takeshi Araki of Hiroshima proposed a new program 'to Promote the Solidarity of Cities toward the Total Abolition of Nuclear Weapons'. This proposal offered cities a way to transcend national borders and work together to press for nuclear abolition. Subsequently, the mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki called on mayors around the world to support this program¹. This resulted in the Mayors for Peace initiative.

In 1988, the International Association of Peace Messenger Cities (IAPMC) was established. Its aim is to recognize and encourage the role and responsibility cities have in creating a culture of peace. According to its statute, the Association strives to make its contribution to the realization of the aims and principles of the United Nations Organization for the strengthening of peace and co-operation between peoples. This Association engages in its activities in particular in the fields of education, youth, culture, sports and leisure activities, environmental protection and quality of life.²

The city movement against Apartheid in the Netherlands and the establishment of hundreds of city links with townships organisations in South Africa contributed to the process of democratic change in South Africa. A same kind of movement can be identified of Dutch municipalities who started relationships with municipalities in Nicaragua, in the support of the Sandinistas in their fight for democracy.

In 2001, The Glocal Forum was founded. The Glocal Forum emphasizes the central role of cities in international relations through its "Glocalization" vision. It believes that mayors are poised to be the new diplomats of the world, and that they are in a position to mobilize the goodwill, energy and expertise of civic communities, to build an environment in which divisions and conflict can be overcome. The Glocal Forum has established a variety of programs to empower local communities in conflict and post-conflict regions to take an active role in the creation and promotion of peace³.

Since the end of the nineties and the beginning of the 21st century we can observe a growing number of local governments that intend to support cities affected by civil conflict and war. Contacts were established with cities in – amongst others - former Yugoslavia, Israel/Palestinian Territories, Colombia, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Sudan and over the past years even Iraq and Afghanistan.

2. What is City Diplomacy

2.1. Definition

Based on the considerations that will be elaborated upon in this concept paper, the following definition of City Diplomacy is used:

City Diplomacy is the tool of local governments and their associations in promoting social cohesion, conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction with the aim to create a stable environment in which the citizens can live together in peace, democracy and prosperity.

¹ www.mayorsforpeace.org

² www.iapmc.org

³ www.glocalforum.org

2.2. Broad and narrow perspective of the City Diplomacy concept

Although this paper adopts the definition above to describe City Diplomacy, it should be noticed that City Diplomacy is still a conceptual work in progress. The Netherlands Institute of International Relations distinguishes six dimensions of City Diplomacy.⁴ One of them refers to conflict and peace, the others address issues such as culture or trade relations. This is an example of a broad definition of City Diplomacy.

The UCLG Committee on City Diplomacy has narrowed down the field. Its focus is on conflict resolution and mitigation, and reconstruction after conflict. UCLG is not the only organisation to chose this perspective. The Glocal Forum describes City Diplomacy as a form of decentralization of international relations management, viewing local authorities as the key actors, especially in conflict and post-conflict areas.⁵ And even though the Federation of Canadian Municipalities does not define the term as such, it is clear that it too sees an international role for Local Governments in issues of conflict and peace.⁶

The concept has a relation with local governments (City), and with international relations (Diplomacy). But is diplomacy solely concerned with issues of war and peace? Or does diplomacy address many more issues, such as promoting trade relations, cultural exchange, and a candidacy for the Olympic games for that matter? The following diagram outlines the three aspects of City Diplomacy:

- Local government
- International relations
- Violent conflict



Area 1 represents the narrow definition of City Diplomacy. It is the case in which all three aspects are present. This means that a local government goes out to help a local government, in another country where there is violent conflict. Area 1 also represents the cases in which local governments fight for peace in a broader international context, such as campaigns to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

Area 2 is an extension of the definition to those instances in which no international help is forthcoming. This concerns all of the cases in which local governments try cope with the effects of violent conflict, mediate between groups, try to cope with influx of refugees, reintegrate former militia, etc.

⁴ Rogier van der Pluijm with Jan Melissen, "City Diplomacy: The Expanding Role of Cities in International Politics", April 2007

⁵ Glocalization, Research Study and Policy Recommendations, edited by CERFE in cooperation with the Glocal Forum and the Think Thank on Glocalization.

⁶ Bush, K. (editor, 2004) "Building Capacity for Peace and Unity, The Role of Local Governments in Peacebuilding", publication of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Ottawa, Canada

Area 3 represents all international co-operation between local governments that takes place outside of conflict areas. This field concerns a great many cases. For instance, a local government may help another to improve its registry. The UCLG Committee on Decentralised Cooperation addresses this working field.

Area 4 concerns peace building by actors other than local governments. The methods however may closely resemble those used by local governments (mediation, for instance, or the reconstruction of public infrastructure useful for all). This area represents cases such as exchanges between school classes, civil-military co-operation, and an array of peace dialogue initiatives by NGOs.⁷

In this paper, City Diplomacy concerns the sum of areas 1 and 2. That means it takes the narrowest possible definition and adds the issue of how local governments cope with violent conflict in their territories. This is a result of the acknowledgment that local governments do have a responsibility to start 'at home' when internal conflict, influenced by global issues, is affecting the internal order. In this time when the threat of a so called 'clash of civilizations' is high on the agenda of the international community, it is the responsibility of local governments to start a dialogue in their territories. Globalization has resulted in a mix of cultures living together in big cities. Local governments have the ability to prevent clashes of cultures, to stimulate dialogue between different ethnic groups and to promote social cohesion within their cities.⁸

*This perception of what City Diplomacy entails is also promoted by professor Antonio Papisca, stating that "Cities Diplomacy is made by all concrete initiatives, especially public policies, that contribute to the construction of "social and international order", that is to build up internal and international peace in accordance with Article 28 (of the Human Declaration of Human Rights, AS). (...). The first help should be provided at home, by pursuing the goals of the 'inclusive city' (...)."*⁹

2.3. The relation to state diplomacy; City Diplomacy is complementary and legitimized

City Diplomacy actions intend to be complementary to state diplomacy, working at a different level, with different objectives. City Diplomacy actions are not to remove the diplomacy role from states, but to provide them with support. This fits in the concept of *multi-level governance*: together, each tier of government acts in accordance with its own responsibility and expertise.

While state diplomacy aims at solving political problems at state level, City Diplomacy is primarily directed to the benefit of the citizens. In a conflict situation, local governments are able to involve a variety of people with different backgrounds, including representatives of minority groups. Local governments can often play a positive and stabilizing role in the interaction between their citizens and the national government.

*Solving conflict related issues at the local level, presents an example of successful conflict management to the national government(s): "Peacebuilding and conflict management is founded on the ability of a municipal government to successfully build an open and trusting relationship with its residents and the organizations and community leaders that represent different groups within the municipality"*¹⁰.

Also across national borders, local governments can stimulate dialogue and understanding between people. Local autonomy, acknowledged to be a constitutional principle of any decentralised state¹¹,

⁷ Diagram and description of areas derived from an unpublished paper by Arne Musch, VNG International senior project manager

⁸ The USAID Local Government and Conflict Toolkit (November 2005) was developed within this perspective. It focuses on the roles local governments can play in creating conflict or in preventing, managing and mitigating conflict and how development assistance can enhance these latter functions.

⁹ Antonio Papisca, "Sussidiarietà, orizzonte mondiale. La diplomazia delle città", in "Pace diritti umani/Peace human rights" (quarterly), III, 2006, pp.127-132 (English abstract: "Subsidiarity, world horizon. Cities diplomacy").

¹⁰ Bush

¹¹ The UN report: "We are the people: civil society, the United Nations and global governance" (the "Cardoso report"), proposes to affirm local autonomy as a universal principle

implies that local governments can develop their own international policy and establish international relations. "Since local government institutions are forced to deal directly with problems that belong to the political agenda of world order, local authorities are fully legitimated to claim and actually play a visible role in international affairs"¹².

In this respect, it can be justified that local authorities not only have the right to interfere in the international arena, but even have a certain responsibility to contribute to global issues that affect human security and safety. Taken from the perspective of the international order, it is argued that "cities are the front line institutions that provide effectiveness to International Law. Consequently they benefit also from a formal legitimation to participate in the functioning of a governance system which, to be good and capable, cannot but be multi-level, even supra-national in some fields."¹³.

*See for example the case of Italy: "In 1991, Municipalities and Provinces were allowed by a national Bill to exercise a larger extent of autonomy in revising their Statutes. The result is that thousands new Statutes include the so-called 'peace human rights norm' that reads as follows: "The Commune X (the Province X), in conformity with the Constitution principles that repudiate war as a means to resolve international disputes, and with the principles of International Law of human rights, recognises peace as a fundamental right of the human being and of the peoples. To this purpose it is committed to take initiative and cooperate with civil society organisations, schools and universities". By this statutory rule, Italian Communes and Provinces formally pledge to comply with the principles of the United Nations Charter, in particular with article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realised"."*¹⁴

2.4. Relation to Decentralised Cooperation – peace as a condition for poverty reduction

City Diplomacy has a different approach and focus than decentralised cooperation. The objectives of the working field of decentralised cooperation are to contribute to development, to reinforce the efficiency of municipal management and to provide local public services to help improve the living conditions of populations and to intensify exchanges and dialogue between nations¹⁵. In the light of the diagram presented above, decentralized cooperation would fall under category 3. There is a growing recognition, however, that mitigating conflict is a key entry point for development, and that the development and security agendas must converge. The new development-security agenda is only slowly being implemented at the country level, through the use of Official Development Assistance (ODA) for armed violence prevention work, for example, and through Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, but in many cases the global policy discussion has moved ahead of local work.

The international community's growing awareness in this field is proven by the recent establishment of the UN Peace Building Commission. This commission has formulated its objective as to marshal resources at the disposal of the international community to advise and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict recovery, focusing attention on reconstruction, institution-building and sustainable development, in countries emerging from conflict. It aims to bring together the UN's broad capacities and experience in conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping, respect for human rights, the rule of law, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and long-term development. It will amongst others develop best practices on issues that require extensive collaboration among political, military, humanitarian and development actors.

¹² Papisca

¹³ Papisca

¹⁴ Papisca

¹⁵ Working definition of the UCLG Committee on Decentralised Cooperation, http://www.cities-localgovernments.org/uclg/upload/newTempDoc/EN_94_eng_plan_de_travail_coop_dec.doc

3. Roles and instruments of City Diplomacy

3.1. Roles

Within city-to-City Diplomacy a few different roles local governments can play can be distinguished:

1. Local governments as **lobbyists**. Local governments lobby the international community with clear messages in favour of a peaceful world, lobby for financial support to peace initiatives at the local level, express acts of solidarity to local governments affected by conflicts, etc.
2. Local governments as **mediators**. Local government mediate between partners who ask for a neutral intervention in their efforts to come closer together. This is done by means of silent diplomacy, actions and dialogue to prevent radicalisation and use of contacts to raise attention for the position of minority or marginalized groups.
3. Local governments as **project partners**. Local governments implement cooperation projects with partners in conflict or post-conflict areas. This form of decentralised cooperation is used in the assistance to overcome the consequences of war and conflict, and in rebuilding harmonious communities.

3.2. Instruments: what activities can local governments undertake

Lobby activities

Preventive actions

Helping with conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction is the main concern of City Diplomacy; preventing conflicts is of course most desirable, but difficult to realize. The best chances of preventing a conflict from escalating into violence present themselves in its early stages. The longer it goes on, the greater the danger of parties becoming ever more rigid in their positions and, as a consequence, less disposed to accepting compromise and non-violent solutions and political settlements. City Diplomacy in this stage will in potential be most feasible in conflicts arising *within* a state, between ethnic groups for example.

Conflict prevention relies on *early warning and response* by local governments. Local governments often do have the mandate and possibilities to develop a concrete early response programme. The early warning will logically be directed toward the national governments and, where needed, the international community. If a state fails to provide security or is too weak to protect its citizens, is unable to provide basic social amenities such as health care, schools and even food, local governments have a growing role to play. City Diplomacy can help these local governments by networking, coalition building and concerted action with civil society organizations active in this field. South-South and North-South collaboration can be a platform for effective action.

Solidarity actions / awareness raising

Conflict and war can cause serious threat to local democracy. Citizens receive limited services, which leads to further escalation of the conflict. Acts of solidarity can generate international attention for the problems that those local governments and consequently the citizens, are facing. Through solidarity visits, local governments can generate international attention for the situation their colleagues are forced to deal with.

Political lobby / awareness raising

Provided that the state of local autonomy in a country allows it, local governments can take political position against the position of their central government with the aim to raise attention for certain international developments.

Italian local governments, for example, regularly demonstrate against certain global developments that, in their opinion, threaten world peace. They are great lobbyists of their own government and are able to

convey the public opinion of their citizens to their national leaders. Italian local governments are united in the Italian Coordination of Local Authorities for Peace and Human Rights.

Southern European local governments are active in lobbying the European Union. They constantly question international policy with regard to the Middle East. Member municipalities are united in the Network of European municipalities for peace in the Middle East.

Another example of an existing lobby network of local governments in the Mayors for Peace initiative, as mentioned above. Its aim is to build solidarity and facilitate coordination among the cities that support the Program to Promote the Solidarity of Cities toward the Total Abolition of Nuclear Weapons. Its primary goal is to work internationally to raise consciousness regarding nuclear weapons abolition.¹⁶

Mediation efforts

Conflicts between neighbouring countries can have a negative effect in the approach of common, cross bordering problems, affecting the living conditions of the citizens of both states. Local governments are the actors that have to deal with these practical problems. Through City Diplomacy actions by third, neutral local governments, local governments of the conflicting countries can be stimulated to cooperate in addressing those problems, focussing on the practical solutions rather than political ones. It can be seen as a special subcategory of the phenomenon of the 'third party intervention' or 'third party facilitation'. Through (silent) diplomacy by third parties, the local governments of the conflicting countries enter into dialogue to discuss the (political) conditions of a cooperation framework. The silent diplomacy actions can be fostered by the local government leadership, but also by the political leaders of the national associations of local governments. In general, it is recommendable to build coalitions with civil society organisations active in the same type of activities.

The "Municipal Alliance for Peace" (MAP) is a direct result of (silent) City Diplomacy fostered by the international Local Government community, which lead to dialogue between Palestinian and Israeli mayors. MAP is a cooperation framework to promote, facilitate and implement local initiatives between Palestinian, Israeli and international municipalities to promote peace and mutual cooperation.

Implementation of decentralised cooperation projects

Reconstruction projects after conflict

Post-conflict reconstruction of local government can be defined as follows: to support, after a conflict, the emergence or re-emergence of effective and legitimate government or administrations at sub national level. Legitimate government is government that is legal, accepted and seen as just in moral sense¹⁷. This implies the promotion of citizenship and the creation of equal opportunities for all citizens, irrespective of the ethnic or cultural background. Quite often, in post-conflict reconstruction, the local governments have to deal with both the war legacy (destruction, unemployment, traumatized population, groups of refugees and/or displaced persons, lack of resources, strong nationalist tendencies, lack of local autonomy) and the 'general' challenges of transition towards a more open and democracy government style.

Fields in which reconstruction projects touch upon aspects of local government are: concrete projects in the field of reconstruction of municipal services or utilities, the reconstruction of schools, libraries, neighborhood centers etc., social programmes for the most vulnerable citizens, introduction of models of citizens' participation, etc.

Through decentralised cooperation projects, technical assistance and international solidarity can be provided to local governments in post conflict countries in reconstruction and democratisation programmes. These projects can be of use in helping partners overcome the consequences of war and conflict, and in rebuilding harmonious communities.

¹⁶ Mission statement Mayors for Peace: www.mayorsforpeace.org

¹⁷ Musch, A. (editor, 2005), "Post-Conflict reconstruction of local government", a publication of VNG International, The Hague, The Netherlands

After the war in the former Yugoslavia, one can witness a great move by municipalities in Western Europe to participate as project partners in reconstruction programmes developed and financed by the international donor community. Not only did these municipalities help to rebuild the cities in the new Balkan countries, by doing so they contributed to a safe return of refugees, helped in rebuilding trust between ethnic groups forced to live together in the same areas, etc. They contributed to effecting social cohesion in these war-torn cities. These projects were implemented in close cooperation with civil society organisations, such as the Dutch organisation IKV.

4. To conclude

Working in a conflict region is a complex and precarious affair. But it is also clear, that the instruments are not new to local governments who have developed their own international cooperation policy and projects. It is all about linking and twinning methodology, technical assistance, advising on municipal policy development, co-operation with citizens and civil society organisations, awareness raising activities, promoting mutual understanding locally, association capacity building programmes, international solidarity and advocacy and lobby activities at the level of national governments and the international community.

This paper is a first attempt to describe what local governments can do to contribute to a peaceful world, from the point of view of the City Diplomacy Committee of UCLG. The examples that are given, and the actions described leave space to unlimited additional good practices. What is needed are academics to collect and present empirical data, to do research on the effects of existing efforts, to describe how the efforts can be viewed in the context of the broader debate on diplomacy in its traditional sense, etc. This is a process that is – at the time this paper was written – in an early stage, but moving into the right direction. The outcomes of the research will be presented at the World Conference on City Diplomacy that is to take place in The Hague in June 2008. This event should mark the international recognition of City Diplomacy as a new concept in the international agenda of peace building.