Knowledge Diplomacy Seminar –

Cities as Sites of Knowledge Creation and Exchange

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1.   Introduction

The online Knowledge Diplomacy Seminar series is a collaboration between the Goethe Institut, British Council (France and Germany), University of London (London and Paris) and is supported by ICR Research. This Knowledge Diplomacy and Cities Series is composed of online discussions and forms the second phase of the University of London's exploration of the concept of 'Knowledge Diplomacy.' The exploration aims to dig deeper into the dynamics of global city cooperation today, by focusing on three European capitals: London, Paris, and Berlin. The aim of the overall series is to bring together leading experts for an exchange of ideas that will contribute to the University of London's approach to its future work on Knowledge Diplomacy and the international agenda.

This second online seminar of 2022 took place on 9 March 2022 and specifically explored the concept of Knowledge Diplomacy in the context of cities as facilitators and spaces of knowledge creation and exchange. This event was also supported by Queen Mary University of London and NEXTEUK project.

### 2.   List of speakers and format of the event

Chaired by **Professor Ben Rogers** (Professor of Practice at the University of London), the panel included presentations and interventions from **Jean-Louis Missika** (Visiting Senior Fellow at LSE Cities, former Member of the Council of Paris and Deputy Mayor for Urban Planning, Architecture, Greater Paris Projects, Economic Development and Attractiveness), **Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius** (Freelance Architect at Raumlaborberlin, Founder and Chair of the Floating University, Professor for Cohabitation at Städelschule Academy of Fine Arts, Frankfurt), and **Jo Beall** (Emeritus Professor and Distinguished Policy Fellow at the London School of Economics). The webinar was one and a half hours long. Each presenter was given 10 to 15 minutes to present, followed by questions from the Chair, then the session concluded by opening the floor for Q&A with the audience.

3. Registration and attendance

The event received 121 registrations via Eventbrite ticketing service. Overall, the registrants were from Bulgaria, Canada, China, Colombia, Comoros, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and United States of America. The top 6

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countries of registrations were the United Kingdom (53), France (13), United States of America (9), Germany (8), Turkey (4), and India (3).

Countries of Attendees - Top 6
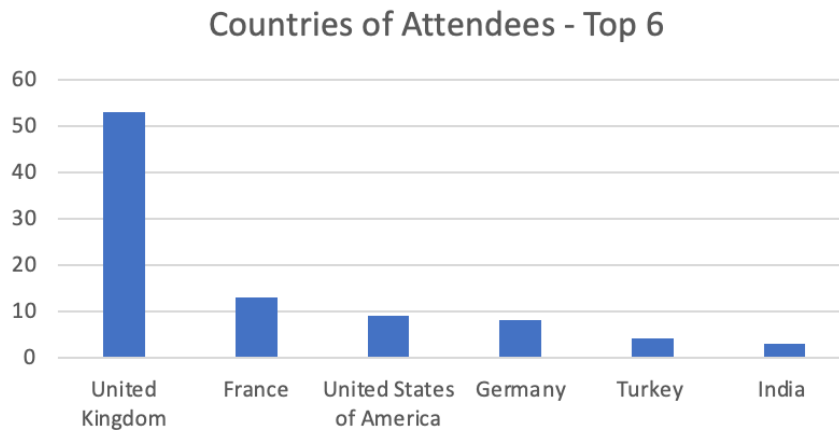
The online session was hosted on Zoom webinar platform. The session was attended by 51 unique viewers[2]. The maximum concurrent views of attendees were 38 attendees[3].

4. Panellists' presentations

The online seminar began with a short introduction by the Chair, **Ben Rogers**. The Chair emphasised that knowledge is intensely political and is becoming increasingly so. This trend is occurring in the context of emerging knowledge economies and it has the potential to deliver benefits. Living in a city provides you with opportunities to access cultural capital in a way which did not exist in the past. In the context of knowledge economies, universities are increasingly becoming important in city development and attractiveness. However, these benefits are not equally distributed and/or accessible. Some cities have the ability to play an active part in the highly digitalised knowledge economy, while other cities do not have the same level of opportunities. Furthermore, the differences in availability of funding are also important: the way in which we fund our cities dictates how knowledge is produced. This is a worrying local, national, and global trend as knowledge becomes more economically and politically valued.

The first presentation was delivered by **Jo Beall**. The panellist started the presentation by discussing the concept of Knowledge Diplomacy. The presentation emphasised that in the past the concept was applicable to the development of trade agreements and intellectual property rights. However, the concept had to transform as the world changed. States and cities started to become increasingly dependent on knowledge economies, with cities such as Singapore leading the trend.

The notion of Knowledge Diplomacy has become associated with soft power, which is understood as using influence, attraction, and persuasion to develop good social relations with international borders rather than coercion and force. Examples of soft power can be observed in the work of organisations such as Goethe Institut and British Council, which have been established for the practice and dissemination of international cultural engagement.

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[2] Users that used their computers to attend the webinar. The figure does not count the panellists or attendees that attended by phone.
[3] Maximum number of attendees at a given moment during the online seminar. The figure excludes the panellists.

The speaker stressed that Knowledge Diplomacy is intrinsic to soft power and vice-versa, as the concept currently includes elements of research collaboration, academic exchange and international higher education working across borders. Knowledge Diplomacy was argued to be a force of positive action, for example, in addressing global issues like the pandemic and climate change. However, the neutrality of the Knowledge Diplomacy concept is questionable, due to existing power relations among various stakeholders.

In regard to cities, the concept of Knowledge Diplomacy needs modifications in order to include the full scale of actors involved in its processes. Universities are increasingly seen as actors who participate in Knowledge Diplomacy processes, given their rich history of scholarly exchange; scholarly engagement is very different in the 21st century. One example of this is the marketisation of education, that can lead to perceive international students as a type of commodity. Some cities are noticing their value and trying to become more attractive to students, specifically as places for the students to live in and return to, which is part of long-term soft-power goals. Other cities have learned that in order be more attractive to students, they need to enhance the environment in the form of public spaces and cultural activities, rather than relying on advertising campaigns alone to attract the flow of students. **Jo Beall** stated that:

> *"Cities pay a great deal of attention to this and there is a lot of competition to get into the top ten […] There are many other cities competing to get there and to do so it is about providing a city which creates an environment where students want to be. They want to enjoy the culture, they want to enjoy the vibe, to enjoy the public space and to enjoy the public realm."*

The next speaker, **Jean-Louis Missika**, delivered the second presentation of the webinar, which addressed the topic of cities as sites of knowledge creation and exchange from the point of view of the data revolution specifically in the governance of cities and city mobility. It is very apparent that there is an emerging role of third actors and stakeholders who have the potential to decide whether to distribute or withhold the data and its analysis. Private actors, for example, in urban transportation, will increasingly have more political weight than traditional city stakeholders, such as mayors. There is an increasing need to ask whether public authorities should negotiate data sharing with private entities, or obligate them by law to do so? This is the main challenge of city diplomacy according to the panellist. The way in which data is shared will decide what kind of public services will be provided in a city. The speaker stressed that:

> *"City diplomacy must still progress in order to invent regulatory tools shared by all local governments."*

Large cities might create strategies and form a "common front" against private global stakeholders. Cities must become aware of political risks if they want to take part in this dynamic and know how to adapt and work with these powerful players. Cities will have to develop a common framework and have it approved by global players and nation states that are reluctant to accept city diplomacy. Global networks of cities like C40 may provide certain insight into how to accomplish this objective. The speaker reflected on his experience of working with the C40 group which discussed how cities can design a set of rules that can be applied globally when negotiating and working with global actors. Knowledge Diplomacy has the potential to aid the development of such frameworks of operation. However, whether cities will decide to utilise the presence of the academic community and research centres remains to be seen.

The final speaker, **Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius**, delivered a presentation on the practical elements of the interplay of space and architecture in urban places. He provided an example

of the Urban Praxis project that brings together people for various knowledge exchange projects. The speaker's presentation highlighted those mobile temporary objects can create sites of knowledge exchange in a temporary space. In this context, the panellist highlighted the role of the Floating University in Berlin, which provides a learning environment for facilitation of non-traditional and transdisciplinary knowledge exchange that practices a distinctive learning method, specifically exposing people to the temporary space and enables site-specific knowledge. In this way, the mentioned strategy counters the flat (or horizontal) knowledge production. The panellist stated that:

> *"This is actually the best place for transdisciplinary learning because you have many different forms of knowledge coming together. You have the academic knowledge, the knowledge that is produced through research and scientific thinking and usually finds its output by words and words put on paper, but you also have the knowledge that comes with the site, that is site-specific knowledge […] You have the situated knowledge by new groups and random mixtures of students, teachers, but also artists, and neighbours coming with the children that produce a very diverse learning environment […]"*

Currently, networks of places and cities aimed at creating different forms of knowledge are being established. However, such sites of knowledge creation and their networks are difficult to negotiate with diplomatic actors on a city level that act as separate stakeholders. For example, the stakeholders representing city culture, urban development, and city environment need to be convinced that such projects are vital.

5. Discussion between the Chair and panellists

The Chair reflected on the three presentations and the relationship between cultural diplomacy and knowledge diplomacy. Particular attention was given to how cities and universities collaborate, the role of universities in advancing national and international agendas, cooperation between cities, and innovative ways of conducting research. **Jean-Louis Missika** emphasised the presentations demonstrate that cities are transforming into knowledge cities, in which the stakeholders involved in shaping that identity are very diverse. This is because knowledge and expertise can be attributed to and generated by the public in addition to traditionally recognised actors in knowledge creation, such as universities. A city acts as a platform that holds the higher education institutional knowledge creators and technical experts and makes sure that these stakeholders are connected.

The Chair posed a question of whether there are emerging international partnerships which involve cities and universities and what can we learn from them today. **Jo Beall** identified several examples, such as the PSL Research University, which was established as a result of negotiations between several prestigious universities and research institutes, who joined forces and established their presence in the Latin Quarter of Paris. Another example provided by the panellist highlighted the city of Bristol. Due to the city's partnership with Bristol University, representatives of the city are invited to meetings with stakeholders at national and international levels on sustainability and sustainable development. This success was achieved by Bristol University's research and the city's achievements and initiatives in the field.

The Chair asked whether there has been an apparent trend of requiring universities to be more involved with local communities, businesses, and policymakers in Berlin by the local governments. **Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius** confirmed that such trends exist, however, it is very difficult to initiate changes within universities as they tend to operate as large flagship institutions with complex systems where changes are implemented in a non-rapid manner.

6. Summary of questions and comments from the audience

During the final part of the webinar, the floor was opened to questions and feedback from the audience. One of the questions asked whether Brexit had an impact on cities being able to facilitate knowledge development and exchange. **Jo Beall** answered that Brexit has had a definite effect on these processes, as it negatively influenced the availability of funding for universities and research centres. This trend is taking place in the context of cities being already severely underfunded, which hampers their ability to act independently in diplomacy. However, in the absence of progress at a national level, cities are ideal sites for continued international engagement and Knowledge Diplomacy. Another question from the audience asked whether social media has had an impact on Knowledge Diplomacy. **Jean-Louis Missika** emphasised that social media has indeed impacted Knowledge Diplomacy and knowledge overall. As social networks rely on algorithms, the trend of increased polarisation of society is currently taking place and it is affecting knowledge through "politisation" of expertise. The panellist emphasised that there is a strong trend of polarisation within management of the public spaces. The social networks can facilitate polarisation in its worst form, and this is a trend that is taking place not only locally or nationally but also internationally. The relationship between cities, the public, and the academic community is becoming increasingly difficult in this context. This phenomenon is highly dangerous for cities and city diplomacy. However, **Jean-Louis Missika** emphasised that this trend can be tackled through participatory democracy:

> *"Because when you put people together in real life and not on the social media; when you organise a true conversation - you discover that you share more than you can imagine with people who seem like they are totally against you."*

Another question asked **Benjamin Foerster-Baldenius** how the projects and spaces, that the speaker highlighted during his presentation, could be implemented and adapted on a regional and international levels instead of a city level. The speaker emphasised that projects need to address local needs and local contexts. When implementing regional and trans-national projects of collaboration, there is always the risk of oversimplifying the goals and disregarding the contexts of local public spaces. It was emphasised that maintaining cities as sites of knowledge creation and exchange should remain on a local level because then oversimplification is avoided. Maintaining openness in knowledge exchange globally is helpful, but caution needs to be maintained.

7. Summary, key action points/recommendations

From the three presentations and the discussions, it is apparent that cities offer important public spaces where people can exchange and develop knowledge. City diplomacy is very important in maintaining the accessibility and availability of those public spaces. However, in the 21st century there are several obstacles that need to be considered when facilitating projects, specifically: the global competition, increased digitalisation, and the participation of new global and powerful actors. Knowledge Diplomacy can help to develop strategies and frameworks which can be used as tools in city diplomacy to ensure the preservation, accessibility and use of public spaces and services. However, Knowledge Diplomacy should not be seen as a process where stakeholders bring knowledge and strategies to those stakeholders who do not have it. In reality, Knowledge Diplomacy has the potential to be conducted as a two-way process that facilitates the exchange of knowledge rather than knowledge implementation from one site to another.