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Cities Going Global ^[1]

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It has been called the century of cities. In a recent article, Parag Khanna said the rise of cities is one of two great trends of the 21st century (the other; the pervasiveness of technology, of course). Urbanization around the world is transforming cities into foci of exponential population growth and warranting new labels and prefixes indicative of monstrous size such as “mega” and “hyper”. As they grow, the resources cities consume, the responsibilities they amass, and the impact they will have on the rest of the world will also continue to grow. (See “Planet of Slums” for more reading on this.)

Great challenges have always arisen concurrent with urbanization, and those challenges continue to evolve with the rapid growth of cities throughout the developing world in particular. The changes to the environment, social constructs, and the economy are significant and manifested in various forms. Urban development has been unable to keep pace with the millions migrating to city centers, thus causing an enormous strain on both residents and the environments in which they inhabit. Well-established ‘modern’ cities are not exempt from such challenges. Moreover, their impact on the rest of the world is increasingly concerning as they have become overly demanding of natural resources, neglectful of their global affect, and shortsighted in the influence they can have on national policies and decisions.

This is not to reprimand city leadership, long-time urbanites, or newly migrated city-dwellers; in fact, it is quite the opposite. This is about the opportunities that cities –all cities –can bring to the table when it comes to addressing economic, environmental and social problems. Urbanization is a phenomenon that could bring people together in a way never before possible—to create, to communicate, to produce, and to progress. The questions that arise from this are many: Can cities use this unique opportunity to assuage political tensions and social conflicts? Can they design environments which are inherently sustainable, peaceful and progressive? Can they improve people’s lives within and outside of city limits?



These are some of the questions I hope to answer in a project I began called “Going Global: How Cities Can Change the World”. It is a blog, a forum--a one-stop-shop if you will—intended as a place where municipal employees, young professionals and citizens can find inspiration as they take the lead in shaping their own cities. In an effort to collect ideas that focus on creative solutions to some of the problems with which urbanization has presented us, as well as explore the role of cities in international arenas, this project will bring together videos, thoughts, projects and images from those whose work will revolutionize the

way we think about cities. The goal is to not only raise awareness of the responsibility that lies ahead for those who are and will be planning cities down the road, but also to inspire city-dwellers to contribute to the ideas that can enable cities to change the world.

Because this project began as my practicum for the Master of Public Diplomacy program, it encompasses one core component that was reiterated throughout the curriculum: listening. With this in mind, the dialogue I hope to create will result from listening to the challenges city governments face, the concerns of urbanites, and the initiatives of various organizations to address the changing nature of cities. The practice of public diplomacy emphasizes the role of members of the public as both audiences and active participants in diplomatic action. This project is a way for many stories to be shared from obvious to unsuspecting corners of the urban landscape, so as to build greater interest and gain a broader perspective on the meaning of city diplomacy and the increasingly important role it holds in tackling global issues.

To share a perspective or interesting city diplomacy story, visit www.citiesgoingglobal.com

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