

**City Diplomacy: Current Trends and Future Prospects (1st edition), edited by Sohaela Amiri and Efe Sevin, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 389 pp., € 85.59 (eBook), ISBN 9783030456146.**

**Urban Diplomacy: A Cosmopolitan Outlook, by Juan Luis Manfredi-Sánchez, Brill Research Perspectives in Diplomacy and Foreign Policy, 2021, 96 pp., \$108.54 (Paperback), ISBN 9004472177.**

**City Diplomacy: From City-States to Global Cities, by Raffaele Marchetti, University of Michigan Press, 2021, 144 pp., € 66.14 (Hardcover), ISBN 9780472055036.**

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The accelerated pace of global interconnectivity has transformed how we communicate, access information, and conceptualize borders and power dynamics within society. Technological advancements, such as the Internet, have democratized the world of information, giving access to unbelievable amounts of public information to anyone anywhere in the world. These life-changing innovations have also democratized diplomacy by affecting power dynamics, dismantling the monopoly of diplomatic practices from the governments, and providing

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non-state actors with the tools, legitimacy, and power to conduct diplomacy on their own (Melissen, 2005; Kelley, 2010). Since then, a range of non-state actors have been growing in visibility and importance, including international organizations, corporations, regional governments, cities, and citizens.

Along with globalization, a demographic transformation has been taking place all over the world, causing a massive migration from rural areas to cities, a phenomenon termed by Brenner as “planetary urbanization” (Brenner, 2014). In 2007, the global urban population surpassed the global rural population (Marchetti, 2021). The increasing population of urban areas and their growing impact on economic and political issues has strengthened the position of cities as non-state diplomatic actors advocating for their own interests and the interests of local constituents (Amiri & Sevin, 2020, p. 4). At the same time, “[i]nternational policy is being introduced into local agendas because the consequences of globalisation are local” (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2021, p. 11). The increasing relevance of urban centers, especially of global cities, has promoted their participation in international relations and public diplomacy to pursue the city’s goals and objectives without the direct approval, support, or supervision from the national government. It is estimated that “70-80% of cities in the world perform at least some form of international activities, for example, twinning agreements, affiliation to networks or international associations” (Amiri & Sevin, 2020, p. 197). The increasing importance and autonomy of cities in terms of diplomacy, has prompted the appearance of more research on the topic, including the three books in this review essay: *City Diplomacy: Current Trends and Future Prospects*, *Urban Diplomacy: A Cosmopolitan Outlook and City Diplomacy: From City-States to Global Cities*.

*City Diplomacy: Current Trends and Future Prospects* is a compilation of independent chapters authored by academic researchers and practitioners. Across the different sections of the book, a common theme can be identified: a diverse and inclusive perspective on current local government actions and city diplomacy practices. The book provides insight on very different fields of practice within city diplomacy, such as social media, marine protection, or cultural education, focusing on cities as independent actors with endless possibilities to enhance their image and leverage their power. *Urban Diplomacy: A Cosmopolitan Outlook* provides an in-depth analysis about the concept of urban diplomacy, defined by the author as “the systematic and politically motivated management of international affairs for the defense of local interests” with innovative “diplomatic tools” as “political and symbolic communication” dependent on “the social demand to become integrated into international affairs with one’s own voice rather than with size, national context, or one’s own resources” (Manfredi-Sánchez, 2021, p. 12). An analysis of urban diplomats, city networks, diplomatic strategies, and their relation to state diplomacy is also included. *City Diplomacy: From City-States to Global Cities* offers a comprehensive analysis of the city diplomacy context, providing a strong overview of nonstate actors in global affairs and the increasing importance of cities in the world. Moreover, it provides an analysis of the multilayered structure and sectors of city diplomacy, defined as the “combination of institutions and practices that allow urban centers to engage in relations with a third party—a state or NSA [non-state actor]—beyond their

borders, with the objective of pursuing their interests” (Marchetti, 2021, p. 47).

Manfredi-Sánchez highlights the growing recognition of cities as diplomatic actors and the rise of urban diplomacy to the status of state diplomacy. He emphasizes the cities’ power to formulate foreign policy, propose a political agenda of their own – whether aligned or not with its own country’s agenda – and their concurrent innovative diplomatic strategies and practices. The lack of legal status and regulations for subnational diplomacy have promoted the exponential increase in city diplomacy. This process has been supported by numerous city networks that have brought global concerns to local agendas; however, *Urban Diplomacy* does not provide an in-depth analysis of the wide range of city networks that compete “for the resolution of problems” (p. 54). Manfredi-Sánchez introduces the image of the urban diplomat: a city diplomacy actor without “political restrictions” or “loyalty to the government,” contrary to a civil servant or career diplomat, who would prove to be more risk averse than an urban diplomat (p. 24). The loyalty of the urban diplomat falls on the city or the local government, causing the categorization of his/her actions as paradiplomacy. These actions can be complementary to state diplomacy, although in certain situations the power of cities might turn against governments when disparities between policy objectives and priorities are visible, e.g., Black Lives Matter.

Manfredi-Sánchez examines the motives, mechanism, and performance of city diplomacy by analyzing the cities’ political leadership, strategy, and resources. Political leadership is essential to city diplomacy. “There is no governance without politics” (p. 52). Cities’ political systems are supported by urban diplomats as mayors, who are representative of democracy and who are introducing international issues and foreign policy into the city’s agenda. The current role of cities in global contexts demands more responsibility on political decisions, and more internationally relevant local political activity. Strategy-building in city diplomacy is characterized by freedom of action and creativity in communication and information spaces, as well as the democratization of actors involved not only in its delivery, but also in the whole strategy-building process. Regarding the implementation of operations with the cities’ available resources, it is important to be realistic with the political objectives and integrate city diplomacy into the public administration by creating an international affairs team in the local government, sending urban diplomatic teams abroad, and participating in international events and networks.

For Manfredi-Sánchez, a global city is the representation of the world, “a mirror of the inequalities of globalisation” (p. 79), a pawn in the building and implementation of global diplomacy. Indeed, the impact and influence of cities in the international agenda is noticeable, but it cannot compete with the sovereignty of nation-states or transnational organizations and institutions such as the European Union or the United Nations.

Amiri and Sevin examine the intricacies of city diplomacy practice with more emphasis on city networks across chapters. Section I focuses on city networks as diplomatic actors. Their exponential growth demands a higher degree of collaboration, due to the overlapping of membership and objectives, since “90% of C40 [C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group]

member cities are also members of Metropolis and almost 99% of Metropolis's members are also members of UCLG [United Cities and Local Governments]" (Chapter 3, p. 49). The relevance of the urban ecosystem in international policy debates has grown, not only in Western settings or the Global North, but in other parts of the world as well—such as the East Asian city network on marine protection introduced in Chapter 4, where a theoretical framework for polycentric systems is provided.

Section II of Amiri and Sevin's book stands out for its integration of digital diplomacy into city diplomacy practices. Detailed analyses of city diplomacy behavior in the Twittersphere were provided in two different contexts: negative emotional engagement and cities' leverage on international summits. It is also worth highlighting the introduction of the concept "un-nation branding": the promotion of a nation-state through its cities and regions without reference to the country (Chapter 7, p. 137). Amiri and Sevin's remaining two sections focus on different governance levels of city diplomacy and a diverse group of case studies. Section III provides an analysis of cities' integration into the international system through city diplomacy networks, institutions, and actors. The cases presented, EU City Diplomacy and US Mayors' Offices of International Affairs, show the ability to conduct successful city diplomacy and develop soft power regardless of the size of the city, and the importance of a widely accepted "sense of mission," "vision," and "values" within the organization to ensure "long-term relevance, efficiency, and integrity" (p. 247-249). In Section IV, the authors' analysis of Singapore's branding as an international peacemaker during the Trump-Kim summit stands out as an innovative case study. Interestingly, Chapter 15's case on the small Finnish urban center of Turku presents a historical approach to city diplomacy, analyzing the beginning of the city's internationalization during the 70s, its international strategy during the Cold War and post-Cold War eras, as well as its 21st century diplomatic actions.

Marchetti presents a strong theoretical analysis for the appearance, establishment, and development of city diplomacy. Part I focuses on the context, starting with an analysis of the current global governance system and highlighting the visible tendencies towards non-state governance and the increasing role of varied non-state players as influencers of global political agendas. A list of emerging relevant non-state actors is provided in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 provides a clear definition of what is considered a city in his research: "urban centers with more than 50,000 inhabitants. Anything smaller would be a town, a village, or a hamlet" (p. 25). This is a limited concept that excludes urban archipelagos or town agglomerated areas. The contextual framework provided is based on strong theoretical research focused on IR theory.

After the context analysis, Part II examines the structure and sectors of operations of city diplomacy. This section finally introduces the concept of city diplomacy, as well as a literature review and current research trends. Chapter 3 presents a national and international legal framework for the implementation of city diplomacy and acknowledges the possibility of working "in 'alegal' spaces" (p. 54). Within the structural analysis, a long list of intrinsic and extrinsic city diplomacy drivers is provided, composing a strong framework for why city diplomacy exists and is gaining international relevance. Marchetti analyzes the different fields

of operations of city diplomacy in Chapter 4, including politics, business, culture, security, and human rights. In this section, international and regional city networks are introduced, providing a comprehensive list of these networks and examples of international events. Strategies and characteristics from the other fields of operations are also provided, such as city branding, marketing, and identity building efforts or the growing sociocultural and environmental responsibility of city and local authorities.

Marchetti concludes the book with an emphasis on the increasing international influence of cities as the “human, financial, technological, and cultural” hubs they have become, and their importance for future global issues and challenges (p. 107). Finally, he provides a list of policy recommendations that don’t necessarily align with the research presented across chapters. Whereas the recommendation “*Better coordination with other international actors*” could be based on Chapters 1 and 3 about non-state actors and city diplomacy structure, no awareness study has been introduced in this book to recommend “*Better societal awareness: educating society to recognize the added value of city international engagement*” (p. 109).

While two of the books are named “city diplomacy” and one is named “urban diplomacy,” there is a disparity between the meaning of city diplomacy for both books named after the same concept. As mentioned, Marchetti refers to city diplomacy as the diplomatic practices of large and medium-sized urban centers with over 50,000 inhabitants, excluding smaller towns and urban archipelagos, which sets a clear difference between the concepts of “city diplomacy” and a more inclusive “urban diplomacy.” Marchetti does not make a single mention of the latter. Amiri and Sevin’s book—also named after city diplomacy—does not state a clear division between smaller and larger cities and the concept “urban diplomacy” is mentioned in Chapter 2. However, the definition of city diplomacy might slightly differ across chapters due to the diversity of authors. *Urban diplomacy* includes both concepts, “city diplomacy” and “urban diplomacy” several times across the book and both terms are constantly used interchangeably.

The research and analysis presented in the three books is supported by a diverse literature review in the field of city diplomacy. Whereas the most relevant city diplomacy authors—such as Michele Acuto, Jan Melissen, or Robert van der Pluijm—are shared among all bibliographies, Manfredi-Sánchez and Marchetti include a vast literature on urban governance and politics and only Marchetti integrates IR theory. Comparing the research included in the three books from most theoretical to most practical, Marchetti’s book provides a stronger theoretical foundation across city diplomacy, urban governance, and international relations, while Amiri and Sevin’s book provides an extensive and diverse compilation of practical case studies. Manfredi-Sánchez’s book lies in between, offering a strong theoretical framework and mentioning numerous practical examples along the discourse. Therefore, the books could be considered complementary for the study of city/urban diplomacy.

Each of the books presents more diverse additional sources related to different areas of research within city diplomacy. Although some of these sources are written in languages other than English, Spanish, Italian, and Finnish, their research could benefit from integrating more

local literature. Although English is the language per excellence in the academic world, overlooking literature in local languages may limit the possibility of adding different perspectives relevant to the core arguments of the author. Nevertheless, *City Diplomacy: Current Trends and Future Prospects* is still an example of diversity, reflected not only in the scholars, but also in the analysis of city diplomacy practices and case studies. Despite the primacy of Western academic research, the three books offer a variety of perspectives, including several examples of city diplomacy from the Global South.

Whereas Amiri and Sevin are missing a rural perspective (they don't make a single mention of the word "rural"), Manfredi-Sánchez and Marchetti mention rural characteristics and perspectives in their books. At the same time, Manfredi-Sánchez and Marchetti barely introduce the concepts to compare demographic factors between rural and urban areas, instead of delving deeper into the relation or similarities between rural diplomacy work and urban diplomacy. Although rural diplomacy by itself is an understudied concept in academia, some work on rural life and population in relation to diplomacy has been published in academic journals such as *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*. On the other hand, the three books integrate regional diplomacy into their research as a concept inevitably connected to city diplomacy. Manfredi-Sánchez states the difference in political goals and aspirations of regions and cities, as well as nation-states. Amiri and Sevin also mention regional scope, governance, and influence across their book, especially within case studies. Marchetti fully integrates the concept of regional diplomacy into his research, present in his contextual analysis, but also intertwined in the city diplomacy analysis.

*Urban Diplomacy*, as well as *City Diplomacy: From City-States to Global Cities*, integrates relevant issues of today across their work. Manfredi-Sánchez includes the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic into urban diplomacy research, how "covid challeng[ed] the boundaries of political geography" (p. 3), allowing cities to act independently from their governments by sharing best practices and acting on their own. Furthermore, he acknowledges the uncertainty of how city diplomacy practices will evolve and how some cities may increase, maintain, or lose their political power depending on the development of the pandemic and the power dynamics in the post-COVID-19 era. Marchetti contradicts Manfredi-Sánchez by stating that cities' growth "will not be significantly affected by the recent COVID crisis," maintaining a positive view in the evolution of cities' power regardless of the impact of the pandemic (p. 30).

Amiri and Sevin's work stands out for the aforementioned treatment of diversity within the book. Abdullah and García-Chueca denounce the absence of diverse voices and perspectives within transnational municipal networks (TMNs) highlighting the abundance of "white, male and [...] privileged" officials in governing bodies (Chapter 3, p. 53). These new voices also bring a critical tone to the process of international city networking, as "hidden agendas" are questioned (Chapter 3, p. 51). In Chapter 8 (p. 167), closer attention should have been paid to certain information, as it is claimed that tweets "are limited to a maximum of 140 characters" when on November 7th, 2017,—almost three years before this study—Twitter

changed the maximum characters in a “tweet from 140 to 280 characters” (Gligoric, Anderson and West, 2018, p. 596).

Marchetti’s book proves to be a solid theoretical analysis of city diplomacy, as well as inclusive of comparative and complementary concepts as rural and regional diplomacy. Unlike the other two books, city diplomacy is also analyzed from a historical perspective applied to international networks and cities as “foreign policy entities” (p. 49). This historical perspective is also present in one of the case studies included in Amiri and Sevin’s work, but there is no deeper theoretical historical analysis. A disconnect between the content of Marchetti’s book and its conclusion takes place when a list of policy recommendations is provided after comprehensive theoretical and empirical research that lacks more in-depth analysis on city diplomacy practices, as provided in Amiri and Sevin’s work.

Altogether, these three books encompass a wide range of city and urban diplomacy research, from theoretical frameworks to city diplomacy case studies, that combines well-established and emerging literature in the field, providing a strong and complementary set of knowledge.

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