

Urban Diplomacy Exchange German-British Partnership Conference “City partnerships for an inclusive and sustainable future”



Leeds, 19 to 21 June 2023

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*The **Urban Diplomacy Exchange German-British Partnership Conference** took place in Leeds, United Kingdom, from 19 to 21 June 2023. It brought together over 60 participants from nine city partnerships participating in the Urban Diplomacy Exchange Project, including local political leaders and city representatives from the relevant thematic departments, as well as urban diplomacy experts, city networks (Core Cities and the Association of German Cities) and civil society organizations such as the British-German Association.*

Urban Diplomacy Exchange (UDE) is a project commissioned by the [German Federal Foreign Office](#) and carried out by the [Service Agency Communities in One World \(SKEW\)](#) from [Engagement Global](#) in cooperation with the [Association of German Cities](#).

Day 1 – Monday, 19 June 2023

Introductory remarks and setting the scene

The conference is part of the Urban Diplomacy Exchange Project (UDE), funded by the German Federal Foreign Office and implemented by the Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW) of Engagement Global in cooperation with the Association of German Cities. The conference took place in a context of multiple crises, including those of climate, biodiversity and social crises. Participants recognised the importance of talking about how sustainable cities can be created for the future given United Nations (UN) expectations that the population will have increased to 9.7 billion in 2050 which will have far-reaching implications. The collective goals of city leaders and practitioners from across the United Kingdom (UK) and Germany focused on making cities fit for a sustainable future, which can be achieved through building new partnerships and deepening existing ones.

“Town twinning brings people together and that is something we need to support”

The **German Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Miguel Berger**, opened the Urban Diplomacy Exchange German-British Partnership Conference in Leeds. The Ambassador expressed his delight that after a series of online events, including the German-British Virtual Mayors Roundtable “Cities United for a Democratic Europe”, held as part of the UDE project on 22 February 2023, work is now being done on British-German relations in person. Cities have worked for reconciliation after the war and have developed in many areas in Germany and the UK, so that today there are around 480 city partnerships between the countries. Urban Diplomacy recognises the importance of cities and their special responsibility in international cooperation.

“Global challenges go beyond our cities and national borders”

The Ambassador emphasised the similarities between issues discussed in Germany and the UK in the areas of climate change and underlined the importance of supporting the related transformation processes. International cooperation and exchange of practices is a logical and productive strategy built on the support done by municipalities and cities. It is important to focus individually on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and find out what cities can do to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. The Ambassador encouraged pragmatic and trusting cooperation between the UK and the European Union (EU), emphasising that *“these are bonds and relationships which will endure for many years in the future”*. The recent loss of students from EU Member States in the UK is regrettable. Thus, the future of the German Embassy involves looking at what can be done to overcome obstacles that have arisen as a result of Brexit. Town twinning and person-to-person contact are fundamental to overcoming these obstacles. Devolution and Levelling Up were also highlighted as an area for more exchange in the future and stronger devolution is expected to affect the United Kingdom. [Especially for readers from Germany, please find here more information about “Devolution”: [Devolution - The Constitution Society \(consoc.org.uk\)](https://www.consoc.org.uk)].

Welcoming remarks

Al Garthwaite, the 129th Lord Mayor of Leeds, welcomed the participants and emphasised the importance of relationships between cities, using the example of Leeds' strong and longstanding connections with Dortmund and Siegen. City partnerships reinforce shared values, and the power of bonds between young people are of utmost importance in maintaining and building flourishing relationships between cities internationally.

James Lewis, Leader of Leeds City Council, praised the “exciting and engaging conference programme” which addresses the challenges to ensure sustainable growth and focuses on enabling discussions around social and ecological sustainability. Strong partnerships are vital to tackling shared challenges, and Urban Diplomacy provides an important opportunity for dialogue after Brexit as the UK remains outward looking and “open for business”.

“It is not only about challenges, but also about urban solutions”

Lina Furch, Head of the Europe and International Affairs Department and Head of the Brussels Office at the Association of German Cities, emphasised the importance of cities. Cities are committed to implementing international agendas and responding to specific issues and global challenges, including those discussed among the Group of Seven (G7) countries ([Urban 7 Process](#)). Cities are also pioneers in many areas such as democracy. Crises such as the war in Ukraine have shaken the world and cities are on the front line, however cities are often not sufficiently involved in international processes at a structural level. Fostering relationships between the UK and Germany will help to ensure that the world develops in a positive way despite the challenges currently being faced.

“Cities are catalysts for transformation and crucial actors to achieve ecological sustainability”

Alexander Wagner of Engagement Global with its Service Agency Communities in One World echoed the sentiments expressed by his fellow speakers and attached great importance to the role of cities. The aim of the conference is to foster an urban diplomacy exchange, strengthen technical exchange and contribute to the implementation of the global sustainability agenda on the ground ahead of the [UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2023](#). It is important to keep in mind the two central approaches of the 2030 Agenda: Universality (meaning that the Global North has to take responsibility together with the Global South for a more sustainable future) and Leaving No One Behind (referring to the responsibility to strive for inclusive development).

An excursus into the Urban Diplomacy Exchange Project (UDE)

Livia Pichorner, head of the UDE project, elaborated that Urban Diplomacy adds an important opportunity for dialogue and exchange to relations between states and governments. UDE is commissioned and funded by the German Federal Foreign Office and is the first project within Engagement Global/SKEW referring to the Global North. The project is aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals, 65% of which can only be achieved at the local level. Cities are a channel for communication and change at the national level. Cities play an important role to articulate the needs of communities at national and international levels.

The UDE Conference in Leeds has brought together over 60 participants from nine city partnerships participating in the UDE project, including local political leaders and city

representatives from the relevant thematic departments, as well as urban diplomacy experts, city networks (Core Cities and the Association of German Cities) and civil society organizations such as the British-German Association.

Partnership pitches

- Bonn – Oxford
- Darmstadt – Chesterfield
- Dortmund – Leeds
- Essen – Sunderland
- Leipzig – Birmingham
- Ludwigsburg – Caerphilly
- Mannheim – Bristol
- Stuttgart – Cardiff / St. Helens
- Tübingen (with County Wesel) – Durham

Representatives from nine British-German city partnerships had the opportunity to share their current projects and learning experiences. The delegates briefly introduced the work around the SDGs (with a special focus on SDG 11, SDG 16 and SDG 17) that they are already implementing and focusing on in their municipalities, and addressed the importance of cities and the value of partnerships to overcome common challenges and achieve social, ecological sustainability and justice.

The goals and approaches of the respective cities overlapped considerably. **Edward Turner, Deputy Leader of Oxford City Council**, highlighted the importance of an outlook of inclusion, reducing inequalities, focusing on inclusivity, and broadening access within cities. **Neil Johnson, Director of Economic Growth at Chesterfield Borough Council**, similarly emphasised the common goal of decreasing disparity. **Caro Wild, Cabinet Member for Climate Change at Cardiff Council**, captured this sentiment: *“inequality and disparity within cities are big connecting points for us all here today”*.

The city representatives outlined how they are connected by common goals and principles, including “leaving no one behind (LNOB)”, which is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. The representatives of the different cities expressed the overarching goals to tackle poverty and inequality and to grow together so that everyone thrives.

Bettina Bunk from the Department of International Sustainability and Development of the City of Stuttgart outlined how cities strive to use Urban Diplomacy Exchange to face common challenges and work towards the principle of LNOB. Post-Corona measures, early intervention and integration programmes for migrants were outlined by **Liana Sophia Lücke-Gyan, City Partnerships Coordinator from the City of Ludwigsburg**, as concrete measures to address the LNOB principle. The City of Birmingham has explored a [Compassionate Cities](#) partnership and is working towards building Compassionate Cities and Communities as part of the LNOB framework. Compassionate Communities UK is part of a growing global social movement transforming relationships, health and wellbeing.

Delegates also recognised the value of learning from projects and approaches in their respective partner cities. **Richard Hurst, Education Advisor – Sustainability from Durham County Council**, drew attention to the value of identifying and exploring how established projects such as [Fairer](#)

wohnen' (Fairer housing) in Tübingen can be implemented in Durham. It is evident that cities have similar challenges and tasks and will continue to learn from one another.

Cities are trying to involve citizens in their commitment to the SDGs and are focusing on localizing individual SDGs. The topics of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs 11, 16 and 17 (Sustainable Cities and Communities; Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; and Partnerships for the Goals respectively) are particularly relevant to the Urban Diplomacy Exchange project. However, the participating cities are also closely working on other SDGs which they have identified or will identify as particularly relevant for their cities following bilateral exchanges and discussions.

Overall, the strategies of the cities overlapped considerably in terms of their recognition of the need to focus on specific SDGs and identify concrete actions which will support a sustainable future. **Hannah Myers, Assistant Director – Policy Change and Reform from St Helens Council**, reported that St Helens has outlined 134 actions that they want to implement to address climate change. Cities also recognize how SDGs can support partnerships. **Marc Charlton, Low Carbon Senior Manager from Sunderland City Council**, voiced commitment to the 2030 Agenda and stressed that this requires a partnership approach. Cities and partnerships are addressing the question together of what they need to do to develop the skills required for a sustainable future.

Rosalind Roberts, Business Improvement Manager at Caerphilly County Borough Council, reported that Caerphilly and Ludwigsburg are focusing their exchange on alternative energy sources and sustainable procurement. There is consensus on the need for cities to take on global responsibilities, and local political leaders from partnerships expressed how they are looking into engagement opportunities with the Global South.

David Linse, Head of International Affairs Department at the City of Mannheim, expressed how concerns about cities counteracting foreign policy can be addressed through structured consultation and the involvement of cities. It was recognised that there is scope for more coordination involving cities in the field of international politics. **Emily Anne Hruban, Policy Advisor at the City of Mannheim**, drew attention to the [G7 Urban7 \(U7\)](#) initiative, which advocates for a continuous dialogue between the G7 nations and municipal actors represented by national associations and supported by international city networks. Through the U7 initiative, cities are committed to greater recognition of their role as stakeholders in the field of sustainability.

ALL PARTNERSHIP PITCH PRESENTATIONS ARE AVAILABLE [VIA THIS LINK](#) (STARTING FROM SLIDE 13)

Intervention by Tom Riordan on the importance of city diplomacy and partnerships

“Good practices are very hard to spread... [you] only truly learn when you go to events like this and get the chance to reflect ”

Tom Riordan, Chief Executive of Leeds City Council, addressed the importance of global relationships. In the post-Brexit context, partnerships and communication are particularly important as the UK is searching for its identity in the world. The UK has recognised the challenges of climate change and it has become a central policy objective, no longer on the periphery. However, issues such as climate change and inequality are not possible to solve from a singular

origination in a binary way. Global challenges demand new partnerships and collective solutions. Cities are significant sources of soft power with valuable knowledge and understanding that transcends that of nation states alone. They are important in addressing international issues and will contribute to creating stable societies around the world.

“Let’s talk really intensely with each other”

Bilateral conversations and dialogue are recognised as extremely important by Edward Turner, Deputy Leader of the Oxford City Council. The importance of dialogue and cooperation between the local, national, and supra-national levels of politics was also addressed.

Day 2 – Tuesday, 20 June 2023

Mayors Roundtable: Keeping societies together – The role of cities in challenging times

- Birmingham: Councillor Elizabeth Clements
- Bonn: Deputy Mayor Dr. Ursula Sautter
- Bristol: Councillor Kye Dudd
- Caerphilly: Councillor Elizabeth Aldworth
- Cardiff: Councillor Caro Wild
- Durham: Councillor Mark Wilkes
- Leeds: Deputy Leader of the Council Debra Coupar
- Ludwigsburg: Lord Mayor Dr. Matthias Knecht
- Oxford: Deputy Leader of the Council Edward Turner

During the **Mayors Roundtable ‘Keeping societies together – The role of cities in challenging times’**, delegates had the opportunity to engage in an open discussion on the topics of cohesion and the transformation of society in challenging times with nine local political leaders from both German and British cities (see above).

Local communities are held together by a shared experience of space and shared objectives. The value of local communities and authorities in creating cohesive and inclusive environments was recognised. Local communities can go to people on the ground, engage with them and involve them in community processes. **Oxford City Council Deputy Leader Edward Turner** highlighted the important role of local authorities in organising support in local communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The importance of united local communities was also emphasised in the context of national politics. **Councillor Mark Wilkes, of Durham County Council**, identified the overarching commitment and shared passion of all political groups for local communities. The events and situations that develop from climate change were identified as bringing communities together and facilitating engagement between wider groups and demographics.

City partnerships enable the sharing of good practices and offer cities the opportunity to develop programs together. The need to look beyond borders and develop a ‘one world’ mindset was emphasized by the **Deputy Mayor of the City of Bonn, Dr. Ursula Sautter**. **Councillor Elizabeth Aldworth of Caerphilly County Borough Council** highlighted how local communities want to enrich and support partnerships. A commitment to ensuring the continuation of active partnerships after Brexit was expressed. The commitment of companies to continue trade was also identified. The need to ensure the continuation of links between universities, schools and partner institutions was acknowledged by **Councillor Caro Wild of Cardiff Council**. **Councillor Elizabeth**

Clements, from the City of Birmingham, drew attention to the importance of grassroots culture in partnerships and cities as it allows people to come together in a context where there is no language barriers. **Lord Mayor Dr. Matthias Knecht, from the City of Ludwigsburg**, identified the importance of a new form of exchange focusing on climate change and technical questions, as necessary to complement traditional cultural exchange. The need for creative and innovative partnerships was expressed by **Leeds City Deputy Leader Debra Coupar**. Projects within partner cities can be established with a narrow focus to tackle specific themes such as far-right extremism.

The problems of financing and funding were addressed by the panel. The need to ensure experienced staff in place was expressed. The positive work of the British-German Association was underscored by Edward Turner. **Councillor Kye Dudd, from Bristol City Council**, reported on the [Bristol One City Approach](#) which brings together public, private, voluntary and third sector partners to work together to implement wider change across society. He emphasised the importance of taking advantage of existing networks which are experiencing the same global challenges to bring about solutions.

Councillor of Birmingham, Elizabeth Clements stressed the importance of establishing a dialogue between the UK Foreign Office and the Local Government Association to look at funding sources. The need to engage ministers to fund partnerships was identified by German and British representatives.

Members of the panel expressed the importance of considering the well-being of future generations and engaging the voices of the youth in policymaking. The value of research partnerships between universities and local authorities was also highlighted. Universities and research centres are crucial partners and contribute to the development of green technology for the future. The regular communication between local councils and universities is productive for the development of sustainable technologies. **Matthias Knecht, Lord Mayor of the City of Ludwigsburg**, reported that universities in Ludwigsburg are keen to participate in bilateral partnerships with UK institutions. The importance of tripartite relationships between academic institutions, the community (including the involvement of enterprises), and local authority was identified.

Cities sharing knowledge (multilateral)

Thematic exchange in group sessions

Group sessions 1 and 2 allowed representatives from UK and German cities to share their current projects and learning experiences, as well as answering questions from conference participants. Group Session 1 focused on urban diplomacy for social sustainability, while Group Session 2 discussed about urban diplomacy for ecological sustainability.

Group Session 1: Urban Diplomacy for social sustainability

The themes discussed in Group Session 1 included diversity, social inclusion and health, the challenges and opportunities of migration, and managing multiculturalism.

Managing multiculturalism – challenges and opportunities for the municipal health care sector

Constanze Anders, Head of the Public Health Department at the City of Leipzig, began by presenting the [KuGel - Culturally Sensitive Health Guides](#) project, which originates from the perspective that the understanding of health differs in different cultures and communities. In the project, trained health advisors from a migration background offer information events on various topics in 19 different languages. The project supports migrants to learn what they themselves can do for their health, where they can get information and advice on health issues and how the German health system works.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE CITY OF LEIPZIG IS AVAILABLE [HERE](#).

From multiculturalism to interculturalism – social cohesion and challenges of far-right extremism

Nadeem Siddique, Head of Service Community Relations & Cohesion, City of Leeds, addressed the importance of building resilient and cohesive communities in the context of changing dynamics within cities. The problem of far-right extremism, particularly following the narrative during Brexit, was identified. In intercultural cities, leaders and citizens embrace diversity, leaders combat discrimination, and adapt governance and services to needs of a diverse population.

The [Best City Ambition](#) is vision for the future of Leeds, focusing on tackling poverty and inequality and improving quality of life for citizens. Constructive peer-to-peer encounters were highlighted as vital to inclusive growth and can counter the tendency towards self-segregation within communities. There are a number of initiatives which are being implemented in Leeds to support equality, diversity, and inclusion. Lead member champions represent the views of minority groups in the council decision making processes. There are also consultative networks and forums, as well as an [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion](#) vision and action plan in place.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE CITY OF LEEDS IS AVAILABLE [HERE](#).

Adult education for social inclusion and integration

Helen Chicot, City of Rochdale Reform and Prevention Lead, discussed the importance of adult education. The [Urban X-Change Network](#) offers nine German Adult Education Centres and their counterparts in Great Britain, Ukraine and the USA the opportunity to carry out cross-border cultural and educational activities. Conversation about adult education is often marginalized to focus on economic impact, however, according to Helen Chicot, it is also about democracy and power sharing. Education builds trust and cohesion and promotes common understanding between people by coming together in safe spaces.

Helen Chicot also reported on the language provision in boroughs and drew attention to the different experiences of language acquisition from curriculum and grassroots organizations. Communities have valuable knowledge about their localities and provide trauma-informed training for tutors. This approach is also being followed in other cities such as Aachen. Within the wider network, shared values are informing measures which aim to take the edge off the traumatic experience of Ukrainian refugees. The importance of psychologically informed environments which are designed and delivered in a way that considers the emotional and psychological needs of individuals was emphasized.

Group Session 2: Urban Diplomacy for ecological sustainability

The themes discussed in Group Session 2 included sustainable urban transformation, sustainable mobility, biodiversity, and climate adaptation.

Climate Adaptation

Heather Law, European Affairs Manager of the City of Birmingham, first introduced the Birmingham Food Project and explained how it came about. Birmingham joined a partnership with the city of Milan and won an award for its food waste projects. The Urban Food Policy Pact, involving cities from Mexico and Pakistan, was initiated to address the climate crisis through the food aspect. It was noted that as part of the EU 2030 Food Agenda, Birmingham has continued to receive funding from the EU/Horizon 2020 Programme for its “Food Trails Project” after the Brexit. Heather Law shared that Milan’s food policy is an inspiration, but also draws inspiration from many other cities working with local farmers on regenerative farming, where shortening the supply chain is also key. This provides opportunities for Levelling Up. It was stated that the interaction with supermarkets is difficult and disparity needs to be fixed.

The Birmingham Food Project works with universities and is measured against the 2030 Food Agenda and the Theory of Change. Although each participating city is working on something different as part of the project, they are all addressing similar issues. The project in Birmingham is co-ordinated with the Public Health Board and stakeholders are brought together through the Creating Healthy Food City Forum. Sarah Pullen (behavioral scientist) and Dr. Justin Varney (head of public health) are involved. Finally, it was emphasised that more cities in the UK are using the insights from Henry Dimbleby’s [National Food Strategy](#).

THE PRESENTATION OF THE CITY OF BIRMINGHAM IS AVAILABLE [HERE](#).

Heiko Just, Head of the Parks Department of the City of Dortmund, shared Dortmund's approach to ecological sustainability. The protection of biodiversity, green spaces and urban gardens were identified as key elements to address climate change. Together with the Parks Department of the City of Dortmund, Borussia Dortmund, the Signal Iduna Group and the Beekeeping Associations, the city is looking to redesign the company green areas and the adjacent public green spaces in a near-natural and ecological way. Since the start with the sowing of a large-scale flower meadow, at least one small project has been implemented every year, such as the construction of a butterfly spiral. The importance of awareness raising, knowledge transfer and environmental education was emphasised. Activities such as interactive rallies for children, lectures and interactive workshops are offered every year during the Biodiversity Day. Heiko Just also pointed out that the city of Dortmund has a scheme in private and public housing where every new house has to have a 'big green roof' to keep rainwater in the house. Questions arose whether solar panels should be also included, and this will be discussed in a next step.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE CITY OF DORTMUND IS AVAILABLE [HERE](#).

Polly Cook, Climate, Energy and Green Spaces Chief Officer for the City of Leeds, shared their strategy to connect green and blue spaces in the city. As part of the Leeds Best City Ambition Programme, the Leeds Parks and Green Spaces strategy 2022 – 2032 aims to provide the best parks and green spaces for citizens. The need to unlock land for nature was identified and significantly more trees need to be planted in both rural and urban areas. Activities such as "Planting for Our Future" are in line with other regional strategies in the UK and green infrastructure was highlighted as a key element in flood risk management. In addition to flood alleviation, areas such as the "Wyke Beck Valley" provide enriched green spaces for citizens to explore new habitats when floodwater is not being stored. Compared to other cities, urban gardening is not yet as popular in Leeds and citizens still need to be made aware on the benefits of green spaces.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE CITY OF LEEDS IS AVAILABLE [HERE](#).

Part of the general discussion was the fact that flooding is becoming an increasingly important issue, along with the greening of cities. The consequences of climate change are getting closer and so is the importance of sharing information with citizens about climate, droughts, heat maps and rain maps. This information helps citizens analyse data and forecast moderate and extreme weather changes as a prevention mechanism. Collaboration with universities, research projects and different donors is important.

Furthermore, the UK has announced a new [Biodiversity Net Gain Scheme](#) where UK developers must leave the site they develop with 10% more biodiversity than when they began with the site. It's soon to be introduced.

Sustainable Mobility

Sarah Hassenpflug, Sustainable Innovation Manager of the City of Oxford, spoke about the importance of providing electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure. The general holistic approach to sustainable mobility has different objectives: reducing miles (cars), promoting cycling, addressing specific needs of different communities, understanding their challenges and requirements. The low-traffic mobility approach is about reallocating traffic, reducing the number of cars by, for example, permanently closing one side of the road for cars and opening up spaces for people. The clean air approach, on the other hand, "rewards" environmentally friendly behaviour and

“punishes” environmentally harmful behaviour through fees based on car types and environmental impact. The importance of engaging citizens and how changes are communicated to the community was pointed out.

Sarah Hassenpflug reported that EV charging needs to be planned strategically and in detail to be sustainable as the cost of doing nothing is higher and not safe for citizens and the city. The main differences arise when choosing the most appropriate method for EVs. Ultra-fast charging is faster, but it is more expensive and challenging for the batteries than standard charging. Home charging using lamp posts, on the other hand, can lead to problems in residential areas as public charging stations and parking spaces can illegally be claimed by citizens. Strategically placed charging stations, mechanisms and coordinated charging schedules via WhatsApp and similar means have successfully supported Oxford’s aim of creating a fitting ecosystem of EV charging solutions.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE CITY OF LEEDS IS AVAILABLE [HERE](#).

Bernd Schott, Environmental and Climate Protection Officer of the City of Tübingen, shared on the current initiatives to promote environmental-friendly mobility in the city. As part of the strategy “Tübingen goes blue 3.0”, the “Blue Ribbon” project was launched, inspired by the Copenhagen model, to build a new network of cycle paths. The network includes at least 4-metre wide cycle lanes, secure bicycle parking areas, new bridges and underpasses. The main goal is to ensure good accessibility to all destinations in the city from the surrounding area. In parallel, the promotion of car sharing was implemented by facilitating public parking spaces to car sharing companies and expanding the EV car sharing fleet. **Bernd Schott** emphasised the importance of promoting and improving the use of public transport. In Tübingen, the main operator of public transport is part of the municipal company and many improvements have been made: cheaper tickets, free public transport use days, high discounts for students and financially weak households, and more accessible bus stops. An interesting fact is that city council itself uses car sharing.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE CITY OF TÜBINGEN IS AVAILABLE [HERE](#).

Intervention of the British-German Association (BGA): The role of civil society in city-to-city partnerships

Oliver St. John, BGA Strategic Partnerships Executive, outlined the work of the British-German Association to support town twinning and town twinning associations (TTAs). Volunteer town twinning associations play an essential role in maintaining links with a twin town, fostering people-to-people contacts and connecting groups and organizations in towns. TTAs face limited funding, low council engagement, and difficulties in recruiting new and younger members. It was recommended that councils generate more awareness of partnerships, appoint councillors and officers to engage with TTAs, offer small grants to TTAs, and provide free use of council facilities for twinning events. The value of international opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds was emphasised as young people’s engagement can lead to the establishment of youth branches and future involvement in partnership activities. To tackle the challenge of reduced city council involvement in partnerships, the appointment of councillors and officers responsible for twinning, focused involvement and exchange of best practice were recommended.

Council to council links can also benefit local communities and facilitate the exchange of best practices. The *BGA Best Practice Guide for TTAs* offers suggestions as to what sort of connections can be made and how twin towns can strengthen links. Overall, it was stressed that as many stakeholders as possible should be involved in partnerships.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE BGA IS AVAILABLE [HERE](#)

Fireside chat on multilevel governance and the role of cities

- Lina Furch, Head of the Europe and International Affairs Department and Head of the Brussels Office, Association of German Cities
- Will Mapplebeck, Strategic Communications Manager, Core Cities
- Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi, Founding Director, City Diplomacy Lab

A panel engaged in a productive discussion on multilevel governance with **Lina Furch** from the Association of German Cities, **Will Mapplebeck** from Core Cities UK and **Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi** from the City Diplomacy Lab. The potential of a collaborative approach involving the cooperation of cities was emphasised and speakers expressed their visions of city diplomacy in the future as a matter of course which will facilitate the transition towards sustainable urban development.

Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi began by outlining that there is no anthropological difference between national and local government. However, cities faced particular challenges: they are close to local actors and citizens, but often lack the power to enforce and implement their visions and actions. Thus, cities do have a genuine need to cooperate and collaborate. The UN has begun to recognise the role of cities and is working towards a collaborative approach involving the voices of cities.

Lina Furch questioned how well structural inclusion is working in the federal and decentralized state of Germany. **Will Mapplebeck** reported that cities in the UK lack sufficient power and participation. According to Mapplebeck, cities are national assets, not liabilities.

It was recognised that engaging cities in democratic countries can advance the vision of foreign partners worldwide towards a more collaborative approach. The importance of protecting local democracy was also emphasised. The potential for cooperation between democratic and non-democratic states in different stages of democracy was underscored by **Lina Furch**. Cities working together internationally enable a channel for conversation and change. There is potential for cities to approach national governments and bring their knowledge into the development of laws.

“Urban7 is a real win for city networks around the world”

Will Mapplebeck commended the G7 for recognizing the transformative power of cities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. By using existing associations and approaching existing networks, confusion in the field of urban policy can be minimised. **Lina Furch** sees the potential of establishing envoys for urban diplomacy and highlighted that it is important to make the work of cities visible. Cities know what they can do and what power they have. However, a rethink is required at international and national level. **Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi** also sees the value of urban diplomacy as a way for cities to move away from being passively affected by global

challenges in the context of enduring internationalisation. City diplomacy enables technical and financial exchanges.

The challenge of the general disinterest in city-to-city diplomacy was identified by **Will Mapplebeck**. Cities' questions about climate change need to be more precise and concrete: go into incremental detail and look at specific policy aspects, like climate finance – financing decarbonisation. Focusing on specific issues can help to overcome the sameness in the urban policy space. **Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi** identified the challenge of global city networks being Eurocentric. Thus, stronger coordination with cities is beneficial for international foreign policy, as 65% of the SDGs need local government involvement to be achieved.

Overall, the panel envisage a strong future for urban diplomacy and hope that more national leaders become more aware of the power and potential of cities. City leaders and networks can transform the perception of cities. It is desirable that the urban perspective becomes the norm and is included in all parts of the designed laws. City diplomacy has a key role in “designing the future of humanity”.

Day 3 – Wednesday, 21 June 2023

Panel discussion: Urban diplomacy for social and ecological justice

- Tom Riordan, Chief Executive, Leeds City Council
- Deputy Mayor Dr. Ursula Sautter, City of Bonn
- Lord Mayor Dr. Matthias Knecht, City of Ludwigsburg

The panel engaged in an interactive discussion on strengthening urban diplomacy for social and ecological justice. The local political leaders identified that engagement at all levels (national, regional, local), more empowerment and sustainable funding are the key aspects cities and city partnerships need to achieve an inclusive and sustainable future.

“We need a fundamental change that it not just about how cites spend money”

Tom Riordan emphasized the need for carbon accounting. Capacity building is necessary and it was stressed that municipalities need to “boil down” complexity and provide people the necessary information to make the right decisions. Municipalities need to equip people with the skills they need to be ready to engage in conversations as circumstances and technology evolve. “We need a fundamental change in how we measure performance of how we are using carbon. So that there is a penalty if you use too much carbon and incentives if you don’t”, said Riordan.

Buildings dedicated to international relations, co-managed by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and municipalities, can help connect local communities and stakeholders. **Lorenzo Kihlgren Grandi** outlined how the physical space (buildings dedicated to international relations) can be used through diverse activities for debate with the citizens.

“We need to evolve city partnerships into something that is necessary”

Ursula Sautter recommended that partnerships step up efforts to achieve results and concrete actions. The UK and Germany play a leading role within the global environment. **Riordan and**

Knecht emphasised the scope for more work with the Global South and the need to develop trilateral relations as cities have diverse diaspora communities and direct connections to the Global South. The potential of connecting cities and different language sections of Africa in order to combine bilateral components into multilateral ones was highlighted.

“Social justice shouldn’t forget people in the here and now”

Ursula Sautter emphasised how climate change is exacerbating inequalities between people. Gender equality and climate change are cross-cutting issues and the underlying principles of carbon accounting should be used to address gender quality. Involving young people at the decision-making level will also improve inclusion.

“The 21st century is the century of cities”

The closeness of cities to people and the importance of communication between people in cities in the context of the war in Ukraine were highlighted. Strategic partnerships between the public and private sectors will be beneficial for the future. It is important for cities to use their leverage to address issues, condense and publish their goals.

Important insights from the partnership exchange, closing remarks and impulses

“Partnership should allow time for fun as well as lofty rhetoric and high-minded politics”

The delegates discussed how they can implement new ideas and visions through concrete actions. **John Donegan, from the City of Leeds Office for International Relations**, addressed the need to focus on bringing ideas to fruition by preparing proposals for administrations, proposing organizational structures and appointing “real people” from communities as ambassadors and influencers for international work. **Catrin Siebert, Head of the Europe and Sustainable County Development Department in the District of Wesel**, outlined how cultural projects can fit with climate change. Delegates identified the need to set timelines and organise topics into a prioritisation hierarchy.

Communication underpins all activities and is an important point for development. Social media has great potential in reaching citizens, as well as in gaining awareness and support for partnerships. Successful partnerships should involve the relevant associations, organizations and departments and communicate both internally and externally. **Samantha Morgan, International Affairs Officer at Bristol City Council**, reported how networks can bring together and encourage other colleagues to become part of the international relations network. It is important that networks at home and abroad are well linked.

Throughout the conference it became clear that working on Sustainable Development Goals is important, productive and beneficial for partnerships. Finally, Livia Pichorner and Alexander Wagner from Engagement Global with its Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW) sincerely thanked the City of Leeds and the conference participants for their engagement and participation.

Site visits

On the last day of the event, the participants had the opportunity to join one of the three site visits organized by the City of Leeds. The site visits showcased social and environmental sustainability initiatives and projects undertaken in Leeds. Below is a short overview:

Zero Carbon Housing

The Leeds Climate Innovation District is a £250 million housing development by private developers [CITU](#), with 800 zero-carbon homes, which aims to accelerate the shift to sustainable cities. Leeds' Climate Innovation District is believed to be the largest urban sustainable development in the UK, and CITU intend it to radically change the way we live in cities, and accelerate the shift to zero-carbon cities. The scheme's design targets the three major emission sources of carbon contributing over 60 per cent of UK emissions: buildings, energy and transport.

A sustainable approach to major regeneration

South Bank Leeds is believed to be one of Europe's biggest regeneration programmes, propelled by £500 million investment. It is the result of a visionary plan to double the size of Leeds city centre by rejuvenating the formerly industrial area south of the River Aire, covering an expansive 253-hectare space equivalent to 350 football pitches. The goal is to create a world-class destination that seamlessly integrates living, learning, creativity, leisure, and investment opportunities. The scheme is projected to create 35,000 new jobs across various sectors.

Sustainability is at the heart of the vision, as it encompasses the creation of vibrant public spaces, including [Aire Park](#), which will be the largest new city centre green space in the UK, as well as cultural amenities, and enhanced connectivity. The project also emphasizes the preservation and integration of historical elements, ensuring that the rich heritage of the area is celebrated and woven into the fabric of the new developments.

Cohesion and communities

The participants were taken out of Leeds city center to see work in Harehills and Seacroft. Two communities with very different demographics, doing excellent work to support cohesion and inclusiveness.

[CATCH](#) are based in Harehills Leeds – a culturally diverse community bringing together many people who were (or whose parents or grandparents were) born outside the UK. CATCH have been working with adults and young people from diverse backgrounds for over 10 years. They have a popular youth programme with over 1000 members providing a range of opportunities for sport, creativity and learning, as well as for volunteering and social action projects. A group of eight young people from CATCH were recently involved in a visit to Dortmund, facilitated by Leeds City Council, Stadt Dortmund and Jugendring Dortmund, and funded by UK German Connection.

Seacroft, where [LS14 Trust](#) is based has a mostly white British demographic. They offer an exciting and sustainability-driven community centre bringing together diverse communities and tackling Far Right radicalisation. The LS14 Trust was set up in 2009 by a group of local people who wanted to work together to change the communities that they loved across Seacroft, Swarcliffe and Whinmoor.