

Article

**The Global Public City in the 21st Century:
Written and Unwritten Rules within and beyond the
State — Transdisciplinary Reflections**

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Summary

The 21st century is predicted to become the century of the city, in which urban spaces will be sites, laboratories, and catalysts for global, local, and transnational forms of (democratic) governance. This sound declaration of another spatial turn puts cities once again at the center of interest, especially when it comes to studying the localization of the global. Cities have become objects, loci, subjects, and agents of emerging transnational forms of governance and cooperation. They increasingly now operate not only within but also parallel to and beyond states on the local, regional, as well as global stages. In the context of the contemporary scientific debate about “written” and “unwritten rules” of political and legal practices in different political spaces around the world, the following reflections focus specifically on global public cities. To this end, the article adds new perspectives on democracy and on both written and unwritten rules of the political realm when it comes, for instance, to cities’ relations with the (democratic) state as well as with other cities as participants in global networks. In these relations cities increasingly use the language of interstate relations and international law, and mimic states’ practiced forms of institutionalized and legalized interaction. The paper briefly summarizes key arguments made from international law and political science perspectives, before then presenting selected voices from the literature who might enable us to enter into a transdisciplinary dialogue with them — especially focusing on comparative and cross-regional ones regarding the 21st century global public city.

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Introduction: some thoughts about cities in the 21st century

The 21st century is predicted to become the century of the city. Twenty-first century cities could be considered as laboratories for global, local, and transnational forms of cooperation and governance and, thus, also as objects and agents of globalization at the same time.¹ Over 50 percent of the world’s population is currently living in

1 In this context the term “global governance” is used to denote public and private partnerships, as well as hybrid relationships with state and non-state actors alike that are involved in the creation and