

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

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The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the abilities of countries around the world to cooperate in the face of a common threat. Although many governments have focused on implementing domestic measures to prevent the spread of the disease, some cities have performed several functions that are traditionally carried out by the state. Brookings analysts have noted that cities have taken responsibility for providing humanitarian supplies such as masks and facilitating data exchange while expanding their influence over decisions that are typically made by states (Pipa & Bouchet, 2020). Accordingly, *City Diplomacy: Current Trends and Future Prospects* has been published at a critical juncture wherein cities are emerging as global actors rather than actors that are merely “complementary to state” (Thonon, 2006; Sizoo, 2007, p.4).

City diplomacy (CD) is a developing interdisciplinary field with deep roots in practice instead of theory. Some aspects of CD were visible in the postwar cooperation between European cities; however, it truly emerged at the beginning of the 2000s, following the increased influence of globalization, which highlighted the role of cities as key players in cooperation and peace-building (Musch et al., 2008, p.10). Nonetheless, CD remained largely unnoticed by the academic community at this time because of its indistinct conceptual boundaries. The editors of this volume intend to bridge the gap between theory and practice by taking the first step toward the creation of “intellectual and academic frameworks” (Amiri

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& Seven, 2020, pp. 25–27) for CD. Namely, the editors seek to overcome skepticism by conceptualizing and collating empirical data, which can then be applied to practice.

The structure of the book may initially confuse readers. Although CD is still an emerging field, the book does not begin with a historical or conceptual overview of the field and of interdisciplinary studies on cities for its readers. However, the authors alleviate this issue to some extent over the course of the text. Notably, Ray Lara elaborates on the role of cities in international relations in Chapter 9. In addition, the discussions of the differences between paradiplomacy and city branding (Chapter 13) and the nuanced or limited capabilities of cities in the field of diplomacy (Chapter 14) enable a debate on the limitations of CD.

The book consists of four main sections, which cover a plethora of CD forms (negotiations, collaborations, advocacy, etc.) and CD's engagement with other interdisciplinary concepts (soft power, city and place branding, public diplomacy, etc.). The first section offers insights into how cities assert their power and global and political influence by utilizing and developing city networks. The second concentrates on individual policies and actions implemented by mayors (Chapter 5), museums (Chapter 6), and cities (Chapters 7 and 8). The third section analyzes how CD is interconnected with different levels of governance, including global, regional, and national governance. Finally, the fourth section presents one of the most insightful parts of the volume by going beyond the traditional focus of CD on Western countries and introducing case studies of CD across the globe, including examples from Singapore, Eastern European countries, and Columbia.

As Michele Acuto notes in the prologue, one of the strengths of this book is its attempt to overcome constraints of the “ivory tower” by combining an academic approach with the application of knowledge gleaned from practice. By bringing together scholars and practitioners, the editors demonstrate different yet mutually beneficial views on CD. Similar to the field of public diplomacy, CD requires an empirical and practical confirmation of its research results that will allow scholars to attain their goal of overcoming skepticism toward the field. In addition, the book overcomes another limitation of the “ivory tower” by expanding the scope of its research interest to include non-Western examples of modern CD, an approach that Pluijm and Melissen (2007) strongly argued for over a decade ago (p. 34).

Some of the book's other strengths serve as a double-edged sword for the field in question. Specifically, the authors introduce a wide range of methodological tools for analyzing and evaluating CD, including case studies, surveys, interviews, tweet analysis, and sentiment analysis. Despite the evident advantages of multilayer and varied analyses, the methods used are fragmented and disconnected, which creates a need for further research that can improve uniformity and triangulation. In addition, the presented data samples often do not match the research scope or purpose, particularly in the case of tweet analysis, wherein the number of collected tweets was relatively small and not representative. Although the editors note that CD “lacks a nuanced analytical framework” (Chapter 4), the existing deficiencies are not addressed, and the task of expanding the data sample has been left for future research.

Moreover, another problem arises from the aim of the work. Being a highly anticipated collection of research, the book has an agenda-driven approach with particular areas of interest. This impacts how nuanced the research inquiry is and consequently detracts from the authors' aim to overcome skepticism toward CD. As Musch and Sizoo (2008) argue, CD “does not always work, (p.22)” especially with respect to certain issues such as peace-building and security. Editors and authors alike rarely note the limitations (except in Chapter 14) and conceptual boundaries that relate to their area of interest, which might mislead future researchers about the nature of CD and its elements.

Nevertheless, such shortcomings are not new for emerging and poorly established academic fields of inquiry. In this context, the book constitutes a major first step toward a more solid and empirically grounded discipline. The essays in this volume can inform practitioners and pave the path for a “successive generation” of CD approaches, the emergence of which Acuto, Kosovac, and Hartley (2021) noted in a recent publication.

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