Le Geneva Cities Hub (GCH)

Villes et acteurs locaux dans le concert international

Le rapport annuel 2021 du GCH, disponible en ligne sur son site[1], laisse apparaitre une progression de son but initial visant à favoriser les interactions entre les villes, gouvernements locaux et régionaux (GLRs) et la Genève Internationale.

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En dépit d'une période difficile liée à la crise sanitaire, la plateforme du GCH a permis d'améliorer les synergies entre acteurs locaux et institutions internationales, favorisant l'abord des thématiques qui peuvent échapper aux radars d'une approche conventionnelle. Dans ce contexte, l'écosystème genevois apparaît comme novateur.

Une certaine agilité a, de fait, été mise en place grâce à une consolidation de l'équipe et de la structure, capable de proposer des évènements qui rassemblent toujours plus d'intérêt auprès de ses partenaires.

Pas moins de Quatre GUD (Geneva Urban Debates) ont été organisés en 2021 en présentant les thématiques des ODD, l'eau, la relance économique, ou encore les droits de l'homme.

La diplomatie des villes a également été présentée sous forme d'évènements permettant de s'inspirer de l'expertise locale pour solutionner les problèmes rencontrés notamment en termes de changement climatique. Ces «city diplomacy events» associés au GUD mettent en exergue et partagent des solutions pour le futur.

Durant sa deuxième année de vie, le GCH a renforcé sa collaboration avec ONU Habitat et la Commission économique des Nations Unies pour l'Europe (CEE-ONU)

Un répertoire des réseaux internationaux permet désormais de visualiser les contacts et réseaux des villes. Trois discussions informelles et confidentielles, favorisant cette mise en réseau, ont été organisées dans le cadre de la Task Force de l'ONU sur le futur des villes. Cette dernière, établie en novembre 2020 par le Secrétaire général de l'ONU sous l'égide d'ONU Habitat, a pour mission de renforcer les interactions entre GLRs et l'ONU, pour les ODD, les droits de l'homme et notamment l'Examen Périodique Universel.

Par ailleurs, plusieurs évènements ont été organisés:
- Les villes de Santiago, Barcelone, Munich se sont réunies pour discuter des moyens visant à développer des «villes intelligentes» grâce aux technologies et innovations répondant aux besoins de leurs résidents, tout en préservant le droit à la vie privée et la protection des données personnelles.
- Des représentants des villes de Genève, Tunis, Kigali et Lyon ont exposé leurs politiques de digitalisation en incluant les populations marginalisées et en tenant compte des enjeux environnementaux.
- Le CICR a co-organisé un événement sur la violence urbaine et la protection du personnel de santé dans les villes.
- La Mission suisse auprès de l'ONU à Genève, le Fonds des Nations Unies pour la sécurité routière, Pro Vélo, et Urbz ont co organisé une réception à l'occasion de la journée internationale du vélo
- La Commission mondiale a abordé la thématique des «Villes et politiques de drogues»
- L'Union internationale des télécommunications a organisé, lors de la journée mondiale des villes, une conférence intitulée «Construire des villes résilientes face au climat grâce à la transformation numérique»
- Enfin, le CGLU et la Ville de Genève ont réuni des acteurs humanitaires internationaux et des représentants de GLRs du Liban, du Ghana et du Mali et ont pu échanger sur la gestion des risques et crises humanitaires et les moyens de renforcer le rôle des GLRs à cet égard.

Après deux années d'existence, le GCH semble avoir trouvé un rythme pour organiser ces évènements liés à la diplomatie informelle. Il semble maintenant évident à chaque partenaire que les villes et GLRs constituent des acteurs incontournables dans la résolution efficace des défis globaux. ∎

1 https://www.genevacitieshub.org/fr/

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Cities better prepared for health emergencies

The Sustainable Development Goals – among them
Goal 3 to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being
for all at all ages – were adopted by the United Nations
General Assembly in 2015.

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The very same year the United
Nations Security Council, for the
first time in its history, called for
an emergency session to address
a public health issue, the Ebola
pandemic.

Recent news about yet again a
lockdown – this time in Shang-
hai – show that coronaviruses
are emerging as a major threat
to people in the 21st century and
they are here to stay. In the last
two decades, three human coro-
naviruses have been reported: in
2003 SARS-CoV, in 2012 MERS-
CoV and in 2019 SARS-CoV-2
(COVID-19). Due to the spread of
infections in a globalized world
with high morbidity and mortal-
ity rates, public and high-level
political attention focus more
on health questions than before.

A special focus is now on cities:
on the one hand international cit-
ies have become hotspots of pan-
demics due to globalized travel
and trade, on the other hand
urban health conditions might
be pre determinant regarding
the capacity to handle the conse-
quences of a pandemic. The WHO
in its 13th General Programme of
Work for 2019-23 – as part of the
"triple billion targets" – identi-
fied better protection from health
emergencies as well as enjoying
better health and well-being.
The High-level Conference on
Preparedness for Public Health
Emergencies Challenges and
Opportunities in Urban Areas
in 2018 emphasized that urban
health challenges require
multi-level and cross-sectoral
cooperation with a specific role
given to local leaders. Though,
COVID-19 demonstrated that

shortcomings still exist in urban
preparedness, local response and
regional coordination.

While COVID-19 is most often
compared to the so-called
"Spanish Flu" (1918-19), a more
telling parallel in my opinion
would be between the influ-
enza pandemics in 1918-19 and
in 2009–2010. Both were caused
by an influenza A(H1N1) virus.
The first was estimated to have
caused 20–50 million deaths,
the second an estimated 151-575
thousand deaths worldwide.In 90
years, we achieved progress that
enabled us to reduce the number
of fatalities tenfold. "In 2009 for
the first time, a pandemic vac-
cine was developed, produced
and deployed in multiple coun-
tries during the first year of the
pandemic. With each pandemic,
researchers, public health experts

and international organizations have gained a better understanding of the complexity and dynamics of influenza pandemics."One similarity with COVID-19 is worth highlighting here. Thanks to an extraordinary international cooperation, scientific and financial public-private partnerships, the first vaccines were also developed, approved and produced in less than one year.

Governments made an important step in the direction of more effective coordination between global, national and local levels. The WHO resolution WHA73.8(2020) on 'Strengthening preparedness for health emergencies: implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005)' calls upon member states, regional economic integration organizations, international, regional and national partners, donors and partners "to assess the vulnerabilities of cities and human settlements to health emergencies, paying particular attention to communicable disease outbreaks, and to enhance preparedness by integrating policies, plans and exercises across health, urban planning, water and sanitation, environmental

protection and other relevant sectors, to ensure local leadership and community involvement".

Increased investment to strengthen capacities and capabilities in urban health services, including health emergency preparedness and response is essential. Following a multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder approach that involves national and local levels in decision-making could be beneficial. As WEF reports show, a holistic urban health policy is desirable, because social determinants of health have a great influence over health and quality of life. Reducing the risks and negative consequences of global diseases together with creating healthier, more productive societies could add $12 trillion to global GDP by 2040.

Recent massive urbanization has led cities to become epicenters of disease transmission. Infectious diseases like COVID-19,

tuberculosis, dengue and diarrhea thrive in poor and overcrowded environments and are closely related to unhealthy housing, poor sanitation and waste management. Given the fact that cities deal with many dimensions of health, they need to be involved not only in the response to pandemics but in the international debate on strengthening preparedness. Mayors from different cities, countries and continents expressed very clearly: due to the proximity to their population, their knowledge and understanding of the local actors and context, they have a crucial role to prevent, prepare for, and recover from health emergencies.

The WHO states that "During the pandemic, many cities have strengthened existing networks and partnerships with communities to best respond to people's needs, while strengthening multisectoral collaboration and strong leadership from the health sector. WHO has been supporting cities in building and shaping these policies and actions."[5] To ensure that cities are better prepared to face future health challenges, including emergencies, it is a prerequisite to put more

emphasis on their needs in WHO debates.

WHO and its member states should consider preparing a more efficient and credible crisis communication strategy to avoid the dissemination of false and potentially harmful information. As for local authorities, it is important that they become the major source of information for citizens on the local health situation. This role requires strategic preparation by breaking the cycle of "panic and neglect". There is a need to better communicate among nearby cities to harmonize local policies to avoid confusion of the population by different measures in place, because nobody is safe until everybody is safe. They should involve all stakeholders responsible for health protection, social assistance and economic recovery from the beginning.

All these are only possible if we strengthen coordination among international, national and local actors, and we make the voice of all relevant stakeholders heard at the discussion table. ■