Application of Sustainability-Oriented Innovation to Participatory Urbanism within a Multilevel Governance Framework: The Case of Geneva

PILIPISZYN, Ashley Christine, HEDJAZI, Alexandre Babak

Abstract

Today’s global cities are hyper-connected, transcend borders and impact international agendas. Within the context of global change, cities’ perpetual adaptability, reflexivity and responsiveness, have legitimized their growing role within the global governance architecture. Nevertheless, the increased mismatch between the role cities are expected to play at the global level and their place within global governance structures hinders the collective ability to address planetary challenges. Taking stock of the importance of inclusivity in cities in order to solve these challenges, innovate and cultivate legitimacy, we argue that the City of Geneva, in collaboration with the Geneva International Airport, achieves legitimacy in the global governance architecture due to its demonstrated capacity to be a champion in social innovation through its facilitation of participatory urbanism. The city of Geneva has been at the epicenter of global governance and decision-making for nearly 100 years and is a prime example of local level implementation of innovative solutions to global challenges, such as sustainable urban [...]
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AC Pilipiszyn & AB Hedjazi

Institute of Environmental Sciences, University of Geneva
Geneva, Switzerland

Corresponding email addresses: ashley.pilipiszyn@unige.ch; alexandre.babak.hedjazi@unige.ch

Today’s global cities are hyper-connected, transcend borders and impact international agendas. Within the context of global change, cities’ perpetual adaptability, reflexivity and responsiveness, have legitimized their growing role within the global governance architecture. Nevertheless, the increased mismatch between the role cities are expected to play at the global level and their place within global governance structures hinders the collective ability to address planetary challenges. Taking stock of the importance of inclusivity in cities in order to solve these challenges, innovate and cultivate legitimacy, we argue that the City of Geneva, in collaboration with the Geneva International Airport, achieves legitimacy in the global governance architecture due to its demonstrated capacity to be a champion in social innovation through its facilitation of participatory urbanism. The city of Geneva has been at the epicenter of global governance and decision-making for nearly 100 years and is a prime example of local level implementation of innovative solutions to global challenges, such as sustainable urban transportation and energy systems. This paper presents our analysis of the City of Geneva through our Sustainability-Oriented Innovation Index for Airports©, with regards the international airport’s capacity to align sustainability strategies through three unique lenses of environmental, social, and technological innovation.

In this case study, we briefly review the key features of Geneva’s metropolitan area and international airport; we explain the social system that impacts the Geneva metroregion; we present the Sustainability-Oriented Innovation Index for Airports© portfolio of Geneva; we study the how the Geneva Airport fosters participatory urbanism; and finally we look at how these innovations have contributed to the overall adaptability, reflexivity, and responsiveness of the Geneva metroregion. Due to the anchored permanency of direct democracy with Switzerland, airport and municipal authorities are especially aware of the power of the voice of the people. Whatever new projects or initiatives the airport or city would like to implement, the respective officials know that it is the people that have the final say, which is why it is imperative to foster a process of participatory deliberation from the beginning that allows community members to co-create, co-design, co-produce, and co-implement novel strategies that support the city locally and globally.

Specifically, the Geneva International Airport has made great strides in order to optimize its connectivity to both energy and public transportation infrasystems in the city. Furthermore, the Geneva International Airport demonstrates exemplary capacity to implement social innovations within the context of an SOI framework that truly engages both the local and global community. From human-centered design within their business model to extensive stakeholder consultations, the Geneva International Airport has shown how social innovation that breeds inclusivity and citizen engagement further solidifies the legitimacy of the city into the multilevel global governance architecture by providing purpose-driven public goods.