



**The ILA study group on the Role of
Cities in International Law
City Report: Geneva**

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The Evolution of International Geneva

1. Introduction

The municipality of Geneva lies at the Western tip of Switzerland and is the capital of the Canton of Geneva. Geneva is the second largest city of Switzerland and has over 205.000 inhabitants.¹ The City is densely populated: with 128 persons per hectare, Geneva shows the highest density of population of all Swiss cities.²

In the federal state structure of Switzerland, cities are – in view of their legal form as municipalities – based at the lowest state level, under the Cantons and the Confederation. However, municipalities in general and cities in particular play a factually important role from an economic, cultural and societal point of view. Their actions are limited by the framework set up in the Canton respectively at the Federal level and must be based on their local autonomy. Relations between the different state levels remain key to coordinate and adapt the legal – and very often also political – setting, especially under consideration of the small size of Switzerland and the state structure as a whole. This can be seen in Geneva as well: The Canton and the City of Geneva are interconnected for the governance of several issues, including international matters. The Cantonal direction for foreign affairs – which is part of the Department of Finance and Human Resources – has a dedicated office in charge of matters related to the reception and local activities of international organisations.³

This report focuses on the practice of the City of Geneva as a center of multilateralism and presents its different facets and evolution. It thereby looks at the internationality of the City, which is often referred to as “*la Genève internationale*”⁴. The first part illustrates which role Geneva plays as a location for international organisations and other actors of the international community. Geneva does not only host international actors but is itself a member of various international city networks. This facet of Geneva’s internationality is presented in the second part. Being host and actor goes hand in hand and should therefore be understood as mutually reinforcing rather than distinctly separable. Based on its roles as a host and player in city networks, the City of Geneva uses its capacities to connect various actors of the international community to discuss and advance the cause of cities.

2. Host to the International Community

This section offers an overview of how the City of Geneva became an import base for the international community. First, the history of international presence in the City of Geneva is

¹ <https://www.ge.ch/statistique/communes/apercu.asp?commune=21> (end of 2019).

² *Union of Swiss Cities*, Yearbook of Statistics of Swiss cities 2021, p. 41.

³ “Service de la Genève internationale”, <https://www.ge.ch/organisation/dai-service-geneve-internationale> (last checked: May 3, 2021). The Office of External Affairs of the City of Geneva works closely together with the Cantonal offices (such as the Delegate to International Geneva) and the Federal representation (namely the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN in Geneva).

⁴ The Swiss authorities use these terms. Cf., for example, <https://www.eda.admin.ch/missions/mission-onu-geneve/fr/home/geneve-international/faits-et-chiffres.html> (last checked: December 18, 2020) and <https://www.geneve-int.ch/> (last checked: September 8, 2020).

wrapped up (2.1). The current significance of the City of Geneva is presented in a second part (2.2). In a broader context, various challenges and opportunities which may impact the international alignment of the City of Geneva are discussed at the end of this part (2.3).

2.1 Historical context

Historically, Geneva's emergence as a major site for international conferences and for seats of various international organisations is generally dated back to the mid-19th century, more precisely to the foundation of the Red Cross in 1863. Notably, two Genevese, Henry Dunant and Gustave Moynier, pursued the first initiatives to establish a commission dealing with core aspects of humanitarian law and was the predecessor of today's International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).⁵ One year after its foundation, Dunant and Moynier convinced the Swiss government to organise a diplomatic conference in Geneva which led to the adoption of the First Geneva Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field^{6,7} This paved the way for further development of international humanitarian law, according to the needs revealed by the realities of war.⁸ The other Geneva Conventions⁹ and Protocols¹⁰, all essential international humanitarian law instruments, were negotiated and signed in Geneva.

Against this background, Geneva gradually gained importance as a host to international conferences and organisations in other fields. Many other organisations were established or moved to Geneva and consolidated the City's role of a host. The headquarters of the League of Nations was installed in the City in 1919. The presence of the ICRC and the political situation contributed to the support for Geneva as the seat for the League of Nations but as well for other international organisations. For example, the International Labour Organization (ILO) followed and established its seat in Geneva only one year later; even though at that time it was not yet confirmed that the seat of the League of Nations would definitely be in Geneva.¹¹ The ILO was supposed, as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I, to reflect the belief that universal and lasting peace can be accomplished only if it is based on social justice.¹² One of the political supporters to move the League of Nations to Geneva was the President of the United States of America Wilson: "Geneva is already the seat of the International Red

⁵ Yves Sandoz, Das Internationale Komitee vom Roten Kreuz, in: HLS (version of June 27, 2016).

⁶ This first version of the First Geneva Convention, revised in 1906, 1929 and 1949 (United Nations Treaty Series, Vol. 75, p. 31) can be found in the International Committee of the Red Cross data base: <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=477CEA122D7B7B3DC12563CD002D6603&action=openDocument>.

⁷ Joëlle Kuntz, Geneva and the Call of Internationalism: A History, 2010, p. 31.

⁸ *Id.*, p. 34.

⁹ Geneva Convention (I) on Wounded and Sick in Armed Forces in the Field, 1949; Geneva Convention (II) on Wounded, Sick and Shipwrecked of Armed Forces at Sea, 1949; Geneva Convention (III) on Prisoners of War, 1949; Geneva Convention (IV) on Civilians, 1949.

¹⁰ Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I), 8 June 1977; Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Protection of Victims of Non-International Armed Conflicts (Protocol II), 8 June 1977; Protocol additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and relating to the Adoption of an Additional Distinctive Emblem (Protocol III), 8 December 2005.

¹¹ Joëlle Kuntz, p. 59.

¹² <https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/history/lang--en/index.htm> (last checked: December 16, 2020).

Cross, which has placed itself at the service of both groups of belligerents, and which, so far as possible, has remained unaffected by the antipathies provoked by the war. Moreover, Switzerland is a people sworn to absolute neutrality by its Constitution and its blend of races and languages. It was marked out to be the meeting place of other peoples desiring to undertake a work of peace and cooperation.”¹³ As set in Article 392 of the Treaty of Versailles the seat of the ILO was established at the seat of the League of Nations as part of the organisation of the League¹⁴.

After its dissolution, the final Assembly of the League of Nations handed over its properties and assets to the UN in 1946.¹⁵ The UN-office in Geneva became the second-largest in the UN-system and the creation of other UN-offices followed and were established in Geneva. Most notably, the offices of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees are based in Geneva. The choice of locating the European headquarters of the UN, including all the agencies, in Geneva indicates the relevance of the City in multilateral diplomacy.¹⁶

The presence of the beforementioned institutions and the scope of the various legal agreements concluded in Geneva show that the preponderant connections between the city and international law lie in international humanitarian law. There are however other agreements and treaties which aim at different fields of law, making International Geneva relevant beyond international humanitarian law.

For instance, in November 2013, Geneva was the site of the important interim agreement between Iran and a group comprising the United States, China, Russia, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom that placed restrictions on Iranian nuclear activities in exchange for a temporary reduction in sanctions.¹⁷ That agreement set the stage for this important accord that was reached in July 2015 in Vienna. Further examples can be found in the field of international arbitration, like the international arbitration tribunal that met in Geneva to settle a dispute between the United States of America and the United Kingdom involving the dispatch of various raiders.¹⁸ In the sense of *multi*-lateralism and the various sites of UN agencies it remains

¹³ Declaration of President Wilson on April 10, 1919 in a meeting on the question of where the League’s headquarters should be located, as cited in: *Joëlle Kuntz*, pp. 55–56. For a full account of the decision to choose Geneva over other cities – namely Brussels was a candidate as well – see *id.*, pp. 47–58. Overall, the choice seems to have been decided not only by political considerations but also strong personal preferences.

¹⁴ The Part XIII of the Peace Treaty of Versailles in regard with Labour can be downloaded here: https://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/1920/20B09_18_engl.pdf (last checked: December 17, 2020).

¹⁵ <https://www.ungeneva.org/en/history/palais-des-nations-history> (last checked: December 17, 2020).

¹⁶ Again, the choice of Geneva can be seen in practical and historical reasons (see *Joëlle Kuntz*, p. 73).

¹⁷ In a different context but also in the field of disarmament, there were different occasions where Geneva was the site of talks of historical significance i.e. to reduce the use of nuclear weapons. The permanent headquarters for the international Disarmament Conference were based in Geneva since 1979. The responsible United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) is organised in five branches with different offices. the Secretariat of the Conference on Disarmament and Conference Support Branch (Geneva) provides organisational and substantive servicing to the Conference on Disarmament, the single multilateral disarmament negotiating forum of the international community, and its Ad hoc Committees. The offices work closely together. The UNODA office in Vienna, for instance, facilitates the cooperation and effective interaction in all areas of disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control with the Welcome to the United Nations Office at Vienna, and with Vienna-based organisations and related specialised agencies, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization and UNODA, as well as with other relevant regional intergovernmental organisations, such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

¹⁸ See *Ladislav Mysyrowicz*, Arbitrage de l’Alabama, in: HLS (version of April 11, 2001).

however clear that not one single place as such can unite the resources and decision-making power by itself but rather can contribute and catalyse processes in an interlinked system of stakeholders.

2.2 Today's significance of International Geneva

As the historical context shows, the City of Geneva has steadily grown into a central hub for multilateral diplomacy, attracting expats from all over the world and thereby strengthening its flair as a multicultural city, which may also affect the general image of Geneva.¹⁹ Geneva remains to be perceived as an International city: according to statistics of October 2020, 31.450 employees work for 37 international organisations²⁰, including 4.196 employees of diplomatic and consular representations based in Geneva.²¹ These figures are even more impressive when adding the representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In 2020, 431 NGOs worked in Geneva, comprising more than 3.000 jobs.²² Only the employees permanently based in Geneva are reflected. Adding the meetings and conferences held there, the number of diplomats and officials grows further: In 2019, a total of 3.489 international meetings with 19.772 sessions and 182.003 officials were registered.²³

The role of Geneva is also integrated in the Swiss foreign policy agenda.²⁴ Within this framework, the City of Geneva is directly addressed, with the aim to place it as a centre of global governance. The internationality of Geneva is therefore actively supported and promoted by the Swiss Government. Building on the close cooperation between the Federal Government, the Canton of Geneva and the City of Geneva, the Federal Council adopted a new dispatch at the Federal level to strengthen Switzerland's position as a host state to international organisations and a central forum for global governance for the future. The dispatch aims to consolidate and ensure the long-term development of Switzerland's role as a host state at the national level in general and not limited to the City of Geneva.²⁵

The implementation of various measures to these ends require respective funding. The Federal Council submitted to the Parliament a new strategy aimed at enhancing Switzerland's

¹⁹ *foraus* – Forum Aussenpolitik, 2018, City Leadership – Towards Filling the Global Governance Gaps?: A case study of the City of Geneva Policy Brief, Geneva (quoted as “*foraus*, Geneva Policy Brief”), p. 6.

²⁰ A list with all the international organisations based (with their respective legal status) in Geneva can be found under Canton et République de Genève, Informations Statistique – Industrie, Commerce et Services, N 14 – October 2020, p. 3. An updated list with all the international organisations based in Switzerland can be found on the website of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs(<https://www.eda.admin.ch/missions/mission-onu-geneve/en/home/geneve-international/faits-et-chiffres.html>).

²¹ *Id.*, p. 1.

²² *Id.*, p. 2. For further information on the presence of NGOs in Geneva see *Stephan Davidshofer/Pablo Diaz/Justine Hirschy/Dalya Mitri/Amal Tawfik*, *Cartographie des ONG au sein de la Genève Internationale*, published in August 2019 (downloadable here: https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/fr/documents/aussenpolitik/internationale-organisationen/cartographie-ONG-Geneve-internationale-rapport-final_FR.pdf, last checked: December 18, 2020); pp. 9ss. show how challenging the identification of NGOs is from a methodological point of view and why numbers may therefore vary.

²³ *Id.*, p. 1.

²⁴ Cf. *Message concernant les mesures à mettre en œuvre pour renforcer le rôle de la Suisse comme Etat hôte pour la période 2020 à 2023 du 20 février 2019 (19.019)*, also available in German (quoted as “Dispatch Host State”), pp. 2318–2319. For further information on the economic impact in the Canton and City of Geneva only see *Dispatch Host State*, p. 2320.

²⁵ Other international organisations are based in the Cantons of Basel, Berne and Vaud.

attractiveness as a host state and centre of global governance. In total, a sum of CHF 111.8 million (approx. USD 121 million) was granted for the period 2020– 23.²⁶ Over CHF 2.5 billion (approx. USD 2.8 billion) is also being invested over the next ten years in major renovation and new building and mobility projects in the international district^{27,28}

2.3 Positioning International Geneva

One may not only describe how Geneva became international but also ask why. When considering this question we shall find factors and arguments which add to the attractiveness of a city as a host for actors of the international community. The main argument – and at the same time the most practical – which speaks for Geneva as the seat of international organisations and location for diplomatic conferences is the existing network which grew over decades: many decision-makers and experts but also donors are now based in Geneva.²⁹

It is difficult to find pull-factors without considering the historical context which may actually have led to the decision to set a conference or to establish an international organisation or a sub-organ in a certain place or not. Like the story of the International Red Cross and the League of Nations tells, personal efforts of strong political figures and neutral grounds played a decisive role.³⁰ The official position as a neutral state³¹ of Switzerland further contributed to the de-politicised setting and role as bridge builder.³²

There are however objections which may be considered against the choice of the City of Geneva: Switzerland and especially Geneva are expensive locations. Finding (affordable) accommodation becomes increasingly difficult, namely for representatives of smaller

²⁶ See *Dispatch Host State*, p. 2347 ff.

²⁷ The so-called international district hosts most of the international organisations, including the UN headquarters, and is located on the right shore of the lake around the Place des Nations.

²⁸ *Simon Bradley*, Renovations set to transform International Geneva, in: swissinfo.ch on April 24, 2018.

²⁹ *Simon Bradley*, The changing face of International Geneva, in: swissinfo.ch on June 5, 2020.

³⁰ *Frédéric Burnand*, Switzerland, the League of Nations, and the shadow of revolution, in: swissinfo.ch on July 8, 2019. On an interesting site note: Swiss citizens voted to join the League of Nations on May 16, 1920 – a result in favor of multilateralism and the first time in the history of direct democracy to deal with an international political issue.

³¹ Neutrality – a concept and political position that reveals various questions which cannot be addressed in this report – is only one of the factors which should be taken in account. An accurate evaluation of the role of Switzerland in multilateral diplomacy would require a global policy assessment. For instance, to be mentioned is the significance of Switzerland in Good Offices diplomacy (which is however not limited to the Canton or the City of Geneva but is decided at the Federal level), where reliability and discretion may be key. Neutrality has very likely played a crucial role for the choice of Geneva as location for the summit between President Biden and President Putin on June 16, 2021.

³² See for example *Simon Bradley*, International Geneva – why is it so important to Switzerland, in: swissinfo.ch on November 21, 2019.

delegations or NGOs.³³ There are repeated calls to move to other locations.³⁴ Factors like a stable environment, solid infrastructure, good reachability of other places and an existing network of stakeholders and knowledge to outweigh the affordability issue in the case of Geneva.

Upholding the diplomatic significance of the Geneva is an endeavour which cannot be left to the City alone. It requires a broader political support from the cantonal and national authorities.³⁵ They all share an interest of promoting the role of the City. One of the challenges hereby is the coordination of policies at different levels: local, cantonal and national efforts need to be aligned. The Swiss government has moved to position Geneva as a global centre of expertise on various areas: peace, security and disarmament, climate, health and digital issues.³⁶ For example, the Geneva Internet Platform (GIP) – a neutral platform established to enable the exchange of knowledge in the field of internet governance – was given a special role in a High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation of the UN.³⁷ The Foreign Policy Strategy 2020-2023 recognises the special role Geneva plays at the international level. The Strategy strengthens the commitment to “further develop its digital foreign policy and position Geneva as a leading location for debate on digitalisation and technology”.³⁸ Or as the Foreign Minister of Switzerland has been quoted: “Geneva is to become the international capital of digital governance”.³⁹ These efforts include commitments to position Geneva as a deliberative forum on various issues around digitalisation, particularly cyber security and cyber diplomacy.⁴⁰

³³ Based on: The changing face of International Geneva – Housing headache for small delegations in International Geneva, in: swissinfo.ch on September 25, 2018. The problem is not recent and measures have been taken: The International Geneva Welcome Centre (CAGI) was founded in 1996 by the Swiss Confederation and the Canton of Geneva, with the support of national and local entities, both public and private. Its objective is to facilitate the installation and integration in the Geneva region of international civil servants, members of permanent missions, consulates and NGOs as well as their families. It also organises and supports cultural and social events which promote exchanges between the Internationals and the local community. There are dedicated services to NGOs that are either already in Geneva or that want to establish themselves in the region. For further information see <https://www.geneve-int.ch/geneva-welcome-center-cagi-0> and www.cagi.ch.

³⁴ *Simon Bradley*, The changing face of International Geneva, in: swissinfo.ch on June 5, 2020.

³⁵ If legal measures are to be taken, they must be based on the competence to legislate or enforce a law. These fundamental questions in a federal state can require a more detailed legal assessment in specific cases.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ See the Report of the UN High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation, published on www.digitalcooperation.org.

³⁸ *Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)*, Foreign Policy Strategy 2020–2023, p. 18 ff. (downloadable here:

https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/en/documents/publications/SchweizerischeAussenpolitik/Aussenpolitische-Strategie-2020-23_EN.pdf, last checked: December 18, 2020). See as well the follow-up Strategy dedicated to a digital foreign policy: *FDFA*, Strategy Digital Foreign Policy 2021–2024 (downloadable here:

https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/eda/en/documents/publications/SchweizerischeAussenpolitik/20201104-strategie-digitalaussenpolitik_EN.pdf, last checked: December 18, 2020).

³⁹ Interview with Federal Councillor *Ignazio Cassis* at the Swiss Digital Days on November 4, 2020 (<https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/fdfa/aktuell/newsuebersicht/2020/11/digitaltage.html>, (last checked: December 18, 2020).

⁴⁰ For instance, the Open-ended Working Group established by UNGA-Resolution 73/27 adopted a final draft report addressing peace and security in cyberspace at the UN in Geneva (see Press release on March 12, 2021 by the Mission of Switzerland to the UN in Geneva, <https://www.dfae.admin.ch/missions/mission-onu-geneve/en/home/news/news.html/content/missions/mission-onu-geneve/en/meta/news/2021/owwg> (last checked: May 17, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic could also have a major impact on Geneva as a (physical) location of meetings held in person. Since most meetings have been cancelled and were conducted digitally, the digitalisation efforts seem to have become even more relevant. One positive aspect could be seen in the accessibility for a broader audience and participants. The new format of conferences being held online also somehow democratised the way of participation; travel expenses and accommodation costs can be saved, and the maximum of participants is theoretically only limited through means of technology.⁴¹ Under the presumption that Geneva benefits from a locational advantage, i.e. being a physical forum for the international community, a shift towards more virtual communication needs to be addressed and is in fact already being addressed (see below). Only future developments will show to which extent – if at all – diplomacy becomes more digital.

3. Player in City Networks

The City of Geneva is a member of many international city networks. The Office of External Affairs of the City coordinates the involvement of the City in the international and generalist networks⁴² (e.g. the ULCG and the AIMF, see below) whereas thematic issues are generally directly dealt with by the competent section in the City.⁴³ The City Administrative Council (i.e. the members of the executive) decides which network to join, generally on the basis of a report from the Office of External Affairs.

According to the municipal authority, the networks benefit the City in several ways: as cities' voices are not yet sufficiently heard internationally, networks reinforce them; they forge links with exemplary municipalities in several fields, and hence provide an opportunity to draw inspiration from other innovative public policies.⁴⁴

Internationality may be linked with urban surroundings which are likely to offer permanent premises and the required financial resources to host conferences, services etc. The factual importance of cities cannot be ignored anymore, alone due to the fact that more than two thirds of the world's population live in urban areas, with a trend to further urbanisation in the next decades.⁴⁵ The City of Geneva illustrates how an active participation by the local level, even at the international level, can be achieved. It furthermore indicates that participation requires resources; a prerequisite which cities – as opposed to rural local governments – in particular may meet. At last, urbanism may as well be linked to the political support to be active, network and promote certain standards and views at different levels.⁴⁶ The notion of urbanism

⁴¹ The Geneva Peace Week 2020 illustrates this. The forum on international peacebuilding was held online and registered over 2'400 participants; a number which – according to City officials – would have exceeded the capacities of the venue where the conference took place in the past.

⁴² <https://www.geneve.ch/fr/autorites-administration/administration-municipale/secretariat-general/service-relations-externes> (last checked: May 18, 2021).

⁴³ As informed by Mr. Nizzola, Project Manager at the Office of External Affairs, City of Geneva.

⁴⁴ <https://www.geneve.ch/fr/themes/geneve-internationale/parteneriats-entre-villes/reseaux-internationaux-villes#> (last checked: December 8, 2020).

⁴⁵ For more information see World Cities Report 2020: The Value of Sustainable Urbanization (accessible under: <https://unhabitat.org/World%20Cities%20Report%202020>; last checked May 18, 2021).

remains however fluffy: city politics are not necessarily open to multilateralism and can change over time.

For example, the City of Geneva was committed to sustainable development already before the SDGs.⁴⁷ After the release of the Charter of European Sustainable Cities and Towns Towards Sustainability otherwise known as the Aalborg Charter in 1994, itself inspired by the Rio Earth Summit's Local Agenda 21 plan, the City of Geneva decided to join it in 1995 and signed it in 1998. From that point on, the City has put in place more and more resources for sustainable development. It first created a position of energy officer in 1999, then a position of delegate to Agenda 21. In 2007, the City decided to broaden it to equality and diversity, in addition to the environmental aspect. Since 2011, the City of Geneva has had a Strategic Programme for Sustainable Development, which covers the main areas of activity of the municipality. This programme is the result of the signing of the 1995 Aalborg Charter, a reference framework for "sustainable cities", and was reaffirmed by the signing of the Aalborg Commitments in 2010. The same year, the Agenda 21 Service was created. This office aims to coordinate and encourage sustainable development in a whole. For example, it encouraged the City to join the Rainbow Cities network, whose participation is now managed by the Office of External Relations Affairs.⁴⁸

The city networks the City of Geneva is involved in will thus be presented in this report in a general way (3.1). Among all these networks, the City of Geneva is mostly active in three networks: The International Association of Francophone Mayors (*Association internationale des maires francophones*; AIMF), the Rainbow Cities Network and the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). A special focus will be put on two influential networks in a second part (3.2).

3.1 Overview of City Networks

The City of Geneva is involved in the following city networks which can be categorised into five themes: peace, environmental protection, human rights, specific urban and regional issues and multi-purpose networks.

Peace:

- Mayors for Peace is a registered NGO with a Special Consultative Status within the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and aims at the total prohibition of nuclear weapons throughout the world.⁴⁹ The Mayors for Peace Hiroshima-Nagasaki Protocol aiming at the abolishment of nuclear weapons was signed in Geneva as a suggested complement to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.⁵⁰ Geneva's role in this framework is limited

⁴⁷ <https://www.geneve.ch/en/themes/sustainable-development/what-action-does-municipality-take/cercle-indicateurs> (last checked: May 18, 2021).

⁴⁸ As informed by Ms. Allal, Agenda 21 Service, City of Geneva. See also https://www.geneve.ch/sites/default/files/fileadmin/public/Departement_1/Publications/Rapport_d_activites_2013_Service_A21.pdf (last checked: May 18, 2021). (last checked: May 18, 2021).

⁴⁹ <http://www.mayorsforpeace.org/english/> (last checked: May 4, 2020).

⁵⁰ Foraus, Geneva Policy Brief, p. 7.

to receiving leaders at their request when they come to Geneva for a conference on disarmament.⁵¹

- The International Association of Peace Messenger Cities (IAPMC) encourages the role and responsibility of cities in creating a culture of peace.⁵²

Environmental Protection:

- Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate & Energy (GCoM) brings cities together for a united response to climate change.⁵³
- The Association Energy-Cities promotes a locally driven energy transition.⁵⁴
- Lastly, the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact is an international agreement among cities from all over the world, committed “to develop sustainable food systems that are inclusive, resilient, safe and diverse, that provide healthy and affordable food to all people in a human rights-based framework, that minimize waste and conserve biodiversity while adapting to and mitigating impacts of climate change”.⁵⁵

Human Rights:

- The Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC) of the Council of Europe promotes diversity and protection against different forms of discrimination.⁵⁶
- The Rainbow Cities Network serves as an exchange platform of good practices between cities that have public policies to combat discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.⁵⁷ Geneva is member of the General Board since 2019 (members of the Board are elected for a period of two years and “act as guardians of the by-laws”).⁵⁸
- The International Association of Educating Cities brings together the local governments committed to the Charter of Educating Cities.⁵⁹
- The League of Democracy Cities is a new network created in 2019 during the Global Forum on Modern Direct Democracy. The City of Geneva decided in December 2020 to sign the Magna Charta of the network and thus join it.⁶⁰

Specific urban and regional issues:

- The Lighting Urban Community International (LUCI) aims to help cities around the world to find appropriate answers to major challenges with light as they are confronted with

⁵¹ As informed by Mr. Nizzola, Project Manager at the Office of External Affairs, City of Geneva.

⁵² <http://www.iapmc.org/> (last checked: December 18, 2020).

⁵³ <https://www.globalcovenantofmayors.org/who-we-are/> (last checked: December 4, 2020).

⁵⁴ <https://energy-cities.eu/> (last checked: May 4, 2020).

⁵⁵ <https://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/#> (last checked: December 4, 2020). The Pact can be downloaded here: <https://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Milan-Urban-Food-Policy-Pact-EN.pdf> (last checked: December 18, 2020).

⁵⁶ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/about> (last checked: May 4, 2020).

⁵⁷ <https://www.rainbowcities.com/> (last checked: May 4, 2020).

⁵⁸ <https://www.rainbowcities.com/about-us/> (last checked: January 19, 2021).

⁵⁹ <https://www.edcities.org/en/> (last checked: May 4, 2020).

⁶⁰ As informed by Mr. Nizzola, Project Manager at the Office of External Affairs, City of Geneva. This recent network has not yet constituted a secretariat nor can it be found on a website (last checked: February 3, 2021).

the emergence of new urban forms, the evolution of urban lifestyles and a need for more sustainable development.⁶¹

Multi-purpose networks: most networks are not limited to a specific purpose but pursue multiple objectives.

- The International Observatory of Mayors Living Together (*Observatoire du Vivre Ensemble*) serves as a platform for exchanging experiences, innovative initiatives and knowledge on cohesion, inclusion and urban security.⁶² It promotes the “Living Together”, which is a concept that means recognising all forms of diversity, fighting against discrimination and working to facilitate peaceful co-existence among society’s members.⁶³ It thus combines urban issues and the fight against discrimination.
- The League of Historical Cities aims to bring together mayors of historic cities at biennial conferences to discuss defined themes such as “The Impact of Globalization on Culture and Way of Living” (2018), “Smart, innovative, creative historic cities of the future” (2016) or “Sustainable Historical Cities” (2006).⁶⁴ Each conference results in a Declaration on the subject in question.

3.2 Geneva within AIMF and UCLG⁶⁵

AIMF

The AIMF currently brings together nearly 300 partially or entirely French-speaking cities in over 50 countries. The network operates according to the principles of decentralised cooperation. The missions of the AIMF are to federate energies, promote ambitious and responsible policies for an urbanity that is more respectful of people and the environment, and collectively carry out projects that open up new prospects for gender equality and diversity.

Geneva joined the AIMF in 1988 and has been particularly active in this network since 2003, when it took over the presidency of the "Humanitarian Support" working group. Today, it is a member of the "Sustainable Urban Development and Environment" and "Innovative Cities – Social and Solidarity Economy" working groups as well as of the Executive Bureau. In June 2006, the AIMF seminar on Local Agendas 21⁶⁶ was hosted in Geneva and in 2009, a meeting of its executive board was also held there. The AIMF has several cooperation funds to help member cities for specific issues. Within this framework, the City of Geneva an agreement with the AIMF for CHF 50.000 (approx. USD 56.494) signed in 2014: the sum is to be made available annually for projects in the field of culture and sport for member cities in the Global South.

⁶¹ <https://www.luciassociation.org/about-luci/> (last checked: May 4, 2020).

⁶² <https://observatoirevivreensemble.org/a-propos> (last checked: December 13, 2020).

⁶³ See *International Observatory of Mayors Living Together, City Policies on Living Together, 2018* (downloadable here: unesdoc.unesco.org/in/rest/annotationSVC/DownloadWatermarkedAttachment/attach_import_74305cc9-ca63-4ae3-9d19-0813459558ee?_=368169eng.pdf&to=16&from=1, last checked: December 18, 2020).

⁶⁴ <https://www.lhc-s.org/conference/prev/> (last checked: December 13, 2020).

⁶⁵ The information about the City's involvement in these two networks were given by Mr. Nizzola, Project Manager at the Office of External Affairs, City of Geneva.

⁶⁶ Local Agendas 21 are the political instrument aimed at translating, to the local level, the main lines of the Agenda 21 established at the Rio Summit in 1992, as recommended in its Chapter 28 (downloadable here: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>, last checked: December 18, 2020).

UCLG

Geneva is also active in the UCLG, one of the most influential networks worldwide and sometimes referred to as “the UN of Cities” or the cities' lobby. It was created in 2004 to unite the voices of local and regional authorities towards the international community.⁶⁷ UCLG is the network in which Geneva is particularly active. The City of Geneva has been a member of UCLG since its creation and is now member of the World Council, which is the main policy-making body.⁶⁸ As a member of four commissions⁶⁹, the City of Geneva has also supported specific actions launched by UCLG, such as the Campaign for the Millennium Development Goals. The City has also played a major role in maintaining the committee on “Gender and equal opportunities” within UCLG, which later became the “Standing Committee on Gender Equality”.

Moreover, Geneva has chaired the Taskforce “Territorial prevention and management of crisis” since 2014.⁷⁰ The aim of this working group is to provide a platform for local authorities to exchange their knowledge and expertise in crisis management. It will improve and increase the availability of local governments expertise to disaster-affected municipalities and it will highlight and develop the role of local governments on the international disaster management, resilience and response. For example, it elaborated a policy paper on effective working with humanitarian actors⁷¹ and created a fund to provide financial assistance to member cities hit by disasters such as Beirut (following the explosion in August 2020).⁷²

4. Convenor for International Actors

In parallel with its engagement in influential global city networks, the City of Geneva is proving itself to be a convenor for many international actors. Some recent diplomatic initiatives taken by the City of Geneva in this context will be presented in this part, highlighting the work of the new platform called Geneva Cities Hub.

In 2013, the City organised the 7th European Sustainable Cities and Towns Conference where various national authorities, private corporations and civil society activists were brought to discuss concrete policies targeting the nexus between financial and environmental crises⁷³ and hosted gatherings of the Mayors for Peace network in 2008 and of the UCLG in 2015 and

⁶⁷ The UCLG was established in the fusion of other organizations of local authorities (see <https://www.uclg.org/en/organisation/about>; last checked: November 6, 2020).

⁶⁸ <https://www.uclg.org/en/organisation/structure/governing-bodies/world-council> (last checked: December 8, 2020).

⁶⁹ The structure and governance of the UCLG has changed several times over the last years. The City of Geneva is part of a committee, a working group and a policy council. See for further information (https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/political/resilience_policy-council-en.pdf; last checked: February 3, 2021).

⁷⁰ UCLG, UCLG Taskforce for Territorial prevention and management of crisis, <https://www.uclg.org/en/organisation/structure/committees-working-groups/uclg-taskforce-territorial-prevention-and> (last checked: December 8, 2020).

⁷¹ UCLG, Guidance for local authorities on working with humanitarian actors, https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/guideautoriteslocales3langues_1.pdf (last checked: December 10, 2020).

⁷² As informed by Mr. Nizzola, Project Manager at the Office of External Affairs, City of Geneva.

⁷³ Foraus, Geneva Policy Brief, p. 8; <http://www.europeanpublicaffairs.eu/7th-european-conference-on-sustainable-cities-and-towns/> (last checked: November 6, 2020).

2016⁷⁴. Moreover and as the President of the UCLG Taskforce “Territorial prevention and management of crisis” (see above), Geneva has organised a meeting on local disaster response in 2016 with various international actors such as UN agencies, NGOs and other UCLG members.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the reactivation of the UN-Habitat⁷⁶ Office in Geneva was actively supported by its representative Sami Kanaan in the UCLG.⁷⁷

The presence of international actors enables the City to furthermore position itself as a promoter of the role of cities and their political visibility at the international level. Among various means of participation for cities in global governance, city networks empower them the most in this context.⁷⁸ The City of Geneva seems to have the capacity to facilitate contacts between cities around the world, cities networks and the global governance entities present in Geneva.⁷⁹

This potential is being tapped by the City of Geneva and the Canton of Geneva, which created in March 2020, with the support of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Geneva Cities Hub (GCH), an association under Swiss law, with the purpose to integrate cities into global governance.

The GCH is not the only measure supported by the Federal Government to strengthen Geneva as a convener of various international actors. For instance, it created – together with the Canton and the City of Geneva – the Geneva Science and Diplomacy Anticipator (GSDA) foundation which aims to bring together different actors from society, science, diplomacy, governmental and intergovernmental organisations, industry or philanthropy in Geneva, as “identifying governance needs and proposing solutions requires innovative partnerships among a variety of stakeholders across national borders.”⁸⁰

The GCH serves as a relay for existing networks rather than becoming – yet another – city network. For example, the GCH welcomed in October 2020 the UN-Habitat’s launch of the World Cities Reports 2020 about sustainable urbanisation.⁸¹ To this end, the GCH co-

⁷⁴ *Foraus*, Geneva Policy Brief, p. 17.

⁷⁵ *Foraus*, Geneva Policy Brief, p. 9.

⁷⁶ Mandated by the UN General Assembly in 1978 to address the issues of urban growth, this United Nations programme’s mission is the promotion of a socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements development and the achievement of adequate shelter for all (see UN General Assembly Resolution 56/206, A/RES/56/206, February 26, 2002).

⁷⁷ Mayor Kanaan met the deputy director of the New York liaison office of UN-Habitat at a UCLG meeting where they discussed the essential role of this agency in relation to city networks and therefore the reactivation of the Geneva Office. Mr. Kanaan facilitated the contact with the Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the UN in Geneva. As informed by Mr. Nizzola, Project Manager at the Office of External Affairs, City of Geneva and <https://www.geneve.ch/fr/themes/geneve-internationale/partenariats-entre-villes/reseaux-internationaux-villes#> (last checked: last checked: December 08, 2020).

⁷⁸ Cf. *foraus*, Geneva Policy Brief, p. 6.

⁷⁹ <https://www.genevacitieshub.org/what-we-do> (last checked: May 4, 2020).

⁸⁰ Cf. *Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs*, Press Release “Federal Council strengthens Switzerland’s position as host state and in addressing emerging issues”, February 20, 2019, <https://www.admin.ch/gov/en/start/documentation/media-releases.msg-id-74051.html> (last checked: December 17, 2020).

⁸¹ UN-Habitat is the United Nations programme focusing on issues related to urbanisation. For more details, see <https://unhabitat.org/launch-of-the-world-cities-report-2020> (last checked: October 30, 2020).

organised a one-day event dedicated to the sustainability of cities and communities⁸² with the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and UN-Habitat at which international city networks, Geneva-based UN agencies, NGOs, academia and civil society participated.⁸³ Following this event, the first ever Forum of Mayors was organised by the GCH and the UNECE and moderated by the President of the GCH and the then Mayor of Geneva Sami Kanaan. This historical event focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change led to the adoption of the Geneva Declaration of Mayors.⁸⁴ This Declaration aspires to clear commitments such as “to tackle climate change at the local level by playing our part to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C and achieve net-zero carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions by 2050” and “to tracking the progress on the commitments, respond to UNECE’s progress survey, and present results of progress at next year’s Forum of Mayors.”⁸⁵

Overall, such events make cities and the challenges but also possible solutions more tangible. Even though cities are formally not represented in international organisations, they found other fora to discuss and exchange practices. Organizations like the GCH can stimulate this exchange in a multi-disciplinary setting and bring cities and various other actors together.⁸⁶

In sum, the course of action of the GCH consists of two parallel approaches. The GCH wishes not only to be a framework for exchange that allows urban actors to communicate between themselves (horizontal approach) but also to “cooperate to influence UN processes and the work of other organisations in Geneva” (vertical approach).⁸⁷ Thus, through its collaboration with UN programme – namely UN-Habitat – Geneva is becoming, through initiatives like the GCH, a platform for the valorisation and integration of cities in the practice of the United Nations and multilateralism in general including the ICRC, Global Funds and NGOs.

Faced with the desire of cities to be taken into account in multilateralism, the GCH therefore wants to act as a convenor and actively promotes the better inclusion of cities in multilateralism in that respect. According to a representative of the GCH, in line with the Swiss culture and tradition of bringing international actors together, Geneva can offer the stable and calm environment which might just be needed to encourage gatherings and consensus. In that respect, the GCH has recently initiated talks on highly relevant topics from an urban perspective: what legal and/or political status should be given cities be assigned at the international level? Is there a complementarity or a competition of sovereignty with states?

⁸² This event was called “InFocus: SDG 11” in reference to the Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities.

⁸³ *Geneva Cities Hub*, International City Networks Directory, in: <https://www.genevacitieshub.org> (last checked: May 4, 2020).

⁸⁴ Geneva Declaration of Mayors, 6 October 2020, https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/Forum_of_Mayors_2020/Declaration_of_Mayors.pdf (last checked: December 10, 2020).

⁸⁵ *Id.*

⁸⁶ See for example the conference co-organized by the Geneva Human Rights Platform, UN-Habitat, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the GCH which brought together experts from NGOs, academia, state representatives and representatives from international organizations as well as the private sector to exchange best practices to ground the development of cities in a human rights framework (*Geneva Cities Hub*, <https://www.genevacitieshub.org/en/experts-discuss-human-rights-at-the-city-level/>; last checked: December 18, 2020).

⁸⁷ *Geneva Cities Hub*, Geneva Cities Hub: Shaping Its Future. Report of the Retreat on 12 December 2019, published in <https://www.genevacitieshub.org>, pp. 2–3.

Should cities and states sit at the same table in the treaty-making processes? On the one hand, cities have some specific legal mandates, implement basic rights and are political representatives. On the other, how could practically *all* the cities have their voices heard?

These delicate questions have been the starting point of discussions during the GCH Annual Retreat in December 2020 to which representatives from academia, city networks (UCLG, AIMF, ICLEI, Metropolis and Mayors' Migration Council), cities (Bonn, Milan and Tours), civil society, diplomatic missions based in Geneva and IOs were invited. No answers were concluded but the GCH remains committed to this debate.

5. Conclusions

Geneva did not turn into an international city overnight. It was rather a long history of personal and official efforts, at both the national and international level. The City of Geneva has become a permanent home to the international community, being the seat of UN's European headquarters and various UN agencies, NGOs and location for many conferences as well. This report presented historical and political factors as to why Geneva became the place of choice for multilateralism: neutrality, safe and stable infrastructure and the long presence of diplomatic actors as well as a strong political will at the Federal level to fortify the internationality of Geneva. However, new challenges and opportunities, like digitalisation, are changing the face of International Geneva. The Swiss Government alongside the Canton and City of Geneva therefore continues to position Geneva as a centre for global policymaking. Political will and sufficient resources are indispensable to achieve this kind of "city diplomacy".

Internationality, as we learned to understand it in regard to the City of Geneva, is not limited to its role as a host in multilateral diplomacy. The City of Geneva participates in various city networks and is particularly active in the AIMF, the UCLG and Rainbow Cities Network. By doing so, the City can contribute substantially to their pursued missions and help the voices of cities being heard at the international level.

Another facet of the internationality of Geneva manifests itself also by its capacity and efforts to continue its long history as convenor. The City of Geneva connects, mainly through the work of the GCH – notably a trilateral initiative which involves the municipal, cantonal and Federal level –, various international actors and supports them in building a network. The GCH has furthermore the capacity to convene actors from different fields, including academia, politics and other representatives of civil society and to address issues such as the question of legal and political status of cities in the multilateral framework.

Overall, the case of the City of Geneva illustrates that cities can become important players at the international level. Networking and coordination between cities are key to strengthen their role. The City of Geneva seems committed to contribute to the various efforts already made and to shape them further; not only as an active participant but also by offering platforms of exchange.