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“Global Changemakers – Cities as Future Labs”

JUNE 28, 2019SEPTEMBER 25, 2019 / JJ

At the recent **Latin America-Caribbean Conference** (<https://global-diplomacy-lab.org/activities/federal-foreign-minister-maas-focuses-on-lac/>) at the Foreign Federal Office in Berlin, we facilitated an interactive session titled “Global Changemakers: Cities as Future Labs” for the **Global Diplomacy Lab** (<https://global-diplomacy-lab.org/blog/global-changemakers-cities-as-future-labs/>). As founders of **BuzzingCities Lab** (<https://buzzingcities.com/about/>) we explored how cities function as future labs for innovative forms of diplomacy and sustainable strategies. Discussions also centred on pain points and success factors of collaborative initiatives between emerging actors, the state and government institutions.



(<https://jj-reports.com/2019/06/28/global-changemakers-cities-as-future-labs/bildschirmfoto-2019-09-19-um-11-18-54/>)



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When a shooting takes place in Rio de Janeiro's favelas, an app helps residents understand what's going on – eyewitnesses can warn others where it is dangerous right now. '[Fogo Cruzado](https://fogocruzado.org.br/) (<https://fogocruzado.org.br/>)' (crossfire) is a digital platform and an app that uses crowdsourcing to document shooting incidents and map violence. Cities like Rio de Janeiro that are struggling with challenges such as gun violence often develop creative solutions and technologies that can be transferred to other cities and countries.

Three takeaways:

#1 Informal stakeholders play a major role in urban change

Involvement of local, often informal actors in Latin American cities is essential to achieve sustainable transformation and master challenges. Grassroots initiatives such as [waste-picker associations](https://www.worldcrunch.com/green-or-gone-1/how-recycling-goes-down-in-the-heart-of-buenos-aires) (<https://www.worldcrunch.com/green-or-gone-1/how-recycling-goes-down-in-the-heart-of-buenos-aires>), [street vendors](https://thecityfix.com/blog/space-street-vendors-equitable-urban-development-participatory-planning-informal-economy-thomas-abbotsonal-shah/) (<https://thecityfix.com/blog/space-street-vendors-equitable-urban-development-participatory-planning-informal-economy-thomas-abbotsonal-shah/>) and local civil rights activists are vital actors of change. Often, local initiatives have already developed solutions, but lack the opportunity to professionalise and reach out to a larger audience. They may also have no access to urban planning and political decision-makers or lack resources. Successful concepts for urban change have to take into account groups such as criminal organisations, i.e. [gangs](#)

(https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/gewalt-in-chicago-wo-waffen-so-selbstverstaendlich-sind-wie.979.de.html?dram:article_id=438533),

militias or self-defence groups.

#2 Technology can provide life hacks and push for accountability

Local actors in Latin American megacities invent tools that pacify conflicts or improve everyday local life – for example, by using technology such as smartphones or data analysis to reveal grievances, facilitate political participation or contribute to new strategies of crowdsourced security. International best practice cases – e.g. virtual wallets, [fact-checking initiatives](#) (<https://buzzingcities.com/2018/06/22/whatsapp-fakenews-in-mexiko-crowdsourcing-gegen-geruchte/>), air quality notification systems via SMS, sharing economy startups or decentralized power grids – show how technology-based approaches can help communities save time and money, secure access to resources, facilitate services and payments, improve the dissemination of information, and enhance security and accountability.

At the interactive session, participants also presented creative prototypes of potential future projects, including:

- a platform for change: an ‘Erasmus’ exchange programme for local officials who want to learn from other cities
- a digital neighbourhood community for Latin American cities that could foster cohesion, as well as local and sharing economy activities
- smart and sustainable plastic monitoring systems with smart bins that detect materials and improve the quota of recycled material
- artistic interventions for alternative uses of spaces to strengthen community cohesion and citizenship

#3 One app won't fix everything

Challenges in cities are often deeply intertwined. They are caused by a lack of access to resources such as mobility, security, education, work, clean water/environment, health care, information and civil rights. At the core are social inequalities and power asymmetries – this cannot be fixed by one app alone.

Especially when developing tech-based solutions, possible side effects such as digital and physical security and questions such as data protection must be taken into consideration – so that already vulnerable communities do not become even more vulnerable.

Nevertheless, technology can document grievances, point out potential solutions and interconnect different actors. This, in turn, can serve as a basis for meaningful urban strategies, political decisions and real change.

[Brasilien](#), [Digitalisierung](#), [Gesellschaft](#), [Lateinamerika](#), [Politik](#), [Wirtschaft](#)

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