

INTERCONNECTIVITY AMONG BRICS MUNICIPALITIES AS A KEY ASPECT OF THE BROADER DISCOURSE ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

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Abstract. The BRICS International Municipal Forum represents a significant achievement in international cooperation, marking an important advancement towards a new multipolar world order. This emerging paradigm stands in contrast to the unipolar world dominated by American hegemony and challenges the established norms of the New World Order of the World Economic Forum. The interconnectivity among municipalities within BRICS countries plays a vital role in shaping the broader discourse on urban development and governance. This paper explores the dynamics of municipal cooperation, knowledge sharing, and infrastructure development within BRICS, with a particular emphasis on the importance of inter-municipal networks in addressing common urban challenges. Furthermore, it presents examples of collaboration among cities and municipalities in these emerging economies on issues such as economic development, smart city initiatives, sustainable urban planning, and governance reforms. By enhancing interconnectivity, BRICS municipalities have the potential to foster innovation, resilience, and inclusive growth while contributing to global urban policy frameworks. Furthermore, the article highlights the capability of these collaborations to influence both regional and international standards of urban governance, thereby positioning BRICS municipalities as key players in the global urbanisation process..

Keywords: BRICS, municipalities, urban development, governance, interconnectivity, smart cities, sustainable urban planning, municipal cooperation, infrastructure development, urban policy.

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INTRODUCTION

The recent global economic downturn has prompted a critical re-evaluation of the role and significance of urban centres within the global economy. As cities increasingly serve as pivotal nodes in the intricate web of globalisation, their interconnectivity becomes a defining characteristic of contemporary urban life.

A striking illustration of this shifting landscape can be found in a Financial Times headline indicating a perceived decline in London's status as a preeminent financial center [4]. This assertion arises following a period of vigorous activity during which London's financial district, commonly known as "the City", reaffirmed its position as a leading global financial hub. However, recent developments have sparked speculation about the future trajectory of London and its viability as a center for the global producer services industry. Like London, numerous other cities in the Western world are grappling with a multifaceted crisis. Social challenges include rising crime and industrial action, while economic difficulties revolve around a shortage of skilled labour and a lack of employment opportunities. Financial constraints are also a significant concern.

In recent years, cities have faced significant economic challenges that threaten their traditional roles as powerhouses of growth and innovation [7]. One of the most prominent indicators of economic struggle in Western cities is the decline of manufacturing industries, which have historically formed the backbone of urban economies. For instance, Detroit, once celebrated as the automobile capital of the world, has seen a dramatic decrease in manufacturing jobs over the past few decades. The city's population has plummeted from over 1.8 million in the 1950s to around 670,000 today, largely due to job losses in the automotive sector and the ensuing economic downturn. This decline has not only resulted in increased unemployment rates but also led to widespread urban decay, as businesses closed and neighborhoods deteriorated.

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated trends already affecting urban economies, particularly the rise of remote work. Major cities such as San Francisco and New York have witnessed an exodus of residents and businesses as employees opt to work from home, leading to decreased demand for commercial real estate and local services. In San Francisco, for example, office vacancy rates have surged to levels not seen in over a decade, raising concerns about the long-term viability of the city's economy, which heavily relies on the tech sector and an influx of talent [2]. The outmigration of residents seeking more affordable living conditions and a better quality of life has further strained the local economy, resulting in decreased consumer spending and investments.

Another critical issue facing Western cities is housing affordability, which has escalated in many urban areas. Cities like London and Los Angeles have experienced significant gentrification, where rising property values displace long-term residents and small businesses. The increasing cost of living has driven many individuals and families to seek housing in suburban and rural areas, undermining the economic vitality of urban centers. In Los Angeles, for example, the median home price has soared, making homeownership unattainable for a significant segment of the population. This trend not only diminishes the diversity of urban communities but also erodes the economic base that supports local businesses and services.

The economic difficulties encountered by urban centres in the Western world contribute to the erosion of hegemonic power. These challenges encompass the decline of traditional industries, the rise of remote work practices, and issues related to housing

affordability [3]. As urban centers confront these challenges, it is imperative for policy-makers to adopt innovative strategies aimed at revitalising local economies, fostering sustainable development, and enhancing the quality of life for all residents. Without such measures, the economic power of these cities may continue to decline, leading to a fundamental shift in the landscape of urban America and Europe.

On the other hand, the rationale behind this concern is multifaceted, encompassing the dynamics of globalisation that have made interconnectivity an essential feature of urban environments for emerging municipalities. The interrelations among municipalities, particularly within the BRICS nations, illustrate the profound implications of this interconnectedness. These cities are increasingly navigating the complexities of post-socialist urban heritage, which shapes their unique socio-economic landscapes and influences their roles in the global economy. This article aims to explore the interconnectivity among BRICS municipalities, examining how their collective experiences and strategies in response to global economic challenges can shed light on broader trends in urban development and economic resilience.

Research

Brics International Municipalities

The BRICS nations have long nurtured the idea of creating a single currency within the organisation to reduce the influence of the US dollar on their respective economies. Currently, at least 88% of international transactions are conducted in US dollars. However, the share of foreign exchange reserves held in US dollars has declined to levels last observed in the 1990s, now representing 58% of the world's foreign exchange reserves.

The urban landscape is undergoing a significant transformation, as cities evolve into metropolises, which in turn are becoming megalopolises, ultimately leading to the emergence of metacities. This raises an important question: what will be the fate of cities in this urban environment? Specifically, how can these urban areas manage the significant expansion they are currently undergoing? The answer lies in cooperation.

The rise of megacities has become a defining feature of urbanisation in the 21st century, reflecting rapid population growth and economic dynamism in various regions, particularly within BRICS countries. Notably, Delhi's population exceeds that of Australia, illustrating the immense scale at which urban centers can expand. This phenomenon is not unique; other BRICS nations also exhibit similar trends, with cities like São Paulo and Mumbai experiencing significant population increases, underscoring their roles as key economic and cultural hubs [8].

Furthermore, projections indicate that cities such as Dhaka, Karachi, and Lagos, along with Taiwan, are on track to evolve into megacities, each expected to surpass a staggering 20 million inhabitants. This trajectory of urban growth raises critical questions regarding infrastructure, sustainability, and governance, as these metropolises confront the challenges and opportunities presented by their rapidly growing popula-

tions. The implications of these developments extend beyond national borders, influencing global economic patterns and necessitating a reevaluation of urban planning strategies in an increasingly interconnected world.

Globalization and urban heritage

What are the effects of the urbanisation? Urbanisation, particularly in the context of megacities and metacities, presents a multifaceted challenge that requires a concerted effort to ensure equitable access to services for all residents. As cities expand rapidly, often exceeding populations of 10 million, the strain on infrastructure, healthcare, education, and public transportation becomes increasingly evident [5]. This issue is especially pertinent in BRICS municipalities, where the pace of urban growth frequently outstrips the ability of local governments to provide essential services effectively. To address these challenges, BRICS cities are exploring innovative approaches that leverage technology and community engagement to enhance service delivery. For instance, initiatives aimed at improving digital connectivity can facilitate better access to information and resources, while participatory planning processes empower residents to influence the development of their communities. Additionally, collaboration among municipalities within the BRICS framework can foster knowledge-sharing and best practices, enabling cities to adopt sustainable solutions that promote inclusivity and resilience in the face of rapid urbanisation. As these municipalities navigate the complexities of service provision, their experiences will offer valuable insights into the broader implications of urbanisation in a global context.

A major problem with megacities and metacities is that while their populations are growing rapidly, services and accessibility are not keeping pace. Many megacities in Africa still lack health systems capable of providing adequate care for their populations.

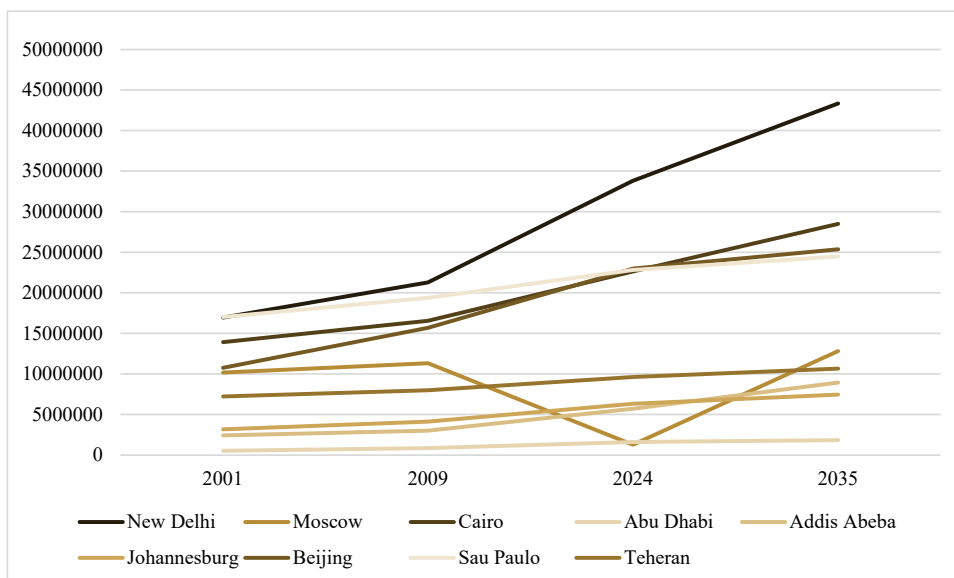


Figure 1. World Population by Country 2001-2035, units.

Source: *World Population by Country 2024 (Live)*. World Population Review. URL: <https://world-populationreview.com/> (accessed 26.10.2024).

As illustrated by the graph, the population is growing at a rate that exceeds the pace of infrastructure development and the expansion of the healthcare system. This has resulted in a considerable proportion of the population lacking access to healthcare.

The health landscape in BRICS+ municipalities is characterised by a complex interplay of communicable and non-communicable diseases, further exacerbated by socio-economic disparities and inadequate health infrastructure. For example, the prevalence of tuberculosis (TB) remains high in urban areas, with India reporting an incidence rate of approximately 210 cases per 100,000 people [6]. This situation is worsened by overcrowded living conditions, which intensify the challenge. Furthermore, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as diabetes and hypertension, are becoming increasingly prevalent. In South Africa, for instance, it is estimated that over 30% of adults are hypertensive, largely driven by lifestyle factors and poor dietary habits. The presence of malnutrition, which includes both undernutrition and obesity, further complicates the health outcomes observed. In Brazil, while approximately 7% of children under the age of five are stunted, the prevalence of obesity among adults has markedly increased, reaching approximately 20%. These issues highlight the complex nature of the health challenges facing urban populations in BRICS+ countries, underscoring the need for comprehensive public health strategies that integrate disease prevention, nutrition, and health education to foster improved health outcomes across diverse socio-economic contexts.

In the context of the BRICS+ nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and additional emerging economies), urban municipalities are confronted with considerable challenges related to population health, economic well-being, and food security. Data from the World Bank and regional health organisations indicate disparities in healthcare access, with only about 60% of urban populations in these countries having reliable access to essential health services. For instance, the average salary in urban Brazil is approximately \$1,200 per month, whereas in India it is approximately \$300. This reflects a stark economic inequality.

Furthermore, food security remains a significant concern. The FAO reports that approximately 15% of urban residents in South Africa experience moderate to severe food insecurity. These circumstances highlight the urgent need for integrated policy responses that address the interconnections between healthcare, economic stability, and food access within the context of rapidly urbanizing environments of the BRICS+ nations.

Perspectives in the cooperation among International Municipalities

The recent BRICS Municipalities Forum held in Moscow marked a significant milestone in fostering international collaboration among urban centres, exemplified by the signing of a memorandum between Moscow and Tehran. As articulated by A. Shaposhnikov, a Russian politician, the forum has already hosted numerous international events and continues to plan many more aimed at engaging a broad audience and facilitating the exchange of best practices on critical issues related to urban and agglomeration de-

velopment. This initiative positions Moscow as a prominent communication platform for residents of megacities worldwide. The memorandum, emphasised by M. Chamran, Chairman of the Islamic City Council of Tehran, reinforces the commitment to building tangible business partnerships between cities, further enhancing bilateral cooperation.¹ Beyond economic ties, there is a growing emphasis on educational collaboration, with various universities from both capitals exploring joint programmes, research initiatives, and exchange opportunities. Such partnerships not only enrich the academic landscape but also contribute to a deeper understanding of urban challenges and solutions, thereby reinforcing the significance of cooperative frameworks in addressing the multifaceted needs of rapidly urbanising populations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the insights presented in this article emphasise the critical importance of interconnectivity among BRICS municipalities as a cornerstone for effective urban development and governance. The ongoing collaboration highlighted through forums such as the BRICS International Municipal Forum demonstrates a strong commitment to addressing the common challenges faced by cities in these emerging economies. By fostering partnerships among local governments and engaging non-governmental organisations (NGOs), BRICS municipalities can leverage shared knowledge and resources to implement innovative solutions tailored to their unique socio-economic contexts.

As cities continue to confront rapid urbanisation, economic disparities, and environmental sustainability, the necessity for cohesive action cannot be overstated. Enhanced cooperation within the BRICS framework not only facilitates the exchange of best practices but also strengthens the collective influence of these municipalities on global urban policy. This concerted effort is essential for creating resilient, inclusive urban environments that meet the needs of diverse populations.

Looking ahead, it is imperative for BRICS nations to deepen their collaborative initiatives, aligning urban development strategies with the principles of sustainable growth and equitable service provision. Engaging with NGOs will further enrich this dialogue, ensuring that civil society voices are integrated into the decision-making process. Ultimately, such synergies will empower BRICS municipalities to navigate the complexities of modern urban challenges and emerge as key players in shaping the future of global urban governance.

¹ IMBRICS Forum 2024 begins in Moscow with Iran in attendance. Islamic Republic News Agency. URL: <https://en.ir-na.ir/news/85580549/IMBRICS-Forum-2024-begins-in-Moscow-with-Iran-in-attendance> (accessed 28.10.2024).

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МУНИЦИПАЛИТЕТЫ БРИКС КАК ОСНОВНАЯ ПЛОЩАДКА ДЛЯ ОБСУЖДЕНИЯ ВОПРОСОВ ГОРОДСКОГО РАЗВИТИЯ И УПРАВЛЕНИЯ

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Аннотация. Международный муниципальный форум БРИКС представляет собой значительное достижение в сфере международного сотрудничества и знаменует важный этап на пути к новому многополярному мировому порядку. Эта новая парадигма возникла как ответ на однополярный мир, в котором доминируют США, и ставит под сомнение мировой порядок,

установленный в рамках Всемирного экономического форума. Сотрудничество между муниципалитетами стран БРИКС формирует площадку для обсуждения вопросов городского развития и управления. В данной статье рассматриваются динамика муниципального сотрудничества, обмен знаниями и развитие инфраструктуры в рамках БРИКС, с особым акцентом на значимость межмуниципального взаимодействия для решения городских проблем. Вместе с тем приводятся примеры того, как города и муниципалитеты в развивающихся экономиках сотрудничают по вопросам экономического развития, инициатив «умных городов», устойчивого городского планирования и реформ управления. Благодаря укреплению сотрудничества муниципалитеты БРИКС повышают свой потенциал в сфере инновационной деятельности, устойчивости и инклюзивного роста, одновременно внося вклад в глобальные вопросы городского планирования. Кроме того, в статье рассматривается способность муниципалитетов стран БРИКС оказывать влияние как на региональные, так и на международные стандарты городского управления, что позиционирует их в качестве ключевых участников процесса глобальной урбанизации.

Ключевые слова: БРИКС, муниципалитеты, городское развитие, управление, взаимосвязанность, умные города, устойчивое городское планирование, муниципальное сотрудничество, развитие инфраструктуры, городская политика.

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