



Article

City-Driven Regionalism in Asia: From Nation-State Limits to Urban Leadership

Hyun-Chool Lee* 

Political Science Department, Konkuk University, Republic of Korea

Abstract

As transboundary challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and large-scale disasters intensify, the limits of nation-state-centered governance have become increasingly evident—particularly in Asia, where supranational integration remains politically constrained. This paper proposes an alternative model of cooperation: city-driven regionalism. In particular, the rise of shrinking and rapidly ageing societies across Asia adds a demographic imperative for deeper, city-level cooperation, as many of the region’s most acute challenges—care systems, labor shortages, and fiscal sustainability—are now fundamentally urban and transboundary in nature.

Grounded in theories of multilevel governance, city diplomacy, and comparative regionalism, the study develops a conceptual framework that repositions cities as both horizontal connectors, fostering peer-to-peer innovation and solidarity, and vertical translators, linking local action with national and global agendas. Drawing on global initiatives such as the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, the ASEAN Smart Cities Network, and the EU’s BiodiverCities program, the paper illustrates how transnational municipal networks enable cities to institutionalize sustainability cooperation.

Building on these insights, it outlines a governance model for a prospective Asian city community, featuring a City Charter, rotating City Assembly, Urban Secretariat, Thematic Clusters, Climate Impact Index, and Solidarity Fund. While respecting national sovereignty, the model promotes regional resilience, policy innovation, and bottom-up climate action. Conceptual in scope, the study provides a foundation for future empirical research and offers a distinctive Asian pathway for city-led regional governance.

Keywords

City diplomacy, Multilevel governance, Transnational municipal networks, Urban climate governance, population ageing, Urban resilience, Asian regionalism

Corresponding author:

* Email: lhc0609@konkuk.ac.kr

Introduction

In recent decades, the world has witnessed a growing number of transboundary challenges that have overwhelmed the capacity of individual nation-states to respond effectively. From climate-induced disasters such as the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami in Indonesia, and the 2025 Myanmar Earthquake, to global public health emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic, the scale and complexity of contemporary crises increasingly demand collaborative, multi-actor responses. The pandemic, in particular, exposed the fragility of global coordination mechanisms and the limitations of nation-state-centered governance in addressing fast-evolving threats.

Against this backdrop, the central question driving this study is: why, amid the erosion of global cooperation and the paralysis of state-led regionalism, have cities emerged as pivotal actors in reimagining regional governance in Asia? This paper contends that the significance of city diplomacy lies not merely in municipal activism, but in a structural transformation of governance itself—one triggered by the combined pressures of climate change, pandemics, and digital interdependence, which have exposed the limits of state-centric coordination and underscored the need for multi-actor, cross-scalar collaboration. At the same time, Asia is confronting an unprecedented demographic transformation, marked by rapidly ageing and shrinking societies (Lee, 2021, 2025). These demographic pressures—ranging from care infrastructure strains to labor shortages and uneven fiscal capacities—are increasingly concentrated in cities, making inter-urban cooperation an indispensable complement to state-centric governance.

While the momentum of globalization has slowed—partly due to pandemic-induced border closures and the rise of populist, inward-looking leadership across many countries—the challenges facing humanity continue to transcend borders. Climate change, pandemics, digital inequality, and forced migration require not only international but also deeply localized responses. Leaving these issues solely to nation-states has revealed significant governance gaps, especially in regions like Asia, where political, economic, and cultural diversity hinders the creation of EU-style supranational institutions (Acharya, 2007; Jetschke & Lenz, 2013).

Against this backdrop, global frameworks such as the New Urban Agenda (UN-Habitat, 2020), the Local2030 initiative, and the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy have all underscored the importance of empowering local and regional governments to address complex global challenges. The 2015 Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs) explicitly recognize the role of subnational actors as essential partners in achieving planetary goals. Cities have increasingly become not just implementers of national strategies, but initiators of climate solutions, conveners of cross-border coalitions, and norm entrepreneurs in global governance.

Recent initiatives such as the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), the G20 Global Smart Cities Alliance, and regional programs like the European Union's Green Deal or BiodiverCities further reflect this shift toward multi-scalar governance. These developments collectively signal a structural reorientation of international cooperation, one in which cities are moving from the periphery to the center of global policy design and diplomacy.

In this context, regionalism, understood as forms of cooperation that go beyond national boundaries but fall short of global institutions, has re-emerged as a critical strategy. However, in Asia, where geopolitical rivalry and sovereignty sensitivities often constrain formal regional integration, traditional models of regionalism have remained limited in scope and effectiveness.

Yet a persistent governance problem remains: Asia's regional organizations, notably ASEAN and APEC, have struggled to provide agile and inclusive mechanisms to address the accelerating complexity of transboundary crises. Despite decades of regional dialogues and frameworks,

these institutions often reflect the constraints of state-centric cooperation, including sovereignty sensitivities, political rivalries, and bureaucratic inertia. For instance, ASEAN's consensus-based approach, while preserving intergovernmental legitimacy, frequently results in slow and fragmented responses to collective risks such as climate-induced disasters and pandemics. This "regional governance gap" highlights a critical limitation: there is no systematic framework in Asia that enables cities to function as empowered agents of regional cooperation. This absence contrasts sharply with developments in Europe and Latin America, where city networks have begun to institutionalize shared standards, pooled resources, and coordinated policy experiments across borders. While regional platforms such as APEC, ARF, and ASEAN provide avenues for state-led diplomacy, they often lack the agility, inclusivity, and problem-solving capacity required in today's multi-crisis landscape.

This paper proposes an alternative pathway: city-driven regionalism. By leveraging the agility, innovation, and local legitimacy of city governments, Asian megacities such as Seoul, Tokyo, Beijing, Shanghai, Jakarta, New Delhi, Hanoi, and Bangkok can lead collaborative efforts to address shared challenges. Cities are no longer merely implementers of national policy; they have become global actors, capable of engaging in diplomacy, forming transnational alliances, and co-creating policy frameworks (Acuto, 2013; Tavares, 2016). In Asia, where national governments often struggle to harmonize, cities can initiate cooperation from the bottom up—acting as both horizontal connectors and vertical translators.

Recent evidence further supports the institutionalization of city diplomacy as a strategic field of international engagement. According to the 2024 Cities and International Engagement Survey (Pejic et al., 2025), 82% of cities identified climate change as the top priority in their international engagements, while 71% have formally endorsed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, over half of the cities reported increased coordination with national governments on global issues, signaling a growing acknowledgment of cities as international actors. Notably, the share of cities whose international staff receive formal training has risen from 19% in 2018 to 57% in 2024, highlighting the professionalization of city diplomacy across multiple urban systems.

This paper argues that city-level cooperation can offer a pragmatic and scalable model for regional governance in Asia, particularly in addressing climate change and disaster resilience. It develops a conceptual framework for city-driven regionalism and situates it within broader debates on state-centric regionalism, while illustrating how emerging forms of inter-city cooperation in Asia may contribute to alternative pathways of regional governance. Ultimately, it proposes a governance architecture that enables cities to institutionalize solidarity, jointly develop standards (such as climate budget tagging), and lead Asia's transition toward a more resilient and inclusive regional future.

This study contributes to the literature by articulating a conceptual and normative framework for city-driven regionalism in Asia and by situating it within the broader debates on multilevel governance and comparative regional integration.

Theoretical Framework: Rethinking Regionalism from the City Level

This paper proposes a conceptual framework that repositions cities as central agents in regional cooperation, particularly in the Asian context where traditional intergovernmental regionalism faces inherent limitations. The framework builds on five interlocking theoretical strands, which together offer a normative and operational rationale for city-driven regionalism in Asia.

Multilevel Governance (MLG): Multilevel Governance (MLG): Originating in the European Union (Hooghe & Marks, 2001), MLG conceptualizes governance as operating across multiple levels—supranational, national, subnational, and local (Lee, 2010). It captures the diffusion of authority away from centralized nation-states and toward both transnational institutions and subnational actors. This reflects a broader transformation in the spatial organization of political power, where the rigid hierarchies of the Westphalian model are gradually giving way to more networked and layered governance systems.

Globalization has accelerated this shift by exposing the limits of state-centric control over complex and transboundary issues such as climate change, trade, migration, and digital governance. As Scholte (2005) and Lee (2010) argue, sovereignty has not disappeared but has become more dispersed, redefined through interactions among supranational bodies, national institutions, and increasingly, local governments. In this context, sub-state actors like cities are not simply recipients of top-down mandates but proactive participants in shaping policy norms and practices.

While the EU has institutionalized MLG through legal and policy mechanisms, governance in Asia remains more state-centric and fragmented. Yet, in practice, cities in the region have found ways to transcend national boundaries by forming cross-border networks and engaging directly with international institutions. Cities act as both implementers of national policy and as norm entrepreneurs—testing, diffusing, and scaling innovative practices that challenge traditional governance hierarchies. As Keating (2008) notes, sub-state actors are increasingly “punching above their weight” in global governance, particularly in urgent domains such as climate change.

While this study adopts multi-level governance (MLG) as its principal analytical framework, it also acknowledges the insights offered by multi-scalar governance (MSG) in highlighting the relational and networked nature of authority across spatial and functional domains. In political science and international relations, *MLG* (Hooghe & Marks, 2001) has been widely employed to describe the vertical dispersion of authority among supranational, national, and subnational levels, emphasizing how decision-making power is shared and negotiated across institutional hierarchies.

By contrast, the notion of *MSG*—frequently used in environmental and urban studies—draws attention to the horizontal and relational dimensions of governance that cut across scales and sectors rather than following fixed levels (Bulkeley, 2005; Jessop et al., 2008).

In this paper, MLG is used as the primary conceptual framework, reflecting its theoretical grounding in the political science literature and its applicability to the institutional dimensions of city diplomacy and regional cooperation. However, the term *multi-scalar* is selectively employed when emphasizing the networked, cross-scalar interactions through which cities engage in climate governance, digital diplomacy, and transnational municipal networks (TMNs). This dual usage allows the analysis to maintain conceptual consistency while recognizing that contemporary urban governance operates not only through institutional levels but also through dynamic relational scales that transcend traditional hierarchies.

Beyond serving as analytical frameworks, multilevel governance (MLG) and comparative regionalism also provide conceptual entry points for reinterpreting the foundational pillars of modern world politics—sovereignty, order, and power.

In conventional international relations, *sovereignty* is understood as the exclusive authority of the nation-state within a territorially bounded space. Yet the growing prominence of city diplomacy and transnational municipal networks (TMNs) demonstrates a shift toward shared and functional sovereignty, in which cities exercise authority in specific policy domains—climate action, public health, or digital governance—without undermining the formal sovereignty of states.

Similarly, the concept of *order*, traditionally framed through interstate hierarchies and the balance of power, is being recast as a multilevel and networked order co-produced by actors operating across and beyond state boundaries. Cities contribute to regional and global order not through coercion or hierarchy, but through coordination, learning, and norm diffusion.

Finally, *power* itself is being redefined. Instead of material dominance, city-driven regionalism foregrounds connective or relational power—the capacity to convene, share, and mobilize knowledge, legitimacy, and collective problem-solving across borders.

This theoretical reframing underscores that city-driven regionalism is more than an administrative or functional innovation; it represents a paradigmatic response to the transformation of sovereignty, order, and power in the post-globalization era.

City Diplomacy and Transnational Municipal Networks (TMNs): Cities have increasingly become international actors, participating in global policy arenas and shaping transnational norms (Acuto, 2013; Tavares, 2016). TMNs such as the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability), and the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) exemplify how cities collaborate to share data, policy tools, and financing strategies. These networks enable cities to bypass national bottlenecks and engage in flexible, issue-driven cooperation. The EU's recent "BiodiverCities by 2030" roadmap (Zulian et al., 2022), which integrates biodiversity goals across European cities through green infrastructure strategies, illustrates the potential of cities to act collectively and lead on cross-border environmental agendas.

In addition to TMNs, recent scholarship has highlighted the emergence of "city diplomacy" as a distinct and institutionalized dimension of international relations. Keohane and Nye (1974) first theorized "trans-governmental networks" that operate below the level of heads of state, enabling collaboration among government sub-units. Risse-Kappen (1995) expanded this notion to describe networks among state officials in sub-units of national governments, which can influence international agendas independently of central foreign policy. Van der Pluijm and Melissen (2007) characterize city diplomacy as a decentralized form of foreign policy, where cities pursue their interests and identities globally. Organizations such as UCLG (United Cities and Local Governments) have further institutionalized the term, emphasizing cities' collective roles in peacebuilding, sustainability, and multilateral dialogue (Musch et al., 2008). The Tokyo Metropolitan Government's strategic articulation of city diplomacy in 2014, defining it as encompassing all international activities conducted by the city, exemplifies the growing breadth and legitimacy of this concept in both academic and policy discourse.

Recent empirical research also supports the view that city diplomacy has moved beyond symbolic engagement to become a formalized and strategic dimension of local governance. According to the 2024 Cities and International Engagement Survey (Pejic et al., 2025), 82% of cities now identify climate change as their top international priority, while 71% have formally adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of their urban strategy. Furthermore, the increasing alignment between local and national governments, reported by 84% of cities, and the rise in trained international affairs staff (from 19% in 2018 to 57% in 2024) demonstrate the professionalization and institutional consolidation of city diplomacy. These developments reinforce the theoretical claim that cities are not merely informal actors, but increasingly function as structured and professionalized agents within global governance.

In recent years, local governments have increasingly asserted themselves as legitimate actors in the global governance of sustainable development. UCLG launched the "#urbanSDG" campaign in response to the limited role that cities played in shaping the MDGs, calling for a stronger integration of local capacities into the SDG framework. This demand gained traction

through mechanisms such as the Local2030 platform and the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), and culminated in the adoption of a local-level SDG implementation checklist by the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) in 2018. These developments reflect the growing institutional recognition of cities as not only implementers but also co-designers of global policy agendas.

In the case of Korea, local governments have proactively responded to the SDGs by adopting sustainability ordinances and establishing local councils for sustainable development, even in the absence of strong incentives from the central government. Such institutionalization of SDG localization signals a broader shift in the agency and autonomy of cities within both national and global governance frameworks. Taken together, these theoretical and empirical developments lay the groundwork for understanding city-driven regionalism as a viable governance framework, especially within the fragmented and diverse political landscape of Asia.

Digital Diplomacy and Smart City Norms: As cities increasingly rely on digital technologies to manage services, shape policy, and engage with citizens, digital diplomacy and smart city governance have emerged as important dimensions of transnational urban cooperation. Digital transformation is not merely a technical process, it involves value-laden decisions about data rights, transparency, equity, and algorithmic accountability. In this context, cities are no longer passive adopters of global tech standards but active contributors to the formulation of digital norms.

Cities are collaborating not only on traditional policy areas like climate and infrastructure, but also on co-developing governance frameworks for digital inclusion, AI ethics, mobility data, and cybersecurity. This shift reflects the growing recognition that digital infrastructure constitutes a new domain of soft power and institutional leverage for cities.

Global platforms such as the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) and the G20 Global Smart Cities Alliance (GSCA) demonstrate the central role of cities in advancing digital norms. The GSCA, coordinated by the World Economic Forum, brings together cities like Tokyo, Bengaluru, Jakarta, and São Paulo to pilot and refine principles related to data privacy, interoperability, algorithmic fairness, and open digital infrastructure. These local implementations are intended to serve as scalable models for other cities navigating similar challenges. Meanwhile, ASCN has promoted cross-border coordination on smart mobility, e-governance, and digital resilience, despite the lack of formal intergovernmental mandates.

This digital urban diplomacy is characterized by its modularity and issue-specific focus, qualities that make it particularly well-suited for replication across diverse political systems. Furthermore, partnerships between cities and multilateral actors (such as ADB, UNDP, and tech consortia) offer both legitimacy and resources for experimentation in areas where national regulations may be absent or underdeveloped.

The growing involvement of cities in shaping global digital standards demonstrates the maturation of subnational digital diplomacy. It also reinforces the idea that cities can act as norm-setters, not only in sustainability and resilience but also in technology governance. By anchoring digital principles in municipal practice, cities contribute to a more accountable and human-centered digital transition.

Comparative Regionalism: Scholars of comparative regionalism highlight the unique character of Asian regionalism, which is often informal, consensus-driven, and network-based—contrasting with the institutionalized, treaty-based regionalism of the European Union (Acharya, 2007; Jetschke & Lenz, 2013). In the EU, regional integration has evolved through formal legal mechanisms, harmonized regulatory regimes, and robust supranational institutions such as the European Commission and the European Parliament. Asian regionalism, in contrast, is deeply

shaped by sovereignty sensitivities, historical grievances, and political asymmetries, resulting in softer forms of cooperation based on dialogue, non-interference, and incrementalism.

This divergence in regional integration models has significant implications for the role of cities. In Europe, cities have gained formal access to regional governance through the Committee of the Regions and cohesion funding mechanisms. In Asia, however, cities must navigate a more state-centric landscape, relying on informal diplomacy, pilot projects, and thematic networks to drive transnational cooperation. As such, city-driven regionalism is not a replication of the European model, but an adaptive strategy aligned with the institutional realities and diversity of the Asian region.

Recent theoretical advances in city-regionalism have further enriched the understanding of how urban governance shapes regional political orders. Projects such as *The Geopolitics of City-Regionalism* (Jonas & Moisiso, 2016) have emphasized that city-regions are not merely economic growth engines but political actors embedded in multiscale power relations. These studies highlight the dual nature of city-regions: while they serve as engines of innovation and cross-border exchange, they are also subject to national steering and geopolitical constraints. Case studies from Denver (USA) and Nanjing (China) illustrate how national governments strategically shape, authorize, or limit city-region initiatives depending on broader state objectives.

These insights underscore the importance of context-sensitive governance models. Rather than treating city-regionalism as inherently bottom-up or emancipatory, scholars increasingly recognize the interplay between state control, territorial logics, and subnational autonomy. In Asia, where centralized political systems remain dominant, a pragmatic form of city-driven regionalism must account for this entanglement.

Building on this comparative insight, the following section situates city-driven regionalism within the broader transformation of the global order—namely, the retreat of globalization and the search for alternative forms of cooperation.

While globalization once symbolized an era of transnational connectivity and economic expansion, its recent retreat has exposed the fragility of global cooperation. The pandemic, the weaponization of trade, and the resurgence of protectionism have all accelerated what many scholars now call “*deglobalization*.” Yet the erosion of globalism does not necessarily entail a return to inward-looking nationalism. Between these two poles lies a crucial middle ground—regionalization, defined as a bottom-up process of integration driven by cities, markets, civil society, and other non-state actors (Börzel, 2016; Hettne et al., 1999).

Conventionally, regionalism refers to state-led, top-down initiatives for regional integration, often institutionalized through treaties or intergovernmental organizations such as ASEAN, the EU, or MERCOSUR. Regionalization, by contrast, denotes more informal, decentralized, and functional linkages that arise among subnational units, private actors, and transnational networks. In this sense, cities have become critical engines of regionalization—facilitating flows of knowledge, technology, and environmental cooperation that transcend national boundaries.

This study situates city-driven regionalism as an institutionalized form of regionalization. It argues that the cooperative dynamics emerging from city diplomacy, transnational municipal networks (TMNs), and urban climate partnerships represent not merely functional exchanges, but the early stages of a new kind of regional governance. Unlike conventional regionalism, which often depends on intergovernmental consensus, city-driven regionalism builds upon the flexible and adaptive logics of regionalization, yet aspires to codify them into shared norms, principles, and institutional frameworks.

In Asia’s post-globalization context—where nation-states remain wary of supranational authority yet increasingly constrained by the limits of unilateral action—city-led regionalization offers a pragmatic pathway to rebuild cooperation without threatening sovereignty. It serves

as a “middle path” between globalism and nationalism, one that preserves openness and interdependence while grounding collaboration in the tangible and networked capacities of cities. Through this lens, city-driven regionalism represents both a continuation of regionalization’s functional dynamics and its normative elevation into a deliberate, city-based architecture of regional order.

The vision of city-driven regionalism does not emerge in a historical vacuum. Rather, it resonates with deeper intellectual currents in Asia’s own regional thought. Long before contemporary debates on multilevel governance or transnational networks, Asian thinkers such as Ahn Jung-geun, Sun Yat-sen, and Rabindranath Tagore articulated ideals of solidarity, mutual learning, and moral community that transcended state borders. While their ideas—collectively known as *Pan-Asianism*—were often constrained by nationalist agendas and the geopolitics of their time, they provided an enduring normative vocabulary for regional cooperation based on shared responsibility and interdependence (Lee, 2021). Revisiting these early conceptions of Asian unity allows us to situate city-driven regionalism not merely as a functional response to global fragmentation, but as a continuation of Asia’s long-standing quest for a more humane and inclusive regional order.

Historical Antecedents: Pan-Asianism and the legacy of Asian Regionalist thought:

The intellectual roots of Asian regionalism date back to 19th-century Pan-Asianism, which emerged as a response to Western imperialism. Thinkers such as Ahn Jung-geun, Sun Yat-sen, and Rabindranath Tagore proposed visions of Asian solidarity based on shared spiritual values, cultural commonality, and resistance to colonial domination (Lee, 2021). An’s *Treatise on Peace in the East* proposed a joint military, economic, and educational framework for East Asian unity. Sun emphasized Asian unity through ethical governance as an alternative to Western imperialism. Tagore rejected both colonialism and nationalism, advocating for a spiritual and cultural foundation for Asian cooperation. While these early models lacked institutional follow-through and were often co-opted by nationalist agendas, they laid the moral and conceptual groundwork for modern regionalism (Lee, 2021; Saaler & Szpilman, 2011).

While 19th-century Pan-Asianism emerged largely as elite discourse shaped by intellectuals and revolutionaries, its normative aspirations - solidarity, mutual respect, and cultural autonomy, are being reinterpreted today through city-based multilateralism. Cities are increasingly reclaiming these values not through grand ideological projects but through pragmatic, decentralized cooperation in areas such as climate resilience, public health, and digital governance. In this way, contemporary city diplomacy echoes the original spirit of Pan-Asianism while avoiding its historical pitfalls, particularly top-down nationalism and regional hierarchy.

While Pan-Asianism did not materialize as a structured regional system, it contributed to the moral vocabulary of Asian internationalism. Its appeal lay in articulating a collective non-Western identity rooted in shared values and civilizational pride, sentiments that continue to inform contemporary city-led visions of regionalism, albeit in more practical and depoliticized forms.

Unlike European regionalism rooted in legal instruments and market integration, Pan-Asian thought emphasized moral leadership and cultural unity, elements that resonate more with urban cooperation today than with centralized national strategies.

While Pan-Asianism articulated a vision of cultural solidarity and moral leadership, its institutional trajectory was limited by several factors: the lack of formal mechanisms for inter-city or subnational coordination, the dominance of nationalist agendas, and the persistence of geopolitical rivalries that undermined collective action. In contrast, contemporary city-driven regionalism departs from Pan-Asianism’s ideational focus by embedding cooperation within pragmatic, issue-specific networks. Yet it also revives core aspirations of regional solidarity

and autonomy from Western-centric governance models. This tension between continuity and departure is critical: city-driven regionalism does not replicate Pan-Asianism’s ideological project but adapts its ethos of shared vulnerability and mutual learning to the demands of the 21st century. In doing so, it demonstrates how subnational actors can institutionalize cooperation where state-led regionalism has often stalled.

This conceptual linkage underscores that while Pan-Asianism failed to evolve into a structured regional system, its normative vocabulary continues to shape contemporary regionalism, albeit through new actors, modalities, and scales.

Application to the Asian Context: In Asia, mega-states such as China and India and a wide variety of political systems and development levels make EU-style regional integration difficult to replicate. Unlike national governments that are often constrained by geopolitical rivalries or bureaucratic inertia, cities are more agile, problem-focused, and incentivized to deliver immediate results to their populations. This paper argues that cities can act as pragmatic nodes of cooperation, developing shared standards (e.g., climate budget tagging), facilitating joint initiatives (e.g., disaster preparedness), and institutionalizing solidarity (e.g., through a regional charter and secretariat).

TMNs and urban climate platforms such as C40, ICLEI, and the ASEAN Smart Cities Network, not only offer governance blueprints but also provide peer-learning mechanisms, funding pipelines, and evaluation frameworks, demonstrating that such models are both politically feasible and administratively scalable.

As illustrated in Figure 1, this conceptual model positions urban centers such as Seoul, Jakarta, Tokyo, Bangkok, and New Delhi as both horizontal connectors, facilitating peer-to-peer collaboration, and vertical translators, bridging local actions with national and regional frameworks across issue domains like climate, disaster resilience, digital innovation, and social inclusion.

While city-driven regionalism offers a common framework, its realization in Asia inevitably reflects diverse policy traditions, legal frameworks, and institutional capacities among major cities. For example, Seoul has emerged as a regional leader in climate budgeting, pioneering a

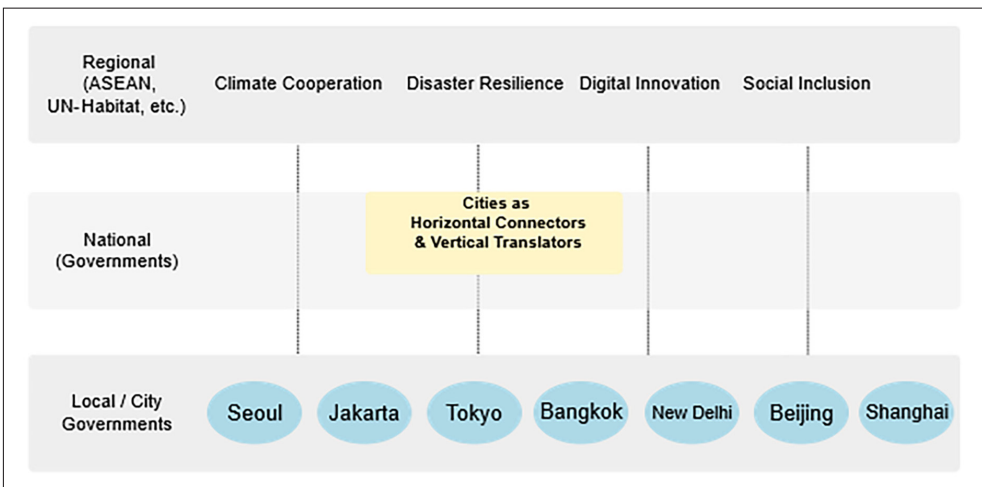


Figure 1. Conceptual model of city-driven regionalism in Asia

detailed climate budget tagging system that tracks emissions-related expenditures and links them to municipal fiscal planning. This approach demonstrates how rigorous financial transparency can be embedded in climate governance. In contrast, Jakarta has leveraged its role as a co-founder of the ASEAN Smart Cities Network to position smart urban development as both a diplomatic tool and a policy priority, despite persistent challenges in inter-agency coordination and funding constraints (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). Bangkok has focused on climate resilience through localized flood adaptation strategies and regional knowledge exchanges, illustrating how mid-sized cities can contribute niche expertise within larger transnational networks. Tokyo, meanwhile, stands out for formally institutionalizing city diplomacy: since 2014, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government has adopted a strategic framework defining city diplomacy as an integrated component of municipal governance.

These variations highlight that while the model of city-driven regionalism is conceptually coherent, its practical implementation is shaped by factors such as the degree of local fiscal autonomy, national legal constraints on subnational foreign affairs, and varying capacities for policy innovation. The experience of Seoul suggests that strong municipal financial systems can underpin credibility in transnational cooperation, whereas Jakarta's case shows the potential of regional networks to partially offset resource constraints. Bangkok demonstrates how functional cooperation in areas like flood management can build legitimacy and shared practice even without substantial fiscal resources. Tokyo underscores the value of formal strategic articulation of city diplomacy to sustain continuity beyond electoral cycles.

Collectively, these examples reveal that realizing city-driven regionalism requires a nuanced understanding of the legal, political, and institutional contexts of each city. A pragmatic approach that leverages local strengths, mitigates governance constraints, and supports mutual learning is essential to translating conceptual frameworks into operational practice. To support these differentiated pathways, future research could develop a typology of enabling conditions, including legal mandates, fiscal capacity, and intergovernmental coordination mechanisms that shape the potential for city-driven regionalism across Asian contexts.

Case Studies: Learning from Global Urban Cooperation Models

To better understand how cities can drive regionalism in practice, this section highlights key international cases where urban networks have led or significantly shaped cross-border cooperation. These examples offer valuable insights for building a city-driven regional framework in Asia.

C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group

The C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group was launched in 2005 by then-Mayor of London Ken Livingstone and has since evolved into one of the most influential city networks focused on climate change. With nearly 100 member cities representing more than 700 million people and one-quarter of the global economy, C40 operates as a powerful platform for city-led climate governance. Member cities include Seoul, Jakarta, Tokyo, New Delhi, and many other major urban centers across the Global North and South.

C40's governance structure is composed of a Steering Committee of mayors, a permanent Secretariat headquartered in London, and various thematic networks addressing issues such as energy transition, urban mobility, waste management, and green finance. One of C40's notable contributions is the development of city-level standards for GHG emissions measurement and climate action planning (C40 Cities, 2023). These include the Global Protocol for Community-

Scale Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventories (GPC) and pathways aligned with the Paris Agreement.

In addition to its technical guidance, C40 has initiated joint declarations and sectoral pledges such as the “Fossil-Fuel-Free Streets Declaration” and the “Clean Air Cities Declaration.” These tools serve not only as norm-setting devices but also as leverage for cities to attract climate finance and influence national policy debates. C40 demonstrates how cities can act collectively and autonomously on global issues even in the absence of formal authority. It also shows the value of vertical coordination, as cities often align their climate policies with national and global targets while pushing for more ambitious action.

ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN)

The ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) was inaugurated in 2018 during Singapore’s ASEAN chairmanship. Unlike C40, ASCN is nested within an intergovernmental regional body but is distinct in its city-centric design. The network brings together 26 pilot cities across all ten ASEAN member states, including Jakarta, Bangkok, Hanoi, and Singapore.

ASCN aims to promote smart and sustainable urban development by enabling cities to formulate their own Smart City Action Plans (SCAPs) and to collaborate on technical and financial innovations. While national governments endorse the initiative, cities retain autonomy in defining their goals and implementation strategies. The ASCN also facilitates cross-sector partnerships, including with the private sector and international development agencies.

In terms of governance, ASCN is coordinated through a national representative from each country, supported by a rotating secretariat and an annual summit. Its hybrid structure reflects ASEAN’s consensus-driven approach while allowing for bottom-up innovation at the urban level.

Despite its promising framework, ASCN faces limitations in terms of funding and institutional continuity. Unlike the C40 or EU-supported initiatives, ASCN lacks a permanent secretariat or standardized metrics for evaluation, making it more reliant on the capacity of individual cities and national backing. Nonetheless, ASCN represents a regionally embedded effort to balance central coordination with municipal autonomy in Southeast Asia.

BiodiverCities by 2030 (European Union)

Launched by the European Commission in partnership with the European Committee of the Regions, BiodiverCities by 2030 represents a regional effort to embed biodiversity into urban policy. Its goal is to support the design and implementation of green infrastructure, restore ecosystems, and integrate nature-based solutions into urban planning (Zulian et al., 2022).

The roadmap identifies several priority areas: enhancing city biodiversity strategies, developing local indicators, funding pilot projects, and fostering citizen engagement. Although guided by EU institutions, the initiative prioritizes co-creation, where cities shape policies in collaboration with regional and national authorities. Cities such as Barcelona, Amsterdam, Ghent, and Milan are actively involved.

BiodiverCities benefits from the EU’s robust multi-level governance framework, which allows for dedicated funding (e.g., from the LIFE programme and Horizon Europe), monitoring tools, and long-term institutional alignment. Moreover, cities involved in the initiative participate in technical workshops and joint policy consultations that ensure iterative learning across borders. This integrated model demonstrates how supranational institutions can enable and scale city-level innovation without undermining national sovereignty.

These cases share several common features: decentralized yet coordinated governance, issue-

driven cooperation, clear membership and accountability structures, and long-term institutional support. Importantly, they show that urban networks can function both independently (C40) and within regional frameworks (ASCN, EU).

For Asia, these models offer scalable pathways for building a city-driven regional community even in the absence of supranational institutions like the EU. In the next section, this paper draws on these lessons to propose a governance architecture tailored for the Asian context—one that leverages the strengths of urban leadership while respecting the region's diversity and sovereignty sensitivities.

Toward a City-Driven Regional Governance Model in Asia

City-driven regionalism in Asia is not merely an idealistic aspiration, it is a pragmatic response to deeply embedded institutional and geopolitical barriers that constrain intergovernmental regionalism. Yet, institutionalizing such a model demands careful attention to a series of critical questions concerning its design, legitimacy, and feasibility.

This section presents a governance proposal not in abstract terms, but as a set of concrete answers to these challenges. Each of the five components (Q1 - Q5) corresponds to a core question that city-based regional cooperation in Asia must address. By responding directly to these questions, this chapter outlines a flexible, inclusive, and politically feasible framework for advancing regional governance through cities.

Drawing on the theoretical foundations and case studies discussed in earlier sections, the proposed model integrates lessons from initiatives like C40 and ASCN while acknowledging the complex political realities of Asia, namely, sovereignty sensitivities, the absence of supranational institutions, and developmental asymmetries.

Question 1: How can city-driven regionalism be normatively justified in a fragmented and sovereignty-sensitive region like Asia?

A city-driven Asian community should prioritize bottom-up regionalism anchored in local innovation, horizontal solidarity, and practical collaboration. Rather than replacing national frameworks, cities complement them by filling governance gaps and accelerating collective action in domains such as climate change, disaster preparedness, digital innovation, and sustainable development. The proposal envisions cities not merely as implementers of national agendas but as co-designers of regional policy frameworks.

The enduring "Asian Paradox", marked by deep economic integration but persistent political divisions, has shown that traditional state-to-state mechanisms often fall short of delivering inclusive and consistent cooperation (Lee, 2021). Political tensions over history, territory, and great-power rivalry have stalled intergovernmental processes across Northeast and Southeast Asia. Yet, cities remain less constrained by these geopolitical stalemates. They are uniquely positioned to sidestep high-level political sensitivities and lead functional cooperation through technical, environmental, and digital initiatives that generate tangible benefits.

Thus, city-led regionalism offers more than administrative innovation; it represents a strategic realignment of how Asia can pursue collective resilience and shared development without relying solely on top-down intergovernmental consensus. It embraces the logic of collaboration among communities rather than confrontation among states, translating the normative aspirations of a 21st-century Asian community into locally grounded governance.

Question 2: What institutional architecture could realistically sustain such cooperation across diverse cities?

- **Asia City Charter:** A foundational document signed by participating cities to articulate shared values (e.g., sustainability, equity, transparency) and outline thematic cooperation areas (climate, digital governance, public health, etc.). The charter will reflect the diverse urban contexts of Asia while establishing a common ethical and strategic foundation.
- **City Assembly:** A representative decision-making body composed of core cities (e.g., Seoul, Jakarta, Bangkok, Tokyo, Hanoi, etc.), rotating annually. It will be responsible for adopting collective strategies, monitoring implementation, and facilitating cross-city collaboration.
- **Urban Secretariat:** A permanent administrative unit coordinating programs, managing data and communications, and providing technical support. The Secretariat would host a team of urban policy experts, network managers, and external relations officers.
- **Thematic Clusters:** Specialized working groups composed of city officials, researchers, and technical advisors. These clusters would focus on key urban agenda areas in Asia—including urban resilience & disaster risk, climate-and-low-carbon transitions, inclusive infrastructure & mobility innovation, digital governance & data-driven cities, and equitable urban health & social inclusion. Each cluster would develop toolkits and policy-guidance documents to be shared across the network.
- **Asian Cities Solidarity Fund:** A joint financing mechanism designed to strengthen horizontal cooperation among Asian cities and gradually evolve into a platform that supports less-resourced and capacity-constrained municipalities. Drawing inspiration from the EU's Cohesion Policy and the C40 Cities Finance Facility, the fund would blend national contributions, philanthropic resources, and multilateral development financing to support collaborative projects addressing shared urban challenges such as climate adaptation, population ageing, infrastructure resilience, and digital transition. Recognizing that Asian cities differ significantly in their state-city relations, legal and institutional frameworks, and fiscal capacities, the fund's design should reflect these diverse contexts, promoting mutual learning, solidarity, and equitable access to regional resources as part of an inclusive model of city-driven regionalism.
- **Modular Participation Design:** Given the vast geographic and political diversity of Asia, this model does not presume uniform participation. Rather, it proposes a modular and networked architecture, where cities join based on functional needs and shared policy goals. The structure allows for core cities with high institutional capacity to lead initiatives, while also enabling smaller or less-resourced cities to collaborate through project-specific clusters or regional corridors. In this way, the model balances scalability with flexibility, and inclusivity with strategic focus.

Importantly, the design also allows for engagement from cities in states with centralized or single-party governance systems, such as China. Participation in this model is not premised on political alignment, but on functional collaboration and shared urban challenges. Technical domains such as air quality, flood resilience, digital governance, and public health offer value-neutral areas where cities can engage regardless of their national system. For instance, Chinese cities such as Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou have already participated in global initiatives like C40 and ICLEI. This city-to-city format enables participation without direct political endorsement, respecting national sovereignty while facilitating mutual learning. In addition, partnerships with regional frameworks such as ASEAN+3 or ADB projects can offer indirect institutional support for cities in countries with tight foreign engagement controls.

To avoid perceptions of geopolitical dominance and ensure balanced ownership, the governance model proposes a rotational leadership mechanism among core Asian cities. The Urban Secretariat, while initially hosted by Seoul due to its technical expertise in climate budgeting and international municipal cooperation, would relocate every three years among participating cities such as Jakarta, Bangkok, Tokyo, or Hanoi. This rotation would be determined through a consensus-based selection process within the City Assembly, taking into account each city's capacity, strategic priorities, and commitment to the shared Charter principles.

This approach serves three key purposes: First, it mitigates concerns over geopolitical hierarchies and reinforces the legitimacy of the initiative across diverse political systems. Second, it allows for the incorporation of different local innovations and administrative experiences into the network's evolving practices. Third, it institutionalizes a culture of shared responsibility and ownership, thereby strengthening the sustainability and credibility of city-driven regionalism over time. The rotating Secretariat model also enables cities with varying resources to demonstrate leadership, facilitating a more equitable distribution of recognition, capacity-building opportunities, and agenda-setting power.

For practical implementation, the rotational arrangement would be formalized in the Asia City Charter and supported by clear procedural guidelines, including transparent criteria for Secretariat selection, predefined timelines for transition, and mechanisms for continuity and knowledge transfer between host cities.

Comparative experiences in transnational municipal networks, such as the C40 Cities' rotating Chair and the UCLG Presidency model, indicate that rotational leadership can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of decentralized governance frameworks by distributing symbolic and operational authority.

As this study is primarily conceptual in scope, it does not seek to demonstrate a fully realized instance of inter-city governance. Instead, it aims to clarify the functional logic and mutual learning potential of city-driven regionalism, particularly under conditions of asymmetric institutional capacity among cities. The proposed framework suggests that city-based cooperation in Asia need not rely on uniform models or best-practice transfers, but can accommodate diverse forms of collaboration, benchmarking, and joint experimentation across policy domains such as climate governance, disaster resilience, and digital transition.

Question 3: How can this city-based model align with national sovereignty and existing regional organizations?

Unlike the EU, where cities are increasingly integrated into supranational governance through instruments such as the Committee of the Regions and cohesion funding mechanisms, Asian regionalism is likely to remain intergovernmental in structure. This proposal does not seek to replace national policies or challenge state sovereignty; rather, it aims to supplement and reinforce them through horizontal cooperation among cities.

Formal linkages with regional and international organizations such as ASEAN, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and UN-Habitat could enhance the initiative's legitimacy while facilitating resource pooling and policy coherence. Through these channels, cities could participate in regional dialogues and development strategies by providing localized data, piloting policy innovations, and informing national decision-making from the bottom up. The proposed governance model therefore offers a flexible and sovereignty-respecting framework for practical cooperation in areas where intergovernmental consensus is difficult to achieve.

Importantly, this model does not seek to circumvent the constitutional limitations many local governments face in foreign affairs. Instead, it operates within and alongside national

legal frameworks to strengthen the alignment between local and global policies. Although local governments in many Asian countries must obtain central approval for international engagements or lack explicit diplomatic mandates, recent trends indicate growing institutional support for decentralized international cooperation. For instance, ministries of foreign affairs in countries such as Korea and Indonesia have established local diplomacy units, and many national governments now endorse city-level participation in global initiatives such as the SDGs and climate accords.

While Hoshiro (2019) empirically demonstrates that economic regionalization does not automatically foster regionalism in East Asia, Jonas and Moisiu (2016) conceptualize cities as geopolitical agents through which states pursue competitiveness and transnational integration. Taken together, these insights suggest that in sovereignty-sensitive contexts like East Asia, city-driven regionalism may function as a pragmatic pathway toward regional cohesion where state-led integration remains politically constrained.

In this sense, city diplomacy complements rather than competes with national diplomacy. By emphasizing technical collaboration, climate finance, data exchange, and SDG implementation, cities can make meaningful contributions to national priorities while simultaneously building transnational coalitions. City diplomacy thus emerges as a form of “pragmatic multilateralism”—a practical mode of regional cooperation that advances both local innovation and national legitimacy.

While the proposed city-driven framework introduces a novel form of regional cooperation, it is not designed to replace or compete with existing intergovernmental institutions such as ASEAN+3, ASEAN+6, the East Asia Summit (EAS), or the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Instead, it seeks to complement and operationalize their policy objectives at the subnational level.

Many of these regional frameworks have produced normative and strategic blueprints for cooperation—ranging from ASEAN’s *Community Vision 2025* to the EAS *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership* (RCEP) dialogue processes—but they often face constraints in implementation due to sovereignty sensitivities, uneven capacity, and limited local engagement. City-driven regionalism addresses these functional gaps by translating regional commitments into localized action. Through city networks, knowledge platforms, and joint pilot projects, local governments can help implement and monitor initiatives in areas such as climate resilience, smart urbanization, and digital governance—domains that demand context-specific, decentralized solutions.

In practice, this model envisions a multi-layered regional ecosystem in which cities act as both “bottom-up translators” and “horizontal connectors.” As bottom-up translators, they localize the goals of ASEAN and ADB-led programs—such as the *ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN)* or *ADB’s Urban Climate Resilience Program*—by tailoring them to city-specific conditions. As horizontal connectors, they facilitate cross-border collaboration among peer cities, sharing data, innovations, and practices that can subsequently inform national and regional policymaking.

Importantly, the proposed city framework remains institutionally non-confrontational. It respects the central role of national governments in regional diplomacy while demonstrating how subnational actors can expand the scope and legitimacy of regional cooperation. By fostering complementary linkages between top-down regionalism and bottom-up regionalization, city-driven regionalism strengthens the policy ecosystem of Asian regionalism as a whole—making it more participatory, adaptive, and implementation-oriented (Hoshiro, 2019).

Question 4: What role can a leading city like Seoul play without triggering hierarchical politics?

Rather than asserting leadership in a hierarchical sense, Seoul could serve as a demonstration city, modeling effective urban diplomacy, transparency in climate budgeting, and scalable innovations in smart city management. Hosting the first “Asian Cities for Climate Summit” and launching the Urban Secretariat in Seoul would signal institutional commitment while inviting broad participation from cities across the region. Seoul’s initiatives could be documented and shared as case-based learning modules.

Seoul’s significance extends beyond its administrative capacity. As the capital of a country that has overcome colonial occupation, civil war, national division, and authoritarian rule—yet has achieved rapid modernization, economic development, and democratization—Seoul symbolizes both resilience and transformation. For many Asian cities and citizens, Korea’s experience offers a narrative of hope and possibility, and Seoul’s leadership in this initiative can inspire broader regional participation grounded in shared histories and aspirations.

Question 5: What are the concrete implementation steps to move from vision to practice?

- **Year 1:** Coalition building, Asia City Charter drafting, inaugural Summit in Seoul
- **Years 2–3:** Secretariat launch, formation of thematic clusters, pilot projects on climate budget tagging, disaster risk dashboards, and regional SDG monitoring
- **Years 4–5:** Membership expansion to secondary cities, integration of data-sharing platforms, establishment of links with ASEAN/ADB/UN-Habitat, and promotion of policy diffusion and mainstreaming

Through this governance model, cities in Asia can transcend geopolitical divides and co-create a new form of regionalism, one that is flexible, inclusive, and grounded in the everyday realities of urban governance. Drawing from but not replicating the European experience, this proposal respects the constraints of Asian regionalism while activating the underutilized potential of cities as regional architects. It offers a pluralistic pathway for inter-urban diplomacy, collaborative policy-making, and resilient development in the 21st century.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the escalating complexity and scale of global challenges, particularly in Asia, demand new regional cooperation models that go beyond the limitations of traditional nation-state frameworks. Climate change, pandemics, digital inequality, and transboundary disasters are multiscale crises requiring coordination across levels of governance.

While European regionalism has evolved through supranational institutions, Asia’s geopolitical diversity and sovereignty sensitivities have constrained similar approaches. In this context, cities emerge as agile and capable agents, able to forge cross-border partnerships, localize global norms, and institutionalize multilevel governance through pragmatic diplomacy and decentralized innovation.

Building on theoretical insights from multilevel governance, city diplomacy, and comparative regionalism, supported by real-world initiatives such as C40, ASCN, and BiodiverCities, this paper outlines a scalable city-driven regionalism model. The proposed governance structure,

comprising a City Charter, rotating Assembly, Urban Secretariat, thematic clusters, benchmarking tools, and a Solidarity Fund, offers an actionable roadmap for cross-city cooperation. Crucially, it works in complementarity, not competition, with national frameworks, positioning cities as connectors between the local and global.

While Seoul is well-positioned to serve as an initial demonstration city and convening hub due to its experience in climate budgeting, the model explicitly envisions a rotating leadership structure among diverse Asian cities. This rotational approach is designed to ensure balanced ownership, cross-cultural legitimacy, and sustained momentum over time.

Importantly, this vision reinterprets and modernizes the spirit of 19th-century Pan-Asianism. While earlier versions emphasized resistance to Western imperialism and invoked cultural unity, they often lacked mechanisms for inclusive multilateralism. In contrast, city-driven regionalism builds on shared vulnerability and mutual aspirations, not ethnic unity or geopolitical identity, as the basis for cooperation. It responds not through ideology, but through practical solidarity in the face of climate disruption, digital divides, and public health insecurity. Moreover, the spread of shrinking and super-aged societies across Asia introduces a structural demographic challenge that no single state can manage alone. Cities, which bear the front-line burdens of care provision, mobility redesign, labor shortages, and fiscal contraction, are uniquely positioned to jointly innovate new models of resilience—making demographic change itself a critical driver of city-driven regionalism.

As humanity enters what many now refer to as the “polycrisis” era, marked by the overlapping risks of environmental degradation, digital fragmentation, and institutional breakdown, relying solely on national or supranational responses has proven insufficient. Subnational actors, especially cities, are increasingly positioned to lead policy innovation, convene stakeholders, and implement globally relevant solutions attuned to local realities.

Future work should explore how this governance model can be scaled through regional corridors, how solidarity funding mechanisms can be designed for fiscal equity, and how legal harmonization can be pursued to safeguard cities’ participation within state-centric diplomatic frameworks. In parallel, research must investigate how to manage potential tensions between city diplomacy and national sovereignty, especially in politically sensitive contexts.

Ultimately, this paper calls for a paradigm shift. By repositioning cities as co-creators of regional governance, Asia can craft a new narrative, one that is pluralistic, adaptive, and rooted in lived urban realities. While it may not replicate the European path, it can pioneer a distinctly Asian trajectory toward inclusive, resilient regionalism. In doing so, it offers a tangible and hopeful alternative amid the global retreat from multilateralism, where cities emerge not as subordinate actors, but as strategic nodes in reimagining regional futures.

This study contributes to the literature on Asian regionalism in three significant ways. First, it develops a novel conceptual framework that transcends state-centric approaches and redefines cities as strategic agents of regional governance. Second, it provides a detailed and actionable institutional architecture—comprising a City Charter, rotating Assembly, Urban Secretariat, thematic clusters, benchmarking tools, and a Solidarity Fund—that offers a practical pathway for implementation. Third, it enriches policy debates by demonstrating how city-driven regionalism can advance multilevel governance while respecting sovereignty sensitivities in Asia’s diverse political landscape.

While this study advances a conceptual framework for city-driven regionalism, future empirical research could build on this foundation by examining the feasibility and impact of the proposed governance model through comparative case studies and pilot implementations. As Asia navigates the overlapping crises of climate disruption, digital fragmentation, and socio-political tensions, city-driven regionalism provides not only an alternative governance framework but

also a collective vision anchored in pragmatism, solidarity, and shared hope for a more resilient regional future. In this spirit, city-driven regionalism is not merely a theoretical proposition but an urgent agenda for action.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. Yoji Sato, Chairman of the Eurasia Foundation (from Asia), for providing significant inspiration for this paper.

AI Acknowledgment

Generative AI or AI-assisted technologies were not used in any way to prepare, write, or complete essential authoring tasks in this manuscript.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2025S1A5C2A02022297).

ORCID iD

Lee, Hyun-Chool  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3985-6266>

References

- Acharya, A. (2007). The emerging regional architecture of world politics. *World Politics*, 59(4), 629–652.
- Acuto, M. (2013). *Global cities, governance and diplomacy: The urban link*. Routledge.
- ASEAN Secretariat. (2021). *ASEAN smart cities network: Progress and opportunities*. <https://asean.org>
- Börzel, T. (2016). From EU governance of crisis to crisis of EU governance: Regulatory failure, redistributive conflict and Eurosceptic publics. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 54(S1), 8–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12431>
- Bulkeley, H. (2005). Reconfiguring environmental governance: Towards a politics of scales and networks. *Political Geography*, 24(8), 875–902.
- C40 Cities. (2023). *About C40*. <https://www.c40.org>
- Hettne, B., Inotai, A., & Sunkel, O. (1999). *Globalism and the new regionalism, Vol. 1*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2001). *Multi-level governance and European integration*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Hoshiro, H. (2019). Does regionalization promote regionalism? Evidence from East Asia. *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 8(2), 199–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2019.1693944>
- Jessop, B., Brenner, N., & Jones, M. (2008). Theorizing sociospatial relations. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 26(3), 389–401.
- Jetschke, A., & Lenz, T. (2013). Does regionalism diffuse? A new research agenda for the study of regional organizations. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20(4), 626–637.
- Jonas, A. E. G., & Moisisio, S. (2016). City regionalism as geopolitical processes: A new framework for analysis: A new framework for analysis. *Progress in Human Geography*, 42(3), 350–370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132516679897> (Original work published 2018)
- Keating, M. (2008). A quarter century of the Europe of the regions. *Regional & Federal Studies*, 18(5), 629–635.

- Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. (1974). Transgovernmental relations and international organizations. *World Politics*, 27(1), 39–62.
- Lee, H.-C. (2010). Ratification of a free trade agreement: The Korean legislature's response to globalization. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 40(2), 291–308. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472331003600507>
- Lee, H.-C. (2021). Population aging and Korean society. *Korea Journal*. 61(2), 5–20. <https://doi.org/10.25024/kj.2021.61.2.5>
- Lee, H.-C. (2025). *Beyond the demographic cliff: Designing a new social contract in a shrinking society*. IMK.
- Lee, H.-C, Moon, H. A., Shin, B. R., Park, S. D., Choi, H. S., Shin, J. H., Park, J. S., Jung, J. H., Kim, S. C., Bae, Y. J., & Park, I. H. (2021). *Theory of the Asian community*. Konkuk University Press.
- Musch, A., van der Valk, C., Sizoo, A., & Tajbakhsh, K. (Eds.) (2008). *City diplomacy: The role of local governments in conflict prevention, peace-building, post-conflict reconstruction*. <https://www.uclg.org>
- Pejic, D., Kling, S., Leavesley, A., Klaus, I., Trijsburg, I., Kosovac, A., & Acuto, M. (2025). *City diplomacy in response to multiple crises: The 2024 Cities and International Engagement Survey*. Melbourne Centre for Cities.
- Risse-Kappen, T. (Ed.). (1995). *Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Saaler, S., & Szpilman, C. W. A. (Eds.) (2011). *Pan-Asianism: A documentary history, Vol. 1: 1850–1920*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Scholte, J. (2005). *Globalization: A critical introduction*. Palgrave.
- Tavares, R. (2016). *Paradiplomacy: Cities and states as global players*. Oxford University Press.
- UN-Habitat. (2020). *The new urban agenda*. <https://unhabitat.org/the-new-urban-agenda-illustrated>
- van der Pluijm, R., & Melissen, J. (2007). *City diplomacy: The expanding role of cities in international politics*. Netherlands Institute of International Relations Clingendael.
- Zulian, G., Marando, F., Vogt, P., Barbero Vignola, G., Babí Almenar, J., Zurbaran Nucci, M., & Prince, K. (2022). *BiodiverCities: A roadmap to enhance the biodiversity and green infrastructure of European cities by 2030*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/21172>