# The struggle to belong
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## The Global City Discourse in Urban Transformations

## A Comparative View on Delhi and Johannesburg

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**Abstract**

*During the past 20 years, the research on global and world cities has shaped our understanding of urbanity in the context of increasing economic globalization. The idea of sharpened competition among the cities of the world has evoked urban development strategies which aim to create internationally connected and competitive urban environments. This research paper goes beyond global/ world city theories and considers local articulations of the idea of a world-class city in two globalizing cities, Delhi and Johannesburg. By using discourse analysis the paper will follow the specific argumentative strategies taken up in order to become global or 'world-class' cities. The framework for a comparative study is given by the efforts of a variety of local actors in both cities to use this vision for their own interests in the context of profound economic, political and social changes. With this perspective, the role of local contexts and actors' coalitions come into view, among which the media plays the ambivalent role of distributing dominant urban imaginaries, but also providing the space where visions of urban modernity are contested.*
*On the one hand, the case studies show that the efforts made in order to pursue the goal of a high global connectivity is not all about local economies, but rather that urban spaces and the perceptions citizens and outsiders have about them, are to be shaped in a specific way. The analysis of actor's strategies, media accounts, campaign material and planning documents from both case cities shows that the material construction of mega projects is accompanied by the symbolic construction of a new image of the city. On the other hand, the experiences from Delhi and Johannesburg imply that although there are international best practices in order to make these cities 'world-class', this vision is shaped in locally specific ways as a consequence of urban development priorities and actor constellations.*

Keywords: global cities, strategic visions, Delhi, Johannesburg

**Focus and research objectives**

Global cities are not exactly a new topic to social sciences. Numerous publications have turned what Sassen and Friedmann started more than 20 years ago into a well-researched topic. Through their worldwide diffusion, these theoretical accounts have subsequently diversified in their theoretical assumptions and empirical interests and the discourse on global cities has entered new forums beyond academic writing. The global city has become a point of reference not only in popular media, but also in urban development all over the world.

In Delhi and Johannesburg, the 'world-class city'- visions deserve attention, as they have changed the way how various public, corporate and other non-governmental actors relate to the respective city, and contributed to major urban transformations on several levels. As in other cities all over the world, strategic visions associated with the term 'world-class','global city' or 'international metropolis' have gained presence in both places and were manifested through the formulation of long-term-agendas at the beginning of the new millennium.

The process in the course of which these two cities are to become world-class cities needs to be understood as a combined initiative including investment incentives, building and infrastructural enterprises, but also "the manipulation of symbols and the construction of identities" (Yeoh 2005: 954). The idea of a global or world-class city turns out to impact not only on organizational and material structures. Images and discourses become equally relevant here. In this article, I turn to these urban imaginaries, which Huyssen describes as "part of any city's reality, rather than being only figments of the imagination" (Huyssen 2008: 3). Thus, instead of looking in detail at specific developments or governmental arrangements,