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BRICS Cities: Creating a Networking¹

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Abstract

BRICS is a relatively new and rapidly developing association. The article examines the foundations that ensure intensive cooperation between the cities of the BRICS countries. It is noted that at the turn of the XX-XXI centuries Russia, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa have undergone significant economic and social reforms, which have led, among other things, to the development of cities and an increase in their numbers. Apart from the reforms, the cities of the BRICS countries have a number of other common points. Thus, they are located in countries with vast territories, diverse natural resources, and diverse ethnic composition. The presence of common characteristics creates common challenges, which encourages cities to cooperate and share experiences. BRICS pays great attention to the development of relations at the city and municipal levels. To this end, the Association of Cities and Municipalities of the BRICS+ countries was established at the International Forum in Kazan in 2024, taking into account the large-scale expansion of the BRICS.

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The article analyzes the issues of interaction between the cities of the BRICS countries in a number of areas, including questions of sustainable development, higher education and digitalization.

Keywords: BRICS, cities, sustainable development, higher education, digitalization, Russia, India, China, Brazil, South Africa.

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1. Problem Statement

BRICS represents an association undergoing intensive and extensive development, which significantly expanded its membership in 2024 - early 2025. Despite the fact that the BRICS association emerged relatively recently - in the twenty-first century - it attracts the attention of researchers and practitioners as a structure oriented toward interaction along the "Global South–Global South" line. Over a relatively short period of its activity, BRICS has asserted itself on the international stage not only as an association occupying significant positions in the global economy, but also as one claiming to shape a new political organization of the world based on network principles [Lebedeva, 2025].

Over the years of BRICS' existence, an extensive body of academic literature has emerged that analyzes various aspects of the activities of this structure, its relations with the Group of Seven and the Group of Twenty [Larionova, Shelepov, 2019], network-based transregional relations [Kuznecov, 2020], its role in global governance [Cinsun, 2015], and others.

At the same time, issues related to the role of cities of BRICS countries in the activities of the association itself remain virtually *terra incognita*, although cities play an enormous role in the development of states and, accordingly, of the structures to which these states belong, and also exert a substantial influence on global politics as a whole [Daadler, 2015]. At the same time, cities act as specific actors in world politics: they are simultaneously state and non-state actors, that is, they possess a combined nature [Arteev, 2017], since, on the one hand, they constitute part of the state, and on the other hand, they enjoy a certain degree of autonomy.

The intensification of interaction among cities on the international stage is also driven by the development of such a phenomenon as “transgovernmentalism,” described by A.-M. Slaughter using the example of the European Union. As A.-M. Slaughter has shown, the essence of this phenomenon lies in the fact that ministries and agencies of various EU countries began to establish network-based connections with one another [Slaughter, 2004]. Apparently, a similar process is taking place at the level of cities, which form networking with their partner cities from other countries of the Association. It appears important to trace this phenomenon using the example of BRICS cities. An important aspect of networking among cities of BRICS countries is that they establish such ties not only on a bilateral basis, but also on a multilateral basis under the auspices of BRICS. According to preliminary data, such a phenomenon is not observed in other groupings, such as the G-7 and the G-20, at least not on a comparable scale.

The first steps toward involving cities in international activity by BRICS countries were taken more than ten years ago. Thus, following the BRICS Summit held in China in 2011, a decision was adopted to hold a Forum of Cooperation of Sister Cities and Local Administrations of BRICS countries [Deklaracija..., 2011]. Subsequently, interaction among BRICS cities intensified. City forums were held periodically and became an important platform for the exchange of experience. In 2024, at an international forum in Kazan, taking into account the large-scale expansion of BRICS, the Association of Cities and Municipalities of BRICS Plus was established. It includes 18,000 cities and municipalities from BRICS+ countries and their partners. The Association defines its goal as “promoting the exchange of best practices in municipal governance, improving quality of life, and stimulating the economic and social development of cities.”² Within the Association, committees have been formed, including those on sustainable development, youth policy and education, and digitalization.

The establishment of the Association of Cities and Municipalities of BRICS+ effectively signifies the recognition of the fact that interaction among BRICS states should be carried out not only “from the top down,” but also - and this is especially important - through “grassroots structures” that create and implement joint projects, as well as engage in interaction across various areas and cooperate. In this regard, the city, first, is primarily an economically oriented actor, which corresponds to the core orientation of BRICS itself. Second, the city is a structure in which economic sectors (manufacturing, passenger transport, high technologies, etc.) intersect with social spheres - culture, education, healthcare, and the like. Thus, BRICS cities form networking

² Assotsiatsiya gorodov i munitsipalitetov stran BRIKS+. Sayt Assotsiatsii. Available at: <https://bricscities.com/ru/> (in Russian), (accessed 15 April 2025) The BRICS+ Association of Cities and Municipalities <https://bricscities.com/> (in English), (accessed 15 April 2025)

not only internally across different spheres, as noted by M. Castells [Castells, 1977], but also with one another.

Thus, the research question of this article can be formulated as follows: how does BRICS develop networking at the city level? At the same time, the focus of the study lies not in analyzing the results of networking (it is still too early to speak about them), but in identifying the very phenomenon of the formation of network ties among BRICS cities.

The network approach is used as the methodological foundation of the study. This approach has become widespread in international studies and has been reflected in a number of works by both domestic and foreign authors.

Despite the fact that the Association of BRICS cities includes new members of the grouping, in this case the study focuses on cities of the five BRICS members (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), since the expansion of BRICS occurred relatively recently, which does not yet allow for a full-scale assessment of the involvement of cities of new members in networking.

2. Cities in BRICS Countries: Specific Features and Role

BRICS countries possess a number of characteristics that affect the states within this grouping, the association formed by them, and, at the same time, the cities of these countries. These characteristics include, above all, the fact that they are rapidly developing economies with substantial potential for further growth. It was in precisely this way that they were identified in 2001 by Goldman Sachs Group analyst O'Neill.

The development of the economies of BRICS countries stimulated the development of cities, which became distinctive centers of industrial, technological, and social development. The economic development of these countries, which had previously been largely agrarian, encouraged population migration from rural areas to urban settlements. A number of cities in BRICS countries are currently among the largest in the world and have populations exceeding ten million people. For example, the population of Delhi exceeds that of Australia [Conedera, 2024]. At the same time, it would be incorrect to speak of an explosive increase in population in these cities in recent years. The population of cities in countries that are currently members of BRICS was already significant in earlier periods. Today, BRICS megacities include, above all, such cities as Delhi, Shanghai, São Paulo, Mumbai, Beijing, Chongqing, Rio de Janeiro, Guangzhou, and Moscow. By

the mid-2010s, the following cities in China, Russia, and Brazil had become the most economically powerful: Shanghai, Moscow, Beijing, and Sao Paulo [Harrison, Yang, 2016].

The economic development of BRICS countries and the growth of the urban population in BRICS cities have led to a wide range of challenges common to these cities, including issues related to passenger transport, food supply, environmental protection, waste management, and others. As a result, the main problem of megacities lies in the fact that their populations are growing rapidly, while the level of service provision and access to urban infrastructure fail to keep pace with this growth [Conedera, 2024]. As in BRICS countries more broadly, cities within the grouping are home to representatives of various nationalities, religions, and languages (for example, South Africa has eleven official languages), which gives rise to another challenge - the prevention of conflicts on ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and similar grounds.

Alongside economic processes, BRICS countries experienced profound socio-political transformations at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which could not but affect cities. In South Africa, the apartheid regime, which restricted human rights on racial grounds, collapsed in the mid-1990s. As a result, black populations began to settle in cities, which in a number of cases led to urban overcrowding and problems in education, healthcare, and related areas. The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s created opportunities for the development of a market economy in Russia, which also led to the economic development of cities with accompanying social consequences. In the mid-1980s, the authoritarian regime in Brazil came to an end, and a series of social and political reforms was implemented (the introduction of universal healthcare, the granting of economic freedoms, and others), which fully affected Brazilian cities as well. China undertook gradual reforms beginning in the 1970s. In the early 1990s, intensive economic development in the PRC took place along the eastern coast. Shanghai, with its port, became China's largest megacity, oriented toward an export-driven economy. Finally, India did not experience such dramatic changes in the late and second half of the twentieth century; however, in 1991, after forty years of strong state involvement in the economy, the country launched a reform associated with economic liberalization. This reform led to an increase in offshore investments and the development of cities such as Bangalore in the south of the country [Harrison, Yang, 2016].

The five BRICS countries also possess vast and diverse territories in ecological and geographical terms, significant reserves of various mineral resources, and, taken together, make a leading contribution to the global economy.

Naturally, alongside shared characteristics, BRICS cities also exhibit a number of distinctive features. Nevertheless, the presence of common problems encourages them to cooperate, exchange experience, and develop networking.

In August 2024, the International Municipal Forum of “BRICS Plus” countries was held in Moscow, during which more than 300 agreements were signed. Issues of “sustainable development, digitalization, healthcare, improvement of urban infrastructure, transport, education and science, culture and tourism,”³ among others, were also discussed.

Interaction among cities of BRICS countries is carried out in various formats. For example, ties between Moscow and cities of the PRC are implemented on the basis of three-year cooperation programs. For the implementation of joint projects, working groups are established, business meetings are held, as well as City Days, Culture Days, and City Economy Days [Geograficheskaja transformacija ..., 2024].

Cities of BRICS countries interact with one another across a wide range of areas. Nevertheless, particular emphasis should be placed on the issue of sustainable development, cooperation in the field of higher education, and the problem of digitalization. The choice of these areas of analysis is обусловлен by the fact that they are most relevant specifically for cities. Environmental issues are most acute in urban areas. Universities that provide higher education are located in cities. Finally, digitalization is developing most intensively in cities. In addition, these areas are largely priorities within BRICS as a whole and, accordingly, are important from the perspective of analyzing interaction among cities of BRICS countries. Another important area of networking among cities of BRICS countries is healthcare. To a large extent, it is linked to environmental problems, digitalization, and medical education. At the same time, healthcare in rural areas is of particular importance. For these reasons, healthcare in BRICS countries has not become the research focus of the present study.

3. Areas of Interaction among Cities of BRICS Countries: Sustainable Development, Higher Education, and Digitalization

One of the most important global problems of our time - the problem of sustainable development - is reflected in the documents of BRICS summits [see analysis in: Daldegan, de

³ Mezhdunarodnyy Munitsipal'nyy Forum stran BRIKS, 27-28 avgusta 2024 g. Sayt Foruma. Available at: <https://brics-russia2024.ru/events/forumy-konferentsii/mezhdunarodnyy-munitsipalnyy-forum-stran-briks-plyus/> (in Russian) (accessed 12 February 2026)

Borba, 2023], as well as in a number of academic articles [see, for example, Morozkina A. K., Skrjabina, 2020; Stupen'kova, Kashuro, 2023].

Initially, in the 1960s - 1970s, the concept of sustainable development was considered primarily in environmental terms, as development in which natural resources available at a given moment would remain accessible to future generations. Subsequently, the problem began to be interpreted more broadly. Environmental issues were joined by economic concerns, and later by issues of social development and governance (ESG); it is in this context that sustainable development is considered further in this study.

BRICS as an association, and its cities, have turned to this issue, recognizing its importance and global character. At the same time, each BRICS country has its own specific features in the field of sustainable development, particularly in the environmental agenda. For example, forest protection and biodiversity conservation are especially relevant for Brazil and India; for Russia and China, issues of environmental pollution and waste management have proved particularly important; while South Africa has focused on problems of biodiversity and water resources [Bondarenko, 2024]. At first glance, these problems appear to concern countries as a whole rather than cities. However, the expansion of urban areas leads to deforestation and a reduction in biodiversity. Sustainable agricultural development contributes to food supply for urban populations, while wildlife conservation creates recreational zones for urban residents and affects their health. Thus, despite country-specific differences, a significant share of efforts to implement the sustainable development goals of BRICS countries falls on cities, particularly on large megacities, where the greatest environmental burden is generated by industrial activity, intensive transport flows, and related factors.

The New Development Bank (NDB), established by BRICS countries in 2014, devotes considerable attention to projects related to sustainable development. At the same time, the “organizational policy and strategic objectives of the NDB prioritize investment in infrastructure, the transport and energy sectors, which implies a significant impact of these projects not only on the state of the environment, but also on the economic and social well-being of local populations in developing countries and regions” [Svetlickij, 2018]. In other words, this concerns environmental, social, and governance issues (ESG), which primarily relate to cities. The NDB website presents projects, including those aimed at urban development. Examples include the Innovative Urban Transport Project in Shimla (India)⁴, the Urban Mobility Improvement Project

⁴ Shimla Innovative Urban Transportation Project. Website of New Development Bank. Available at: <https://www.ndb.int/project/shimla-innovative-urban-transportation-project/> (in English), (accessed 15 April 2025)

in Serra (Brazil)⁵, as well as the Municipal Water Supply and Sanitation Program in South Africa⁶, among others.

In recent years, BRICS has placed particular emphasis on the need to take sustainable development into account. Thus, in 2020, BRICS adopted the Strategy for Economic Partnership up to 2025, which, alongside two other areas, identifies sustainable development as a priority. According to the document, “the implementation by BRICS countries of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (hereinafter the 2030 Agenda) contributed to balanced and comprehensive development and strengthened cooperation in promoting sustainable development in its three dimensions—economic, social, and environmental” (Strategija jekonomicheskogo partnerstva ..., 2020, p. 11).

In further development of the Strategy for Economic Partnership, the Green Cities of BRICS Forum was held in Moscow on 18 - 19 November 2024. At this forum, the main anthropogenic challenges faced by cities of this association were formulated, regardless of the country or continent in which they are located. Among these challenges are noise pollution, transport congestion, pollution of air, water, and soil, high energy consumption, waste management, and the reduction of green spaces. The next Green Cities of BRICS Forum is scheduled for September 2025⁷. Such forums provide a foundation for networking among cities specifically within the BRICS framework. An important aspect is that BRICS, as an association, sets the framework for such interaction.

Another area of cooperation among cities of BRICS countries is higher education. Moreover, this area effectively goes beyond the boundaries of BRICS countries and cities themselves, stimulating the development of higher education in the “Global South” [Yuyun, 2018].

Within BRICS, higher education is carried out both on the basis of bilateral agreements between universities and within the framework of the BRICS Network University. In addition, in 2013, the BRICS University League (a consortium of leading research universities of BRICS countries) was established, with the aim of academic cooperation. It should be emphasized that, in this case, as in

⁵ Serra Urban Mobility Improvement Project. Website of New Development Bank. Available at: <https://www.ndb.int/project/serra-urban-mobility-project-requalifica-serra/> (in English), (accessed 15 April 2025)

⁶ South Africa Municipal Water Supply and Sanitation Program. Website of New Development Bank. Available at: <https://www.ndb.int/project/south-africa-municipal-water-supply-and-sanitation-program/> (in English), (accessed 15 April 2025)

⁷ Forum zelonnyye goroda BRIKS, 17 - 18 September 2025, Moscow. Sayt Forum. Available at: <https://cloudcityconf.ru/greenbricsforum/ru/> (in Russian), (accessed 15 April 2025).

the case of sustainable development, relations are built on a network principle, which corresponds to contemporary realities.

It is evident that partner universities are located in major cities of BRICS countries. In Russia, universities participating in the BRICS Network University are located in cities such as Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, and Tomsk. Many universities, for example the National Research Tomsk State University, have agreements with universities in India, China, Brazil, as well as with a new BRICS member admitted in January 2025 - Indonesia [TSU, 2025]. For a city, <https://journals.tsu.ru> the development of universities and their international cooperation constitutes an important area not only in terms of intellectual output, including benefits for the city itself, but also as a significant factor of internationalization and soft power of both the country and the city, and, more broadly, of the “soft” positioning of BRICS as a progressive and socially oriented association.

As shown by Chinese researchers, in all BRICS countries - albeit to varying degrees - international academic cooperation has expanded, which has been reflected, in particular, in the production of joint international publications [Fan, Liu, a.o., 2022].

Despite a number of successful projects, higher education within BRICS faces several challenges. L. Yuyun identifies the following problems: (1) an insufficient number of exchange and cooperation programs in agriculture, technical skills, and the humanities; (2) a lack of funding; (3) insufficient publicity (a need to more actively inform about university cooperation) [Yuyun, 2018]. To these problems, one should add that BRICS countries themselves are not particularly active in developing the BRICS Network University. It requires more advanced coordination mechanisms, as well as the creation of incentives for students to study within such a university. In addition, the issue of the language of instruction arises, since BRICS countries are extremely diverse linguistically.

To address the challenges faced by higher education in the BRICS countries, two approaches are proposed. First, this involves the establishment of advanced universities and their integration into the global scientific community; second, the development of horizontal inter-university networks, including the BRICS Network University, aimed at addressing the most pressing challenges of the BRICS countries [Khomyakov, Dwyer, Weller, 2020]. With regard to the first approach, it appears appropriate to focus on identifying leading inter-university partnerships within the framework of the BRICS Network University across various fields of study within the consortium. Particular attention should be given to these partnerships, alongside the establishment of production facilities

in the cities hosting these universities to provide opportunities for practical training and potential subsequent employment for graduates.

Cities have always been centers for the development of innovations and new technologies. The digitalization of cities is a relatively new direction that has developed in recent years. Digitalization encompasses all spheres and all structures of the modern world. Moreover, digitalization in cities implies the formation of interaction among various spheres of urban activity: the economy, culture, education, the social sphere, and others.

The issue of digitalization in BRICS countries began to be actively discussed in 2015, following the summit held in Ufa [Morozkina, 2020]. BRICS countries are at different levels of digital development, but overall they lag behind developed states [see in more detail: Ignatov, 2020]. BRICS as an association pays considerable attention to digitalization, identifying as its main priorities “the development of digital infrastructure and the promotion of expanded access to digital services for the population, business, and public authorities” [Ignatov, 2020, p. 52]. The uneven nature of digital development is обусловлена by a number of factors. Thus, digital inequality in the labor markets of BRICS countries is determined by economic, educational, and infrastructural factors. Recognizing this, a number of BRICS governments have launched programs aimed at increasing the digital literacy of the population and developing the necessary infrastructure [Lazanjuk, Pugacheva, a.o., 2025]. As a result, positive changes have begun to emerge. An analysis of access to fixed broadband Internet in BRICS countries over the period from 2013 to 2018 showed that all BRICS countries “have achieved certain successes in reducing internal inequality in access to and use of digital technologies, but remain at different levels” [Morozkina, 2020, p. 83].

At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that differences in digitalization are observed not only between BRICS countries, but also within each individual state. India can serve as an example here: despite the fact that the country ranks second in the world in terms of the number of Internet subscribers, an analysis conducted in 17 out of 21 states revealed a significant digital divide [Bera, 2019].

It is evident that the digital divide, both within BRICS countries and in comparison with developed countries of the world, affects the digitalization of cities within the Association. For example, Moscow is one of the leading cities in the world in terms of digital development. In particular, artificial intelligence is applied in more than 90 urban projects in Moscow (including healthcare

and urban transport management)⁸. Kazan also has extensive experience in developing digitalization. The city has successfully implemented IT technologies in urban governance. As a result, Kazan has become one of the leaders of Russia's federal "Smart City" program⁹.

At the same time, many other cities in BRICS countries, especially in a number of new member states of the association, lag significantly behind in this respect. The widening gap in the digitalization of cities has a negative impact on the development of the economies of BRICS countries themselves [Petrova, 2024].

Within the Committee on Digitalization established under the Association of Cities and Municipalities of BRICS+, four areas of activity aimed at introducing digital technologies into urban governance have been identified: transparency and openness of governance; automation and optimization; interaction with the population; and quality of services¹⁰.

Overall, cooperation among cities in the field of digitalization proceeds along two paths: (1) on a multilateral basis, including through the Association of Cities and Municipalities of BRICS+; and (2) through the transfer of experience to cities in other countries. For example, Moscow has stated its readiness to share its experience in digitalization with Indian cities—Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and Kolkata [Cheremin, 2023].

4. Conclusion

BRICS demonstrates strong development dynamics, having become an important element of global governance. However, increased attention to networking among cities in BRICS countries has emerged relatively recently, as a result of the recognition of the need for cooperation at municipal and urban levels, which contributes to strengthening the association itself. To some extent, this was also facilitated by the introduction of Western sanctions against Russia, which led to a pivot to the East in Russia's strategy and, as a consequence, to the intensification of ties between Russian cities and cities of BRICS countries. It appears that such interaction among cities will continue and intensify, as it corresponds to the general trend toward the development of networking in the contemporary world.

⁸ *Iskusstvennyy intellekt primenyayetsya boleye chem v 90 stolichnykh proyektakh*. Ofitsial'nyy sayt Mera i Pravitel'stva Moskvy. 20 sentyabrya 2024 g. <https://www.mos.ru/news/item/144257073/> (in Russian), (accessed 15 April 2025).

⁹ *Mery gorodov BRIKS+ obmenyalis' opytom v IT i sel'skom khozyaystve*. Gazeta.ru. 11 aprelya 2025 g. Available at: <https://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2025/04/11/25533596.shtml> (in Russian), (accessed 15 April 2025)

¹⁰ *Assotsiatsiya gorodov i munitsipalitetov stran BRIKS+*. Komitet po tsifrovizatsii. Available at: <https://bricscities.com/ru/about/categories/committee-on-digitalization/> (in Russian), (accessed 15 April 2025)

Cities of BRICS countries, despite their differences and the uniqueness of each of them, share a number of common features обусловленные both by the characteristics of the countries themselves (the implementation of reforms at the turn of the twentieth and twenty first centuries, the presence of large territories, ethnic diversity, and similar factors) and by the characteristics of the cities (the population of many cities in BRICS countries amounts to several million). Shared characteristics of cities and common challenges encourage the development of networking. Moreover, cooperation is not limited solely to the exchange of experience, but also involves the creation of joint structures of interaction, which is important, under the auspices of BRICS itself. This distinguishes the networking of cities formed within the BRICS framework from the network interaction of many cities worldwide, which is created *ad hoc*. The results of network interaction among BRICS cities are not yet evident, since the networks themselves have only begun to take shape.

Among the leading areas of network cooperation for cities of Russia, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa are sustainable development, interaction in the field of higher education, healthcare, and digitalization. Naturally, other areas of cooperation among cities of BRICS countries are also developing.

The issue of sustainable development is particularly relevant for megacities in BRICS countries, where industrial enterprises operate, traffic flows are intensive, and large volumes of industrial waste are generated. In turn, higher education is concentrated in universities located in leading cities of BRICS countries, which encourages municipal authorities to interact with universities. On the one hand, authorities must ensure transport accessibility, food provision, and similar services for students and faculty; on the other hand, they must jointly develop and implement innovative projects in the urban economy.

At present, issues related to the digitalization of various areas of urban activity and the use of new technologies are becoming increasingly evident. In these areas, intensive interaction is beginning to take place both at the level of the Association of Cities and Municipalities of BRICS+ and at the level of interaction among the BRICS countries themselves. However, the digital divide, both between BRICS countries and among cities within each country, remains a significant problem.

Other areas of network cooperation among cities of BRICS countries are also developing. Thus, an important area of interaction among cities concerns healthcare. At the same time, it is closely linked to environmental issues, the training of medical personnel, and digitalization.

It appears that in the future, the intensity of networking and cooperation among cities of Russia, China, Brazil, India, and South Africa will increase and expand. New areas of cooperation will also emerge. Cities of new BRICS members—the UAE, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Indonesia—will also become involved in this interaction at the level of cities of the five original BRICS members. One of the main challenges of further interaction may prove to be the uneven development of BRICS countries and their cities, including the cities of new member states. Therefore, one of the leading tasks of BRICS should be aimed at overcoming this unevenness of development.

Interaction among cities of BRICS countries regarding how urban governance as a whole should be organized, taking into account the “tying of knots” across various spheres and the synergy among these spheres, has not yet become evident for cities of the Association. This area represents a potential field of activity for cities of BRICS countries in the future.

Overall, the further development of BRICS as an association will largely depend on interaction not only at the state level, but also at the “grassroots level,” in particular at the level of cities and municipalities. In turn, network structures of cities of BRICS countries will be able to contribute to the formation of the “Global South” as a key element of the political organization of the world.

The phenomenon of networking among cities under the auspices of BRICS also raises more fundamental theoretical problems. Ideas of network-based political development of the world are being actively discussed at present. Various models of intrastate networking are examined depending on the political system of the state itself [Metz, Brandenberger], and foreign policy is analyzed as being constructed, inter alia, on the basis of networking with business actors and NGOs of other countries [Slaughter, 2017], among other aspects. At the same time, doubts arise as to whether network relations in world politics can be effective due to the chaotic formation of such ties and relationships. The example of BRICS cities demonstrates that this problem is, at least partially, resolved by the fact that the association sets the framework for network relations, while their formation at the grassroots level (the level of cities) allows BRICS itself to develop. Thus, the process of network formation becomes more structured.

It appears that further research into network ties within BRICS and BRICS+ at various levels may be highly promising from the perspective of analyzing the formation of a new political organization of the world that extends beyond the Association, which in a narrower sense is usually referred to as the “world order.” Is the political organization of the world undergoing a transformation from a largely hierarchically organized structure, in which great powers play the

leading role, into a more complex network structure with centers formed, inter alia, by states, cities, and other actors?

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