

Soft power and a city

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The American political scientist Joseph Nye introduced the term soft power at the end of the Cold War to describe the ability of a state to obtain what it wants through attraction, as distinct from coercion or payment. In his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, published in 2004, he identified three sources of such power: a country's culture, its political values and its foreign policy, in so far as others regard them as legitimate and attractive.¹ The concept was designed for great powers. It has since been applied to middle powers, to regions and to cities, which compete for talent, investment, institutions and visitors with means that rarely include force and only partly include money.

A city of under two hundred thousand inhabitants cannot project power in any conventional sense. Basel nevertheless possesses a remarkable stock of what Nye would call attractive assets. Earlier Parts have described several of them: the Bank for International Settlements and the Basel Committee, whose name has become a synonym for international banking standards; the life sciences groups, whose research and products reach every country; and the fairs, above all Art Basel, which carry the name of the city to Miami Beach, Hong Kong and Paris.² This chapter turns to a further asset, which is older than all of them and which underpins their attraction: the city's museums, foundations and tradition of patronage.

The argument of the chapter is simple. Basel became a city of art because its citizens, its old families and later its industrial companies repeatedly decided to convert private wealth into public culture. Those decisions created institutions that now attract collectors, scholars, scientists, executives and their families, many of whom would otherwise have had little reason to settle in a small city on the Rhine. Culture has therefore become part of the infrastructure of the financial centre and of the life sciences cluster, in the same way as the airport, the international schools and the tax regime. The author, who has worked in several financial centres

in Europe and Asia, has observed that this kind of cultural depth is difficult to build quickly and impossible to buy outright.³

Three features distinguish the Basel model. The first is continuity, since the city's public collection goes back to 1661 and several of its foundations have existed for more than a century. The second is the combination of civic, private and corporate patronage, which allows the same institutions to draw on public budgets, family foundations and the pharmaceutical groups at the same time. The third is discretion, which reflects the culture of the old families that Part C described and which still shapes the manner in which wealth is given and acknowledged in the city.⁴ The sections that follow examine these features in the museums, in music and theatre, in the public financing of culture and in the debates of recent years.

1 Notes

1. Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, New York 1990, where the term first appears; id., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York 2004, chapter 1. To be verified. ↩
2. On the Basel brand in global financial governance and the role of Art Basel in carrying the city's name abroad, see Part F, Chapter V, and Part H, Chapter IV. To be verified. ↩
3. On culture as a location factor for internationally mobile professionals and wealthy families, see the location studies of the canton of Basel-Stadt and of BAK Economics on the attractiveness of the Basel region. To be verified. ↩
4. On the Daig, the old Basel families, and their culture of discretion, see Part C, Chapter II. To be verified. ↩

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