

INTRODUCTION

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In recent years, cities have consolidated their position as major players on the international scene. Yet, their ambition to project themselves internationally and to influence global agendas is not a new phenomenon. Cities have operated through organised networks for decades. The first international organisation of cities, the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), was created in 1913. Towards the end of the past century, the regional integration processes of the 1990s engendered a proliferation of city networks, especially in Europe but also in Latin America, Africa and Asia. In 2004, the founding of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) as a platform for international municipalism marked a turning point.

Since then, city networks have played an important role in defining and implementing some of the main global agendas. Today, their involvement in the COP, the United Nations Conference on Climate Change,¹ their success in adding a territorial dimension to the UN 2030 Agenda, and their participation in the Steering Committee of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation, are good examples of how city networks are making their voice heard. That new measures to tackle global challenges now take cities' needs, interests and aspirations into account is a sign of what has been achieved. While much remains to be done, cities have gained a seat at the global table.

However, at the same time, the growing prominence of the urban question on international agendas has caused a reconfiguration of the ecosystem of city networks that is not always coherent. Multiple platforms have emerged that promote initiatives related to cities and that try to engage with traditional international actors, especially governments and international organisations, but also civil society and the private and knowledge sectors.

This reconfiguration of the ecosystem of city networks brings with it both risks and opportunities, especially for traditional networks that until recently occupied this space almost exclusively. The risks are tied to the diffusion of efforts and the lack of complementarity and coordination. All of this potentially translates into communication problems with the

1. Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

international organisations behind the major global agendas. However, these diverse efforts to promote the international presence of cities also present opportunities to open up spaces for fostering alliances with different actors that are central to promoting better urban policies.

This CIDOB Monograph seeks to analyse the changing dynamics of the ecosystem of city networks over the past years, focusing on how the main platforms operate, what influence they have on global agendas, what services they provide to their partners and how they coordinate their efforts. By zooming in on the strategies networks have been developing to enhance their influence and make their operations more effective, the volume examines in more detail the added value they provide. In short, the objective is to identify the challenges and opportunities posed by the reconfiguration of the traditional ecosystem of city networks as a result of the increasing importance attributed to urbanisation processes on international development agendas; an “urban turn” in international policy discourses that is in part the fruit of the work of traditional city networks over the past three decades.

The origin of this volume was a roundtable seminar on “Rethinking the Ecosystem of International City Networks: Challenges and Opportunities” held as part of CIDOB’s Global Cities Programme on July 3rd 2018. The seminar brought together a broad range of actors involved in city networking: academics that critically analyse the phenomenon, representatives of city councils that are members of city networks, representatives of United Nations (UN) programmes that specialise in decentralised cooperation, and representatives of major regional and international city networks and platforms, including Eurocities, the Euro-Latin American Alliance of Cooperation among Cities (AL-LAs), MedCities, Cities Alliance, the International Association of Educating Cities (IAEC), the World Association of the Major Metropolises (Metropolis), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40) and 100 Resilient Cities (100RC).

Volume structure

The variety of actors who participated in the seminar is reflected in the contributions to this volume. More theoretical and critical approaches sit side by side with the more applied perspectives of practitioners and policymakers.

The first section, **Unpacking and rethinking contemporary city networking**, consists of four longer chapters that flag up the major trends and tensions in the ecosystem. Each chapter suggests possible ways forward to meet the challenges posed by the increasing density and diversity of organisational forms that have emerged to network cities. The question of what risks and opportunities this new plethora of networks poses in terms of the ability and capacity of cities to leverage international agendas and offer democratic solutions to complex global problems is the backbone of all four chapters.

Agustí Fernández de Losada, Director of CIDOB’s Global Cities Programme, analyses the different types of city networks that make

up the contemporary ecosystem, charting how traditional networks of public membership have come to exist alongside a range of multi-stakeholder public-private city platforms. Some of today's most powerful international platforms, such as C40 and 100RC, are privately financed and led. Together with the multiplication and diversification of actors involved in international city networking, the large-scale investment of private capital and interests is fundamentally reshaping the ecosystem and has created an increasingly competitive dynamic. Fragmentation and the lack of a unified municipalist voice are often the result, making the dialogue with other international actors, especially multilateral organisations, increasingly difficult. Fernández de Losada argues that in order to not reverse the growing recognition of cities as legitimate actors in international governance, the ecosystem needs to move towards a cooperative dynamic that reinforces synergies and complementarities between different networks and platforms, especially those with the greatest capacity for advocacy. In particular, more collaboration is needed if networks and platforms want to move beyond the symbolic recognition of cities and local governments in multilateral forums and global agendas and towards actively shaping them so that they respond to local challenges and problems.

Continuing where Fernández de Losada leaves off, **Jean-Pierre Malé**, former Director of the Observatory of Decentralised Cooperation, discusses ad hoc strategic alliances between cities – which he calls “cities fronts” – as an emerging form of city networking that is proving an effective method of bringing local issues to the table of global governance. Malé identifies two types of cities fronts. One is reactive and emerges from cities mobilising against specific policies imposed by higher levels of government (e.g. the Sanctuary Cities movement in the United States, which opposes Trump's migration policy); and the other is proactive and emerges from cities mobilising against major global issues and dynamics that directly affect local life and require an urgent response (e.g. the “Cities for Adequate Housing”² declaration presented at UCLG's New York Executive Bureau during the UN High-level Political Forum in July 2018). In contrast to established forms of city networking, these cities fronts are not only temporally limited and structurally light and flexible, they are also based on a shared political will to upscale local problems and concerns that require solutions from the international community. For Malé, the short-term actions of cities fronts complement the medium- to long-term advocacy initiatives of major representative networks, which are aimed at the formal recognition of cities within the global governance system, but which have so far largely failed to promote actual policy or structural changes in this system.

Giovanni Allegretti, Senior Researcher at the Centre for Social Studies at the University of Coimbra, examines how the different types and generations of city networks are responding to new ideas on demodiversity and growing demands for citizen participation in urban decision-making processes. This approach throws into relief larger issues and questions around the networks' organisational structure and governance models. The first half of the chapter traces how at the start of the twenty-first century the common view among city networks of participatory practices as “a cross-cutting methodology of action” was partially reformulated to constitute a “goal in itself” in specific contexts. One example is the World Social Forum, where participatory practices were linked

2. https://www.uclg.org/sites/default/files/cities_por_adequate_housing.pdf

with concerns about social inclusion and poverty reduction, as well as debates around the “right to the city” following the 2008 financial crisis, which linked participation with human rights-based approaches to urban governance. While the issue was mostly promoted by structurally “light”, short-lived and multi-actoral networks that were closely linked with social movements, it was also taken up by some of the traditional structurally “heavy” networks. The second half of the chapter moves on to analyse how the new generation of privately funded and led city platforms (introduced in the chapter by Fernández de Losada) have approached the question of citizen participation and by extension that of equal representation in management positions. It is argued that while the hybrid membership composition and flexible governance structures of the platforms make them ideal candidates to lead innovation on these issues, they have so far failed to grasp this opportunity.

In her contribution, **Maruxa Cardama**, formerly a Senior Policy Specialist at Cities Alliance, and now Secretary General of the Partnership on Sustainable Low Carbon Transport, provides us with the perspective of a long-time practitioner deeply involved in the international municipalism movement. Her chapter calls for a self-reflexive and critical debate about the future of the ecosystem of city networks that should not only include local and regional governments and their networks, but also other urban stakeholders from the private and knowledge sectors and civil society organisations. Only by involving the full diversity of actors engaged in city networking can more synergistic and complementary ways of operating be formulated. Yet, Cardama also points out that with the growing privatisation of city networking and the dilution of the democratic founding values of the municipalism movement, it is important that traditional networks of local and regional governments seize the opportunity to lead and set the terms of the debate on the future of city networking before other less democratic forces do so. The chapter closes with some insightful reflections on the opportunities that a synergistic and democratic reconfiguration of the ecosystem could entail with regard to broader issues and questions on how to tackle the current crisis of democracy and the challenge of localising global sustainable development agendas.

The remainder of the volume consists of shorter opinion pieces by representatives of city networks, city councils, and UN agencies. The second section, **Challenges for a new global governance: city networks on the international stage**, addresses the fundamental question of how city networks are contributing to revising the UN's global governance system and what role they should play in a revitalised system built on notions of multi-level and networked forms of governance. It opens with a piece by **Emilia Saiz**, Secretary General of UCLG, in which she argues that the holistic and participatory paradigm of development put in place by the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has not only paved the way for the recognition of local governments as implementers of global agendas but also for their inclusion in the definition of future policies and agendas. Global agendas can only aim for a renewal of democracy and provide people with a sense of control over the future of their planet if they manage to effectively connect with and accommodate the “local dimension”. **Johannes Krassnitzer**, International Coordinator of UNDP's ART Initiative, which promotes sustainable development at the local level, discusses how networks of local

and regional governments are emerging as one of the most catalytic actors in promoting the recent paradigm shift in global development governance by fostering networked governance approaches that privilege multi-actor partnerships over individual action. Especially in the area of development cooperation, city and region networks are transcending established hierarchies and categorisations of traditional and non-traditional development actors. **Felip Roca**, Director of International Relations at Barcelona City Council, expands on the new role of city networks as key drivers of a revised global governance system, arguing that this role also comes with new responsibilities. Networks need to move beyond the advocacy narrative of traditional international municipalism towards more technical discourses that can demonstrate the actual capacity of local governments to tackle global challenges by defining better indicators and other instruments of public policy.

The third section, **The role of new city platforms**, provides insights into how city platforms such as C40 and 100RC seek to connect with the traditional ecosystem of city networks and how they define their role in this ecosystem. **Emmanuelle Pinault**, Programme Director of City Diplomacy at C40, provides a short overview of the organisation's mission, history and governance structure, pinpointing seven features that "make the C40 model unique". **Lina Liakou**, Managing Director for Europe and the Middle East at 100 Resilient Cities, explains how the new platforms have emerged to support cities in their responses to global challenges not only by connecting them globally but also by providing them with the expertise of the non-profit and private sectors. For example, 100RC works closely with financial institutions to help the market understand the value of investing in high-resilience projects. The contribution of **Arnau Gutiérrez Camps**, Deputy Director General for International Affairs, Networks and Multilateral Organisations at Madrid City Council, sheds some light on how the city councils of major capitals such as Madrid see their participation in traditional networks and the new platforms as complementary.

The question of complementarity is addressed in more detail in the final section of the volume, **How to move towards complementarity between networks**, with contributions by representatives of traditional city networks, composed of and financed by local governments. **Octavi de la Varga**, Secretary General of Metropolis, raises the paradox that while city networks are becoming increasingly important actors in international governance, the ecosystem is showing signs of exhaustion and ineffectiveness. Largely, this is the result of a lack of coordination and collaboration between individual networks and platforms, which can only be overcome by a collective effort to align the agendas of different networks. **Anna Lisa Boni**, Secretary General of Eurocities, approaches the issue with more caution. While – like other authors in this section – she argues that the busy calendar of competing local government events and summits is not sustainable and ways of merging events need to be found, she is sceptical of efforts to forcibly systematise the ecosystem of networks. For Boni, systematisation is bound to result in further specialisation, which in turn will reproduce "silo-approaches" to urban policymaking that have proven ineffective in tackling today's complex global challenges. **Marina Canals**, Secretary General of the International Association of Educating Cities, addresses the role of local governments in the conundrum of how to move towards greater com-

plementarity between networks. Joining a network implies much more than paying the membership fee. City councils have a responsibility to actively engage in the networks they form part of and make them integral to their international relations strategy, rather than treating them as a mere marketing “label”. Active and engaged members can also assist the different networks they form part of by identifying synergies and opportunities for collaboration. The section closes with a piece by **Xavier Tiana**, Secretary General of MedCities, in which he details how an established network like MedCities, which is strongly rooted in a specific region, is building complementary partnerships with other city networks and development organisations that share its interest in strengthening Euro-Mediterranean relations.

The volume concludes with a piece by **Eva Garcia-Chueca**, Scientific Coordinator of CIDOB’s Global Cities Programme, in which she proposes a future research agenda that puts into question the assumption that the participation of cities and their networks in global governance is per se positive. In particular, she points towards the fact that city diplomacy tends to amplify the voice of certain cities: mega cities and those located in the northern hemisphere. This bias has created a hierarchy of cities and reproduced older colonial power relations. For Garcia-Chueca the role of cities as new global political actors is positive only in so far as city diplomacy constitutes a democratic voice that fosters the democratization of global governance. Crucially, to become such a transformative force, city networks need to become more transparent and create democratic governance and membership structures that can accommodate the full diversity of urban territories.