

The new climate leaders?

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Abstract. Little interest has thus far been paid to the role of cities in world politics. Yet, several are the examples of city-based engagements suggesting an emerging urban presence in international relations. The Climate Leadership Group, despite its recent lineage, is perhaps the most significant case of metropolitan intersection with global governance. To illustrate this I rely on Actor-Network Theory (ANT) to develop a qualitative network analysis of the evolution of the C40 in the past seven years from a limited gathering of municipal leaders to a transnational organisation partnering with the World Bank. Pinpointed on the unfolding of a twin diplomacy/planning approach, the evolution of the C40 can demonstrate the key role of global cities as actors in global environmental politics. These cities have a pivotal part in charting new geographies of climate governance, prompting the rise of subpolitical policymaking arrangements pinpointed on innovative and hybrid connections. Yet, there remains some important rational continuity, in particular with neoliberalism, which ultimately limits the revolutionary potential these cities might have for international relations.

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Standing in front of a large audience of reporters, municipal officers, and businessmen to announce a new partnership between his organisation and the 58 metropolises gathered in the Climate Leadership Group (or ‘C40’) the then-World Bank president Robert Zoellick stated in June 2011: ‘it is no stretch of the imagination to believe that cities will take the lead in overcoming climate change’.¹ The statement came shortly after the C40 finalised a merger with the Clinton Foundation’s Climate Change Initiative, while conducting extensive climate policy surveys in collaboration with global engineering consulting firm ARUP and UK-based environmental group Carbon Disclosure Project. In short, the world’s major cities are fast gaining currency on the complex grounds of world politics, prompting important changes in the texture of global governance. Yet in the midst of this revolutionary agency there is also some substantial continuity with the practices and logics of world politics – a dimension that is often sidelined in those few accounts that have sought to demonstrate the potential of cities in international relations. To redress this unbalance and at the same time step towards more systematic understandings of city agency, I focus on the C40 as a relatively recent but growingly influential network for climate policy.

¹ Alexei Barrionuevo, ‘World Bank to Help Cities Control Climate Change’, *New York Times* (2 June 2011), available at: {http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/02/science/earth/02climate.html?_r=3} accessed 24 January 2012.

The article proceeds in three steps: first it illustrates the limits of the small literature available on cities and international politics and sketches the qualitative network mapping of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as fruitful rejoinder to these shortcomings. Then it develops an ANT analysis of the C40's evolution from a relatively limited gathering of municipal leaders to an emerging global climate governance organisation. Lastly it provides some brief considerations on the C40's influence on global governance through this process, as well as the potential, but still embryonic, role of major cities in world politics.

The 'scholarship'

Little attention has thus far been paid to the role of cities in either International Relations (IR) theory or more broadly in the study of world politics. International studies as a discipline stands largely immune to the spreading interest in the present-day effects of urbanisation, and the role of the world's key settlements. Even if some mainstream outlets for academics such as *Foreign Policy* have (albeit briefly) taken cities into consideration by following on the expanding genus of city rankings now publicly available, the international scholarship on this issue is still relegated to a few rare theorisations that offer very limited accounts of the global political presence of the city.² For instance, 'para-diplomatic' activities of non-central governments like federal states or regions have only been object of niche studies in the early 1990s, such as Heidi Hobbs's *City Hall Goes Abroad* or Earl H. Fry's examinations of municipalities' activism in world politics.³ It is symptomatic that the only major call for a study of the international impact of cities dates back more than twenty years, and has been widely ignored until very recently.⁴ These studies, while capable of recognising how substate actors 'perforate' the sovereignty of states, putting forward their particularistic interests through cross-boundary connections, have generally lacked a theoretical engagement with both the sources of such agency, as well as often times the global impacts of the growing interaction between cities and global governance.⁵

Despite these unfortunately overlooked works, the most relevant shortcoming of the scattered international scholarship on the subject is limiting the consideration of cities to a subjected position: cities tend to either be represented as the sites for international relations, or be subsumed as lower-level governmental entities with limited reach. As such, there remains a conspicuous gap in providing theoretical bridges

² See 'The 2008 Global Cities Index', *Foreign Policy* (November/December 2008), pp. 68–77.

³ Heidi H. Hobbs, *City Hall Goes Abroad: The Foreign Policy of Local Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1994); Earl H. Fry, 'State and Local Governments in the International Arena', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 509 (1990), pp. 118–27; also see Ivo D. Duchacek, Daniel Latouche, and Garth Stevenson, *Perforated Sovereignties and International Relations* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

⁴ Chadwick F. Alger, 'The World Relations of Cities: Closing the Gap Between Social Science Paradigms and Everyday Human Experience', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34:4 (1990), pp. 494 and 513.

⁵ A relevant exception, albeit still limited in its consideration of cities, is Brian Hocking, *Localizing Foreign Policy: Non-Central Governments and Multilayered Diplomacy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993). The interaction of cities and global governance has also been explored in Michele Betsill and Harriet Bulkeley, 'Cities and the Multilevel Governance of Global Climate Change', *Global Governance*, 12:2 (2006), pp. 141–59.

between the extensive scholarship developed in urban studies and the vast debate on the transformations of the present world order in international studies – a consideration recently voiced by Simon Curtis in relation to global cities albeit still with little attention for their actual actor capacity.⁶ Crucially, then, I would also argue that an ‘active’ understanding of cities’ direct relevance for world politics is imperative. This is for instance the limit of the recent *Cities and Global Governance*, a collection that, while gathering many excellent urbanists, still lacked a cross-cutting theorisation for bounding the various contributions together into a functional primer for international scholars.

The international scholarship has widely refrained from describing why and how cities take transnational action, rather setting out in many cases to compile countless rankings of major metropolises.⁷ On the contrary, considering agency means allowing for cities to be analysed in their rightful position as a participant in the phenomena that are continuously reshaping the ‘international’ and the structures of global governance. While in some cases the literature seemed to hint at this possibility, this analysis has generally gone short of accreditation some actor capacity to cities.⁸ In general, the international scholarship on cities has thus far encountered three major limitations I will attempt to redress in my study: first, it has rarely attempted to devise a theoretical framework to ferret fragments of urbanist and geographical analysis effectively and translate them into IR considerations; second, it has lacked a productive and progressive appreciation of the active participation of cities in world politics and the direct political influence they have on global governance; third, where such active role has been hinted at, no analytics of the sources and impacts of this diplomatic capacity have thus far been developed.

The limits of the literature: an ANT reply

How can we then bring the city in IR? A possible methodological solution is offered by social theories of assemblage, and Actor-Network Theory (ANT) in particular, which have a natural tendency towards considering the aggregation dynamics that produce structures and power-relations in society.⁹ ANT is today an increasingly popular frame in social thought and a well-established research programme within Science and Technology Studies. ANT’s success hinges on its capacity to convey a structurationist account of society that steps beyond structure-agency divides, allows for the debunking of master categories and preconstituted geographies, and accounts for both individuals and ‘non-humans’, whether objects, institutions, or even norms,

⁶ Simon Curtis, ‘Global Cities and the Transformation of the International System’, *Review of International Studies*, 37:4 (2011), pp. 1923–47.

⁷ This is for example the case of Kent Calder and Mariko de Feytas, ‘Global Political Cities as Actors in Twenty-First Century International Affairs’, *SAIS Review*, 29:1 (2009), pp. 79–97. I have offered a more extensive rejoinder on this issue of agency in Michele Acuto, ‘Global cities: gorillas in our midst’, *Alternatives*, 35:4 (2010), pp. 425–48.

⁸ As suggested in Jan Melissen and Rogier van der Pluijm, ‘City diplomacy: the Expanding Role of Cities in International Politics’ (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations ‘Clingendael’, April 2007).

⁹ Curtis, ‘Global cities and the Transformation of the International System’, p. 1939. I have illustrated the analytical advantages of ANT for integrating cities in global governance more at length in Michele Acuto, ‘Putting ANTs in the *mille-feuille*’, *CITY*, 15:4 (2011), pp. 552–62.

to influence the social world.¹⁰ As such, ANT can in this case allow us to discuss the influence of cities in global governance while not dissociating them from international political contexts and while facilitating an account of how cities might be, such as states, international agents while not biasing agency with anthropocentrism.¹¹ ANT has in fact long been concerned with unpacking ‘the tactics and strategies of power’ and can present IR with critical analytical approaches that depict international agents as ‘actor-networks’ whose nature is inherently represented by an assemblage of heterogeneous elements and whose agency is contingent on relationality with the landscape they are embedded in.¹² Precisely for this capacity to trace the articulations of society through the assemblage (and failure) of networks, ANT can develop an account not only of how the agency of cities might emerge in global governance, but also of how assemblages of cities such as the C40 might ‘supervene’ the agency of their members and also become capable of exerting influence on world affairs like many other international organisations more commonly investigated in IR.¹³ The C40 might, in ANT terms, have the capacity to influence world politics by becoming a ‘hybrid collectif’ which is ‘an emergent effect created by the heterogeneous parts that make it up’, but which cannot be dissociated from the (international) context in which it acts.¹⁴

Concerned with explaining how such multilayered networking unfolds in society ANT theorists set out to ‘follow the actors’ involved in establishing these associations.¹⁵ This approach is developed to understand the processes of making connections, or (as ANT theorists call it) ‘translation’, which creates convergence among previously different elements of society and determines identities, interactions, and margins of manoeuvre of the actors in question.¹⁶ In terms of providing an effective analytical toolbox to trace these structurations, ANT has thus developed a particularly high-yielding qualitative frame on the dynamics of networking. Crucially, this approach is not simply descriptive, but also capable of conveying unevenness and

¹⁰ Useful introductions to ANT can be found in John Law, ‘Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity’, *Systems Practice*, 5:4 (1992), pp. 379–93; and Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: an Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹¹ On the anthropocentric limits of the international agency discourse see Jacob Schiff, ‘Real? As if! Critical reflections on state personhood’, *Review of International Studies*, 34:2 (2008), pp. 363–77.

¹² John Law, ‘Notes on the Theory of the Actor-Network: Ordering, Strategy and Heterogeneity’, *Systems Practice*, 5:4 (1992), p. 387.

¹³ The idea of supervenience and the question of agency in the international arena has been object of a recent lively debate in *Review of International Affairs*. As Alex Wendt pointed out on states, ‘supervenience’ is to be intended here a somewhat ‘weak’ theoretical variant to emergentism. It is the emergence of a set of properties (or group actor) ‘over’ another, in the sense that there cannot be a transformation in the former without also producing a difference in the latter, a view that allows us to connect ‘macro’ to ‘micro’ phenomena and thus networking *within* the C40 with networking *of* the C40. Alexander Wendt, ‘The state as a person in international theory’, *Review of International Studies*, 30:1 (2004), p. 300.

¹⁴ Michel Callon and John Law, ‘Agency and the Hybrid Collectif’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 94 (1995), pp. 481–507.

¹⁵ John Law, Arie Rip, and Michael Callon (eds), *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology: Sociology of Science in the Real World* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 4.

¹⁶ Michel Callon, ‘Struggles and Negotiations to Define What Is Problematic and What Is Not: The Sociology of Translation’, in Roger G. Krohn, Karin D. Knorr-Cetina, and Richard Whitley (eds), *The Social Process of Scientific Investigation: Sociology of the Sciences Yearbook* (Boston: Reidel, 1980), p. 211.

power-relations. The ANT perspective, in fact, pays particular attention to whom (or what) is capable of determining the shape of social structures.¹⁷

Accordingly, the development of networks can be said to involve four stages. First, network-makers ('mediators') define the nature of the network. Here they problematise the founding rationale of the network and seek to suggest a solution to these circumstances that locates them as indispensable (or 'obligatory passage points') for the achievement of such outcomes by a group of potential allies.¹⁸ Then, allies are 'locked into place' (the 'interessment' phase) by demonstrating how their interests lie within the network, and redefining their identities and as part of it.¹⁹ Third, allies (which can be humans, objects, institutions, and norms) are enrolled in the hybrid assemblage of the network. This stage sees the negotiation between the mediators and their allies, arranging the basic 'modus vivendi' of the network and locking into place their positions and roles. Organised within this structure, a network can be then activated (or 'mobilised') and thus can itself become a source of influence as an 'actor-network' exerting power as a function of its assembled nature. Seeing the structure of networking through this series of 'steps' provides social theorists with a research framework that allows qualitative methodology to decipher the dynamics of network-making and, in my case, potentially deconstruct the structuration of linkages between cities and global governance. Moreover, as noted above, it can equip us with a progressive sense of supervenience that sees the emergence of actors as not dissociated from the landscape in which they 'act' and which is wary of the multiscalar nature of agency in world politics. These multiscalar connections have been a prime focus of that meeting of major cities that World Bank president Robert Zoellick nominated for international leadership in June 2011. Yet how did the C40 emerge to such high expectations, and how much of these are actually lived up to by contemporary metropolises like New York or London? An ANT summary of the evolution of the Group can help in clarifying this issue and sketch some preliminary considerations on the international political role of cities.

Problematization

The development of the C40 as networked structure in global governance dates back to the Autumn of 2005. Under the initiative of then-mayor Ken Livingstone and his deputy Nicky Gavron, the Greater London Authority gathered a group of large metropolises at a two-day World Cities Leadership and Climate Summit.²⁰ The meeting, convened in partnership with ICLEI and the British non-profit organisation The Climate Group under the original banner of 'C20' cities, focused on the urban

¹⁷ This model originated in Michel Callon, 'Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation: Domestication of the Scollops and the Fisherman of St Briec Bay', in John Law (ed.), *Power, Action and Belief: A New Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 196–223. It has now developed widely across most of ANT theorists, as in Anna Davies, 'Power, Politics and Networks: Shaping Partnerships for Sustainable Communities', *Area*, 34:2 (2002), pp. 190–203.

¹⁸ Bruno Latour, 'Where Are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts', in Wiebe Bijker and John Law (eds), *Shaping Technology/Building Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), p. 249.

¹⁹ Callon, 'Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation', p. 198.

²⁰ Taking part in this summit were London, Barcelona, Beijing, Berlin, Brussels, Chicago, Curitiba, New Delhi, Madrid, Melbourne, Mexico City, New York, Paris, Philadelphia, Rome, San Francisco, São Paulo, Shanghai, Stockholm, Toronto, and Zurich.

governance of climate change by showcasing best planning and financing practices from the various cities involved. The key issue at stake, as put forward by Livingstone, was to tackle bureaucratic and political obstacles to effective delivery in urban-focused climate initiatives. By presenting its agency on this issue as both source and solution for a sustainable future, London argued for cities' 'practical action on the ground' and therefore not for a brand new approach, but a more extensive interconnection of an already established capacity.²¹

The idea was not that major cities in the world were lacking the ability to tackle climate change: rather, these metropolises were already pioneering best practices in this field and the drawback was instead to be found in their limitations in exchanging expertise and coordinating efforts. Forming a network established around the indispensable role of large cities as delivery ends of environmental policy seemed the winning strategy. Core to development of C20 and then C40, especially since the partnership with the Clinton Foundation, was the positioning of cities as central agents in climate politics and the role of the Group as key catalyst for innovative sustainability initiatives. Problematisation, in this sense, was a two-fold and open-ended task: on the one hand, advocating the nature of the issue (climate change) as an urban-driven question while, on the other, suggesting not only the privileged position of cities as repositories of innovation, but also demonstrating that such skills existed and were in place. This was a process that necessitated a translation of global concerns into the localised language of planning, architecture, and urban public policy.

The Summit concluded with the declaration of a partnership (at the time known as 'C20 Partnership') to be chaired by the GLA and capable of reporting back to the UN in 18 months.²² As such, the C20 set to establish itself both as a 'space of engagement' for cities, gathered to exchange resources and expertise on climate change, as well as a catalyst capable of representing, as much as prompting, connections among major metropolises.²³ Key to this aggregation function was, right from the start, the role of metropolitan planning officials that established a thriving base of cross-national exchanges on strategic urban directions and green best practices. A central spot has also been occupied since 2005 by the mayors of these cities who, as Livingstone's overarching tone for the Summit suggested, sought a more or less explicit rupture with their central executives. In fact, if formally linked to the apparatus of their states as governmental representatives, C40 mayors have progressively taken a stance against the official diplomatic track of the international realm. Now, if this has rarely resulted in open critiques towards their own central governments (as in the case of Livingstone), the 'city versus "the international"' phrase has almost achieved the state of truism in the C40 internal workings' – as several municipal officials have confirmed to me through the past years and as the current C40 Chair, New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, now openly boasts.²⁴

²¹ As noted in Gavron's speech at the outset of the summit. GLA Mayor Press Release (4 October 2005): 'Mayor brings together major cities to take lead on climate change', available at: {<http://www.london.gov.uk/media>} accessed 14 December 2010.

²² *Communiqué of the Large World Cities (C20)*, London – action #6 (5 October 2005), p. 2.

²³ The term is from Kevin R. Cox, 'Spaces of Dependence, Spaces of Engagement and the Politics of Scale, Or: Looking for Local Politics', *Political Geography*, 17:1 (1998), pp. 1–23.

²⁴ Interview with C40 member city local government (transport and planning) officer, Singapore (14 January 2011).

Importantly, this bifurcation of city and state agency has been, ever since 2005, solidly pinpointed on illustrating the planning and city management powers of the Group's members – a strategy that has recently culminated in a large 2011 report of C40 cities actions on climate change and their related mayoral prerogatives.²⁵ Archetypal of this present-day evolution, the 2005 conference was set up around sessions on public transport, energy supply, building retrofitting and waste management, discussing the specifics of traffic congestions or comparing health wave responses. If largely implied but not stated in these early meetings, a progressive duality between the world of 'cities acting' and the quandaries of 'states talking' was to develop into a core theme of the expanded C40.²⁶

Maintaining a relative closure on the role of cities as 'obligatory passage points' for global environmental governance has perhaps been the major challenge to the network's problematisation. C40 cities have, in fact, to acquire a certain degree of legitimacy to partake in the complex architecture of global governance concerned with the environment. The Group is prone to problematise its exclusive positioning in terms of international politics as this latter sphere is the one that plays the core role in the dynamics of the geography of global governance. This has equalled reiterating cities as core actors in the global response to climate change. Likewise, it promoted a growing emphasis on the 'global' nature of its member cities. Initially sponsored as 'large' cities to appeal to the vast demographic reach of the C20's local governments, the Group has since evolved to embrace a many metropolises with international reach gathered for their capacity to inspire global change and impact the lives of millions. The C40's 'we cities' rhetoric, kick-started by Livingstone, implies three logical corollaries: the urban, as the exclusive domain of cities, holds a particular centrality in the 'local' dimension of global governance; 'global' cities, understood as pivots of worldwide networks, hold a particular centrality amongst cities; the local and urban reach of these 'global' cities, as particularly well-positioned when it comes to implementing climate policy effectively. The internationalisation of C40 cities in environmental governance is therefore strongly intertwined with negotiating the capacity of these metropolises to represent local, urban, and city interests through as meaningful action in world politics.

Interestment

Promoting C40 cities as central in the geography of global environmental governance has meant facing a series of both exogenous and endogenous pressures on the establishment of the C40. Externally, the Group is conditioned by the need to relate to the broader realms of world politics in a 'language' other non-urban actors can easily understand. However, this also poses an internal problem that shapes the structure of the C40 as its capacity for action is premised on the enrolment of other global civil society allies as intermediaries in its transnational network. This is reflected in the conditionality of the C40's interestment processes both within the Group as well as with other structures of world politics.

²⁵ ARUP-C40 joint report 'Climate Action in Megacities: C40 Cities Baseline and Opportunities', available at: {http://www.arup.com/Publications/Climate_Action_in_Megacities.aspx} accessed 17 July 2011.

²⁶ The expressions have often been reiterated, not least by the successive C40 Chairs David Miller of Toronto and Michael Bloomberg of New York, at the outset of each biannual Summit.

To begin with, external closure on the role of global cities in the politics of the environment is challenged by their capacity to deliver in terms acceptable at an international political scale, as well as by the need not to dissociate the C40's climate agency too much from the broader dynamics of global climate governance. The translation of climate-related political issues from the realm of international negotiations to a context of planners and urbanists runs the risk of technicalisation of the Group's agency, and thus the alienation of international actors from the C40's local effectiveness. This means that the Group needs to mediate, continuously, between its need to 'de-politicise' climate change policymaking (to acquire technical room for manoeuvre) and its necessity to speak the language of international affairs. To this extent, the C40's networking has been coupled with a search for a greater 'legitimacy of order' in environmental politics: positioning themselves as key actors in the global effort to curb climate change, C40 cities have expressed their claim to rightful participation in the international 'community' and thus their entitlement to membership in the complex of stakeholders engaged in global environmental governance.²⁷ As such, the transnational political agency of the Group has focused on formulating joint statements, calls for actions and collective plans targeted towards expanding and reproblematising the role of metropolises in global environmental politics. For instance, the C40 has openly engaged with the recent June 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio + 20) or the December 2009 UNFCCC round in Copenhagen (COP15). However, this has meant that global cities gathered in the C40 have also had to cast some of their planning and urban management engagements in the 'language' of international politics. One example might be the 2009 Seoul Summit plenary declaration. Ushered in a tone of international solemnity by the opening line ('We the government leaders and delegates of C40 cities ...'), the document was compiled following canonical international law and UN customary practices marked a series of preambulatory acknowledgement paragraphs ('recognizing that ...', 'reaffirming that ...' and so forth), followed by a bulk of proclamations and explanatory annexes.²⁸

C40 cities have thus begun to demonstrate there are overlapping international and urban interests by speaking in, as much as to, international relations terms typical of twentieth century IR-speak – a dynamic that has been more recently reflected not just in interestment but across all stages of networking of the Group from problematisation to mobilisation. A factor maintaining a close tie between the C40's internal space of engagement (for its members) and the international structures 'around' it can therefore be found in the Group's frequent mimicking of some diplomatic procedures of 'higher politics'. The network has adopted much of the commonplace political language of covenants, international summits, and state-centric policymaking in order to develop its internal political structure. For example, the C40 has frequently issued 'joint actions' as in the October 2008 Tokyo conference or the May 2007 New York Summit, and taken part in wider agreements such as in 2009 Copenhagen Climate Communiqué or the Global Cities Covenant on Climate (known as 'Mexico Pact') signed at the Mexico City World Mayors Summit on Climate in November 2010.

²⁷ Ian Clark, 'Legitimacy in a Global Order', *Review of International Studies*, 29:1 (2003), pp. 75–95.

²⁸ C40 Large Cities Climate Summit statement, 'Seoul Declaration' (18–21 May 2009), available at {<http://www.c40cities.org/news/news-20090522.jsp>} accessed 27 April 2011.

Likewise, in order to structure the centrality of global cities the Group has, since its 2005 roots, subscribed to much of the dominant environmental governance discourse that underpins the international response to climate change. So, while the C40 has devised a series of innovative approaches to the issue such as a procurement system for green retrofitting or issue-based workshops on sustainable urbanism, much of its rhetoric remains anchored to the broader structures of world politics. This is embedded in three strands of continuity reproduced by the C40 in its problematisation and interestment stages. First, when describing the positioning of global cities *vis-à-vis* climate change members, Group executives and even workshop practitioners make ample reference to the political language of the UN Framework and to the scientific discourse that forms much of the widely agreed know-how on environmental politics. This is exemplified, for instance, by the constant referencing of the Stern Review and IPCC datasets in both the C40's initial networking stages as well as its more recent developments. For instance, at the 2007 New York Summit, Mayor Bloomberg's keynote address made extensive remarks on the Review's conclusions.²⁹ In particular, the figures on the urban contribution to climate change have been largely (and, quite arguably, uncritically) embraced by the C40, following Stern's and the IPCC's indication that cities are responsible for around 75 per cent of the total greenhouse gas emissions – a statistic now espoused by all the group members.³⁰ This '75 per cent rhetoric' has progressively been adopted in presentations and discussions at the C40, and has today gained status of a well-founded truism in climate science.³¹ However, as David Satterthwaite has pointed out, such estimates might considerably understate the contributions from agriculture and deforestation and from heavy industries, fossil-fuelled power stations, and high-consumption households not located in cities.³² While a discussion on the exact contribution of cities to climate change is far beyond the scope of my inquiry, what is anyhow interesting is the wide usage of this discourse as a cornerstone of the problematisation of the Group's (and, by proxy, its members') influence on environmental governance. By repeating and showcasing the 75 per cent estimate, cities gathered in the C40 are not just pointing the finger at themselves in a recurring *mea culpa*: on the contrary, the '75 per cent rhetoric' contributes to offer scientific bases for these metropolises' centrality in climate change issues and primary policymaking positioning in responding to the threat of global warming. As mayor Bloomberg put it at the opening ceremony of the 2011 São Paulo summit:

History now summons us to that duty – and we must answer its call. That sense of great responsibility, and also of immense possibility, must guide our work.³³

²⁹ Mayor Bloomberg keynote address to the C40 Large Cities Climate Summit 2007 (15 May 2007). Transcript available at: {<http://www.c40cities.org/summit/2007/speeches>} accessed 24 April 2011.

³⁰ 'By some estimates, urban areas account for 78 per cent of carbon emissions from human activities.' See Nicholas Stern, *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 517. Much of the same could also be said of the 'canonical' definition of 'sustainability' set by the Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* in 1987.

³¹ The figure now regularly appears in speeches, powerpoints, reports, and pamphlets at both C40 summits and workshops.

³² David Satterthwaite, 'Cities' Contribution to Global Warming: Notes on the Allocation of Greenhouse Gas Emissions', *Environment and Urbanization*, 20:2 (2008), pp. 539–49.

³³ Mayor Michael Bloomberg's opening speech, C40 São Paulo Summit (1 June 2011), available at: {http://c40saopaulosummit.com/site/conteudo/index.php?in_secao=27&lang=3&in_conteudo=112} accessed 17 July 2011.

Enrolment

If the first steps in the organisation of the C40 highlighted the privileged role of cities in environmental challenges, subsequent developments sought to extend the networked reach of the Group by enrolling new allies and negotiating their position within this evolving framework. Linking the initial pool of metropolises in the C40 network was a relatively easy matter since their stakes were similar and several of these had common ties already. Negotiating the establishment of the Group initially meant the formalisation of pre-existent ties among major metropolises that gathered around the pro-activeness of the GLA and other members of the C40 steering committee like New York and Los Angeles. However, conscious of the stalemates and intricacies of global governance, the London-based C40 secretariat knew that the network had to go beyond the local government sphere. This understanding was already echoed in the 2005 Summit *communiqué*:

We are ready to take action and join other cities, regions, states, provinces, national governments, and corporations around the world to lead the way.³⁴

Building on Livingstone's realisation that these cities already had the means to implement policy actions transnationally, a view supported by several other heads of local governments in developed countries such as Bloomberg, the secretariat set out to reinforce the Group's outreach by venturing into the prolific world of private charities. Even before the 2007 plenary summit a key actor for the Group's reach was then enrolled in the network: meeting in Los Angeles under the auspices of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, a partnership was signed with the Clinton Foundation's newly-formed Climate Initiative (CCI) on the 1st of August 2006.³⁵ This latter, as the agreement set out, was to be delivery partner and major catalyst for the expansion of the network beyond the C20 to a 'C40'. Shortly after the network moved beyond the initial limited membership to encompass more key centres from the developing world, with a further bulk of 13 cities officially joining at the May 2007 plenary in New York bringing the total number of participants to 40, later adjoined by further 16 affiliates.

CCI has since become crucial in the C40, with a role rooted in three core initiatives sketched in the 2006 partnership. First, CCI functions as a pivot to create a consortium capable of pooling the purchasing power of these metropolises and liaise with the major Energy Service Companies (the so-called 'ESCOs' such as Honeywell or Siemens) thus facilitating the C40's structural expansion into the global market to lower the prices of energy saving products and sustainable technologies. Second, the CCI has also focused on mobilising experts and IT from the private sector to provide conjunct technical assistance to member cities. Third, CCI fosters the development of city-based technical networking such as the testing of emission impacts measurement tools as well as the establishment of internet-based communications systems amongst local governments. Besides negotiating the enlargement of the C40 membership, the CCI has thus been functioning as a medium between the Group's own political and policymaking enterprise and global financial means to implement it on the ground.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ For the text of the agreement see: Clinton Foundation Press Release (1 August 2006): 'President Clinton Launches Clinton Climate Initiative', available at: {<http://www.clintonfoundation.org/news/news-media>} accessed 14 August 2011.

This meant that the linkage with Foundation's Climate Initiative has been acting as a network multiplier allowing the C40 to go beyond the transnational municipal effort of its early days. Through the CCI's mediation, the C40 has encompassed several other scales in a growing series of public-private partnerships pinpointed on these cities' key positioning *vis-à-vis* climate change.

By mid-2007 the shape of the network was centred on a small London-based secretariat partnering with CCI in New York, overseeing general meetings and ongoing operations. The C40 has since been headed by a steering committee of nine and an elected chairman represented by a member city mayor. Participation to the Group is voluntary, and the linkage among the metropolises is continuously 'activated' through a series of issue-based practitioners workshops and *ad hoc* meetings that assure a constant decentralised cooperation amongst members. Biannual conferences (London 2005, New York 2007, Seoul 2009, and São Paulo 2011) provide regular occasions for general assembly, as well as a window for continual problematisation of the key role of global cities in environmental governance.

The CCI has since then become progressively integrated into what can now be rightfully labelled as a 'hybrid' governing arrangement: if in the five years since the original partnership, the link between the Foundation's Climate Initiative and the Group's key executive as represented by the London headquarters has unfolded through a loose coordination of mutually-supported initiatives, the two merged in January 2011 into a common secretariat. While originally enrolled as 'delivery partner' capable of enhancing the network's mobilisation, the CCI has fast become a key stakeholder steering the Group's activity. This connection, as evinced in several of my interviews and in a recent New York Times article, was not solely originated in the need for an expanded organisational capacity but also the result of a previously loose system of coordination that 'left confused city officials and employees of the groups working at cross purposes' in an arrangement that was largely 'plagued by problems'.³⁶

To redress these limits the C40, originated from a conference of large cities with adjoining climate programmes, has in fact progressively developed into a hybrid collectif capable of interacting with the key structures of global governance. In order to do so, the initial meeting of metropolitan 'climate leaders' based on loose connections amongst them has had to become progressively institutionalised into a coherent structure. A fundamental passage in this transition has been that of developing an 'organisational strategy' to overcome the almost informal nature of the network as initially set by Livingstone. Presented at the November 2010 Hong Kong workshop, this strategy was the first step in Bloomberg's C40 chairmanship, who took over from Toronto's David Miller (2006–10) just a month before that. What has informally become known as the 'Hong Kong Strategy' was thus devised, and subsequently adopted by the C40 Steering Committee to strengthen the Group's 'organizational capacity and its ability to work with other organizations' as well as ensure that 'city directors are fully supported by the integrated work of the C40' and make 'the C40 a more visible and effective leader in urban sustainability'.³⁷

³⁶ Michael Barbaro, 'Bloomberg and Clinton to Merge Climate Groups', *The New York Times* (13 April 2011).

³⁷ The Strategy, yet to be officially released, was sketched at the Hong Kong Summit (5–6 November 2010) and illustrated publicly by Bloomberg in the address to the fourth biannual summit in São Paulo (31 May–2 June 2011).

Fundamentally, the Strategy pushes in the direction of consolidation. Moving towards a tighter network, the evolution of the C40 has been envisaged by its secretariat and steering committee to enhance the Group's structural coherence and operational capacity. The plan set out in Hong Kong in 2010, and showcased in São Paulo in 2011, illustrates a clear will by the Group (or at least the Group's executive led by London and New York) to move into a greater collective influence in the dynamics of climate policy. In Bloomberg's ambitious words:

We can and must work together, more closely and productively. In the process, we will, I am confident, make C40 the world's leading, and most indispensable, climate change organization.³⁸

Mobilisation

The Group has therefore been mobilised following a two-track process based on direct political advocacy, mostly in the shape of city diplomacy, and catalytic technical implementation of the Group's effort to curb climate change. First, C40 cities have a cross-cutting lobby role. In this sense, the C40 has sought to impact directly other spheres of global governance by influencing the dynamics of both international and domestic public policy mechanisms. For instance, shortly after the London summit the C40 leadership reported to the December 2005 UNFCCC round in Montreal (COP13), and have since then taken active part in mayoral and city-based initiatives parallel to the UN framework such as those revolving around the COP15 in 2009. Typical instruments activating the network in this process are international meetings and secretariat embassies, but C40 cities are also lobbying their central governments policymaking for green urban developments, as well as participating in major international fora. In this sense, the C40 has been particularly proactive in new forms of diplomacy pushing for a more open and less hierarchical practices of global governance that can step beyond the 'club' engagements of traditional international relations and relying on 'network diplomacy' approaches.³⁹

The main diplomatic task of the C40, of course, has been to put forward an urban-aware climate agenda, and in this, the fundamental task of the C40's political track goes beyond advocacy. Providing a framework for the institutionalisation of the policymaking practices developed by the Group's members, the C40 can step beyond *ad hoc* cooperation and set up ongoing governance engagements. Biannual summits, workshop series, transnational policy initiatives and large-scale partnership, when coordinated through the C40, all contribute to evolve this city-based networking – a process of organisation that unravels conjunctly at both political and technical planning levels within the overall architecture provided by the Group's plenary meetings.

The same process also allows for the question of climate change to be translated to a more technical audience which is neither directly engaged with the dealings of 'higher politics' nor necessarily concerned with the civilising mission of many climate

³⁸ Mayor Michael Bloomberg's opening speech, C40 São Paulo Summit (1 June 2011), emphasis added.

³⁹ Jorge Heine, 'On the Manner of Practicising the New Diplomacy', in Andrew F. Cooper, Brian Hocking, and William Maley (eds), *Global Governance and Diplomacy: Worlds Apart?* (London: Palgrave, 2008), p. 273.

advocates. City diplomacy by the C40 secretariat, and even more crucially by the C40 itself on their behalf, is thus key to establish a (global) city problematisation and enrol core actors for the Group's agenda. The technical aspect of the C40's agency provides instead the implementation necessary to put all of this networking in practice at the level of urban planning. In order to overcome the obstacles of power politics the C40 has thus undergone a metamorphosis from 'international' organisation to the hybrid policy network embodied in the Hong Kong Strategy. In fact, if in 2005 the shape of the Group (then 'C20 Large World Cities') was essentially pinpointed on a regular general assembly of members, observers, a small secretariat and an 'honorary' chair (London), by the third C40 Cities Summit held in Seoul in 2009 the network had expanded in more complex ramifications.

Hence, despite a growing political recognition, it is in its technical dimension that the Group has perhaps achieved the most.⁴⁰ The development of common planning strategies, shared metropolitan policies, transnational instruments, and preferential connections amongst global cities and major international institutions that the Group has in fact been thriving.⁴¹ In fact, if the political role of the C40 has demonstrated a capacity to partake in the global governance discourse, the more technical tackling of climate issues has had the merit of implementing real action on the ground and foster collective responses to share and similar problems at the urban level. Key secretariat members have, in fact, repeatedly drummed on the extensive 'climate action' undertaken in aggregate, or 'collectively', by C40 members.⁴² This focus contributes to a series of structural developments in the network: it fosters a perception of the C40 as a coherent and coordinated whole; it improves the visibility of the C40's technical capacity; and it stresses both individual members and collective Group participation to climate governance. In ANT terms, this evolution has allowed the simplification of a hybrid collective which could supervene the individual agency of its members and influence world affairs as a coherent entity. Yet, this mobilisation is not detached from the continuing translation of 'macro' international political action into the 'micro' dimension of urban policymaking that is characteristic of the C40 technical track.

Since the New York Summit in 2007 the C40 has set out to organise a series of issue-based workshops to bring together not only executives from the Group's global cities, but more specifically planners and technical officers. Beginning with a meeting in Stockholm in December later that year, and following with a mounting succession of fora on, for instance, airports and ports planning (Los Angeles and Rotterdam 2008), waste management (London 2010), energy efficiency (Berlin 2010), and infrastructure financing (Basel 2011), the C40 has generated a now well-established practice

⁴⁰ Recent cases of academic attention to the case can be traced, amongst others, in Philipp Pattberg, 'The Role and Relevance of Networked Climate Governance', in Frank Biermann, Philipp Pattberg, and Fariborz Zelli (eds), *Global Climate Governance Beyond 2012: Architecture, Agency and Adaptation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 146–64; and Sofie Bouteligier, *Cities, Networks and Global Environmental Governance* (London: Routledge, 2012).

⁴¹ See, for example, the BBC World Service special *The Climate Connection* (9 December 2010): 'Part Four The New Leaders' which has pointed at the C40 as a model of innovative climate leadership: 'From Toronto to Seoul, Karachi to Addis Ababa the C40 leaders have put aside their naturally competitive instincts to create real environmental benefits for their own citizens and to share them with other cities', available at: {http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/science/2010/12/101201_climate_connection_prog_four_tx.shtml} accessed 8 January 2012.

⁴² See, for instance, the interview with C40 Chair special advisor Rohit Aggarwala on E&E TV's *OnPoint* (27 July 2011), available at: {http://www.eenews.net/tv/video_guide/1373?page=1&sort_type=date} accessed 8 January 2012.

of assembling practitioners in order to showcase best practices and exchange scientific knowledge on strategic urban planning. On the other hand, the 2007 summit also kick-started the CCI's mediatory role between private actors and the Group.

For instance, the CCI set up a procurement scheme to facilitate green redevelopments in the Group's global cities through the C40/CCI Energy Efficiency Building Retrofit Program (EEBRP). This public-private partnership framework has allowed the C40 to develop into a transnational consortium (formed by C40 cities, multinational corporations, and CCI) capable of facilitating the adoption of large-scale and sustainability-oriented retrofits. Bringing together global cities, ESCOs and commercial banks under the joint coordination of CCI and the C40 secretariat, this extension of the Group's network has prompted a technical and hybrid (public-private) coordination of climate change efforts. Importantly, public-private enterprises like EEBRP are aimed at the establishment of common practices and preferential pathways amongst global cities, as well as between these and the private sector as key intermediary for the implementation of the Group's goals. As such, the C40 structure gains network power *vis-à-vis* other actors by establishing 'best practices' and standards that define the 'cutting edge' in climate governance, while also developing almost obligatory paths for member cities' city diplomacy capacity on climate issues. So, if the logic of public-private hybridisation has been one of overcoming budgetary and action limits, this has also recast the traditional political-economic dependences of these cities on their global market bases, these have not been denied in the process of hybridisation via CCI, but rather reorganised and mobilised through a urban-centred transnational process. Much of the same can be said for the C40's connection with the World Bank – perhaps the greatest structural development of the Group in 2011.

While the CCI linkage, especially since the merger, has provided some substantive economic support for the Group's long-term sustainability, the prompt to establish a more formal connection with the World Bank has emerged from the concerns surrounding the financing of green retrofit in many of the C40 members. Seen as 'a natural extension of the Bank's relation with each city' the partnership with the Bank is considered crucial in order to catalyse more private capital and to allow a quicker pay-out of the various climate-sensitive projects implemented at the strategic planning level by the Group.⁴³ In this sense much emphasis has thus far been put on developing a consistent approach to climate action planning strategies across the C40. In particular, the agreement is aimed towards establishing a common approach to measuring and reporting on city greenhouse gas emissions. Yet, this is not simply a planning concern: as the agreement underlines, standardised action is mainly needed to permit potential investors to identify opportunities across cities and thus to multiply the Group's financing by emphasising the capacity of the C40 to be a catalyst of action.

To be certain, this linkage offers distinct implementation advantages, especially in terms of offering incentives to the 'less active C40 members' (an expression used in many instances by C40 and World Bank executives at the São Paulo summit) and affiliate cities to take up more extensive actions. Moreover, the connection with technical experts at the Bank, and especially at the World Bank Institute, brings some

⁴³ A summary of Robert Zoellick's speech at C40 São Paulo Summit (1 June 2011) and of the partnership is available at: {<http://go.worldbank.org/BVGELE3NQ0>} accessed 17 July 2011.

considerable experience in leveraging ‘climate financing’ instruments with the private sector, thus allowing for further hybrid linkages between the CCI-C40 and not solely ESCOs but private providers more in general. As the Bank’s linkage begins to unravel in this direction in both the initial rhetoric on this key linkage and its related plans for action, the two tracks of the C40 have once again appeared central: connecting the Bank’s apparatus not solely to the political, but chiefly to the technical dimension of the Group’s agency, facilitates a particularly multiscalar reach. Furthermore, this link allows C40 and Bank to bypass the inefficiency of the approach of the UNFCCC negotiations by setting up direct connections between the transnational scale of both the Bank and the C40’s city diplomacy, and the urban sphere represented in the latter’s planning track. This push for scalar reach and ‘trouble jumping’ echoed in Zoellick’s words as he underlined how the Bank’s interest in setting up a direct linkage with the C40 was mainly prompted by a need to ‘deepen our partnership directly with cities’ as these latter ‘are the future of climate change’ – a declaration that reinforces these cities’ appointment as obligatory passage points for global environmental governance.⁴⁴

An influential (actor-)network

Bloomberg spared no praises as he inaugurated the fourth biannual summit of the Climate Leadership Group in May 2011: ‘We own tremendous influence’, he reminded a vast audience of metropolitan officers and media representatives, ‘what our cities do individually and in unison increasingly sets the agenda for people everywhere.’⁴⁵ Rhetoric aside, the chairman’s statement is not overly off the map. Ultimately, the major lesson that can be found in the network processes considered here is that, as the June 2011 Rio Summit report released jointly by C40 and consulting firm ARUP underlined, ‘cities act’ and have substantial powers on a whole range of crucial realms of global governance.⁴⁶ Ranging from direct ownership and operation of key services such as water and energy supply, to the capacity to set visions, policy orientation and parameters, and expanding into the realm of transnational and diplomatic initiatives, the global cities of the C40 have an influential positioning in environmental (if not global) governance and a direct impact on millions of city dwellers worldwide. Yet, how does this process affect the geography of global governance in which it is embedded?

To begin with, C40 cities have attempted to overcome the problem of action beyond informal pledges that has stalled negotiations on universal environmental frameworks. By reconverting existing ties and well-established planning practices the Group has fostered more climate-focused and concerted types of city-to-city cooperation and urban redevelopment that, right from the second C40 Summit, have begun to offer tangible results. The C40’s policymaking style, focused on sharing information

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s opening speech, C40 São Paulo Summit (1 June 2011).

⁴⁶ ARUP report, ‘Climate Action in Megacities: C40 Cities Baseline and Opportunities’ (Version 1.0) released by the C40 Climate Leadership Group and ARUP (1 June 2011), available at: {http://www.arup.com/News/2011_06_June/01_Jun_11_C40_Climate_Action_Megacities_Sao_Paulo.aspx} accessed 24 January 2012.

on environmental policy and facilitating public-private partnerships, represents relative structural novelties with respect to the ‘global deal’ universal decision-making take and the ‘global civil society’ activism that have populated global governance in the past decades.⁴⁷ The C40 does not rely on the traditional regime-building emphasis typical of both the former’s bargaining and the latter’s advocacy. Rather than constructing a binding scheme encompassing cities in similarities, the C40 emphasises the productivity of difference (and the learning potential coming from its display) and the incentives of inter-city competition.

This has resulted in *ad hoc* and localised public-private implementation of generalised policy principles showcased at the Group’s major meetings, thus overcoming the checks of international negotiation by allowing cities to offer their own versions of ‘climate solutions’ and, conversely, tailoring common practices to the development needs of each municipality. In order to maintain such a diversified approach the C40 has enhanced the effectiveness of some traditional policymaking arenas such as transnational fora, plenary membership summits, and multilateral meetings, by limiting the number of urban ‘climate leaders’ and selected private partners.

In this sense, the C40 has (thanks to the twin-tracks approach) relied on a series of participation incentives. On the more political side, the Group has offered a chance for these metropolises to enhance their international legitimacy while also improving their policymaking independence. This can be achieved, in the C40 case, by respectively being identified as active components of an effective effort against global warming while also not acting on behalf of their national governments, but rather in the name of their ‘duty’ as key governance scales on environmental issue. Moreover, further stimuli to active participation (and, crucially, implementation) also come from the Group’s technical track. The involvement in the C40 has presented cities with the comparative advantage of the Group’s pooled network power: participants to the network can in fact gain privileged access to both policy and market ties that can function well beyond the Group’s purpose. This simultaneously allows municipal officials to scrutinise other cities’ ‘green growth’ strategies and gain expertise on planning best practices.⁴⁸ As a political officer from the GLA put it: ‘the [C40] meeting offers a sweeping window to survey the state of urban planning in our global competitors, and twin global action with global competitiveness’.⁴⁹

Likewise, this has also presented a response to the core problem for global governance, the ‘free rider’ question.⁵⁰ As the activities of the network are issue-specific and participation is on a voluntary basis, metropolises can contribute in the areas where they can provide key expertise, and implement programmes that best suit their development needs. Moreover, their participation is incentivised by the scale advantages of pooling large municipal resources, exchanging best practices models, and accessing privileged technical (and more broadly planning) services through the Group’s private allies. Emblematic of this approach is for instance the membership justification provided by Sydney’s Mayor Clover Moore to her City Council on the

⁴⁷ On ‘global deal’ and ‘global civil society’ see respectively Robert Falkner, Hannes Stephan, and John Vogler, ‘International Climate Policy after Copenhagen: Towards a “Building Blocks” Approach’, *Global Policy*, 1:3 (2010), pp. 252–62; and Ronnie D. Lipschutz, ‘Reconstructing World Politics: The Emergence of Global Civil Society’, *Millennium*, 21:3 (1992), pp. 389–420.

⁴⁸ Michael E. Porter and Claas van der Linde, ‘Green and Competitive: Ending the Stalemate’, *Harvard Business Review*, 73:5 (1999), pp. 120–34.

⁴⁹ Interview with former Greater London Authority communications officer, London (1 July 2009).

⁵⁰ A problem brought to the forefront of environmental policymaking by the *Stern Review*.

eve of the 2007 biannual summit, where she highlighted how ‘the C40 has no formal membership and it does not require a financial contribution from the City of Sydney’ and ‘member cities are able to opt in and out of any of the agreed elements of the program’.⁵¹ To put it simply, the C40 costs cities very little, and it is almost completely voluntary. In this sense, cities have been able not solely to connect transnationally, but fundamentally to develop an hybrid form of governance centred on public-private partnerships that shifts their scale of action beyond the domestic divide problems that often prevents implementation in both ‘global deal’ and ‘civil society’ approaches.

Presenting perhaps the greatest lead on both models, the C40’s hybrid and transnational nature enables its members to overcome the barriers set by the domestic divide between international policymaking and local implementation. Cities are able to bypass their constitutional and budgetary constraints by activating the powers of association embedded in the mobilisation of the C40 network. As the ANT overview tells us, C40 cities have emerged as influential actors in environmental politics as a function of their interconnectivity with other cities, international actors, and global markets. Yet cities are not the only actor-networks of this story: the C40 itself has also evolved in a similar way by linking to CCI, World Bank, and private actors like ARUP, all while cutting across the traditional structures of the international system.

What is perhaps the largest implication of global city agency as carried out globally is that parts of the geography of global governance are respatialised as policymaking dynamics are uprooted and recast beyond the ‘global deal’ skeleton of world politics. Global cities have a key stake in creating alternative paths for international policymaking. German sociologist Ulrich Beck labelled this dynamic ‘subpoliticisation’ as a short-hand for ‘subsystem politicisation’ – a structural displacement of the locus of political agency in contexts other than those institutionalised in traditional practice.⁵² This process implies the shift of political proceedings and dealings through different (subsystemic) structures such as those of municipal government, as well as the production of novel structures altogether, as in the cross-boundary connections of the Climate Leadership Group. In this case, climate policymaking has for example been partly moved to cities from the ‘global deal’ alignments of the UN to cross-municipal initiatives like the Building Retrofit programme. Likewise the implementation of climate responses has also seen a subpoliticisation in that it has been unfolding through the hybrid organisation of the CCI’s procurement process or the baseline data sharing exercise coordinated via ARUP in 2011.

In general, the geopolitical consequences of these subpoliticisation processes are to be found in the decontextualisation of decision-making. By ‘changing the rules and boundaries of the political’ into alternative geographical alignments, policymaking ‘becomes more open and susceptible to new linkages, as well as capable of being negotiated and reshaped’.⁵³ This is evident, for instance, in the partial respatialisation of the global climate policy from the security concerns of international diplomacy to the technical domains of planning and municipal cooperation of the C40. The rise of multiscale structures, the crystallisation of pluralist arrangements,

⁵¹ Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of the City of Sydney, Meeting No. 1456 (2 April 2007), p. 229.

⁵² Ulrich Beck, ‘Subpolitics: Ecology and the Disintegration of Institutional Power’, *Organization Environment*, 10:1 (1997), pp. 52–65.

⁵³ Ulrich Beck, *World Risk Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 40.

and the privatisation of governance, all result in an enlargement of traditional political processes rather than in their disappearance.⁵⁴ The reorganisation of the political spaces of our epoch questions the foundations and hierarchical prerogatives of the Westphalian system, as the emergence of subpolitics ‘stresses the significance of sources of power outside the political system in a differentiated modern society’ – and thus implicitly of network power beyond sovereign control.⁵⁵ While remaining capable of exerting some degrees of sovereign prerogatives through their core governmental institutions, such as the GLA in London, cities have progressively embraced the productivity of networked and multiscalar forms of influence. In particular, these metropolises confirm that the means to succeed in contemporary world politics are to be found in ‘soft’ approaches and cross-cutting ‘catalytic’ forms of engagement.⁵⁶ This governance redefinition, however, results in the ‘decoupling of politics from government’ and in the emergence of political engagements in areas beyond those traditionally ‘prescribed’ for them, such as parliaments, unions, and electoral proceedings.⁵⁷ Consequently, this process implies the emergence of policy (and thus political) connections outside of the established and habitual governmental structures of national decision-making, which in geographical terms equates a rescaling of control and power-geometries at a multitude of societal levels. The C40 becomes an arena for hybrid and transnational connections to govern the production of spaces (social and physical) not only at the urban level but across metropolitan borders and state boundaries.

Not a flat network

The ANT account on the development of the C40 points at two processes that have direct implication for the understanding of these cities’ agency on global governance. Much of ‘international’ influence of the C40 is embedded in the capacity of mayors and municipal officers to implement the innovations showcased through the Group’s technical track in the everyday reality faced by their local constituents. Yet, when representing these as actors in a wider network of metropolises, city leaders also partake in promoting their city as an agent capable of undertaking diplomatic activities quite similar to other more traditional international actors. In this sense, the capacity of cities like New York to forge alliances with other local governments, or sign memoranda of understanding with corporate and international organisations such as the Clinton Climate Initiative or the World Bank, makes a significant difference to the unfolding of world politics beyond the traditional Westphalian dimension of state-to-state relations. Likewise, the ability of metropolises to gather in transnational

⁵⁴ See David Lake, ‘Global Governance: A Relational Approach’, in Aseem Prakash and Jeffrey Hart (eds), *Globalization and Governance* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 31–8. On these features in the European case see, amongst others, Maria Green Cowles, James A. Caporaso, and Thomas Risse (eds), *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁵⁵ Boris Holzer and Mads P. Sørensen, ‘Rethinking Subpolitics: Beyond the “Iron Cage” of Modern Politics?’, *Theory Culture Society*, 20:2 (2003), p. 80.

⁵⁶ Brian Hocking, ‘Catalytic Diplomacy: Beyond “Newness” and “Decline”’, in Jan Melissen (ed.), *Innovation in Diplomatic Practice* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 21. I here of course paraphrase Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

⁵⁷ Ulrich Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics: Rethinking Modernity in the Global Social Order*, trans. Mark Ritter (Cambridge: Polity, 1997), p. 98.

municipal networks focused on bringing an urban-aware agenda into the broader debate on climate change, as in the case of the C40, allows such metropolises to pool resources, exchange information, devise joint actions, and relate to political structures ‘above’ the localised level of municipal affairs, therefore bypassing national hierarchies by constructing innovative scales of climate action or linking multiple contexts in a multiscale response to this global challenge. This can ultimately lead to the emergence of a further agent like the C40. This consideration has a particular relevance as it points out the multiple spatiality of global governance where actor-networks may nest within one another.⁵⁸ Such progressive sense of supervenience and structuration in world politics, in turn, begs for a more geographically-prone understanding of politics. The C40 network is not flat but an actor-network that emerges from the assemblage of other actor-networks, depicting a deeper political structure than much literature on transnational networks gives away.⁵⁹

Yet this multiscale complexity also points at another geopolitical consideration. In most cases, beyond the New York-London axis, C40 members tend to occupy ‘secondary’ positions such as that held, for instance, by Los Angeles that had a prominent role in the initial establishment of the C40/CCI partnership, or even almost ‘observer status’ effectively granted to more peripheral ‘participating’ and ‘affiliate’ cities such as Lima, Addis Ababa, or Warsaw. In this view, shared amongst several of the Group’s members and affiliate cities is a feeling that ‘NYLON’ occupies a *primus inter pares* role in the C40 structure, with some few other key ‘global’ cities such as those of the steering committee clustering around the centrality of this ‘dynamic duo’ and providing the impetus for a Group where a majority of the other metropolises are located on the margins of international action.⁶⁰ However, a series of increasingly proactive players has also been steadily rising to challenge the Western Anglo-Saxon dominance of the C40. After Tokyo paved the way to the mobilisation of the network with the 2008 C40 Climate Change Summit, key global cities of the ‘East’ progressively gained momentum in setting the pace for the Group’s engagement. Headed by Seoul, host of the 3rd biannual Summit in 2009, and Hong Kong, organiser of the ‘Quality of Living’ workshop in November 2010, which developed into a key framework setting process, this partial Eastward shift of the C40 is reflective of the growing prominence of Asian metropolises in world affairs.

Overall, all of these submersed stratification dynamics exemplify a key internal factor: as Kristine Kern and Harriet Bulkeley noted in relation to European transnational municipal networks, the general characterisation of these city coalitions as capable of some degree of self-governance tends to be misleadingly coupled, at least in the superficial international literature reading, with non-hierarchical, horizontal, and polycentric forms of political organisation. Simply, transnational networks are often simplistically assumed to be flat.⁶¹ On the contrary the Group’s network is, despite its decentralised governance and transnational nature, far from horizontal:

⁵⁸ List and Pettit, *Group Agency*, p. 40.

⁵⁹ I have explored this multiscale construction more at length by unpacking the C40. See Michele Acuto, *The Urban Link* (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁶⁰ The C40 steering committee includes New York (chair), London, Los Angeles, Berlin, Hong Kong, Jakarta, Johannesburg, São Paulo, Seoul, and Tokyo.

⁶¹ Kristine Kern and Harriet Bulkeley, ‘Cities, Europeanization and Multi-level Governance: Governing Climate Change through Transnational Municipal Networks’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 47:2 (2009), pp. 309–32.

an internal uneven geography persist within the C40 to replicate some of the ‘core-periphery’ logics of contemporary world politics – a reflection that might also be confirmed by the decision to hold the latest 2011 Summit in a rising ‘BRIC’ city such as São Paulo.

Moreover, the problematisation of global cities as key actors in climate governance also suggests another power structure that, although very subtle, underpins the network’s organisation and mobilisation. The Group represents the assumed core of a global urban hierarchy, and if differences in status and political influence can be mapped geographically within the C40, much of the same can be said of the relation between these urban cores and their more or less peripheral ‘peers’ who are not part of the network. Indeed, even the initial networking strategy devised by London in 2005 sought to gather an elite of core cities that, for global prominence and sheer population, were to head an urban-based approach to climate change. As a GLA political officer remarked: ‘Livingstone’s original idea was much in parallel to that year’s G8 ... as the Group gathered the largest economies he gathered the largest cities, where “large” was not just a measure of size but of importance.’⁶² The parallel with the Group of Eight is not casual: the Group’s membership is not, as in other networks, open, and accessible. Rather, the C40 gathers (at least rhetorically) the top echelon of today’s metropolises, and this idea set much of the ground for its establishment.

In practice, such ‘exceptionalist’ reasoning means that C40 cities might have been developing a thicker complex of relations amongst themselves than with other ‘less globalised’ cities, therefore enhancing their grip on world politics and the global economy, and increasing their aggregate network power.⁶³ This cliquishness of C40 cities echoes much of the critiques moved to the elitism of traditional ‘club’ diplomacy. In an attempt to overcome traditional political dependences, these metropolises have devised a new transnational structure at the crossroads between a municipal network and an extended public-private engagement. Yet, in doing so, they have also recast (rather than denied in toto) some of the key rationalities underpinning the very dependences they have so hardly sought to outdo. The Group has since its inception imitated the language and collective action dynamics of both those power politics burdening other environmental paradigms, while taking up innovative hybrid approaches of its own. In particular the C40 case still points at a complex internal political process that, if superficially might be interpreted as horizontal, still holds large degrees of asymmetry, and within which structural unevenness emerged apace.

Risky links?

The direction of the C40’s policymaking process is neither the typical top-down approach of the ‘global deal’ perspective, centred on developing universal conventions to be applied nationally by each negotiating partner, nor the bottom-up civil society lobby that seeks to pressuring actors into binding obligations while also calling for a democratisation of the decision-making process. Rather, as Mikael

⁶² Interview with Greater London Authority political officer, London (30 June 2009).

⁶³ This is also confirmed by a recent quantitative study of the C40 developed in Taedong Lee and Susan van de Meene, ‘Who Teaches and Who Learns?: Policy Learning through the C40 Cities Climate Network’, *Policy Sciences*, 45:3 (2012), pp. 199–220.

Román underlined, the C40 allows for the possibility of ‘governance from the middle’ as the Group connects cities and their allies by mediating from a median positioning ‘below’ the state system and ‘above’ private actors and civil society.⁶⁴ In this sense, the C40 might constitute a prime example of truly transnational network. As such the subpoliticisation of governance structures evinced in this networking process is not just a matter of privatisation: first, in the public-private partnerships constituting much of the bedrock of C40 cities’ internationalisation, government entities such as municipal authorities remain ‘thin’ providers in the sense that they serve a central, but not independent, role in policymaking. Cities in the C40 are still key network-builders but their capacity to mobilise the Group is all the more dependent on non-governmental allies such as the CCI and World Bank. Through this particular linkage, the private sector, represented not solely by corporations and firms but also lobbies and other civil society organisations, acquires a partial mandate to partake in the policymaking technologies of these cities in virtue of its capacity to sustain planning implementation and urban growth.

The subpoliticisation of environmental governance has thus been achieved by these global cities through a transnational network that has developed at the same time a political track parallel to international and global civil society spheres, and a technical track that has provided much of the implementation powers crucial to permit real action beyond the rhetoric of biannual summits. The policy transfer in the workshops or summits can also be pointed at as a type of governing practice with even more pervasive scalar reach than many of the instruments of ‘global deal’ diplomacy, but perhaps less accountable and revolutionary. What this process tells us is that subpoliticisation dynamics can also inspire a ‘depoliticising’ effect ‘shift[ing] from politics to administration’ and ‘from debating principles to debating mechanisms’.⁶⁵ Subpolitics can often be equated with more ‘direct’ forms of political action in that they result in ‘selective interventions’ that have the capacity of ‘bypassing the institutions of will-formation (political parties, parliaments)’ by mobilising political agency beyond alternative grounds.⁶⁶ Hence, the emergence of subpolitical arrangements diminishes governments’ (not just national but also regional and local) privileges to implement and formulate policy autonomously as mandated by their constituencies.⁶⁷ Since it changes the institutional rules and negotiable boundaries of the political, the subpolitical can be said, as Beck puts it, to be able to ‘set politics free’.⁶⁸ This political opening, due to its occurrence in a context that is characterised by some systemic constraints such as those of global markets, also allows for a manipulation of the engagements happening in such alternative governing structures. As such, when pushing towards depoliticisation, this geopolitical respatialisation presents some questionable consequences.

This dynamic might, in fact, result in a ‘suspension of politics’ that, by removing the space of contestation, runs the risk of transforming these transnational links into what James Ferguson famously labelled ‘anti-politics machine’ – an apparatus that

⁶⁴ Mikael Román, ‘Governing from the Middle: The C40 Cities Leadership Group’, *Corporate Governance*, 10:1 (2010), p. 84.

⁶⁵ Thus removing the debate on the acceptability of such principles and shifting the discussion on their technical implementation only. Amanda Root, *Market Citizenship: Experiments in Democracy and Globalization* (London: SAGE, 2007), p. 44.

⁶⁶ Ulrich Beck, *World at Risk* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 95.

⁶⁷ Ulrich Beck, *Power in a Global Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), p. 23.

⁶⁸ Beck, *World Risk Society*, p. 40.

expands the exercise of power through depoliticisation, technicalisation, and temporary suspension of politics proper from even the most sensible political operations.⁶⁹ Now, this does not mean that the networks I have described are devoid of ‘politics’ or that the machinations of these anti-politics dynamics are lacking in power relations. On the contrary, as the multiscale dynamics illustrated in the previous section can evince, anti-politics processes are actually very much power-laden. The ‘political’ that disappears in this instance as the social relations of these urban links bring climate change and planning to a different scale is that space ‘for enunciating difference and for negotiating dissensus’ that allow societies to determine collectively, in Laswell’s popular triad, who ‘gets what, when and how’.⁷⁰

In this context, one of the most dangerous effects of depoliticisation is that, as John Harriss puts it, ‘existing power structures are in fact accepted as a given’.⁷¹ This for instance the case of the ‘international’ architecture when it comes to the C40’s agency. The Group does not seek to contest or ameliorate the shortcomings of such climate responses, but rather devises parallel (or alternative) governance schemes to bypass them. Quite similarly, the inevitability of the global marketplace, as structured through the systems of international financing and global commodity chains, are taken for granted as inescapable fixtures in the emergence of the C40 actor-network, whose strategic planning or city diplomacy solutions are sought via neoliberal terms. This is certainly prompted by the intertwining of the C40 dealings with the CCI, which pushes for a market-friendly (if not ‘oriented’) approach to governance due to its ‘mission of applying the Foundation’s business-oriented approach to the fight against climate change in practical, measurable, and significant ways’.⁷² The coordination of so many metropolitan (and private, if one takes into account CCI, ARUP, and World Bank) interests has thus far been pinpointed on a ‘common gain’ mentality that has to date been presented with little question either from within or without C40 circles. Yet, this means in practice that the C40 approach to climate change, already representative of an aggregate of many local governments needs, is also extending to encompass business agendas that see a great deal of benefits in a largely neoliberal approach to environmental challenges – a trend that neither tighter ties to consultancies such as ARUP nor a privileged access to the World Bank are likely to displace.

Conversely, this rational continuity promotes a twin process: on the one hand, wary of the impediments and dominance of a mostly neoliberal global governance, (global) cities shift the locus, rhetoric, and object of global political agency towards alternative scales in order to bypass such structural constraints. On the other hand, equally conscious of the possibilities that a neoliberal system allows for ‘individual’ agency, these metropolises exert networked influence and gain room for (political)

⁶⁹ James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: ‘Development’, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 255–6.

⁷⁰ See respectively Erik Swyngedouw, ‘Antinomies of the Postpolitical City: In Search of a Democratic Politics of Environmental Production’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 33:3 (2009), pp. 608; and Harold Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: Peter Smith, 1950).

⁷¹ John Harriss, *Depoliticizing Development: The World Bank and Social Capital* (London: Anthem, 2002), p. 11.

⁷² To this one could also add, as Roman notes, the inherent political agenda of the Clinton Foundation itself, which brings with its implementation support the former President’s take on world politics. See Román, ‘Governing from the Middle’, p. 80.

manoeuvre via planning and market instruments that in turn perpetuate the centrality of economic and technical dimensions of the system itself. These two dynamics, if considered jointly, remind us that the positioning of global cities in global governance is inherently the result of a structuration between the two.

The internationalisation of cities into the broader spheres of global governance is in fact not just a result of a cosmopolitan drive for the common good: along with the philosophical tenets for the growing presence of key globalising metropolises in environmental politics, we need to take into consideration the more pragmatic and economically determinist reasons that drive most of this transnational move of City Halls at large. The ‘marketisation’ of city public policy and the commodification of environmental respatialisation at the urban level, in this sense, prompt further governing disaggregation, in particular, do little to improve the oft-unequal *status quo* of the contemporary global system. The ‘marketisation’ of city climate policy, in this sense, might only prompt further hierarchisation between ‘global’ and ‘ordinary’ cities and, more generally, might do little to improve the neoliberal status quo of the contemporary global system.⁷³ So while on the international politics scale cities contribute to raise awareness and promote new green agendas, at the crucial every-day street level of urban policy the contradictions of the neoliberal system that leads to a call for novel governance solutions at a broader scale are perpetrated with more and more ‘politics via markets’.⁷⁴ Since they partake in the continuation of established governing rationalities, which in turn continue some of the underlying logics of contemporary world politics, global cities ultimately limit the revolutionary potential they have in global governance.

This is not to say, however, that a focus on cities is the wrong way for the more critical international studies. On the contrary, there is much to gain from the ‘glocalisation’ of environmental initiatives at scales below and above the state system, and there is certainly much to be praised when it comes to today’s metropolitan innovative potential.⁷⁵ Indeed, as many of the cross-national networks of cities like the C40 are showing us, urban public policy can demonstrate flexibility and diplomatic capability that challenge the effectiveness of the machinations of traditional state-centric alignments. Nevertheless, the environmental (if not, more broadly, the international) role of cities should not go unscrutinised. Unpacking the bases, directions, and long-term political consequences of the emergence of cities in global governance is an imperative for practitioners and analysts at all policymaking levels.

⁷³ This critique is voiced, amongst others in Doreen Massey, *World City* (London: Polity, 2007) and Jennifer Robinson, *Ordinary Cities* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

⁷⁴ Ronnie D. Lipschutz and James K. Rowe, *Regulation for the Rest of Us?* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 173.

⁷⁵ Erik Swyngedouw, ‘Neither Global nor Local: “Glocalization” and the Politics of Scale’, in Kevin R. Cox (ed.), *Globalization: Reasserting the Power of the Local* (New York: Guilford, 1997), pp. 137–66.