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City networks are an essential part of cities' international action. They may be classified in several ways: by the type of actors that form them, by their geographical reach, by the issues they work on, or by being generalist in nature.

In Madrid's case, the city participates in the principal global network United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and has hosted various meetings of its governing bodies. Created in 2004 by merging a range of networks, UCLG was one of the main results of Habitat II (held in Istanbul in 1996). Its emergence has led to talk of the beginning of a phase of the institutionalisation of cities' international action. This new phase could culminate in securing a seat at the global table for cities, in other words, a specific space and formal recognition of participation for cities within the United Nations system (Salmerón, 2016).

Madrid's participation in UCLG is operationalised via Metropolis, a network for large cities, which only cities with over one million inhabitants can join. Madrid also actively participates in regional networks. Among these, the Unión de Ciudades Capitales de Iberoamérica stands out. This international city network aims to build a model of peaceful coexistence and socially responsible development and to consolidate awareness that permits greater understanding and cooperation between the Ibero-American peoples. Further, Madrid forms part of Eurocities, a notable European-level regional city network.

Of the thematic networks that Madrid participates in C40 stands out. This network of cities for climate action holds the clear view that cities will shape our future. One example is the trend towards restricting diesel vehicles. Without having specific competences on the issue, the banning of the most polluting cars from some of Europe's major cities is having direct consequences on the supply side of the car market (Teffer, 2018).

The role of new platforms like C40 and 100 Resilient Cities is to focus attention on specific issues. Their main contribution to the traditional ecosystem of city networks is in promoting specialisation in fields such as the fight against climate change. Though this type of network has

been successful in attracting new actors (civil society organisations and businesses) this is no guarantee of success, not least because of the multiplication of actors.

United Nations agencies, philanthropic organisations and universities have been developing their own urban studies initiatives. Notable examples are CIDOB's Global Cities Programme, the Oxford Programme for the Future of Cities, the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative and the City Leadership Laboratory at University College London, which actively collaborates with the World Health Organization. It should, however, be noted that these kinds of initiative involve as many risks as opportunities. To the extent that they contribute to analysing a phenomenon with global reach, the endeavours are positive, but we must keep working to promote complementarity between the traditional networks and the new platforms. The ecosystem of city networks might be categorised as "Darwinist", as the most active, useful and strongest networks tend to expand and play ever greater roles, while the less useful decline and ultimately disappear.

The web of international networks forms an ecosystem that is constantly evolving, but it is not cities that set the pace of its development. Other actors play a fundamental role in this ecosystem: from states and central governments (with their own soft diplomacy dynamics) to companies with eminently commercial motivations. Then there are the numerous think tanks, study centres and public-private consortiums whose aims and motivations are not always transparent.

Hence the importance of differentiating between the aims of the various networks and platforms. Local governments' main mission is to improve their inhabitants' living conditions. When various cities join to create an international network of a public nature, the main goal is to generate positive impacts in their own territories. But as some of these new platforms are led by foundations and private companies, it is crucial to remember the *raison d'être* of each of these new actors in the international arena.

Despite the shadows these international city networks cast, the added value of the ecosystem they make up is indisputable. As various authors have pointed out, working in networks encourages mutual exchange and learning, allows lobbying systems to be structured, members to be inserted into higher spheres of action, economies of scale to be generated and leadership roles to be secured.

And yet this added value may be said to be inversely proportional to a city's size and capacity: small and medium-sized cities benefit more than large metropolises, as they are able to achieve results that would be unattainable alone. Certain lessons for large cities should be drawn from this:

- Cities like Madrid can and must participate in the international ecosystem by generating direct and indirect positive impacts and addressing the composition and objectives of the ecosystem.
- The generation of economies of scale and securing of leadership roles are less applicable to large cities than to small and medium-sized ones.
- Cities have various types of "power" (or competences). They must use them to align their international strategy with the performance of their duties. Local governments can exercise real and symbolic power over issues by acting with other institutions.

- Metropolises should be particularly selective when it comes to their participation in the ecosystem of international networks, as the benefits to be obtained must align with their own agenda.

That cities are recognised as international actors is a fact. And yet studies of city networks, their governance structures and objectives remain scarce. The potential of city networks should be advancing towards approaches that integrate both local and international dimensions (Acuto et al., 2017).

To conclude, continuous adaptation work is necessary for cities like Madrid. Continuity must be maintained without ceasing to permanently review the international course. This means avoiding fads, recognising initiatives of a markedly business nature, and advancing towards the creation of institutional spaces that enable cities to transfer their agendas to the international ecosystem.

References

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