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**Book reviews
on global economy
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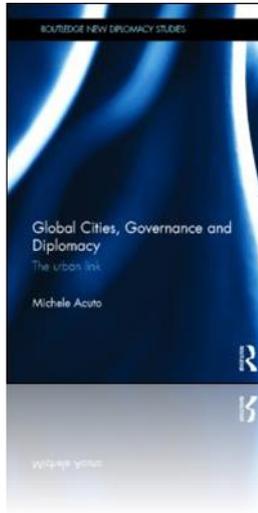


Obra Social "la Caixa"



Global Cities, Governance and Diplomacy: The Urban Link

Acuto, Michele, (2013), Routledge, USA and Canada.



“International studies needs to be wary that the spatiality of political relations is no longer reflected in the mainstream state-centrism, as both internationalist and alternative explanations might provide a too tight fit to match the vast complexity of world affairs.”

“Half of the human population is settled within metropolitan areas. From a social, as much as from a technological viewpoint, humankind is now mirrored in the city more than in any other construct.”

“The urbanization of the world’s population is not solely a physical process, but also an inherently social revolution that redefines the spaces of interaction amongst people, and thus conversely the contemporary practice of political relations. It is the rise of this “urban age” that makes our task of redressing

both the discipline’s blindness to cities a non-postponable necessity. Cities can no longer be sidelined as the sole domain of technical sciences such as architecture, or the “place” of geographers or sociologists.”

Summary

International studies have become rooted in a chronic long-sightedness that has largely neglected the role of cities in domestic affairs and focused solely on the role of the state. This ‘blindness’ or ‘attention deficit’, in the words of Michele Acuto, has undermined the ability of the discipline to appreciate the complexity of world politics, and more importantly, to appreciate the revolution in the basic parameters of 21st century politics that is characterised by an evolution from government towards governance. To amend this misperception, *Global Cities, Governance and Diplomacy* aims to introduce global cities as elements in the architecture of world politics, demonstrating their key role in globalisation. To illustrate this point, the case of the C40, the transnational and hybrid organisation that is combating climate change and is composed of global cities, is examined in detail. This organisation is an example of how global cities produce political structures that influence diplomatic relations.

Moreover, this example shows how the discipline of international relations could benefit from adopting practices from the fields of urban studies and human geography, mainly in terms of accepting innovative approaches and the multiple geometries of power adopted by cities. To this end, Acuto employs a structuralist analytical framework using actor-network theory – and which aims to produce a lens

built on the logic of city diplomacy. In using this approach, Acuto emphasises the need to assess the inter-sectorial processes that constitute the spatiality of global governance. Although the author achieves his goal of moving the discipline of international relations beyond traditional and rigid ideas about states, and avoids the absolute dualism that pits states against cities, his work suffers from an excess of theory over practical application. Only a single case study that links theory and practice is offered when positioning cities in the architecture of global governance – and this case is focused on the C40.

The author

Michele Acuto is research director and senior lecturer in global networks and diplomacy at the Department of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Public Policy (STEEaPP) at University College in London. He is also a member of the Institute for Science, Innovation, and Society at Oxford. Previously, he was a member of the Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California, and a member of the Oxford Programme for the Future of Cities. He has taught science and technology studies at the University of Canberra and international relations at the National University of Australia. He is also author of *The Urban Link* (Routledge), editor of *Negotiating Relief*, co-editor of *Global City Challenges*, *Reassembling International Theory*, and of *Cities and the Global Politics of the Environment* (all published by Palgrave Macmillan).

Key ideas and opinion

The author divides the book into three parts in order to create a structure that enables a systematic investigation of global cities, their organisation, structure, and mutually constructive influence on diplomacy and global governance. Michele Acuto initially focuses on the **agency of the global city** – meaning an analysis of the insertion of the global city in global governance – and discusses the relationship while offering possible interpretations. He then investigates the **structure of the global city, its impact, and the limitations** of its influence in the context of **global environmental governance**. Finally, the author considers how this relationship impacts the **spatiality of international politics**.

The agency of the global city

Global Cities, Governance and Diplomacy begins with a description of the geopolitical context of global governance using **an architecture built around international climate policy. This example provides a clear example of the geopolitical changes in the international role of cities in recent decades.** Cities have joined alongside the state agreements and civil society movements that proliferated in the 80s and 90s in looking

for international solutions to the ‘tragedy of the commons’. **Cities are represented by local authorities or, in some cases, such as London, by regional authorities, and have progressively entered the political arena at the highest level.** There was an initial wave of urban internationalisation in the 90s, and a subsequent expansion of urban-based organisations after 2000.

The International Council for Local Environmental Local Initiatives (ICLEI) was founded in 1990 and underpinned these efforts with **the launch in 1993 of the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP).** This initiative aimed to forge a coalition of cities that together represent ten per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. **Such urban coalitions had little impact on the ‘global agreements’ and were marginalised in the negotiations** – being relegated to a role of pure execution of projects and programs. **However, since 2000,** the increasing interconnectedness – seen as an increasing number of cross-border relationships – and an exchange of urban best practices (as well as an expansion of local governance to other sub-state and non-state actors) **has marked a ‘new localism’ in which cities seek more leverage by implementing transformative local agendas.**

The author emphasises initiatives for cooperation between cities, such as the creation in 2005 of the **World Mayors Council on Climate Change,** and the subsequent declaration of the **2007 World Mayors and Local Governments Climate Protection Agreement,** launched during the 13th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Bali. **These developments mean that cities no longer just provide an ‘actively passive’ role on the global state of affairs, but exert a ‘directly active’ role in diplomacy,** with the creation of transnational networks in the field of global governance.

Structuring the global city

The author focuses the second part of the book on **strategic urban planning to anchor and enhance the central role of global cities in the management of world affairs.** London, the leading global city, is the test case for investigating the influence of transnational networks of cities. **According to the author, London, and particularly the Greater London Authority (GLA) after its establishment in 1999, constitutes an excellent example of transnational agency in action.**

Strategic planning and urban management in London have a history as long as the city’s legacy as a global city. The form of government in the city underwent various administrative reorganisations well into the twentieth century, the largest of which was the creation of the **Greater London Council in 1963** (whose creation was a response to suburban sprawl and the continuing internationalisation of the city). **After being abolished in 1986 by the Thatcher government** because of the widening gap between the Council and the national government, **London was left without a coordinating body for 14 years.** During this period, the global interconnections,

E economic responsibilities, as well as the complexity of the demands of planning a conurbation of seven million people highlighted the need for a governance structure capable of managing and boosting London's overall positioning. As a result, **from late 1990, key urban actors began to plan new local connections** to maintain the traditional global reach of London, both politically and economically, and gradually **focused on the development of a Greater London Authority (GLA).**

The establishment of the GLA involved redefining London's commitment to national, international, and global spheres (as well as more local issues such as neighbourhoods, districts, cities, etc.) relative to the vision of London as a global city and global hub. **The GLA had a vision of London as a 'global', 'prosperous', 'ecological' and 'connected' city.** This vision was revealed in its **bid for the Olympic Games**, and the momentum of diplomatic actions intended to combat climate change (as shown in the 2005 Mayors Summit led by the **then mayor, Livingstone, and which produced the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group** – a transnational political network in which global cities such as London are involved in global environmental governance). Like many other metropolises, London has witnessed the decline of direct state management, an increase in sponsored social and economic projects, and the participation of quasi or non-state actors in a range of networks and public-private partnerships.

In the author's opinion, London may have increased its power in the networks in terms of formulating policy and strategic planning, **but its room for manoeuvre on a global scale remains partially limited by the fact that it is a city.** Thus, hybridisation (i.e., the mix of public-private partnerships in transnational networks) is seen as the best strategy to gain traction in a global scenario that is focused on economic activity. Regarding the increasing inter-sectorial involvement of the GLA in combating climate change, the author points to a cross-sectional role that ranges from localised planning activities to wider leadership initiatives – and the formulation of environmental policies that include London in spheres of global governance such as the C40.

According to the author, **cities in the C40 (a progressively institutionalised network of global cities that has developed a multi-scale climate governance structure)** have tried to overcome inaction in the negotiations on universal state-led environmental frameworks and **focus on cooperation between cities, urban renewal, and the implementation of established planning practices.** Acuto claims that this approach has produced tangible results since the first summit in 2005. The C40 has followed the logic of Livingstone, whereby **the task of global cities is to work together to maximise efficiency and lead by example** in environmental policies. The C40's style of policy formulation is rooted in sharing information on environmental policy and facilitating public-private partnerships (PPPs); this represents a structural novelty with respect to the universal 'global deal' approach to decision-making and civil society activism that has characterised global governance in recent decades. **The C40 is not built on the**

logic of strengthening the global approach, nor the advocacy campaigns typical of civil society. Instead, the group's approach emphasises the productivity of the differences between cities (and learning potential) and the incentive of competition between cities.

This has resulted in ad-hoc public-private implementation and operations according to the principles revealed in major group meetings. The group has thus managed to present its own versions of climate solutions, and **common practices to meet the needs of each city have been developed. The C40 has enhanced the international legitimacy and policymaking independence of cities.** Therefore, for Acuto, the C40 is not just a set of connections between countries, but represents 'group agent' in international policy that can create compromise between the urban scale and other scales. **This has resulted in a hybrid position in terms of global governance with several advantages:** firstly, **cities have the governmental authority to locally implement policies and mobilise resources for joint action;** secondly, as a transnational network, **the C40 can act as a collective actor and bring pressure to bear at multiple scales of governance** (ranging from private to international and not limited by the strict dynamics of international decision making) to develop strategies for adapting to climate change.

For the author, C40 demonstrates that global cities have the capacity to change the geography of global governance and sculpt new government alliances – and therefore new geometries of power. Global cities have sought to position themselves as essential building blocks for effective climate governance. Some cities have increasingly adopted a mediating role in the network itself – and whose internal workings show two trends: **firstly, the central role that the major global cities of the C40 tend to occupy (e.g. London, New York, Toronto, and Los Angeles)** versus more peripheral cities (e.g. Cairo, Lima, Karachi or Warsaw), which, despite participating in most of the workshops, play only a limited role in the main organisation of the network. And secondly, the tendency to hierarchy: global C40 cities are in a dominant position relative to cities not affiliated with the network. From a more general point of view, this implies that **cities are participating in the scattering and re-aggregation of control, authority, and a greater policy influence that goes beyond the characteristic 21st century state-based vertical hierarchy.**

A progressive urban agenda for international relations

In the final part of the book, Acuto attempts to outline some preliminary conclusions about the structure of global cities – which he considers to be strategic catalysts for transnational action – and of global governance. **He draws attention to the need for global cities (or 'invisible gorillas' as he describes them) to inspire new perspectives in the analysis of politics and international diplomacy.** This involves changing the political processes and relationships across different structures (sub-systemic), such as municipal governments, as well as the production of new structures, as seen in the

case of the cross-border connections created by the Climate Leadership Group. Although the current hierarchical system of international relations is no longer the only operating system, Acuto reminds us that its overall structure remains a mainstay in the broader global governance commitments. **Therefore, rather than replace central governments, the links created around cities will displace the dominance of the nation state with more fluid and cross-sectional connections in which states are just one of many partners in the assembly.**

For Acuto, beyond the consequences for traditional state structures, the sub-politicisation of international politics **leads to increasingly complex network in the field of international politics.** Governing is no longer just the prerogative of states, but a relational feature of social organisation and political connections through multiple layers of geography. While the politics of scale are increasing in global governance, strategic policy formulation has become a necessary instrument to interconnect the various elements of the political stage. This leads, in turn, to **the creation of new hybrid spaces of engagement that increase the likelihood of breakdown and re-aggregation beyond traditional politics.** For the author, **multi-level and network narratives** can help us take into account the vast number of actors and structures intertwined in the production of political alliances, ranging from global to local.

Given the lack of theoretical and multidisciplinary tools needed to understand the complexity of the **relevance of global cities for global governance, international relations theorists have ignored most of its practical relevance.** More importantly, in the view of Acuto, turning a blind eye to the role of major cities means that these theorists hold substantial responsibility for the potential depoliticisation that underlies urban contacts and the rise of technocrats who are reshaping global governance beyond the international outlines. For the author, **the internationalisation of cities in the wider spheres of global governance is not only due to a cosmopolitan impulse to manage the common good, but is also the result of more pragmatic and economic motivations.**

Thus, sustainable initiatives are often defined as the need for cities to compete to attract capital, tourism, culture, and position in city rankings. **The marketisation of cities' public policies and the commodification of environmental urban planning can lead to an even greater hierarchy separating global cities from ordinary ones,** and do little to correct global inequality. The author concludes by stressing that **while there is much to gain from the 'glocalisation' of initiatives, analysts and practitioners must examine the growing role that cities are playing in global governance.** This, according to the author, will require scholars to leave the comfort zone of international relations. The contribution that global cities can make to the discipline of international relations is their ability **to encourage innovative forms of multidisciplinary engagement between urban studies academics and political sociologists.** However, this will, in the words of Acuto, bring more complexity than abstraction.