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Public Policy, Global Cities
and the State:
a Case for a Comparison
Between Barcelona and Paris

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The general understanding of domestic policymaking – involving among others legitimization of public action, interest representation, and problem solving – has increasingly been challenged in Europe in recent times by local processes of policy change away from the exclusive purview of central governments. The impact of the economic crisis in housing and education, or the formidable challenge of health pandemics, are among the many new issues that accrue to global cities in the face of the reluctant involvement of other levels of government. Currently, city authorities are driven to reformulating long-established challenges pertaining to the territories they manage, such as inequality, security, and sustainability, thus redefining the terms of their cooperation with other levels of government.

A new mode of city governance is emerging, and global cities are at the forefront of this transformation. While the inner dynamics of the cities' policy process have been instrumental in laying down the foundation for this change, the play of powerful transnational forces has been equally decisive in driving most processes of change of global cities at the local level. We observe such forces in many different policy areas, from regulatory governance to innovative social policies, but also in the management of specific issues like the relentless flow of migrants or novel political practices of participatory and digital democracy, among many other issues. There is a distinct territorial and urban component to this process, whereby concerns originally taking place *in the city*, have increasingly morphed into concerns *of the city*, as global policy issues have gained specific traction because of their increasingly local and urban expression.¹

To a great extent, this change of expression has occurred by reshaping the scope and substance of many policies that were framed differently during the twentieth century. These policies mostly centered on national government-level concerns, while other government levels, or even territorial dimensions, were downplayed, if not neglected altogether. With this change in scale, do we necessarily see a significant alteration to the substance or scope of these policy concerns? For policy domains such as development, innovation, security and sustainability, it could be argued that the combined social demand for higher living standards and safer and competitive environments of urban populations has brought to light the imperative of addressing otherwise complex issues within the tangible and visible materiality of cities.² While a first reading of this transformation could be interpreted as a way out of the complexity of policymaking, we claim, rather, that the opposite is taking place.

Cities' political leadership has been challenged with new demands of high complexity – most of them of an inter-sectoral nature – that require the articulation of complex networks of interested stakeholders, and which involve difficult and interdependent policy interventions. In this sense, cities

¹ This has been the example of migration policies for instance, traditionally conceived on an *ex urbe* capacity but increasingly being thought of, and thought by, stakeholders operating in large cities, in Europe in particular.

² Other specific transformations have even altered the very perception of city development aspiring to other pursuits, less driven by material accumulation and focused rather on community building, resilience and 'care'.

have become natural laboratories for the transformation of policymaking in a context of stagnated and disputed globalisation. If major European cities have responded with a traditional array of instruments in terms of investments,³ real estate promotion and infrastructure development, they have also resorted to ad hoc tactical interventions and innovation processes, with ever-faster response times, as a way of coping (Silva 2016). The COVID-19 crisis has been a significant contributing factor in this way, but not the only contributing factor by any means, as increasingly visible challenges arising from climate change have had consequences for urban environments, accelerating residential, production and logistical strategies (Schilthuizen 2018).

These topical requests differ significantly between the industrialised north and the aspirational Global South, and yet they have somehow resolutely met across the spectrum. Nonetheless, in the context of Western European cities, what differs from a global response template is the nature of the arrangements that have, slowly but surely, enshrined a certain mode of governance (Treib et al 2005) that promotes citizens' rights, whether aspirational or real, as well as an understanding of how regulations pertaining to vital city services should be designed. Global cities like London and Paris and Barcelona more specifically, combine a unique set of features in which goals of human progress, social justice, and participation evolve into specific planning and governmental responses. These responses accelerate, but also collide with, the relevant dynamics of change brought about by challenging globalisation patterns and the emergence of novel stakeholders.

With these general transformations as the background, we aim to examine how two major European cities face these substantial epochal challenges today, from their redefinition of traditional planning and development – in the light of climate change and the imperative of sustainability – to the revision of service disruption brought about by digital services and innovations increasingly in the hands of private actors (Storper, 2017; Artigas, 2019). More fundamentally, in the face of mushrooming new risks, which public responses in terms of city programmes, planning and regulations are emerging? Some signals indicate that European cities are becoming the place where a profound redefinition of social and political choices with regards to the most extreme features of today's market economy is taking place.⁴ To study new modes of city governance constitutes an ever-formidable analytical challenge, as in most cases it represents a continuous policy experiment. For these reasons, the scope, the pace and the instrumental capacity of urban-driven policy processes can often outpace national decision processes, and this has turned global European cities into strategic engines for social change on our continent.

³ These response strategies have been driven mostly by intertwining the objectives of national, regional and local governments, responding to perceived as traditional crisis 'garbage can' references.

⁴ Note on the gig economy in cities.

1. COMPARING PARIS AND BARCELONA: THE EXTENSION OF EXPERIMENTAL GOVERNANCE THROUGH PARTICIPATION?

Paris and Barcelona have been relevant examples of policy processes increasingly gravitating towards city boundaries. This has turned them into a vital locus of policy design and implementation of relevant national policies, but they are also increasingly defined by city-specific political struggles and concerns related to specific issues – transportation and housing to name two – and their corresponding framing (da Cruz et al 2019). While this is a transformation that has operated broad and large in many European cities over the last two decades, there are specific traits of these centralities in Paris and Barcelona. Both cities have openly embraced a strong metropolitan template, whether operational or in the process of becoming operational. In absolute political terms, we observe important power struggles taking place in their territory and very much defining the chances of implementation of national policy responses. In this way, both cities have played a crucial role in shaping the prospects of policy success of programmes and initiatives carried out by central governments in traditional and novel areas.⁵ Among the latter, issues such as the cities' integration policies, technological disruptive industrial processes – in the form of transnational digital platforms, but also in the form of the modernisation of public services – have been met with a reshuffling of material, reputational and symbolic policy resources. There have also been specific and very substantial changes to the policy agendas and resources of these metropolitan entities. With a corresponding imperative of tending to increasingly sophisticated demands,⁶ these two global cities have reinforced their key strategic roles.

In this sense, both cities have seen local regulations of both market and society strengthening: urban society and political system arrangements that served as the blueprints for institutional continuity and path-dependent processes have seen 'new' policies coming from the external environment as a reaction to challenges and opportunities. While no uniform reaction to these challenges has been observed in Europe (Savitch & Kantor, 2002; Jessop, 2002; d'Albergo & Lefèvre, 2007) these responses have been perceived as being more legitimate – if at all more effective and governable – when produced through consensual and cooperative relationships between political institutions and urban society. In this sense, in an age of increasing benchmarking and policy diffusion at the local level, the importance of fine-grained comparisons between these different responses cannot be overstated (Mavraux, 2017; Le Galès, 2019).

Are we witnessing the development of a form of experimental governance and the dedicated framing of policy responses in the case of these two metropolises? Several developments point to the

⁵ A very relevant example is to be found on the intersection of competitive and innovative national policies at the local level in Western European cities, together with metropolitan designs coming from both the national and local level. At times, supporting each other, but often at odds, they have become key intersectional testing grounds for the articulation of multi-level governance. See Albach 2018, Artigas & Castellano 2021.

⁶ This is an evolution witnessed in several policy sectors such as the provision of water services (Eau de Paris) or energy (Barcelona Energia).

acceleration of previously stated globalisation dynamics and novel governance modes based on more reactive formats of policy response in the face of ever-accelerating challenges. On one hand, the acceleration of investment waves since the early 2000s have led to financial capital's increasing capacity for disruption, becoming increasingly mobile, adaptive and disruptive through specific ventures pertaining to the digital economy.⁷ On the other hand, we find a multiplicity of platform-related actors, and an increasing balkanisation of stakeholders at the city level within the formerly rather unified sectors of energy, mobility, health, etc. Bringing about innovations, these processes have pushed local authorities in both cities to react to this new level playing field. This has forced them to mobilise important policy resources in the form of expertise, technical savvy and the coordination of capabilities, thus extending the traditional reach of governance arrangements to new actors.

These novel, experimental responses do not necessarily stem from the mere initiative of city governments, as they have in part been the outcome of the limits of traditional command-and-control responses. Resorting to longstanding path-dependent practices, the outputs generated by national policies for issues developing within city perimeters have often been amiss, if not a misfit, in part because of their disconnect with local priorities, and in part because of their inability to reflect on the part played by these cities in greater responses to pressing global challenges. Thus, certain issues have proven impossible for the two cities to address by resorting to traditional competition mechanisms – novel city services – or in terms of the traditional multi-level interactive mechanisms such as climate change or decarbonisation strategies. Actually, environmental programmes in particular, based on international, and at times even remote, negotiations, have slowly but surely given way to a more locally based approach; an approach in which cross-border coordination with similar metropolitan entities has proven to be far more effective for expanding the experimental capacity of cities to be involved in environmental global governance (Lin, 2018; Gordon, 2020)⁸.

Inasmuch as this evolution points to the necessity of a local framing of environmental, innovation-, and digital-related issues, it points to tangible outcomes that 'make sense' for a concerned population. In this sense, the increasingly high levels of participation in key decisions regarding city development, acceptable transformations and service expansion have been increasingly connected in both cities to open consultation, the formalisation of participatory channels, and ongoing levels of experimentation regarding civil society and local/regional government interactions for improving city governments' decisions.

In the case of Paris, urban renewal projects have undergone regular consultation procedures such as the *Plan Local d'Urbanisme* (PLU) and the *Débat public*, which are open to both individuals

⁷ These investments have a very novel composition, as they are being driven by non-traditional sources such as East Asia (for example, China and Singapore) operating under specific arrangements of ownership and strategic planning in international markets. Other more recent waves of investment have spawned after the Brexit, with a redistribution of financial firms and assets across Europe.

⁸ In particular, through organisations such as Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), the C40 cities have become pivotal stakeholders in the large city networks which coordinate global urban responses to climate change.

and associations. More recent attempts relative to cities have been the initiatives carried out throughout 2020 by the French government with the *Convention Citoyenne pour le Climat (CCC)* that tackled an important city-specific range of issues. The institutionalisation of these participatory channels and regular interactions with policymakers have consolidated robust policy networks in the French capital, in particular during the tenure of the current mayor, Anne Hidalgo (2014–). The overall contributions of the public to decisions undertaken by the local and regional government are still under scrutiny, as the city governments have been able to keep the upper hand during the process.⁹ Other initiatives, such as the CCC, implemented at the national level but closely related to city issues, while having opened the discussion on an environmental transition to new areas and expanding on the present ones, has so far remained firmly in the hands of the French national government.

Since the 1970s, Barcelona has on its own promoted a model of new governance with more participatory and inclusive decision-making models concerned with the ‘urban planning and in the quality of the city’ (Borja, 2013). The first proposals for citizen participation in the urban environment were developed with the design of popular urban plans setting up institutional channels from the mid-1980s onwards. With the consolidation of representative democracy throughout the 1980s, when a system of sectoral advisory councils was institutionalised, technical criteria prevailed in urban planning with active cooptation practices.¹⁰ However, these norms made it possible to promote social participation by decentralising public administration, which opened the way to the creation of policies that more actively promoted citizen participation, thus facilitating relations with the community and increasing opportunities to promote contact with the inhabitants (Borja, 1996). This last decade has seen the institutionalisation of participation in Barcelona strengthened through the expansion of its legal framework – at both the local and regional level – which has allowed for more widely encompassing and far-reaching responses with regards to addressing important issues pertaining to planning, housing, and the repossession of certain utilities, although the outcomes of these different processes are still uncertain.¹¹ Current participation bodies and instruments can be territorial and sectoral in nature, but have now been introduced broadly in most local policymaking processes. They have thus contributed to the discussion of public policies that motivate territorial development at its different scales, and sectoral development when the functions are related to a certain functional sphere of municipal action or city utilities (Flores, 2020).¹²

The limits of these participatory mechanisms, as drivers for introducing new modes of governance and for revising current regulatory frameworks for key intervention areas in the city, have

⁹ See in particular the observations pertaining to the preselection process for the participatory budget of the French capital in Nicolas Douay, *La numérisation des dispositifs de participation de la Mairie de Paris*, Netcom, 30-3/4, 2016

¹⁰ Giving way on occasions, these gave rise to associative patronage practices. See Bonet, 2014.

¹¹ <https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/vinclesbcn/en/noticia/616831> y <https://www.economista.es/energia/noticias/10996907/01/21/Barcelona-Energia-la-electrica-publica-de-Colau-vende-la-luz-mas-cara-que-su-competencia.html>

¹² As per Diputació de Barcelona. (2017b). Reglament tipus de participació ciutadana. Col·lecció, Eines. Sèrie Benestar i ciutadania. Recuperado de <http://www1.diba.cat/l1breria/pdf/58846.pdf>

been extensively addressed in the context of both cities (Font & Blanco, 2006). There is a lingering question over whether formal rules and official rhetoric actually concretise real participatory practices and indicate a significant shift in the expansion of the scope and substance of policies in the city. However, growing experience and learning processes both contribute to progressively closing the gap.

2. EXPERIMENTING, FRAMING, MEDIATING AND CHALLENGING ISSUES DIFFERENTLY: WHICH ROLE FOR TREND-SETTING CITIES?

We also observe that in both cities, novel participatory mechanisms have been combined with another dynamic: the impact of multi-level governance in the context of European cities, as policy communities of urban planning and urban renewal projects influenced by European programmes intertwine.¹³ Together with other transnational dynamics at work, such as the participation in ICLEI and in the C40, these different networks have endorsed inclusive processes, and at times isomorphic policy responses, in relation to specific policy domains such as climate-change-related transitions (Steffen et al., 2019).

This evolution, which combines relatively novel participatory mechanisms with coordinated transnational responses, can be interpreted as the result of the limitations of traditional policy instruments – such as direct regulatory interventions, subsidies, and taxes – that have a limited capacity to provide the necessary incentives for innovation, new technologies, and knowledge-related responses at the local level.¹⁴ It is therefore not surprising to observe that Barcelona and Paris both participate intensively in the development of experimental trans-governmental initiatives,¹⁵ in which action networks (Heijden, 2016) and distinct collaborative knowledge facilitate mechanisms aimed at reducing urban resources and carbon intensities. Irrespective of the fact that over recent decades these action networks have linked different city entities across borders – or even cities with major innovating multinational companies such as Google, Huawei, Cisco, and Uber – cities like Paris and Barcelona have embraced a *trend-setting strategy*.¹⁶ Within these networks, these two cities have endorsed the role of innovating, sometimes even revolutionising, entities regarding the introduction of specific regulations and legal instruments. In this sense, irrespective of the concrete contribution of transnational networks to their specific policy responses (Kern & Alber, 2010), the latter have been powerful legitimising instruments for local decisions and have contributed to the international influence of these two metropolitan entities.

¹³ Such as the URBACT program. See Kahn (2017).

¹⁴ In the sense that cities are often delegated to implement national or regional strategies with traditional governance instruments for low-carbon development and transformation (James, 2015).

¹⁵ Thus, ‘...the notion of experimental governance has made rapid inroads in governance theory and practice. Its origins can be traced back to renowned social reformers such as John Dewey (1991 [1927]) and Donald Campbell (1969). They argue that governance instruments need to be treated as somewhat malleable and fluid interventions, as opposed to the more conventional understanding of instruments as fixed programmes’ (van der Heijden, 2016, p.5). From an extension of these notions towards pragmatic governance as per energy controversies, see Zittoun and Chailleux (2021).

¹⁶ We define a trend-setting strategy as the ability – alleged or real – of city governments to position their policy experimentations as benchmarks within a specific policy sector and/or domain.

We argue that this position of relative strength has given these two global cities a greater latitude and self-reinforcing mechanisms to engage in experimental, collaborative approaches, as they seek novel ways in which to consolidate the tacit knowledge of non-state actors that can be included in the instrumentation design, thus opening up possibilities of improving effectiveness (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2011) and compliance (Borzel, 2012). Paris and Barcelona have placed experimentation at the centre of public action at the city level, both internally and externally, which has opened up interesting avenues for setting up limits of city action of larger national decisions on the one hand, and interesting scaling possibilities on the other.

This experimental governance format has led cities increasingly to embrace direct forms of regulatory governance, often setting up rules for national regulatory frameworks that have failed to address relevant sectoral issues that either converge, reveal themselves, or erupt at the city level. These regulatory formats have stemmed from the maturation of participatory channels and are partly related to a form of increasing localised expertise on the city dimension of sectoral policies. Energy and water management, but most recently transport, have proven this interesting trend in both Paris and Barcelona, where specific, direct legal provisions issued at the city level have reclaimed vital services that operated ‘in the city for the city’. The example of *Eau de Paris*, under public ownership, or *Barcelona Energia*, operating at the metropolitan level, are both relevant examples of innovative public ownership and management experiments. They have both become benchmarks at the global level and have ignited similar processes in other cities, ranging from Jakarta to Santiago de Chile. More interestingly, because of the proximity of these two major European cities, several key decisions pertaining to new digital platform services have been disseminated between them, revealing an incredible potential for regulatory transfers between global cities (Artigas and Castellano 2020, 2021).

The experimentation with locally generated instruments for specific city-related issues has become the other important arm of this governance transformation. It is particularly promising because of its scaling possibilities. If an experiment works in a specific part of a city, that experiment, or the lessons learned from it, might easily be scaled up to other cities in similar circumstances (Sassen, 2015). It might also be scaled up to regions, and even to the national level. These dynamics, no doubt, have constituted an important transformation in recent years, where the increasing use of market- and corporate-based approaches and incentives—such as benchmarking, information sharing, and communication strategies – has narrowed the gap between national and local policy responses. The fact that technology- and environment-related issues have raised the stakes and the nature of challenges increasingly dealt with at the local level, has led in time to highly localised and embedded governance instruments which depend on complex networks of local actors involved in each city’s governance (Evans, 2011).

While these trends are encouraging, and there is much joint learning about this type of governance – particularly in academia in recent years – it is important to highlight that small, but relevant, differences in city contexts have the potential to challenge the transferability of these

approaches. This could ultimately be the case for both Paris and Barcelona.¹⁷ The dynamism of city interests, the nature of support coalitions and policy networks and, last but not least, the very nature of the political system, determine the scaling up or re-appropriation of relevant issues at the city level and the limits of knowledge-based instruments. For example, city leadership in global environmental governance, and in particular the ambitions of both Paris and Barcelona to become global leaders in low-carbon urban development, eventually may not be sufficient to force these transformations that rely on a support base and on coordination imperatives with other government levels.

3. THE METROPOLITAN DIMENSION OF PARIS AND BARCELONA: FRIEND OR FOE?

The metropolitan nature of the two cities, where multi-level territorial articulation is complex – including municipalities and the different priorities of the metropolitan city and regional government for growth and competitiveness – can lead to diverse appreciation of the pressing needs of certain issues, such as environmental concerns (Jessop, 2002). The way in which metropolitan entities are able to deal with these at times conflicting interests and/or identities can be streamlined by resorting to a complementary, but not necessarily politically institutionalised, coordinated presence of governance and participatory practices. But at times too, a more voluntarist collaboration, or even a strong institutional construct, may be the indispensable locus for gathering the necessary resources to address issues that transcend the strict city limits. Such issues are an increasing concern for metropolitan city regions. The Ville de Paris discovered for instance how important new urban policies were, including economic development as a central aim, as the initially positive position of the city among the global cities did not improve without political measures aimed at innovation and competitiveness. It is no less true, however, that the imperative of agglomeration has coexisted in the Parisian case with regards to expanding the strategic operational capacity of the city, as proven by the ongoing reorganisation of the metropolitan territory under the banner of *Grand Paris*. As more recent research has highlighted, this process is still very much underway and remains prone to significant fragmentation and political conflict.¹⁸ The metropolitan area of Barcelona, which has regained its capacities in different policy areas since 2010, started to articulate a metropolitan regulatory governance on key issues such as transport, the environment, and utilities such as electricity or water.

¹⁷ From an analytical standing point, the capacity to compare embedded public policy responses and infer similar sequences or dynamics at work is hampered by the uniqueness of power relations and actors' systems localized at the local level (Zittoun and Chailleux 2021, Ch. 1).

¹⁸ As Renaud Epstein puts it '(...) It is through the prism of this double socio-spatial and municipal fragmentation, the link of which has been reaffirmed to justify the recent reforms of the city policy (planning law for the city and urban cohesion of February 21, 2014, known as the Lamy law) and metropolitan institutions (law on the modernisation of public action territorial and affirmation of the metropolises of January 27, 2014, known as the Maptam law, and the law of June 3, 2010 relating to Greater Paris) 'that city policy in the Île-de-France metropolis should be examined (Epstein 2020).

Because of the important processes of agglomeration and the concentration of resources and social dynamics arising from these new processes (Storper, 2014) that we have already detailed, large cities and their metropolitan areas have the capacity to raise new issues that are specific to their own predicament. This is not entirely new, but from a strict political standing point, it is certainly recent and a very relevant transformation in the age of experimental governance and globalisation. By all accounts, cities certainly currently confront the opportunity of addressing long-established policy problems under a more tangible scope, sometimes addressing the problems directly, and resorting to innovative policies at the local level or even resorting to social arrangements which cannot be seen at other levels. In addition, their capacity to move issues to the top of the governmental agenda, based on their more salient features addressed in their *urban* form, remains a powerful lever of political action. Examples of these emerging policy processes at the local level – including utilities, services, land use (agriculture and peri-urban development), social justice, innovation among many others – pertain to multiple areas, and have been expanding in recent decades.

There is an additional dimension to the emerging relevance of cities as policy actors. Cities have proven in the past that they can collaborate by means of specific partnerships that have produced relevant outcomes at the European level, as per the INTERREG and URBA programmes from the ERDF. However, today's cities are strongly interlinked through multiple channels and networks in a more established structure than before. In addition, there has been a long-established tradition of subsidiarity at the local level in the context of the EU (Hall et al., 2011). But this dynamic has evolved into more assertive forms of network governance in recent years and is becoming a growing political dynamic. In the face of sluggish or unsatisfactory policymaking processes at the national and European level, in particular in the face of pressing challenges such as climate-change-related issues for instance, there have been increasingly loud calls for more straightforward public action, starting from the city level upwards (Swyngedow, 2020).

While increasing metropolitan relevance bears an intrinsically, though not entirely, bottom-up dynamic to it, four decades of transnational forces at play – originating from more recent forms of globalisation – have contributed to this call to arms too. Whereas commercial, financial, but also social relations between cities¹⁹ have favoured the spread of important local policy processes across the world – igniting both resistance and partnership in response to specific environmental challenges and to market and technological innovations, as well as market and technological innovations – they have also observed the emergence of a global market for the policy needs of the cities. In this context of intense inter-city interactions, metropolitan entities are thus engaged in formidable, and at times insidious, trade-offs in the form of an increasing inter-dependency on other global cities. These patterns are often driven by furious market dynamics that have an unprecedented capability to disrupt, and which threaten crowding out policymaking altogether because of the number of private global players who are involved

¹⁹What the OECD has labeled as the human face of globalization. OECD 2014.

in shaping the provision of local services and networks. Here, we should highlight the role of large real estate investments, global service providers, city transport managers, among other dynamics, that represent significant trends that affect metropolises.

There is a threat from global service providers that undermines a city's autonomy and that lies at every stage of the policymaking cycle. These powerful entities – such as transportation digital platforms, smart-city system developers, and global investors – have acquired the power to address issues, and sometimes even to provide predictable, tangible outcomes in advance. This is in stark contrast to traditional policy responses. In the face of this extravagant plans²⁰ which have in recent years also provided a cautionary tale or two in this respect,²¹ there is a very real risk of local policymaking becoming irrelevant for providing effective responses through traditional multi-level policy channels, while private global standards are emerging as the dominant procedures for policy initiatives in local politics. The problems highlighted by these transnational forces – whether water-integration paradigms promoted by the OECD, new transportation models driven by powerful firms (Lyft, Uber, FreeNow), digital platforms for accommodation (Airbnb), or safe-city solutions (Huawei) (Artigas, 2019) – can be observed in both Barcelona and Paris. These problems nonetheless need to be substantiated every time and have been met in part with innovative, ad hoc responses. At times, however, such processes have also led these large metropolises to engage in fierce competition with each other. They have aimed at striking key investment deals and agreeing on the location, or relocation, of innovation centres connected to these corporations. In order to attract talent, resources and ideas, a plethora of metropolitan-level programmes have led to a change in the breadth and scope of public action and have introduced innovative policy processes driven by these urban transformations.

4. A NEW FUNCTIONAL CONTRACT: FROM GOVERNANCE TO REGULATORY GOVERNANCE TO SOVEREIGNTY?

As we have already detailed, urban policies have expanded and have become more diverse over the years in the two cities examined, as they have in most global cities. There are many specific issues that have arisen as the result of new varieties of social interactions within cities in the context of globalisation and its emerging tensions: specific segregation dynamics, policing data-intensity, clustering and competitiveness, knowledge generation and valorisation, and international migration management. These issues call for specific policy responses *thought by* as well as *thought for* the local level, although their designs and effects might also span several other levels of government. Such transformations taking

²⁰ Which has led to an important revision of the smart city canonical model stemming from the IT companies themselves. See https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/rethinking_smart_cities_from_the_ground_up_2015.pdf

²¹ As in the case for Sidewalk Labs in Toronto by Alphabet, and the decision to curtail the initial ambition and promise of the project. Financial Times 20/04/2020. Another example lies in the, at times, normative research connected to new urban surveillance system capabilities as inevitable vectors of social control, disregarding an important body of the literature on technical systems, and pointing to data overflow and disruption possibilities. See Kitchin 2019.

place *in cities* and driven by social interactions can be perceived in the city voters' political behaviour, which has evolved significantly in recent decades between the core and the periphery of cities (Epstein 2020). Here, issues have arisen – as they relate to the demand for healthy, liveable environments, but also to new *functional contracts* – as new policy challenges that may have a direct impact on local and metropolitan populations. To find response strategies for the operational needs of cities today, local stakeholders and political representatives require intelligence and prospective resources to act as global cities, as they struggle with the interactions of the powerful, sometimes even disruptive, forces of a new service-driven economy that operates from a global perspective. These private global entities, both old and new – exemplified by powerful financial entities such as venture capital (VC) firms, new digital platforms, and traditional companies – are spearheading an unprecedented pressure for change. They concentrate at the city level by cutting across multiple policy domains and retaining their involvement in other levels of government.

These global firms and the dynamics they generate do not operate in a vacuum; they meet legacies of long addressed/unaddressed city issues in the form of specific policy outcomes. They also try to meet, and have the potential to shape, the institutional complexities of past and current internal bureaucratic struggles and specific policy networks/ government arrangements in city politics. In this sense, the combination of these transformations is exhausting the traditional metropolitan governance responses, as understood in practice and in the literature since the 1990s. This combination is also actively unveiling pathways by way of addressing *new* substantive issues, introducing policy proposals, and setting up the arena for new struggles in relation to these courses of action. This is reflected in the transformations of current urban politics as many global cities confront such dilemmas. For example, a new form of regulatory urbanism is emerging in which the cities' ability to respond to local challenges will be determined by their understanding of, and subsequent development of, resources of complex technical and scientific knowledge for the required policy capacity to 'steer the boat' (Levi Faur, 2014). However, overcoming these firms' technocratic leadership and private standard dominance, and empowering those who ultimately suffer or benefit from these interventions, remains fundamental. This is seldom better achieved than by citizens' participatory mechanisms that can provide both a framework and a narrative for the challenge ahead, and possibly also to provide related means of intervention by city residents. For this reason, learning how regulatory governance principles can be reconciled with the imperatives of local participation, and with a locally based understanding of the implications of these interactions, is the main challenge for large cities today.

Establishing or re-establishing a dented sovereignty, rather than assessing it by fiat or by delegation, points to a different sovereignty struggle than the one raised by a traditional central government–local government tug of war (Hall, 2004; Jordana, 2019). Rather than exercising dominion over territories, in the traditional understanding of domestic government, the challenge ahead points to the capacity of metropolitan city governments – and, by indirect extension, transnational city networks – to harness these forces to their own benefit. They might even do this for the common good of the

cities' inhabitants by coordinating them, setting up clear rules and governing principles that increase predictability and reduce the possibilities of disruption. In the same vein, as the COVID 19 crisis has already shown, the capacity of cities to cut themselves off from these interactions, and to recast the very organisational nature of urban economic and social dynamics, reveals the combined potential impact that cities can exert nowadays in reshaping entire economic sectors and global social dynamics. In this sense, the problem is not so much the extent to which we have transcended the industrial metropolises of the twentieth century and their clear distribution of functions. The problem, rather, is who has the greatest power of disruption, and more fundamentally, how can metropolises rule in this era of regulatory governance and global fragmentation?

5. THE TERRITORIAL DIMENSION OF POLICYMAKING: REASSEMBLING PUBLIC ACTION AT AN ACTIONABLE SCALE

The belief that cities are mere arenas where important issues are decided – *in spite of their being ingrained with a certain perception of national politics* – has become invalid for analytical purposes. If it was ever like that in the past, the situation has now decisively changed. Disregarding the complex role that cities play would be to neglect the transformation of cities into entities encompassing but also increasingly conformed of powerful actors engaged in important transnational networks and having acquired in recent decades a relevant and substantial policy capacity. In addition, it is important to be aware that the bureaucracies of global cities participate increasingly in complex, multi-level trade-offs with regional governments in such a way that they have become almost region-wide metropolises, and, in most cases, have extended these activities beyond current administrative limits. Quite often, traditional state bureaucracies are also involved in, and support, such initiatives, but they do not necessarily lead them. They tend to partner with these fortunate cities, thus benefiting from their support (Jordana, 2019).

All these processes facilitate, and sometimes complicate, the provision of territorialised public goods to global metropolises, enabling, but sometimes also sidelining, cities' traditional stakeholders in subtle decision-making processes. As mentioned before, these processes raise important questions of policy coordination for those actors who participate in regulatory governance. The mediating capacity that these urban entities and their political leadership use when negotiating their development on their own terms is part of a complex interplay and trade-off. So, what are the consequences we can foresee for policymaking in cities? The transformation of metropolitan politics – as a result of all the changes and influences already referred to, as well as the emergence of new actors operating at the global level – is far-reaching, given that the traditional advocacy coalition framework and traditional roles of policy entrepreneurship are shifting constantly by the enduring presence of these all-influential actors.

Finally, we have to highlight the growing provision of sophisticated policy instruments applied to city politics that represent the last element in this sequence. These instruments, with their increasingly technical complexity, self-proclaimed evident value, and capacity to crowd out potential alternatives at the implementation stage, are a formidable challenge, because in the long run they can alter the very formulation of policy problems (Halpern and Le Galès 2011). Among these instruments, sophisticated regulatory instruments emerge as a major source of transformation. These instruments allow the configuration of new models of governance at the local and metropolitan level, in many different fields of public action that influence the design and implementation of precise regulatory tools as a core issue in local policymaking. The territorial scale of cities and the concentration of processes, let alone their nodality as vital consumers of information, have allowed distinct policy processes, other than those pursued by traditional policy-making processes in national states, that could promote interesting innovations in terms of consensus-based and co-production principles.

An important component of city government and related public policies lies in the transformation of local bureaucracies. As one of the most visible territorial expressions of public service for citizens, local bureaucrats, many of whom are active at street level, play a crucial role in the aggregation of social demands, including important issues of legitimacy and resources that translate at times into a limited policy capacity. City bureaucracies are also in the process of changing in order to address the multiple challenges referred to earlier. From a complete dominance of street-level services, major cities and their metropolitan areas are currently producing a different type of public servant: sophisticated bureaucrats with innovative analytical capabilities and a myriad interaction with peers at the national and international level. These public servants are creating impressive collaborative networks focused on producing and implementing policy innovations.

The above-mentioned dynamic also raises important issues of smart coordination for public action in metropolitan and global city territories, where context may exacerbate both administrative rivalries and inter-bureaucratic feuds. Different bureaucratic bodies – such as the administrations of services such as water, transport, health and education, but also agencies of innovation and so on – face increasing pressures for articulated responses. These responses might be in the form of local sustainability plans, far-reaching strategies, or plain-and-simple sector specific development projects that ultimately take place at the metropolitan level, creating pressures to increase coordination across policy areas. Moreover, these designs are combined with social demands that implicitly point to a necessary transformation of administrative organisations, or at least point to improved coordination tools and simpler interactions with citizens beyond administrative boundaries. In many cases, what is needed is a smarter, or even better, an *intelligent* system of coordination between all agencies and entities with territorially focused authorities. This would be a way of solving complex issues or difficult problems that could not be addressed through traditional channels based on hierarchical structures and a clear delineation of boundaries.

The transformations referred to here occur simultaneously with some important city processes related to path-dependent, splintered territorial, and thus social–economic, trajectories, that have led to an unequal distribution of city resources between municipalities and departments. While compensated in part by re-distributive mechanisms articulated by states, the current dynamics of financial austerity and the increasing burden of services increasingly devolved at the local level have forced local bureaucracies to *do more with less*, and to consider the consequences of urban inequality as well. This raises important questions about urban justice across different metropolitan territories and confronts capital cities and the peripheries – or rising neighbourhoods versus depressed neighbourhoods – with citizens’ legitimate aspirations for comparable levels of social well-being in the same global city.

The last dimension we want to address is the consequence for public action at the city level of both the transformation of metropolitan governance and the new type of policies that global cities are introducing and promoting. For example, we might ask, to what extent are European cities increasingly disconnected from national dynamics in many areas of regulatory governance? And how could we further our understanding of these emerging processes of regulatory division in the context of global competition among large metropolises? We are probably moving towards new regulatory regimes that will address the logic of multi-level regulation differently. This means an increasing level of detail and various adjustments when regulations are implemented to regulatees. These new, emerging modes of territorial regulation will show a more fractal than a hierarchical organisation, in which regulatory building blocks are combined differently in each case, according to the different policy processes in each global city. In the end, however, the final regulatory outputs may not be too different across the different settings, with specific adjustments by each global city being based on how the regulatory blocks are combined.

6. PARIS AND BARCELONA: A COMPARISON OF MEANS AND STRATEGIES IN REDEFINING PUBLIC ACTION

To what extent can we observe the emergence of such processes of regulatory revision and adjustment for particular policy issues in Barcelona and Paris in recent years? Here it is important to identify how both cities have been involved in the development of new planning instruments – developed from the bottom up or spreading from city-to-city – as a means of regulating public spaces and urban expansion across metropolitan territories in the context of ever-stronger globalisation patterns, and with far-reaching consequences for the dynamics mentioned earlier. Important unresolved issues could thus be explored for both cities by way of new actors and institutions that would reframe the inefficiencies of current operating models or would just reproduce similar patterns of urban inequality and exploitation under new policy frameworks.

The interpretative approach to the current transformation of the cities' governance, the emergence of new regulatory instruments, and the evolution of the role of the state as a traditional public policy producer, as outlined in the previous pages, raise many questions about enabling the changes needed for cities to cope with these transformations as well. It also points to a fundamental, renewed role of the state itself as a designer and producer of public policies. Here we aimed to open a discussion about these issues and their implications, systematically comparing two of the largest cities in Europe, including their metropolitan areas: Paris and Barcelona. Actually, we are referring here to the second- and the fourth-largest metropolitan areas by population in Europe (according to the Eurostat metropolitan regions, 2018). Comparing such current challenges for global cities and taking these two large metropolises in Europe as examples, would require systematic analyses controlling most of the similar variables, while focusing on exploring significant differences. However, following the claim made by Patrick Le Galès (2019), here is an opportunity for these two cities to identify the logic of different policy responses and institutional reconfigurations to cope with similar challenges, in rather similar, complex environments.

The metropolitan dimensions of Paris and Barcelona present a formidable challenge in the way of policy coordination that appears to be surprisingly similar for both cities. The encroaching of competences and attributions across these administrations, and the long-term trajectories of ad hoc arrangements aimed at ensuring a governance capacity, have led certain policy domains, such as transport and the environment, among others, to be caught between a rock and a hard place. Although the features of the national states in which the cities are located differ, we find a common purpose in the search for new policy designs that can address the cities' global challenges. One big difference is that one is a capital city – Paris, the largest capital in continental Europe – and the other is the largest non-state capital in Europe. However, both share not too dissimilar administrative traditions. They both face similar difficulties in managing their metropolitan territories due to the profusion of overlapping jurisdictions, and they both focus their leadership for consolidating themselves as multidimensional global cities, far from the narrow perception of them as mere global mega-centres for tourism. The imperative of policy coordination is further exacerbated because these metropolises embrace important transformations aimed at consolidating their status as global cities.

Out of this complex interplay, a final thought arises about the policy transformations examined here. We have discussed how cities can be the initiators of specific policy styles and development models in a period when their relevance is increasing in world affairs, and as they become increasingly involved in global governance. No doubt such transformations have the potential to recast how public action evolves and how it approaches social demands and issues. In this way, global cities are key stakeholders in the process of defining mechanisms for state transformation. They trigger a more profound transformation of the state logic of producing public policy beyond what has been common knowledge in the last two centuries. It is important, therefore, that a systematic effort be proposed to identify, from a comparative perspective, how city transformation can contribute to understanding the governance

challenges that states are today confronted with in their territorial politics, even extending it to other political systems, and sometimes operating in the absence of a state such as the European Union. The cases of Paris and Barcelona, and the research agenda initiated by this paper, will allow us to progress this analytical endeavour, that is, to understand the mechanisms of long-term state transformation across different sectors and policy issues.

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