Four Perspectives on European World Cities

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Abstract

This paper examines the governance of European World Cities from four perspectives leading to a consideration of the potential for European cities to take a lead in developing the networks of cooperation and coordination that existing international institutions fail to deliver. The paper starts with a brief review of the governance challenges facing London, Paris and other cities before examining the EU's perspective on the system of European cities. We consider tensions between Europe's spatial policy and its world cities. A third perspective takes us into debate about the wider economic connectivity of world cities and the final part of the paper goes on to emphasise the need to consider the potential of Europe's World Cities to make the institutional and policy connections that may help world cities move beyond economic competition.

Introduction

I am going to offer a view from Europe about Europe's world cities but I also want to take a global perspective on managing world cities. As we have heard from Hank Savitch, and we know from the academic literature, the definition of world cities and indeed the very desirability in academic discourse of making this sort of distinction between types of city is controversial (see Robinson, 2006). Whilst I don't deny the importance of these arguments I'd like to concentrate, not on issues of definition and analytical categories, but on political questions about managing world cities. That is I don't want to get into whether world cities are new, which cities are world cities and which not, or if being a world city has good or bad effects, or how urban studies may have been distorted by such global concepts, but I want to focus on what we want our cities to achieve. Here I think there may be particular lessons from the European experience, not in a sense of simply transferring practice between cities, but lesson-drawing which might contribute foundations for some new thinking about how world cities might cooperate and develop new policy directions in particular for environmental policy.

I want to start by talking through some current perspectives of European cities and their EU context. I then want to move from Europe and briefly visit theories about the global connectivities of European cities and to point up the relative weakness of thinking about inter-city politics in the discussion of connectivity and then talk about where things might improve.

Europe's World Cities

There's a bit of history here about which cities can be regarded as world cities (Hall, 1966, Friedmann, 1986, Hall & Pain, 2008). As we move through the twentieth century we lose some of the old imperial cities from the list, Peter Hall in 1966 refers to London, Paris and Moscow, and John Friedmann's list of 'alpha' and 'beta' world cities expands the list. Recently there is some muddying of the waters as various studies want us to look at polycentric mega-city-regions – some without an obvious centre – but we can be fairly certain about the status of London and Paris with their concentrations of advanced producer services, and we need to think about the repositioning of Moscow (though we've seen Moscow as financial centre struggle to keep up in current economic crisis).

One of the important Europe-wide issues is this question of scale. Should we be talking about world cities or world city-regions or mega-city-regions at some scale less extensive than North West Europe? Within NWE the question of scale presents both problems of definition and political challenges. London city-region, whilst clearly identified by the UK government as the No1 Economic Asset, has a fragmented politics – three regional plans, three economic strategies and extreme confusion in the planning of the eastward extension of London into the Thames Gateway – (which is planned to offer space for housing, for a new port and, some have suggested, a new airport).

Paris has its own version of the city-region governance problem. Over the past 10 or so years the wider region has fragmented into numerous groupings of local governments, each with a strategic plan and competitive

economic ambitions (Subra & Newman, 2008). The City of Paris (with a population of just 2m) has only lately become interested in making links across its borders. Not least of the problems is party politics – but there are some signs of intra-regional cooperation and President Sarkozy is trying to find the right formula for institutional reform and a 'Grand Paris'.

Finding the right scale of government is a common issue facing European cities.

EU Perspective

From an EU perspective – and this interventionist scale is extremely important for understanding the European case – we need to think about scale in terms of city-regional networks (see http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/themes/spatial_en.htm). What the discussion about European spatial planning agrees on is that the network of successful cities at the heart of Europe (from London to Milan to Hamburg) is vital to the global competitiveness of the European economy. High-speed rail is expected to make the connections within the core region and with other city-regions.

Spatial planning then likes to imagine other city networks beyond the core. We need to take a long term view of some of these – the Sofia – Istanbul – Athens group for example - but this scale of potential city collaboration it is hoped will make new globally competitive groups of cities.

The EU perspective is not always compatible with the world cities' view – for example, some of the time London shares the European network perspective but at others turns its gaze to New York and global connections.

Global Connectivity

Now let's move on to thinking about European cities in global context. Can I start by just rehearsing some the critiques of work on world city networks. If we count advanced producer services – the bankers, accountants, lawyers, and the links within and between companies – we get Peter Taylor's maps of

connectivity (Taylor, 2008). Some of this work has been useful in pointing up the interdependence of cities – and we know from the economic crisis, that New York and London rise and fall together. But, this is also a rather limiting perspective on world cities and criticised for the lack of attention to the multiple, other global connections between people in cities.

However, one thing the literature does do is introduce a view of world city politics, and specifically of a global business class that may have the global clout to make a new-global-world-city-politics by imposing its demands on all world cities. What Taylor (2004) in particular talks about is a class base for transnational politics, a ' network bourgeoisie' or global plutocracy' (2004, 214)

So far so good in getting us thinking about the transnational politics of world cities – but it's a rather narrow perspective. A different, but equally incomplete analysis can be found in the work of Sassen (2004) and others who focus on what they see as 'highly politicized diasporic groups' connected through a 'virtual public sphere' and constituting, potentially, politically demanding groups. There are undoubtedly some very big issues of representation in European world cities (the weakness of the London Assembly, the exclusion of some suburban interests in Paris) but there's little evidence of inter-city, diasporic networks impacting on world city politics.

What's needed alongside these perspectives on world city politics is more explicit consideration of the role of public sector actors in shaping a global policy.

World City Policy Network?

The role of world cities on a global political stage is important because other international forums or intergovernmental networks seem not to be working. There is what the political scientist Jan-Erik Lane (2006) calls a 'heavy institutional deficit' when it comes to global cooperation and coordination. Cooperation is limited.

What the World Bank and other global institutions do is inadequate and as national governments worry about infrastructure investment and especially

about energy security there's an institutional context of national protectionism and regional protectionism in the case of the EU.

The institutional deficit needs a response and some new means of institutional cooperation are needed. This is especially important in response to climate change.

There is no lack of thinking about institutional responses on the part of theorists of globalisation. For example, Giddens (2008) argues that it is only the nation states that can take up the challenges of climate change. According to David Held (2008) we should focus on better integration between state and transnational law and relationships between commercial law and environmental law.

But these analysts have little to say about world cities -there seems to me to be a need to integrate what we know about world city politics into this discussion. We need to think about how world cities as global actors can to start to fill the gap - the institutional deficit – and be better integrated into existing international forums, take a lead within their nation states and take a lead in international cooperation.

How might government actors at world city scale become global players and rise to these challenges?

We can think about this building in stages. Already there is a considerable amount of information exchange and benchmarking work, recently for example– in New York for the 2030 plan and in the City of London. World cities are interested in each other (and more interested in each other than in other cities within their regions). Some of this inward looking and competitive benchmarking might develop into more outward looking and developmental policy making

The European case here has something to offer, and we could usefully draw lessons from the extensive and in some cases developed policy networks that

have grown over the past 30 years or so (for example, eurocities.org). There is a depth of experience about how inter city cooperation can be made to work.

At a global scale then we can look at, say, the growing scope and depth of networks like Metropolis (metropolis.org) which started as a consultancy arm of regional government in Paris and developed a large membership and multiple activities and behaves like an NGO. More recently initiatives like the Clinton network (c40cities.org) started as a global lobby to bring cities together to discuss common problems and potential solutions. There are examples of how inward looking, competitive benchmarking might develop into more outward looking thinking about collaborative lessons. Metropolis and C40 are 'hybrid' institutions – NGOs but also governments and that hybridity gives institutional advantages. City governments have the power to deliver, and to exert political influence within their nation states.

Now there's not space this afternoon to expand on this in detail - but I do want to make a couple of points, 1) that the European experience of city policy networks may be something to learn from, and more importantly 2) that we should take this networking more seriously – world cities have advantages in their influence over national policy (European national policy has been abandoned in favour of world cities, nation states want their world cities to succeed, and should listen to what they say). The world cities also have the advantage of concentrated expertise (City of London has for example created new environmental financial instruments and trading schemes through the Alternative Investment Market) and we should expect not just a global business class to be pushing global thinking. World city residents to want to know that their cities are drawing on best practice elsewhere and that their own city is producing exemplary policy initiatives. The world cities can offer leadership: as the new mayor of London says –

"…..London is well placed to help the world adapt…… I am committed to making London a world leader in tackling climate change." (GLA 2008)

and "Happy, green, clean, safe…. And pioneering on the whole environmental agenda, taking that stuff seriously, making London the centre of the new global green revolution." (The Guardian,2008)

If world city leaders do 'take it seriously' then there is a global leadership role to be developed through world city networks.

European world cities have their problems, they have substantial governance problems – getting the scale of government right is just one of them. But they also have 30 years or so of relatively close cooperation encouraged to some extent by the EU. There are lessons for building wider global connections. World cities stand in special place. Facing the challenges of climate change, the European world city may still be, as Descartes said of world city Amsterdam in the seventeenth century, 'an inventory of the possible' (cited in Brook, 2008, 8).

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