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The inclusive city

The inclusive city: a project for a European future

Abstract

Amerigo Pochini and Valerio Marinelli discuss the topic of relations between cities, or 'city diplomacy', taking into account the simultaneously competitive and cooperative efforts of cities. They propose creating an urban project that would address common issues across different cities. This transnational network of 'inclusive cities' would require trust, skilled human capital and adequate funding, but the authors believe this approach could eventually resolve what they consider as a contradiction between territoriality and relationality.

> Introduction

The state-nation crisis, the intense development of economic globalisation, and the process of European integration are having a significant impact on cities, which are becoming increasingly prominent within the European Union.

In this light, cities support their local interests: the administrations negotiate their autonomy from the state within the centre-periphery dialectic, promote local development policies, and take part in multilevel governance efforts together with regional, national, and supranational actors. They can also build relationships with foreign cities, and in many cases these bonds could be institutionalised thanks to new city networks.

This kind of external relations, which has often been referred to as 'city diplomacy', is a remarkable feature of contemporary Europe. This is not a new phenomenon, but its potential, if fully realised, could lead to substantial research in social innovation.

Establishing relations between cities can be a challenge. In fact, cities nowadays are faced with the task to meet contrasting needs: territoriality and relationality. The former is stimulated by the local citizens' demand for economic growth; the latter is driven by the crucial need to establish fruitful connections with other actors, a distinguishing feature of network-based social structures and, more generally, of globalisation. On the one hand, meeting local needs means competing with other cities in terms of financial investment,

qualified human capital, and tourism. On the other hand, meeting relational needs means building cooperative relations with other cities. A strong tension emerges between competitive and cooperative efforts: not only cities need to connect to each other, but they also need to attract resources, which would be inevitably withdrawn from others. Balancing this tension in a satisfactory way for all parties involved is a complex challenge for city administrations.

Is it possible to solve the issue by implementing mechanisms and projects that imply an intense activity of cooperation? This paper proposes a positive answer, subject to a condition: one has to be able to imagine a radical solution of social development, feasible on a long-term basis. In such times of crisis, only strong ideas can pave the way to the future.

> Education is crucial

This paper aims to provide a practical solution to the dichotomy presented above: the creation of an urban project addressing similar issues across different cities.

Over the last decades, cities have been developing economic dynamics, which progressively generated a polarisation of wealth, thus leading to a higher level of social inequality. This has generated a spatial segmentation of social urban groups: for instance, there has been an increase in gentrification in city centres. Such processes are known to be developing more evidently in global cities: regardless of the levels of wealth and internationalisation of a city, it is common to find socially degraded areas with high-impact social issues for the local community. Factors such as poverty, informal economy, immigration, and crime can have a major impact on cities, with varying levels of incidence according to different contexts. This can lead to critical situations, where formal educational institutions experience high levels of stress, students risk becoming a vulnerable category, and are greatly exposed to social marginalisation.

Most people would agree that young people represent the future of our cities, and the risk of losing a significant portion of them signifies a potential loss of development opportunities. From a quantitative perspective, this can be measured by the number of students who abandon school; from a qualitative perspective, in terms of unsatisfactory learning, both cognitive and emotional. The proposed project would enable cities to select a limited number of educational institutes - the ones with the highest levels of stress - and invest significant resources in them. It would be an ethical choice, and a far-sighted one as well, as it could generate benefits in the long term.

One of the main project guidelines aims at offering the best education to those who are more disadvantaged. In a highly globalised society, offering high-quality education means, among other things, educating young people in an international environment. It follows that educational mobility within Europe would have to be performed at high levels. This would help students to raise their awareness about being European citizens, and to maximise their soft skills, which will then be greatly valued in the labour market. The growing importance of the knowledge economy and of the network paradigm implies that creativity and the ability to establish relations with other people could play a crucial role in educational institutes.

Therefore, skilled human capital is at the core of cities' development and European integration. Here, the term 'education' applies to all levels, from pre-school onwards, proposing high-quality education accessible to everyone within the city.

At this stage and in this context, this paper will not illustrate in detail potential educational offers, or the category of students to be targeted; rather, its aim is to define the political aspects of the project, since educational policies could become a means for intercity relations. Education can be seen as a way to increase local competitiveness, given that cities compete with each other to attract skilled human capital. With regard to such urban policies, the present proposal suggests a cooperative pattern through which cities can

work together. This will be explained below.

> A method for the inclusive city

'Europe, globalisation, networks': these three concepts, so relevant nowadays and already mentioned here, suggest that such a project should not be limited to one urban environment: rather, it should ideally include several cities, possibly one for each European state. An initial issue concerns the criteria to be followed when selecting partner cities. Three steps need to be taken into consideration: firstly, the genetic phase of the project; secondly, the practical administrative rules to be dealt with; and thirdly, funding resources. These three aspects will be now analysed in this order.

The city responsible for starting the project, 'City Zero', would be a medium to large-sized city, with a prior and substantial international dimension. What would be the best method to select the other partner cities, so as to build a transnational European network?

The criterion of building on existing town twinning agreements could fit the present purpose for three reasons: historical origins; idealistic tension; and trust. Town twinning agreements, and their organised structure, were born in Europe after World War II, and represented an important form of social innovation in terms of intercity relations. After the human and material disaster which followed the atrocious conflict, several local communities established initial relationships – mainly between French and German cities – inspired by a growing desire for peace and reconciliation. From the 1950s, this system has been intensively adopted by some organisations as a way to raise people's awareness about their belonging to an extended European 'family', leading to the creation of the United States of Europe. Therefore, the historical origins of the town twinning agreements are strictly related to the process of European integration.

However, this type of relation between cities also requires a level of trust. Twinned cities enter into a permanent agreement, at least theoretically, which creates the basis for stable cooperation between them. Such agreement is therefore likely to build trust among the parties: although not all twinned cities are active and thriving, it can be said that a city is likely to find its best and most trusted partners among the cities which are already their twins. This is because they already have stable relationships, they know and trust each other.

It could be useful to use the criterion of town twinning in order to select partner cities, for the above reasons. Usually, the bigger cities with a stronger international vision are considered as actors in different urban networks: such networks can generate a strong level of trust, therefore it would seem natural to seek potential partners there. However, the system of town twinning seems a more appropriate way to find partners, for the reasons explained above, which also go beyond trust.

The second issue concerns the genetic phase of the project. After selecting potential partner cities, and having concluded a preliminary agreement with those that apply, it would be important to carry out the delicate process of defining common objectives and actions. This phase would include all urban shareholders and stakeholders, since the process will have non-reversible consequences. Such phase would then be finalised with a document, agreed upon and signed by all the urban administrations involved: the role of the mayors would be of crucial importance, as they would take a position of leadership and a non-partisan attitude, encouraging their communities to join the project.

As far as the third issue is concerned, several factors shall be considered in the final paper, such as the regulations regarding constitution and functioning, and the assignment of competences by a specific board, which will be responsible for project implementation. Such board would be composed of members appointed by the city administration, following equality criteria.

A fourth issue concerns funding resources: this

aspect is probably the most radical set forth in the present paper. The solution proposed is at the core of a vision of future cities, and is inspired by a socially valuable instrument - the system of town twinning. Funding would have to be provided for within the annual balance of each participating administration. The paper would also suggest that the administrations should be responsible for the assignment of a fixed annual share of their own budget, to be destined to project implementation. Such share should be clearly indicated in the document: it would be a fixed quota and could only be increased. The paper will also outline adequate disciplinary measures in order to discourage defections or opportunistic behaviours based upon a free-rider model. As a result, only part of the project funding would come from the European Union, other foundations, and the private sector.

The proposed funding method implies the sharing of part of a city's available resources with those of another partner city, thus establishing a principle of solidarity between cities that belong to a different state sovereignty. Although the percentage of budget share would be the same for all the cities involved, they would have a different absolute budget, and some budgets are likely to be much higher than others. However, the fact that each city could contribute to the project with unequal resources is not sufficient to meet the principle of solidarity: for instance, a city could decide to spend the budget share only in its own territory, thus revoking solidarity. Funds would be used where most needed, in a non-partisan way, and a specific board will be responsible for evaluating such expenditures. Why should cities commit themselves to such binding mutual agreements, which imply asymmetrical costs? It could be argued that, from the point of view of expenditures, it would be a zero-sum game, with both winners and losers. However, this paper suggests a different take on the matter. The agreement may represent a form of constitutive policy, since it includes the creation of a permanent board, as previously put forward. The expected project outcome would likely strengthen the education sector, which is seen here as a collective good

able to support local development initiatives in each city involved in the project. Such vision is likely to lead towards an appreciation of human capital, which will in turn be encouraged to travel to the participant cities. Implementing this project also means cooperating closely with institutions and collective actors, which would have positive effects on the final social capital. Such an agreement is likely to generate wealth, since it will give rise to more numerous and highly skilled human capital levels. These improvements will have a positive effect on economic development in the long term.

Within this network, cities will be able to support each other and will progress together in the long term through the transnational transfer of resources, and the improvement of human capital available in the city.

> Towards a network of inclusive cities

Needless to say, there are several critical issues in this project. However, this is not a reason to lose motivation. Ours is a time of crisis. What is the real role of cities? Is human nature truly competitive? How can we overcome social inequalities? How to make up for the flaws in the European integration process?

This project reflects the belief of two students: we believe that cities can effectively overcome the dichotomy between territoriality/relationality through the cooperative mechanism described above. In fact, the problem is not about balancing two contrasting needs. We believe that cities and their people can greatly and mutually benefit from a cooperation project. We believe in the 'inclusive city'. The proposed city would be inclusive both internally and externally: on its inside, social inequalities are reduced, and on the outside, the network of partner cities shares resources to face common problems. Such a network will perhaps be an innovation: the participating cities start implementing a project, as described above, therefore sharing a fixed rate budget on a transnational basis. This, in turn, will create a spillover effect towards the implementation of many other

shared projects. As a result, this will generate pressure on the member states of the EU from the bottom up, ideally pushing towards a more solid political integration. This vision aims indeed at the creation of a United States of Europe, but it is also possible to imagine an alternative scenario, in which the network of cities will represent the core of a hybrid institution, and sovereignty will be shared on a transnational basis. It is our belief that this type of alternative evolution could indeed be possible.

The paper proposes a provoking vision about the future of cities: this could be seen as a mere intellectual exercise. Still, it is based on the hope that a few enlightened mayors in European cities would accept this challenge, so as to work together towards an 'inclusive city', to create new perspectives. Nowadays, life can be critical, and people need a new generation of leaders who will inspire trust, interpret new social needs, and ultimately generate creative solutions, such as the 'inclusive city network' itself.

In terms of intellectual honesty, it is fair to point out that this proposal, while aiming to resolve the contradiction between territoriality and relationality, can lead to other contradictions at a higher level. In fact, the cooperative behaviour of the city network will inevitably increase competition between the inclusive cities and those outside the network. However, a permanent solution to this, and to any other kind of contradiction, perhaps lies beyond the realm of human possibility. Ultimately, the purpose of this paper is to provide a useful contribution and suggestions for the future development of European cities.

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