

Cities and their international role in a pandemic world

Municipalities demand more prominence when it comes to tackling global challenges

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1. Introduction

Laura Foraster i Lloret, Secretary General of DIPLOCAT, welcomed the participants and attendees and commented on the goal for the day, which was to highlight the role of cities and their leadership in facing the global challenges, in line with the motto of the entity's 2019-2022 Strategic Plan: "International dialogue: Connect. Project. Empower". Indeed, DIPLOCAT is working to connect Catalonia with the world, establishing bridges of dialogue between Catalan civil society and the rest of the world, projecting the country abroad and training and empowering both the entities that are part of the consortium and the country's civil society in international relations.

Foraster explained that the working group of the local world was established just before the pandemic, which proposed a series of discussions on cities. According to a 2018 United Nations report, 68% of the population will live in urban areas by 2050. Speaking of the pandemic, it is also worth noting that population density has been a key factor in the expansion of Covid. In the last two years, 90% of registered cases have been recorded in urban environments.

As a result, cities are demanding more resources and more autonomy, not only locally but also internationally. This new role of cities in the global debate can be seen in the fact that the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a specific urban goal on inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities, and 169 goals that depend entirely on the actions taken by local governments.

Global challenges require broad and diverse responses, which must include different actors. These major international challenges, such as climate change, migration, health and security, are becoming domestic issues that affect citizens and affect day-to-day life in cities. States are therefore no longer the sole actors in international relations.

The larger goals have become much more global and much more supportive, as well as much more cooperative in character. This is a new kind of interaction between the different actors and, therefore, the distribution of roles between states, metropolises, regions and cities has been adapted to these new needs. A clear example of this more localised action was seen at the United Nations World Climate Summit in Glasgow. The mayors present were able to forge much stronger and more ambitious global alliances to address climate change and the climate emergency. Cities claim that they are better prepared to take this step forward, to take on more powers and more resources, and claim that they are key players in the decisions and actions taken by the states.

This phenomenon has been evident throughout the management of the pandemic: when the states collapsed, the cities took over. Not only on a day-to-day basis, in the eyes of the public, but also internationally. It is also true that some local authorities have daily, more direct, communication with citizens, and have smaller governments, more agile in responding to these emergencies.

This conference aims to discuss what we learned during the pandemic and to analyse the new role of cities and the synergies that arise. Can these new mechanisms and these new international relations between cities be systematised? Can we capitalise on this acquired knowledge? Have the big cities served as a driving force for the rest of the country? What effect have they had on the immediate environment around the metropolitan areas? Will the shared experiences set guidelines for a future with more decentralisation, cooperation and -the word of the day- resilience? We also want to reflect on whether what happened has been a turning point in the way the international system functions or whether it has simply been the result of this unexpected emergency and then business will return to normal. Was the impact transformative or merely temporary?

Gerard Figueras, Secretary of Foreign Affairs and the EU at the Government of Catalonia, said that it is essential that cities engage in dialogue, not just for those cities which serve as an international reference, but also medium or small cities, because it will be much easier for cities to cooperate than for states. In all global challenges, it is the states who have the capacity to make the most strategic decisions, with a longer-term or deeper focus, in the end it is the sub-state governments, therefore the regional governments and the cities, who have to implement these decisions. Therefore, there is a double message that should be highlighted. On the one hand, cities and regions must not be mere spectators of what is being decided at the state level to meet global challenges, but they must also be able to participate in diagnosing and proposing solutions. On the other hand, decision-making must include multilevel governance, which means that it must be possible to implement solutions in a coordinated manner between the various levels of government. There has to be coordination because resources are scarce, in many cases the tools are similar, with the shared goal of responding to their citizens. They are responsible not only from the point of view of the solution that is put on the table by the public decision-makers, but also for involving the public - and this requires open governments - in diagnosing the problems.

In the specific case of the Covid-19 pandemic, subnational governments and cities faced a notable difficulty in being able to implement those decisions that were taken at the state level and in some cases the continental level. There are many lessons to be learned and information to be studied. How things have been done and how the city has been able to respond. We can use what we have learned to apply these lessons in the immediate future, in what may still be a pandemic. And above all, how should we reflect on the need for more dialogue, more interconnection between cities, between regional governments, between cities and regional governments, and obviously also with the states. This must be done with Barcelona at the forefront, which has a very powerful internationalisation infrastructure for the city and is an international benchmark. The city also serves as a beacon in the whole local area. But we must be aware that the rest of the country's municipalities have fewer tools, less capacity and therefore need the help of the government to internationalise.

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2. First round table: “Leadership of cities in post-covid recovery”

Hannah Abdullah, a senior researcher in CIDOB's Global Cities Program, moderates the first round table, with the participation of Saskia Sassen, Professor of Sociology at Columbia University; Felip Roca, Director of International Relations for the Barcelona City Council; and Paul Costello, Head of Programs for the German Marshall Fund (GMF). The purpose of the discussion was twofold. First, to discuss how cities have collaborated globally to address the pandemic and its economic impacts. Second, to analyse their role in the recovery process.

Hannah Abdullah made an introduction, highlighting the fact that the pandemic has led to significant movements of populations from cities to rural areas. However, cities have been resilient and there have been new forms of development with the creation of new centres, greater use of digital technologies which replace social contact, more promotion of green spaces, more mobility on foot and with cycling, and there is also more talk of cities caring for their citizens and promoting humanist values. The pandemic has brought on urban innovations and fostered international cooperation between cities, which learn from each other about innovations and good practices. Alliances between cities around the world have increased since the turn of the 21st century and with the pandemic, cooperation and solidarity between cities has intensified and accelerated.

New networks have emerged, such as Cities for Global Health, and the Eurocities platform has been activated. All of these platforms were activated at the start of the pandemic so that cities could learn from each other about how to deal with the current situation. While national governments have adopted a strategy of isolation, of looking inward, because they were overwhelmed by all the problems they faced, cities have looked outward and established transnational cooperation.

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Saskia Sassen reaffirmed the idea that we have entered a new era, in which many things may work well or may be an obstacle. We are facing a boom time for complex predatory formations and cities are forced to deal with them. Something very serious is happening and it may not be readily visible. Small and medium-sized cities are working quite well, but large cities have become an object of desire on the part of powerful actors, such as the finance sector. The financial sector has developed a whole host of complex and clever tools that makes it possible to enter the big cities, where more and more people are losing touch, are not eating well, are tired, or are living in bad conditions. In Europe, the situation may not be so desperate yet, but in other parts of the world, we are seeing radical transformations. More and more people who were previously thought to be part of society have become excluded and expelled. For the sociologist, big cities have lost their innocence and are facing a breakdown and a loss of control.

Felip Roca explained how the pandemic has intensified collaboration and solidarity between cities. Cities work on an international scale from a perspective of tension, because internationality and locality are two different forces going in opposite directions. Indeed, mayors need to be very present in solving local problems, but at the same time, there are predatory forces that make life in the city very complicated, especially in big cities. This is the first tension. The second tension, speaking specifically of Barcelona, is how the Catalan capital is positioned in the international arena as a global city, but with a very small size compared to the other cities with which it normally interacts. Therefore, the metropolitan dimension, in which it works with the surrounding cities is essential. Barcelona will hardly maintain its status as an international leader if it is not working together with all the cities that are part of the metropolitan area, and even beyond the metropolitan area.

The director of International Relations of the Barcelona City Council also highlighted the resilience of cities when facing the pandemic, and the need to work on this resilience and learn from it. In the case of Covid-19, the feeling is that all cities, including the most successful ones such as Paris, London, New York or Los Angeles, were areas that were forced to be locked down.

Shared challenges are a very fertile ground for beginning to develop useful collaborative initiatives. From Barcelona, two strategic lines were proposed: to explain what was being done in the world and to translate it into English, and to have a team that captured the needs in regard to social welfare, urban planning and health. Answers and initiatives were sought through traditional networks, such as the UCLG, Metropolis, CIDEU or C40. International relations directors in most cities around the world were connected by chat. We also worked with U.S. cities via the German Marshall Fund.

In spite of everything, Felip Roca believes that cities could not have had a better international position when it comes to existing and participating in the decision-making space. But while cities are the hero of the story, the discourse, there is no translation in the mechanisms that really allow to define and work together regarding the decisions made in the face of the great challenges.

Paul Costello highlighted the confluence of issues regarding cities and democracy. There are many networks of cities on the subject, but until very recently, the issue of democracy in cities was not

considered at all. There is the exception of the Fearless Cities Network, which emerged in Barcelona a few years ago, and the Pact of Free Cities, which began in Bratislava, Budapest, Warsaw and Prague, and then extended to 20 cities around the world, through which they decided to exchange good practices while also seeking to find strategies to fight authoritarianism. The Cities Fortifying Democracy program has been running for almost a year from the GMF, with the support of the German Foreign Ministry. Citizen polls were conducted on threats to democracy and the main issue that came up was inequality. Cities concentrate inequalities, and crystallise them. Inequality is most visible in cities, and therefore cities play a key role. At the Biden Democracy Summit, the GMF hosted a session on mayors and their role in strengthening democracy, which is necessary as there are many countries where democratic erosion has been detected. As the local level and the cities are the level of government that generates the most confidence among the population, it is especially important to fight against democratic erosion on this scale. Creating cities with equity, justice, pluralism, an interwoven community, is one of the best ways to practically demonstrate how a very diverse democracy can work, and it is also a good antidote on a local scale against the populism and extreme liberalism that is booming in many countries.

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The head of programs at the German Marshall Fund noted that the local level is where there are more opportunities to experiment. Democracy is not a static thing. Democracy today is not the same as it was 50 years ago, nor will it be the same 50 years from now. So, we have to try things. For example, in the city of Seattle, each citizen was given a \$25 voucher to give to the candidate they thought was most appropriate. The Citizen Convention of the city of Nantes is also a prime example. In addition, Costello recalled the importance of the right to vote. New York City has authorised the right to vote for foreign residents: 800,000 people who previously could not participate in local elections will now be able to do. In Amsterdam, the legal age for voting in municipal elections has been reduced to 16 years. There are other examples of cities working in the field of human rights, public space or digital rights. These experiments take on relevance when taken elsewhere and improved upon or adapted to different contexts.

Hanna Abdullah emphasised that cities have played and will continue to play a very important role in ensuring a green and fair recovery. Big cities are the drivers of innovation for dealing with the climate emergency and are also the scale of government closest to the citizen. They are at the forefront of facilitating inclusion, participation and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. But very few cities have adapted their technical capabilities or have the financial resources to meet the multiple challenges posed by the transition to a greener, fairer economy, and a greener, fairer society as well. To make the situation more difficult, many cities have had to implement national recovery plans to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic, plans that did not always meet the most urgent needs of cities.

In this regard, Felip Roca explained that Barcelona wants to have direct resources from the European Union or other sources of funding to try to make the crisis an opportunity for change, and not just to return to what it was like before. It is not just a battle for funding, to get projects for the cities, but to transform the city model of the pre-pandemic era. However, it does not appear that cities can really participate in the decision-making mechanisms. A seat at the global table is precisely what is needed to get the global agenda to take into account the needs of the people, housing, the fight against inequality, etc. Cities converge quite a bit on the political agenda even when mayors are from very different parties and ideologies. The confrontation of political parties, while very present at the state level, is more imperceptible at the local level.

In the Pact for Free Cities, for example, there is a curious alliance between left-wing and right-wing mayors. Mayors have very direct access to their public. They are always in touch with reality, and the needs are not so different in different countries and in different cities. This makes agreeing on working points easier than when there is a geostrategy behind it. But global governance spaces are absolutely controlled by state groups and therefore the states needed to be lobbied. In this sense, there was a very visible movement of powerful mayors at the COP26 in Glasgow, who set up a working group to help cities help each other in defining strategies for their own states. A true multilevel governance approach needs to be developed, including at the local level. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the connections between cities, because they can maintain a relationship between citizens that goes beyond perceptions and governments and political systems. City diplomacy needs to be further promoted as well, as they can maintain the basis for dialogue between states.

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Saskia Sassen commented on how Covid-19 has intensified the often-invisible logic behind those who are leaving the cities. When you think of finance, you think of banks, but it goes far beyond that. The banks are very powerful actors, who are not necessarily interested in the city, but instead need to snatch and take elements from the city. There was a time when it was said, "This is business, this is finance." Now there are cross-cutting actors who go from one area to another, and they do it in a way that we do not always see or recognise or understand. According to the sociologist, it is a new type of skill, a new ability, which takes advantage of new technologies. The financial system is known for being able to use and exploit the tools of other areas in its favour. Minor actors disappear and powerful actors crop up everywhere. They often make fantastic innovations, but the problem is that they are aimed at those who have more privileges. The new generations are very critical and a sign of hope, because they are willing to fight and understand the complexity of the new context.

Paul Costello agreed with the idea that cities may have won the story but do not yet have a place on the table where the decisions are made concerning plans for recovery. In the United States, for example, the Build Back Better plan includes more than 500 billion dollars for climate change, energy, construction, buildings and transportation, and more than 1.5 billion for housing. Paradoxically, cities did not play an active role in its design, but the priorities of the cities, conveyed through the National League of Cities association, have been taken into account. There is a more focused approach to quality of life in cities, especially in an age of confinement and post-confinement. For many people, work may not be so closely linked to the city, as it may be more important to live in a city than to have a job. In the future, it will be more important to be a city with green spaces and leisure spaces, where you can walk or enjoy public transport, than to be the smart city which tops some sort of ranking. However, the ability to carry out projects is closely related to municipal funding. American cities have suffered greatly from Covid. The way we finance ourselves depends a lot on taxes, which are very short-term, mostly based on consumption and buying and selling, and American cities can never go into deficit. The impact of the pandemic has been devastating and this greatly affects their ability to complete certain projects and tasks.

Finally, a person in the audience asked Saskia Sassen her opinion of these predatory formations that are part of citizen networks today, such as the Bloomberg Foundation, which is one of the main sources of funding for the C40. The teacher replied that cities are attractive for financial funds because they make it possible to generate significant income. The city has become one more object of desire, which can be developed in various ways to create privileges for specific actors.

3. Second round table: “International initiatives for a better life”

Mariona Tomàs is an adjunct professor of political science at the University of Barcelona and moderated this debate between Joan Chicón, head of the European International Relations Service of the Terrassa City Council; Katharina Freter, director of European and International Relations of the Nantes City Council and also of the Nantes Metropole; and Stefanie Miller, Deputy Head of European Union Affairs and Global Sustainability for the Mannheim City Council.

Before giving way to the debate, Mariona Tomàs made a brief introduction. She said that cities had to react very quickly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Citizens do not have a good understanding of who the competition is, but the local government and its political representatives are the first to be targeted. She cited a study carried out by the Barcelona Institute of Regional and Metropolitan Studies on the 36 municipalities in the Barcelona metropolitan area. They analysed the actions taken by local councils in the first three months of the 2020 pandemic. This study included more than 1,400 initiatives in 36 municipalities (the study can be consulted on the IERMB website), which depend very much on the size of the municipalities. More than half of the initiatives were in Barcelona. In the AMB, there are municipalities of very different sizes, but a quarter of the initiatives had to do with issues related to social inclusion and then there were other types of actions. For example, one of the most obvious was the need to expand public spaces: more sidewalks, plazas, squares, etc. were needed, with dimensions that facilitate the distance between people while also creating more space to walk around the city. Other necessary initiatives included tax rebates for vulnerable families, campaigns to encourage local commerce by giving vouchers to people to be used to shop locally, digital accompaniment and the deployment of support tools, the distribution of computer equipment to families who needed it, etc.

For the Terrassa City Council, Joan Chicón began by expressing the desire that we maintain all the opportunities for collaboration and tools that can be provided by various administrations and actors for multilevel governance once the pandemic is over. In Terrassa, there was already a Master Plan for Internationalisation, which at the time defined five priority areas of work, with the possibility for complementary actions to react to what was being done in other cities in the area. The five areas are audiovisual (both the Audiovisual Park of Catalonia and the Filmoteca Nacional de Catalunya are in Terrassa), cultural, university, health and sports (with a special focus on field hockey).

In this sense, since the last elections, and as specified in the government program, the different municipal areas have been working on the basis of three main and transversal components. Firstly, the issue of inequality and social cohesion. In Terrassa, some intersectional projects have been carried out, for example those related to gender policies.

Secondly, human rights were incorporated when working on public policy. For example, Terrassa is one of the more than 200 UNESCO Creative Cities. This opens up a wide range of possibilities when working together with other cities, for example in the audiovisual field. During the pandemic, a collaborative project was launched called “Youth at home making films”. This project aimed to encourage the talent, creativity and ingenuity of young people to deal with images related to Covid, concerning issues such as prevention measures, social distancing, palliative care, etc. They were encouraged to make videos of their personal experiences and show how they coped with the monotony of confinement. The basis for the project, coordinated by the Audiovisual Park of Catalonia, was a free video editing program, a series of virtual teaching courses, and a basic cinematography manual called “Making cinema from home”. The result was visible on social media and can still be seen [here](#).

Thirdly, culture. Terrassa is part of the Agenda 21 for Culture, which is linked to the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) network. The Terrassa Archive promotes the “Threads of Knowledge” project, which explains the incidence and impact that the various pandemics or epidemics that arose in the city have had, from the Black Death of 1347 to the present day, so that the public can have a clear vision of what has been happening over the years. During the pandemic, there were various activities related to cultural promotion, such as a collection of capsules of classical music or performing arts, with collections of plays performed in municipal theatres.

Next, Katharina Freter explained the experience in Nantes. She described how France is a very centralised country and therefore most decisions related to the pandemic come from the President of France. Cities have a rather limited framework for action, but in Nantes, they focused on the most disadvantaged people. At the beginning of the pandemic, in 2020, there was great concern about how low-income families, especially families with children, would be supplied with food. In normal times, schools provide meals to low-income families, paid for in part by the city of Nantes. When schools closed during confinement, it was found that there was a high level of food insecurity, especially in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods of the city.

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The city council did two things. First, it provided a payment of 100 euros to each family with low income and children between 3 and 11 years old. This amounted to more than 1 million euros and supported more than 7,000 families and approximately 40% of all children aged 3 to 11 years old. Payments were made automatically through social welfare centres, so families did not have to request them. The second initiative was long-term: the creation of solidarity gardens. In Nantes, 6 out of 10 low-income families said they did not eat much fresh food. The main idea was to have fewer flowers and more tomatoes, potatoes and courgettes. It was a project of the Nantes Department of Gardening which created various community gardens, which allow citizens to participate while raising awareness about biodiversity and food and also helping to improving the quality of life.

Between 2020 and 2021, parks or unoccupied green areas were transformed into orchards and 23 cultivation points were created, covering about 300 m² in the 11 districts of the city of Nantes, and a large urban garden. There are several different types of orchards. A dozen are grown collectively by residents with the support of local associations, and the rest are managed by the Department of Gardening and Parks and Gardens. Schools were also included as part of this project. There are 56 classes participating in workshops held in these orchards. In 2021, 17 tons of vegetables were collected, which were distributed among 1,500 vulnerable citizens through various associations and food banks. The budget was 200,000 euros, plus 10,000 euros for each of the orchards. This project served as an inspiration for the city of Cardiff, which replicated it to be developed on an even larger scale.

As for Mannheim, Stefanie Miller explained that it is a city located in the southwest of Germany, between Frankfurt and Stuttgart. It has about 250,000 inhabitants, which in Germany makes it an average city, but is part of a large metropolitan region. Mannheim is a densely populated city, which caused the virus to spread rapidly. The first examples of a response to the Covid-19 crisis were vaccination campaigns: going to the neighbourhoods, trying to make vaccination accessible, putting vaccination points in shopping centres, etc. The population is very diverse and international, as it is a very multicultural city. The aim was to reach the migrant population

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by providing them with information on health measures, but also on vaccination campaigns in the most widely spoken languages in the city. All the information has been translated and we have worked very closely with the migrant community. Highlights include the joint project with the Mannheim Migration Advisory Council and a video campaign called “I’m getting vaccinated.” Thanks to this Council, it was possible to identify important local actors, such as doctors with a migrant background or the imam of the neighbourhood mosque, people who are well connected to the community and who participated in the video, explaining why it is important to get vaccinated and encouraging others to do so. This video was recorded in the native languages of these people and spread on social media.

Stefanie Miller also highlighted cultural activities, which have suffered greatly from the pandemic. The “Art of Life” program has been launched to bring the city’s cultural scene back to life. Cultural groups were offered the opportunity to hold on-line events and were provided with the necessary technical equipment and support to be able to broadcast them. Mannheim wanted to prioritise the cultural sector, which did not receive much support from the federal government.

When it comes to recovery, there is a focused intention to not simply go back to business as usual, to the way things were before. There is also a commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When we talk about recovery, we are talking about a green recovery. For example, the city is taking advantage of the public’s enthusiasm for cycling. There has been a significant change in the last two years. Many people have started using bicycles, which they did not use before, and the city wants to take advantage of this change of mentality. Thus, plans have been accelerated to make Mannheim a much more bike-friendly city, and more accessible by public transport. This would not have been accelerated had it not been for the pandemic, and so this is a positive aspect.

Next, Mariona Tomàs asked about the mechanisms that have been used to share these experiences and internationalise them. Joan Chicón commented that, as a medium-sized city, cooperation is vital in being able to project and internationalise local activity and to be able to achieve all the global agendas at the local level, as the city alone does not have the strength or resources required to be able to carry out these goals on its own. In this sense, Terrassa is committed to being a part of the international networks, which allow them take advantage of their various collaborative options, exchanging good practices, participating in projects, making visible the projects being developed in Terrassa, which can now be projected to the world, etc. Terrassa is part of the European Eurocities network, as are Barcelona, Nantes and Mannheim. Together they are working in various thematic areas and working groups, adapting the elements of the world agenda to the municipal level. Terrassa is also part of the United Cities and Local Governments, Agenda 21 for Culture, and the UNESCO Network of Creative Cities. This has allowed stories of their local experiences to reach as far as the Japanese city of Yamagata. This comarcal capital of Vallès Occidental also belongs to other more sectoral networks in areas such as the environment and economic development.

Complementing oneself internationally is a basic tool, because everyone is a specialist in a specific subject, and it is important to collaborate and not to compete. With previous work with DIPLOCAT or with the Department of Foreign Action and Open Government of the Government of the Generalitat of Catalonia, the goal is to then make this work known to international networks and organisations. One example is the city’s participation in the Urban Agenda that took place in Quito, through its work with such entities as the United Nations, or the joint strategy with Barcelona City Council in the networks in which both cities are present.

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Joan Chicón also highlighted other projects, such as one with Nantes, which chaired the Eurocities network economic development working group, which has led to good possibilities in the areas of city branding and the internationalisation of the economy. Terrassa is also working with the cities of Mannheim, Leipzig and Gothenburg, among others. The cities' internationalisation teams are responsible for grounding the projects in the municipality, in two areas: First, with the government teams and the municipal areas, and second, with the citizens, so they can appreciate the usefulness of this work and ensure that the project is useful and beneficial for everyone.

Katharina Freter highlighted several elements. First of all, Eurocities, which she described as an inspiring example. Secondly, the group created at the initiative of Barcelona in regard to the sustainable recovery of the city's centres. They were a series of stories from French cities, Ljubljana, Barcelona and other areas that facilitated reflection on recovery and sustainable tourism. Nantes was inspired to organise an international conference on tourism for the future, which was held last September. A WhatsApp group was also set up, a very simple initiative, with partners from Guinea, Cameroon, Senegal and Tahiti, to exchange experiences on local campaigns and share views on the initiatives. The pandemic also helped accelerate and strengthen cooperation with the twin city of Seattle in the United States. Digital events were organised and companies in the maritime sector were encouraged to work together. A trade mission to Nantes was organised with the Washington State Department of Commerce, and in April, a French delegation will travel to Seattle, with political, economic and civil society leaders. Therefore, the pandemic has accelerated the relationship with Seattle. Finally, Frater mentioned an initiative related to culture: a conference centre that organises exhibitions and debates on European cultures asked people to send poems and recipes to spread optimism during the confinement.

Stefanie Miller said that as an international city, it was clear that Mannheim wanted to collaborate with other cities in the world during the pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic, when it was not possible to meet, they organised a virtual summit with the mayors of Mannheim's twin cities. They shared good practices and discussed the importance of citizen diplomacy beyond the pandemic. It was a special event, as all the mayors of the twin cities were able to participate, which would not have been possible in person. He also mentioned other initiatives, such as a project to fight Covid-19 with the city of Chisinau in Moldova and Chernivtsi in Ukraine. The medical staff shared their experience electronically with the medical staff of the associated cities. This was at a time when there was not much information and therefore it was very useful. There was also a public information campaign on how to protect yourself during the pandemic, with funding from the German federal government. In a similar project, the city of Hebron, Palestine, conducted an information campaign and provided medical supplies. What was most needed were masks and disinfectant gel. Mannheim also received help, such as a donation from the city of Zhenjiang of 100,000 surgical masks when it was very difficult to find these items in Germany. When the situation in Germany improved, Mannheim gave masks to the twin Poland city of Bydgoszcz.

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In addition to economic resources, it is key that cities have a clear plan for internationalisation, that there is a firm commitment and teams dedicated to this area, because the results of this effect will not appear today, but tomorrow.

Finally, Stefanie Miller talked about financial support for a student exchange program with schools in the twin cities, especially with the French in Toulon. There are a number of activities that have had to be cancelled in the last two years, so they wanted to offer an alternative. The city worked together with the local French institute, offering them technical and financial support to create a program to organise virtual student exchanges.

Mariona Tomàs asked the speakers what obstacles have been encountered in taking the initiative or what has made it easier to carry them out. Joan Chicón emphasised that, in addition to economic resources, it is key that cities have a clear plan for internationalisation, that there is a firm commitment and teams dedicated to this area, because the results of this effect will not appear today, but tomorrow. In the case of medium and small cities, this is a job that must be done little by little and that must permeate the entire municipal ecosystem. The results can often not be seen within a period of four years, which are the electoral periods at the municipal level, but require longer deadlines.

Chicón also argued that cities should be able to express themselves in a direct voice and in a direct way, giving rise to directives or laws. The pandemic has increased the need to listen to cities and make them key players in European bodies such as the Commission or the European Parliament.

Katharina Freter explained that at the beginning of the pandemic, they had technical and equipment problems and that other cities probably also had similar issues when moving their work on-line. They also identified some interesting examples at the European and international level, seeing that there was a lack of human resources and that some public policy sectors did not have the opportunity to apply good practices learned abroad. Implementation was a challenge, because there were not enough resources. The representative from Nantes also claimed that cities can sit at the table of the states of the European Union when designing new public policies, financial instruments or recovery instruments. The European Union's recovery mechanism provides Member States with a consultative role in defining national action plans. This is a step forward in recognising city networks and the lobbying work they have done. However, a survey was conducted on the Eurocities network which found that 80% of the cities in the network had not been consulted by the national government when drafting the national action plans. The challenge is to continue to put pressure on the European authorities and, above all, to turn possible conquests into reality.

Stefanie Miller agreed with the interventions of her colleagues and mentioned another obstacle that appeared at the beginning of the pandemic. Because a lot of effort had to be put into solving problems at the national level, the international scale became secondary. Her team had to explain why it was important to continue with international work, to make it clear that the pandemic was global and therefore did not understand borders. In other words, the international arena was not a priority at first and workers were even transferred to other departments. Over time, the need for international cooperation has become clear.

When taking questions from the public, the representative of the Reus City Council said they are very interested in encouraging collaboration between territories and asked how the city can establish relationships with without incurring the tensions which arise in the supra-municipal sphere or even between states. Joan Chicón replied that it is the networks of cities itself which must be used. It is

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It is necessary to seek out the complicity of networks in which it is possible to collaborate directly, either by institutional or thematic interest.

necessary to seek out the complicity of networks in which it is possible to collaborate directly, either by institutional or thematic interest. If the Reus City Council operates from within a network, it will be able to do so without friction with other supra-municipal bodies. Katharina Freter agreed with Chicón and argued that the simplest and most efficient tool is to be a member of a European network of cities where there are working groups. In her experience with Nantes she found that, apart from defining the relationship with the state, cities are considering how to identify the areas of policy that can be worked on at European level. After the last municipal elections, for example, the mayor decided on the alliances at the territory level, which can be local, regional, national or European. Each politician in charge of a particular field has to decide what level of alliances he wants to establish and this facilitates the work of the internationalisation department. Stefanie Miller added that cooperation between cities is one of the advantages of combating national frictions, as it helps to strengthen municipal diplomacy. She said that Mannheim has worked with cities in Turkey, for example, despite significant friction between the two countries. The city council has lasting alliances, which go beyond tensions between states. It is necessary to be clear about the strategic priorities and to assess which partnerships or alliances are to be established, and these do not always coincide with the interests of national policy.

Finally, a person in the room thanked the panel for the session and asked about the projects that take migrants into account, as the pandemic has shown that this group is even more vulnerable in society. Stefanie Miller discussed the example of the projects with the Turkish community in Mannheim and said that they kept in touch during the pandemic. She explained that the Turkish community in her city is very strong and that they had organised Covid testing and vaccination centres in the various neighbourhoods. In this way, the Mannheim City Council has been able to reach a population group that would otherwise have been difficult to access. Joan Chicón commented that, in the case of Terrassa, there are various lines of action linked to participation in issues of democratic quality and youth, and especially in educational programs. He explained that due to cultural issues or other conditions, it is necessary to do additional educational work and outreach. It is often more difficult to get women involved than men, and this requires prior awareness-raising, education, and teaching programs about what you want to do.

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Cooperation between cities is one of the advantages of combating national frictions, as it helps to strengthen municipal diplomacy.

Annex. Participants



> HANNAH ABDULLAH

SENIOR RESEARCHER IN CIDOB'S GLOBAL CITIES PROGRAMME

Hannah Abdullah is a senior researcher in the Global Cities Programme at CIDOB (Barcelona Center for International Affairs). Her research focuses on city diplomacy in the fields of climate change and culture, especially in Europe and the Mediterranean region. Her recent publications include work on the role of cities in global and European governance and the transition towards sustainable development.

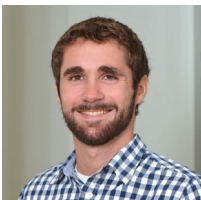
Hannah holds an MA and PhD in sociology from the London School of Economics. She was a postdoctoral fellow at the Chair of Cultural Sociology at the Technical University of Dresden, and she has taught and lectured at the London School of Economics, the University of Leipzig and Pompeu Fabra University. Before joining CIDOB, she held the position of commissioner of cultural programmes at the Goethe-Institut in New York, where she developed and directed programmes on architecture and urban issues, among others.



> JOAN CHICÓN

HEAD OF THE EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SERVICE AT TERRASSA CITY COUNCIL

Joan Chicón holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of Barcelona. He is an expert in coalition governments and has a Master in Public Administration and Management from the UAB. He took a postgraduate degree in Local Government from the UB and a degree in Contemporary History from the UB (International Relations). He is also a graduate of European Union Courses from Spain's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He has been working in the Public Administration for 20 years on European and international issues.



> PAUL COSTELLO

PROGRAM MANAGER OF GMF CITIES AT THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND OF THE UNITED STATES

Paul Costello is a Program Manager for the German Marshall Fund's Cities program, based in the organization's Berlin office. He works at the intersection of local and global issues, helping to connect cities from Europe and North America around common issues where cities have a growing international role. He leads the program's City Directors of International Affairs (CDIA) Network, the Cities Managing Migration project, and is involved in several other projects that are part of the GMF Cities democracy work. He is a graduate of the Master of Public Policy program at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin and has a Bachelor of Arts from McGill University in Montreal.



> GERARD M. FIGUERAS I ALBÀ

FOREIGN ACTION SECRETARY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF CATALONIA

Figueras took charge of the post in June 2021. Previously and since February 2016, he had been Secretary-General of Sports at the Ministry of the Presidency of the Government of Catalonia. Between 2013 and 2016, he was director of the Catalan Council of Sport, and before that, between 2011 and 2013, member of the Catalan Parliament. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Political and Administrative Science by Pompeu Fabra University. He has an Executive Master's degree in Sports Organisation Management by the Catholic University of Louvain (UCL) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Belgium. He also holds a Master's degree in Shipping Business by the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC) and a Master's degree in Political Marketing and Communication by the Political and Social Science Institute (ICPS), Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB). He is presently studying for a Master's degree in Olympic Studies at the German Sport University (GSU) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC).



> LAURA FORESTER

SECRETARY GENERAL OF DIPLOCAT

She holds a degree in Economics and Business Administration from the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), a degree in Humanities from the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) and an MA in European Studies from the KU Leuven. She also has specific education in Public Diplomacy and in Election Observation Missions. Prior to her current position as Secretary General of DIPLOCAT, she was Executive Director of the entity until its temporary closure in April 2018. Foraster has been Chief of Cabinet of the Minister for Innovation, Universities and Enterprise and of the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Consumer Affairs of the Government of Catalonia, where she was responsible for the management of the Minister's Cabinet, the political assistance to the Minister and for European Union and international issues. Her previous professional experience includes Parliamentary Assistant to Catalan Members of the European Parliament in Brussels and Strasbourg, following the Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Foreign and Security Policy Committee and the Constitutional Affairs Committee. In Brussels, she also worked for the European Commission, the Committee of the Regions and the Catalan Government Delegation in the EU.



> KATHARINA FRETER

DIRECTOR OF EUROPE AND INTERNATIONAL AT NANTES CITY COUNCIL

Katharina Freter is the Director of European and International Relations for the city of Nantes and Nantes Metropole. This position covers European policies and networks such as EUROCITIES and CEMR/UCLG, European funding, partnerships with Seattle, Hamburg and Niigata (Japan), among others, as well as cooperation with Dschang (Cameroon), Rufisque (Senegal) and the Grand Anse department in Haiti. She manages a team of more than 20 people to help transform Nantes into an open European city that offers opportunities for mobility and exchange at European and international level, especially for young people.



> STEFANIE MILLER

DEPUTY HEAD OF EU AFFAIRS AND GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY AT MANNHEIM CITY COUNCIL

Stefanie Miller studied Sociology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Mainz. After several years working in the field of EU project management at an NGO in France, she started working at Mannheim City Council in 2017. She is the Deputy Head of the EU Affairs Office and Global Sustainability of the City of Mannheim. She is in charge of the strategic city-city partnership, as well as various cooperation and development projects with the Palestinian territories, Ukraine, Moldova and Turkey.



> FELIP ROCA

DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AT THE BARCELONA CITY COUNCIL

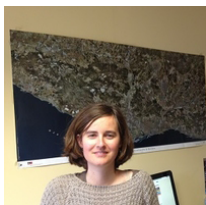
Felip Roca has been Director of International Relations of Barcelona City Council since September 2016. He graduated in Communication Sciences at the Autonomous University of Barcelona and studied International Relations at Johns Hopkins University. Having specialized in international diplomacy, local and regional government, over the past 15 years he has worked for a number of public administrations in the fields of international cooperation and institutional relations. From 2015 to 2017, he served as Secretary General of Metropolis, the global network of major cities and metropolitan areas. He was Director of International Cooperation for Barcelona City Council from 2011 to 2015. He is fluent in French, Spanish, English, Italian and Catalan.



> SASKIA SASSEN

ROBERT S. LYND PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY AND MEMBER OF ITS COMMITTEE ON GLOBAL THOUGHT

Saskia Sassen is the Robert S. Lynd Professor of Sociology at Columbia University and a Member of its Committee on Global Thought, which she chaired from 2009 until 2015. She studies cities, immigration, and states in the world economy. Inequality, gendering and digitization are three key variables running through her work. Born in the Netherlands, she grew up in Argentina and Italy, studied in France, was raised in five languages and began her professional life in the United States. She is the author of eight books and the editor or co-editor of three books. Together, her authored books have been translated in over twenty languages. She has received many awards and honors, among them twelve doctor honoris causa and multiple named lectures.



> MARIONA TOMÀS

LECTURER IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA

Mariona Tomàs is Associate Professor of Political Science, member of the Research Group in Local Studies (GREL) at the University of Barcelona. Her research focuses on metropolitan governance, urban policies and local government. She is an expert on metropolitan reforms in Montreal, and she has received awards from the Governor General of Canada and the Parliament of Quebec. In 2017, she published a book on the metropolitan thought of Pasqual Maragall. She has studied citizen participation in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area and is now leading a comparative project on metropolitan governance in Spain. She is a member of the Advisory Board of CIDOB's Global Cities Programme and commissioner of the multilevel metropolis of the Barcelona Metropolitan Strategic Plan.

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- Government of Catalonia
- Barcelona City Council
- Tarragona City Council
- Girona City Council
- Lleida City Council
- Vielha e Mijaran City Council
- Barcelona Provincial Council
- Tarragona Provincial Council
- Girona Provincial Council
- Lleida Provincial Council
- Conselh Generau d'Aran
- Catalan Association of Municipalities and Counties
- Federation of Municipalities of Catalonia

» Entities of the business sector

- General Council of the Official Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Navigation of Catalonia
- Entrepreneurs association Foment del Treball Nacional
- Association of Micro-, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises of Catalonia (PIMEC)
- Confederation of Cooperatives of Catalonia
- Multi-Sector Business Association (AMEC)
- Private Foundation of Entrepreneurs (FemCAT)

» Entities of the social, trade union and sports sector

- The Group of Entities of the Voluntary Sector of Catalonia
- Trade union Unió General de Treballadors de Catalunya (UGT)
- Trade union Comissions Obreres de Catalunya (CCOO)
- Football Club Barcelona

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- University of Barcelona (UB)
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- University of Girona (UdG)
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- Barcelona School of Economics (BSE)