



Globalisation and the city

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Globalisation has given major cities a role of hitherto unprecedented importance. It may be that consolidation of the solid web of economic, financial, political, cultural and tourist ties which today connects the world's major conurbations has helped to strengthen this position.

The current dynamic places cities in a situation of great responsibility to the extent that economic development, technological innovation, scientific advances and artistic creation are born out of the major urban conglomerations, and spread from there to the rest of civilisation.

Europe is a fine example of this. A comparative analysis of the regions which make up the European Union reveals that there exists a clear correlation between urban identity and development. It is the capital regions, and those which contain major conurbations, which occupy the leading positions in terms of economic prosperity.

However, this status as leader, positioning cities centre stage, also implies a wide range of shared challenges. In the same way that major cities take on a common, collective protagonism, based on this great network which connects them and which seems to drive everything, it is also clear that, today, large conurbations face the same challenges, and are confronted with the same threats.

There are many demands to which the city is subjected in the modern world. Migratory processes, the saturation of urban spaces, the obsolescence of infrastructure, the need to introduce technological innovation, industrial relocation... these are all challenges on a large scale which, to a greater or lesser extent, define the agenda of every major city. They are issues requiring an effective, committed and responsible answer from local authorities. They are all trials to be overcome, challenges to the sustainment of the current model of global development, so clearly based on urban progress.

We must come up with formulas which will allow cities to find an effective and convincing responses to all these questions. Having come this far, it would seem wise to stop and think about the desirability of considering a new urban policy, as certain states seem to be doing these days. It may be that the current distribution of responsibilities among the various administrative levels and the corresponding financial dependencies and balance, are obsolete. This is hardly surprising since they date from earlier times in which the prominence of the city was by no means comparable to the situation today.

This is a complex task, a transformation which is necessary but, given its scope, will not be simple and will demand the involvement of all. In this regard, it is striking how in modern times "competitiveness" is commonplace in literature dealing with regional and urban spaces whereas references to "cooperation" are few and far between.

There can be no doubt that our system feeds on competition and that the rivalry among the world's main cities to attract qualified inhabitants, manufacturing investment or tourist flows is creating the possibility for change, adaptation, innovation and, ultimately, progress.

However, it is no less true that, to the extent that major cities face the same challenges, to the extent that their future is defined by the same phenomena, there also exists a huge capacity for cooperation. There would seem to be enormous possibilities for urban collaboration on a global scale.

Major cities must be capable of establishing and developing the mechanisms needed to guarantee a leading position in the allocation of public administration in line with their key role in our societies.

In this whole context, it would seem necessary to convince the other agents involved (nation states, regional governments, multilateral bodies, major companies...) that major cities are today suffering the consequences of a clear imbalance which is threatening the sustainability of the model itself. There is no correlation between the scale and complexity of the role they have played over recent years and the financial and administrative resources on which they are able to draw in order to put this into practice. Hence, the need to seek out new perspectives and imaginative solutions to bring balance to the situation.