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Situating C40 in the Evolution of Networked Urban Climate Governance

Rejoinder to Commentaries by Michele Acuto, Niki Frantzeskaki, David Gordon & Craig Johnson, Emmanuelle Pinault and Emilia Smeds

A series of responses to 'A Decade of C40: Research Insights and
Agendas for City Networks',

Kathryn Davidson, Lars Coenen, Brendan Gleeson¹

We are grateful to our interlocutors for the considerate and thought-provoking commentary provided on our paper. It provides a lot of food for thought for researchers to engage with the increasingly significant urban climate governance orchestrated in and by city networks. It should not come as a surprise that there are still many unresolved questions and debates about the shifting configurations of authority and legitimacy carved out by cities as players of force in addressing the wicked challenge of climate change. The responses by Acuto, Frantzeskaki, Gordon & Johnson, Pinault and Smeds all draw attention to the fact that networked urban climate governance indeed plays out in a multi-level governance framing. City networks such as C40 give collective voice to cities in a global arena of climate action. They can play a powerful role in helping with the urgent task of

¹ Davidson, K., Coenen, L., and Gleeson, B. (2019), A Decade of C40: Research Insights and Agendas for City Networks, *Global Policy*, 11 (4), doi: 10.1111/1758-5899.12740

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adapting our urban habitats to fast moving climate change and to assisting the wider cause of planetary mitigation of dangerous carbon emissions.

Our respondents are right in asserting that C40 and its member cities should not be viewed as operating in a political and economic vacuum. Situating C40 in a wider political space opens avenues of research that extend on the one hand into a closer look at the intra-organisational configurations and dynamics of city networks and, on the other, into scrutinizing the relationships between C40 and other governance arrangements encompassing climate and urban policy. Acuto's suggestion to adopt an inside-out perspective offers a fruitful analytical and methodological point of departure to trace, compare and evaluate 'the lived experiences' of individual cities across the globe that shed light on the nuanced politics of C40 actions on the ground. Smeds further substantiates this inquiry through her proposition to study the politics of leadership, membership and donorship. Recent developments – which were not known to the authors at the time of writing – within the 100 Resilient Cities network demonstrate indeed the relevance and timeliness of keeping track of the organizational transformations that city network orchestrators, intermediaries and target organisations are exposed to. While the network concept implicitly invites an analytical focus on connections, dynamics and actors within the network, the respondents call for broadening the political economy scope of city networks and remind us of the complex relationships of these networks with other modalities and forms of urban governance. These include market relationships with private sector actors, intra-governmental state hierarchies and democratic relations with citizens. Here, Gordon & Johnson make a highly apposite distinction between 'power over' and 'power with' which readily comes to bear when considering the knowledge dynamics and the degree of openness and transparency that is espoused in city networks.

Our initial paper conceptualized such knowledge dynamics as experimentation to emphasize that the climate actions and solutions that are developed and diffused through C40 are inherently open-ended and vexed by a plethora of uncertainties. The wickedness of climate change defies any off-the-shelf, one-size-fits-all innovation but requires continuous adaptation to local circumstances and feedback. This logic of open-ended experimentation profits indeed from open innovation (as opposed to closed innovation, see Chesbrough et al., 2006) and asserts, as suggested by Frantzeskaki that city-networks act as curators of institutional spaces for co-creation and knowledge co-production. Frantzeskaki further elaborates on this theme in connection to processes of democratization – a process that questions the hegemony of expert knowledge and opens knowledge generation and use to a broader range of stakeholders and knowledgeable agents, notably citizens. We remain however doubtful whether co-creation should and, indeed, does lead to de-politicizing knowledge. Rather, by emphasizing the need for evidence-based, knowledge-rich

decision and policy-making, the political stakes in the co-creation processes are heightened. Co-creation and knowledge co-production in climate experiments is conducive to local adaptation of solutions and ideas and could indeed lead to smarter policy mobilities in city networks. However, this is not to say that all knowledge should be treated as equal. How different capabilities, areas of expertise and lived experiences across a plethora of knowledgeable actors are brought together, orchestrated and intermediated in urban experimentation remains to be an open question that is often too easily black-boxed by referring to sympathetic terms such as living labs, co-creation and co-production.

There is still a lot of empirical and theoretical research needed to unpack urban climate experimentation to shed light on its benefits and costs. It came to us as a surprise, however, that the notion of Darwinian experimentation generated 'astonishment and indignation' on behalf of Pinault. We acknowledge that the connotation 'Darwinian' may be interpreted in multiple ways and invites for some further clarification. Our specific use of the term is drawn from current scholarship not from the dark pages of historical politics. Rather than alluding to political ideologies that subscribe to principles of generalized Darwinism the concept, taken from a comprehensive literature review on experimentalism in Ansell and Bartenberger (2016), refers to evolutionary processes of variation, selection and retention, which have become influential in evolutionary economics, in studies of technological innovation, and are gaining notice in the field of policy experimentation (Dosi and Nelson, 1994; Nair and Roy, 2009). Pinault's commentary points also to an important qualification in terms of the subject of experimentation that resonates with Smeds' comment concerning the bias towards technical learning over political learning. It is a well-known insight from studies in socio-technical transitions that trial and demonstration projects, or more generally niche experimentation, more easily and readily invite for first-order technical learning whereas second-order learning, involving shifting norms, values and process of institutional and behavioural change, are more prone to inertia and path-dependency (Smith and Raven, 2012). Here Pinault provides a helpful observation that this lack of political learning is in part caused by political challenges and resource distributions where city governments still find themselves often at the lower end of state hierarchies.

The commentaries that have been provided by our interlocutors also point to the interrelatedness of the analytical categories that have underpinned our research agenda; i.e. the political economies of city networks, the knowledge dynamics in city networks and how city networks transform key urban institutions (Davidson et al., 2018). Notably, these categories come together through the ways in which knowledge generated and used in city networks is co-created through the interplay of heterogeneous actors that respectively have differentiated and uneven access to resources, are

representative of different interests and bring various capabilities into the mix when co-producing knowledge. Considering this unevenness and asymmetry, we assert that values of openness and principles of transparency are of pivotal importance for this knowledge to be practical when put to bear in transforming key urban institutions. In other words, for research to be actionable and experimentation to be generative, it is key that the knowledge that is created and articulated in city networks remains firmly embedded in the public realm. Here, active involvement and collaboration with private sector actors in city networks is crucial due to the critical resources, skills, data, technologies that firms like Siemens, ARUP, etc can contribute with in the zero-carbon transitions. And indeed, greater public-private co-creation and co-production of knowledge be acknowledged as one of the hallmark achievements of city networks such as C40. At the same time, it needs to be noted that it can come at a price when it means that such knowledge remains locked away as proprietary private knowledge and treated as tradeable Intellectual Property. While co-creative, it would imply that some actors, notably marginalized groups, may unintendedly be excluded from access to the learning processes that city networks seek to espouse. To ensure generative co-productive, it is therefore important to safeguard that the way solutions and innovations developed in and by city networks are governed by principles of democratic and public access to data, information and knowledge for all stakeholders involved. We thank our correspondents for their constructive reading of our paper and acknowledge the hard work of all involved in city networks, including the C40.

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