

Knowledge Diplomacy Seminar – Cities as Actors for Global Climate Change

Report prepared by Dr Liliya Alijeva¹

1. Introduction

The online Knowledge Diplomacy Seminar series is a collaboration between the British Council (France and Germany), Goethe Institut, and University of London (London and Paris). The project is supported by ICR Research, Queen Mary University of London and the NEXTEUK project. This Knowledge Diplomacy and Cities Series is composed of online discussions and forms the second phase of the University of London's exploration of the concept of 'Knowledge Diplomacy.' The exploration aims to dig deeper into the dynamics of global city cooperation today, by focusing on European cities and beyond. The aim of the overall series is to bring together leading experts for an exchange of ideas that will contribute to the University of London's approach to its future work on Knowledge Diplomacy and the international agenda.

This fourth and final online seminar of 2022 took place on 6 October 2022 and specifically explored the concept of Knowledge Diplomacy in the context of cities as facilitators and spaces of climate change action and diplomacy.

2. List of speakers and format of the event

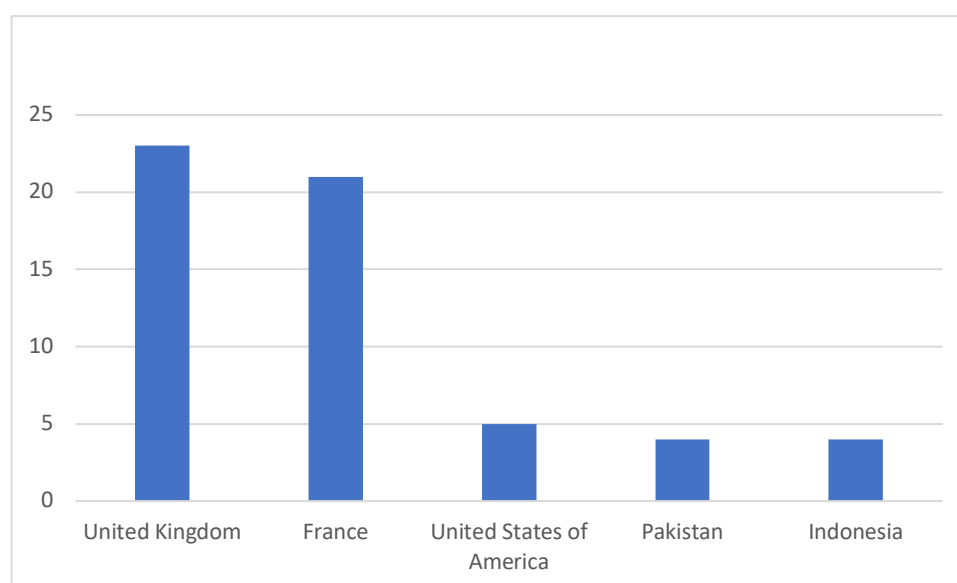
Chaired by **Sir Ian Blatchford** (Director and Chief Executive of the Science Museum Group), the panel included presentations and interventions from **Célia Blauel** (Former Deputy Mayor of Paris for the Environment, Sustainable Development, Water, Canal Policies and the Climate Energy Plan), **David Miller** (Managing Director of the C40 Centre for Urban Climate Policy and Economy), and **Eda Ayaydin** (Teaching Fellow at the University of London Institute in Paris). The webinar was one and a half hours long. Each presenter was given 10 to 15 minutes to present, followed by questions from the Chair regarding the presentations from the panellists, then the session concluded by opening the floor for Q&A from the audience.

¹ Project Officer at the University of London Institute in Paris. Member of the Knowledge Diplomacy Core Group Team.

3. Registration and attendance

The event received 98 registrations via the Eventbrite ticketing service. Overall, the registrants were from Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, China, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Lesotho, Mexico, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Spain, Sudan, Tanzania, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, and the United States of America. The top 5 countries of registrations were the United Kingdom (23), France (21), the United States of America (5), Pakistan (4), and Indonesia (4).

Top 5 Countries of Attendees



The online session was hosted on the Zoom webinar platform and was attended by 56 users in total with 37 unique viewers². The maximum concurrent number of views was 26 attendees³.

4. Panellists' presentations

The online seminar began with an insightful presentation from **Célia Blauel** who reflected on the role of academia and its contribution to public policies during her time as Deputy Mayor of Paris in charge of climate energy, ecological transition, and water. Strong scientific data and significant studies on climate change have been produced, but at the time, public policy circles did not treat them with the attention they merited. The speaker emphasised that, regrettably, negotiations in many other fields, beyond those involving climate change, also frequently face this type of experience.

The speaker focused on the role of Paris in tackling climate change. It was emphasised that the city of Paris has been on the front lines for over ten years. Given that cities emit large amounts of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as a result of the human activities and way of life, the cities had to take the lead in combating climate change. The speaker emphasised that

² Users that used their computers to attend the webinar. The figure does not count the panellists or attendees that attended by phone.

³ Maximum number of attendees at a given moment during the online seminar. The figure excludes the panellists.

cities are currently more likely than national governments to take the lead in addressing climate change:

“Being at the local level, we are asked to act [...] and fulfil more than the states. This is good, because at the local level we have good political tools [...] to act on, also (we have) a link with citizens which we believe is not perfect, but it exists, which explains why cities are on that front line.”

Since 2007, Paris has had a roadmap in the form of Climate Action Plans for climate change mitigation, including in areas of transport, buildings, food, and many other fields. In 2015, the emphasis turned to urban adaptation in light of the studies carried out prior to COP21 in Paris. As a result, the creation of green adaptation funds and climate crisis preparedness were given more attention on the city's agenda. The Paris Climate Change Strategy now relies on three broad strategy pillars: transforming through public policies, mobilising civil society, and taking action on the European and global levels.

The presentation emphasised the importance of networks for cities to respond to global issues and take part in diplomatic processes on various levels. For instance, former Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo and numerous other leaders helped bring about changes that made cities more significant on the global stage after the COP21. The importance of networks can be observed in the emergence of *la Diplomatie des Villes* concept which understands the phenomenon as a tool for cities and local territories. The concept initiated formations and associations of municipalities and cities as its basis. The C40, Energy Cities, United Cities and Local Governments, ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, and smaller networks like EuroCities that focus on particular topics and/or themes rather than a wide range of urgent challenges were just a few of the city networks listed by the speaker. Overall, the emergence of such networks of cities indicates that future efforts will centre on collaboration between cities and various stakeholders rather than competition.

The speaker discussed the importance of higher education and academia in the most recent developments in urban cooperation and noted that there are significant obstacles in how policymakers interpret academia:

“I would say obviously academic experts are really there to help us... But not that much. We have a lot of studies that were giving a lot of data and ideas to build the transformative roadmaps of our cities [...] but even if we had the best experts of climate and social impacts working with us [...] nobody would really believe what we are saying.”

This draws attention to the general problem of academic-political cooperation and academic stakeholders' involvement in decision-making processes. According to the presenter's observations, this dynamic is changing as public opinion and public awareness of climate change are increasing. Even while this might not be sufficient to bridge the political and academic divide, the expansion of popular opinion is nonetheless a promising development. In the instance of the policy addressing air pollution in Paris, public knowledge of the impact of air pollution on public health was a crucial element in its effective implementation. Political campaigns in 2014 and the timing of the COP21 in Paris contributed to this increase in public awareness.

The presentation highlighted that local governments frequently consult non-profit organisations and civil society before approaching the academic community when seeking to participate in international negotiations. Stakeholders at the national level do not always favourably view cities and non-state actors' active participation in the international arena. The speaker emphasised that local government representatives are frequently more familiar with

higher education institutions and the academic community in their cities than representatives from the national government are. Therefore, by building and maintaining networks that offer a kind of "translation" of scientific work, cities are better prepared to engage in climate change debates.

The **Chair** asked the speaker whether the presenter felt that there was a burden of expectation on the city and its government when climate change negotiations were taking place in their city. The speaker discussed the COP21 event in Paris and emphasised that this was true prior to, during, and following the negotiations because the city needed to make accommodations for fostering solidarity and cooperation. The **Chair** questioned whether there was a risk that different stakeholders and their audiences might express and interpret scholarly work differently. The speaker responded that public officials, upon entering the political world, need to learn new and timely knowledge rapidly due to the nature of their work. However, academic work must be understandable to non-academic stakeholders who require concise and rapid delivery of the latest findings. The presenter highlighted that academics who become politicians and organisations such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) do exactly that: they communicate real and clear science in the avenues where it should be considered. In addition, the audiences have also become more aware and accepting of this type of knowledge; therefore, the change is mutual.

The second presentation was delivered by **David Miller**. During the second presentation, David Miller spoke. The speaker emphasised that cities are important not merely because of the individual leadership of people like Mayor Hidalgo and others, but also because, as of 2008–2009, the world has become primarily urban. This transition occurred due to the growth of megacities in countries like China and the migration of people to cities in countries like India, Latin America, and Africa.

The speaker highlighted the growing significance of cities in terms of public policy, particularly with regard to issues related to climate change. Because cities account for 70% of GHG emissions and constitute the source of the issue, local governments are better equipped to develop solutions than their national counterparts. City to city collaboration is exemplified by the Denmark2020 program which is a collaboration of virtually all Danish cities and towns to create 1.5C compatible action plans, which were facilitated in the collaboration with C40. Cities are showing clear commitments to keeping the world within 1.5 degrees of warming. Unfortunately, national governments have temperature increases that are above the recommended trajectory, which is concerning. This reveals that efforts of national governments to combat climate change lack clear plans.

The speaker emphasised that cities can frequently function far more cooperatively than national governments. For instance, the Mayor of Los Angeles Eric Garcetti led the Cities Race to Zero alliance, which is an informal diplomatic network among mayors and non-governmental actors representing more than 1000 cities. This alliance plans and develops strategies for issues including transportation, waste, buildings, energy and many other areas. The speaker further continued on this point by discussing recent advancements in the maritime industry, namely the current Los Angeles and Shanghai green shipping corridor initiative. At a time when the United States of America and China were experiencing extremely difficult diplomatic relations, the two cities took the initiative. While national governments are caught in a diplomatic standoff, cities could start the conversation on green shipping on a global scale, even involving significant players in the maritime field like the Maerks company. There are many other examples of cities taking the lead in addressing global climate change more effectively than the national governments, including Oslo, which created a budget that accounts for the impact of climate change on the city.

When discussing the role of international higher education and research in international cooperation, the speaker underscored that one needs to understand the main difference between the academic and political worlds:

“The academic world acknowledges, as it should, doubts and questions parameters; in the political world, you need to be clear and straightforward and much more certain. [...] I think the very best politicians on the issue of climate change, as on many other issues of inequality, economy and public health, are working from solid science but they speak to people in ways that people will hear much better because they speak clearly and simply with clarity of purpose.”

The **Chair** agreed with the speaker’s statement and argued that policymakers need to know enough information to make a decision. The speaker agreed but emphasised that the right kind of information is needed to make decisions. The speaker commented on the role of city government to ensure the participation and benefit of everyone in the city. He continued that climate adaptation policies can also address other pressing issues like inequality and the cost of living in the community:

“If you have the right knowledge [...] and have enough of it, you can really drive those kinds of results. But you have to ultimately be based in science and facts otherwise you can get some really offside results.”

A question from the audience asked the speaker whether developing cities can offer advice to developed cities in addressing environmental issues. The speaker replied that networks of cities facilitate this type of knowledge exchange because mayors of different cities face similar climate challenges. The network facilitates conversations where the same questions brought by different city governments can be answered. In this setting, the academic community can also assist mayors in understanding the answers by showcasing research and scientific evidence.

Eda Ayaydin, the final speaker, diverged from the discussion regarding cities to discuss broader scientific endeavours in the Arctic. Because temperatures in the Arctic increase far more quickly than in other parts of the world, including cities, the speaker emphasised that the region is crucial for tackling climate change. The speaker emphasised that this year’s temperature rise in the area was four times faster than it was three years earlier and that the repercussions of this trend should be seriously considered:

“If the Arctic is the roof of the world, then what happens there is returning to the Southern latitudes [...]. That’s why the Arctic states, cities, NGOs and universities take this issue very seriously.”

The speaker emphasised the continued work at the Arctic Council, which offers a political and scientific forum that is extremely unique to the organisation. The speaker emphasised the several crucial roles that scientists play in addressing climate change because they offer imaginative depictions of the Arctic, influence public opinion, and promote decision-making and cooperation among various stakeholders.

Like other cities across the world, cities in the Arctic area provide space for and promote decision-making platforms for topics that are pertinent to their communities. Regarding the annual diplomatic processes concerning the Arctic region, the Arctic Frontiers Conference is organised in Tromsø, the Arctic Circle Assembly takes place in Reykjavik, and the High North Dialogues takes place in Bodø. The speaker recognised that local city action is important and in conjunction with the facilitation of global diplomatic forums, like COP26, the cities are

capable of raising awareness on issues that affect them and providing a platform for voices to the local community.

It is essential to engage with international higher education and research, but more needs to be done to translate knowledge into information that can be put to use, much like the IPCC and Arctic Council reports, which are brief and simplify study findings. However, the speaker noted that this kind of concise presentation needs to be genuine because:

“While tackling climate change, yes, [...] the (number of) projects is increasing but the greenwashing is the thing we have to be actually careful about because the distribution of the funds requires attention.”

The **Chair** reflected on the presentation in combination with the presentations by previous speakers. The speaker was requested to convey the hopes and frustrations of the scientists. According to the speaker, scientists are capable of communicating with local officials or political parties, but for this engagement to be successful, political will is essential. The will varies between cities in the North and South; some local representatives may take scientists and their research seriously, while others may not.

The speaker said that it was always difficult to obtain the right political will for researchers, not simply in the wake of economic crises and the pandemic. Overall, the speaker emphasised that local engagement for researchers is the only feasible solution to reach that political will. While the work at the Arctic Council stakeholders provides a unique forum for scientists to engage in international diplomacy; there is always a potential risk that the politics of these forums may affect the work of scientists.

The audience asked the speaker which type of methodology and data should be more trusted today - qualitative or quantitative? The speaker stated that for scientific methods it is clear that both methods are important. The speaker stated that the use of both quantitative and qualitative data can be observed in the recent IPCC reports.

The **Chair** asked the final question during the online session although we frequently think of physicists and other technical experts when we think of knowledge and expertise, should we turn to social scientists for knowledge instead? The speaker concurred that it is important to consider the knowledge from “soft science” as there a lot of crucial research is conducted by social scientists. The speaker highlighted that Arctic studies recognise the significance of their work because social science can help us understand climate change better than “hard” science alone.

5. Summary, key action points/recommendations

The three presentations and the discussions suggest that cities are leading the way in combating climate change because local governments can work together much more effectively and link the policies to their communities. Cities are therefore better able to act in climate change-related international diplomacy. There is stronger cooperation between cities and city authorities with higher education institutions and academia overall. However, scholarly research encounters problems such as accessibility and communication of data, academic knowledge, research and scientific discovery may not be sufficient in the political world. The academic community may be required to study methods for increasing public awareness, encouraging varied engagement and the creation of accessible networks, as well as learning how to frame and position latest scholarly contributions within the current pressing issues.