Diasporas as Actors in Urban Diplomacy

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Summary

Cities are becoming critical in governing global challenges, and urban policies are not seen as purely local realities. From critical diplomatic studies, this essay states that the notion of urban diplomacy has the possibility to distinguish itself by avoiding being a mere imitation of state/traditional diplomacy, and it allows an analytical path to identify a more inclusive perspective to involve resident foreigners in the design and implementation of a city's foreign policy. This essay discusses the role of global human mobility in urban diplomacy and the foreign policy of cities from a deterritorialised perspective. The essay argues that diaspora organisations are relevant actors in designing and implementing cities' foreign policy as part of inclusive urban diplomacy through their trans-local dynamics. Following a qualitative approach, the essay's empirical bases are four socio-political experiences that show how Mexico City's diaspora feeds trans-locally the everyday relationship between Mexico City and Chicago.

Keywords

urban diplomacy – city's foreign policy – trans-local – diasporas – deterritorialisation

1 Introduction

Cities are positioned as strategic territories to implement contemporary global agendas (Sustainable Development Goals, climate change, urban agenda). This global phenomenon has generated a growing interest in identifying and
analysing the capacities of cities to assume that global role.\textsuperscript{1} At the same time, diverse perspectives on contemporary global transformations situate human mobility as a factor in redesigning and dislocating national socio-political spaces towards a transnational sense of belonging and trans-local dynamics as stable and laudable features of the world.\textsuperscript{2}

Following Sennett on how to think about co-operation and collaboration in the design of cities,\textsuperscript{3} and Vos on the study of inclusive urban diplomacy,\textsuperscript{4} this essay reflects on the importance of asking oneself about cities’ inclusion capacities in the face of contemporary human diversity beyond sedentary social thought.\textsuperscript{5}

From this perspective, the aim is to open a dialogue on the design of the foreign policy of cities and the pertinence of rethinking and applying urban diplomacy in the face of global human mobility. This conversation is relevant when, in the name of patriotic values and sovereignty, people and communities in motion face hostility and multi-scale policy frameworks that exclude them from the societies where they were born or grew up. This reflection seeks to address the following question: how does global human mobility challenge the study and the application of urban diplomacy and the foreign policy of cities?

The study of city diplomacy has made significant developments.\textsuperscript{6} With a complementary approach to the predominant perspectives on the study of city diplomacy (city networks, city twinning and the economic promotion of cities), this essay follows a critical approach and research agenda focused on studying the relationship between diplomacy, city and global human mobility (paradiplomacy and civic binationality, and foreign policy of cities and migrants).\textsuperscript{7}

On this reflective path, it is argued that diaspora organisations are relevant actors in designing and implementing cities’ foreign policy as part of inclusive urban diplomacy through their trans-local dynamics. Following the essay’s central argument, the discussion contributes to understanding the role of global human mobility in transforming contemporary diplomacy, with a particular interest in the foreign policy of cities and urban diplomacy from a deterritorialised perspective.

\textsuperscript{1} Acuto 2016; Curtis 2016.
\textsuperscript{2} Di Cesare 2020; Levin 2020; Sager 2018.
\textsuperscript{3} Sennett 2018.
\textsuperscript{4} Vos 2016.
\textsuperscript{5} Eun 2021; Levin 2020; Sager 2018.
\textsuperscript{6} Acuto, Kosovac and Harley 2021; Grande 2020; Marchetti 2021; Pipa and Bouchet 2020; Sevin 2021; Sohuela and Sevin 2020.
\textsuperscript{7} Alejo 2019, 2020.
Following a qualitative approach, the role of diaspora organisations in urban diplomacy is examined through interrogating the following empirical question: to what extent does Mexico City’s urban diplomacy incorporate its diaspora organisations into its foreign policy? This brief essay uses the case of the Mexico City diaspora in Chicago to respond to this question. The selected case offers four socio-political experiences to show how this diaspora feeds daily life in the relationship between Mexico City and Chicago: representative offices abroad, deterritorialised political rights, the rights of families to be united in the face of the deportation process and cultural projects related to the presence of Mexico City in Chicago.

2 Urban Diplomacy, Cities’ Foreign Policy and Diasporas

This essay embraces intellectual paths of thinking about the multiplicities and pluralities of diplomatic practices, actors and spaces. On the challenges of urban diplomacy in the face of global human mobility, this reflection considers diplomacy from a decentring perspective. Then, this deliberation understands urban diplomacy from a set of trans-local practices that redefine diplomacy agency and spaces.

The study and application of foreign policy has evolved. Today it is affirmed that foreign policy is not limited to an exclusive policy of nation states. Currently, scholars and practitioners recognise that different actors can design and implement their own foreign policy. Curtis and Acuto define the foreign policy of a city as a ‘city’s formal strategy in dealing with other governmental and non-governmental actors on an international stage’.

The study of diasporas in diplomacy as complementary and strategic agents who strengthen the presence and negotiations (processes and policy frameworks) between receiving, sending and transit states is well developed. By recognising the role of various non-governmental actors in developing the foreign policy of cities, diaspora organisations are placed as relevant actors in international politics and, in particular, in diplomacy. In the context of the diplomacy and diasporas literature, this essay contributes to understanding the role of diasporas in the foreign policy of cities and urban diplomacy.

8 Constantinou et al. 2021; Cornago 2013; Dittmer and McConnell 2016.
9 Dittmer and McConnell 2016, 6.
10 Dittmer 2020, 156; Leira 2019, 196.
11 Curtis and Acuto 2019, 1.
12 Adamson and Tsourapas 2019; Baser Ozturk and Hoyo 2020; Bravo and De Moya 2021; Brinkerhoff 2019; Dolea 2021; Ho and McConnell 2019; Kennedy 2020; Manor and
Two reasons are put forward here in support of the perspective of the right of diaspora communities to be consulted and allowed to contribute to the foreign policy of cities.

Firstly, cities are not just physical spaces with artificial constructions, for they involve vital processes fed by the people who inhabit them. Acuto affirms that ‘[p]rocesses and institutions of global urban governance have very tangible implications on everyday urban life’. That is, they are built on an ongoing basis with changing human relationships that give them meaning. In essence, ‘the urban context is not about static and given places, but rather, it entails dynamic processes.’

Secondly, the global human mobility groups (economic migrants, refugees, diasporas, tourists) are repeatedly mentioned in official government speeches, by business and in cultural exchanges between localities. This formal recognition indicates that diaspora communities are critical components of the relationships between cities. Families, individuals and organisations with different backgrounds, abilities and goals feed diaspora communities. With the recognition of this diversity within diasporas, this essay reflects on the plurality in motion found within diaspora communities. Moreover, this deliberation highlights how diaspora communities contribute to mutual and reciprocal knowledge between localities and their inhabitants.

Based on this theoretical perspective on urban diplomacy, foreign policy of cities and diasporas, the interest here lies in reflecting upon how diasporas challenge the mechanisms, channels and capacities of cities to design and implement their foreign policy as part of inclusive urban diplomacy.

3 Trans-local Dynamics from Mexico City's Diaspora in Chicago

Analysing the trans-local dynamics that have been unfolding among the Mexico City diaspora in Chicago, this section offers qualitative evidence for the discussion offered in this brief essay about the role of diasporas in urban diplomacy and their relevance in designing and implementing cities’ foreign policy. Four socio-political processes are presented that show how this diaspora displays
trans-local dynamics that feed the everyday relationship between Mexico City and Chicago.

3.1 **First Case Study: Representative Offices Abroad**

For the government of Mexico City, the international action of cities benefits the activities of local governments. For the ‘diversity and dynamism’ of Mexico City’s international relations, the local government ‘requires coordinated and inter-institutional strategies both outside and within the local government’. Thus, the government affirms that cities’ foreign policy is not limited to ‘the government’s actions’.16 That is, Mexico City’s foreign policy recognises the Mexico City diaspora as necessary for the city’s global projection.17

Based on this perspective, the government of Mexico City installed representative offices in the cities of Los Angeles and Chicago. With two phases between 2007 and 2018 (Houses of Mexico City and Mexico City Initiative), these offices sought to ‘strengthen’ the co-operation between relevant actors and to pursue a common agenda in the commercial, tourist, migratory and cultural spheres with a ‘binational perspective’. Mexico City’s representative office in Chicago organised ‘strategic dialogues’ between the two cities for ‘economic, social, cultural and governmental’ exchanges. This office also organised community fairs (services and programmes of the local government) for the Mexico City diaspora residing in Chicago. In addition, in 2018 these offices promoted a platform for the representative offices of other Mexican local governments in the United States to co-ordinate the protection of Mexican migrants in the United States in the face of the intensified anti-Mexican environment during the Trump Administration.

3.2 **Second Case Study: Migrant Deputy**

With the new Constitution of Mexico City (2017), the political rights of the Mexico City diaspora have been advanced. People from Mexico City who live outside of Mexico can be candidates for migrant deputy, and they have the right to vote for direct representation in the local congress. The migrant deputy is a migrant representative who acts on their behalf as a member of the congress. In 2021, the Mexico City diaspora voted for the first time to elect a migrant deputy in Mexico’s electoral process. In Chicago, intense political-electoral activity was observed by the diaspora organisations of Mexico City in response to this new transnational electoral process. In this election, three of the nine candidates (all three women) resided in Chicago. Moreover, these diaspora organisations

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16 Gobierno de Ciudad de México 2016, 12.
17 Gobierno de Ciudad de México 2017, 44.
have promoted virtual civic spaces (e.g., debates between candidates, electoral participation and interviews with the candidates) to involve the people of Mexico City in the United States in this deterritorialised electoral process.

For these organisations, electing a migrant deputy is a political right won after several years of struggle. They see the figure of the migrant deputy as ‘essential’ for the community of Mexico City in the United States. They say they need a representative and intermediary in the local congress of Mexico City. These Mexico City diaspora organisations want to improve the quality of life of the places where they were born and where some of their family members and friends still live. They argue that after sending money to their places of origin and sharing their culture and traditions between generations, it is necessary to have ‘the right to influence the politics’ that define the future of their places of origin.

3.3 Third Case Study: The Rights of Families against Deportation
The third piece of evidence is the trans-local activism aimed at defending the rights of individuals and families deported from the United States and currently residing in Mexico City. These organisations foster trans-local senses of belonging for individuals and families who lived in the United States for many years but were deported (some were born in the United States). These groups of people say they have a hybrid identity. They assume they are ‘from here and there’. The Otros Dreams in Acción (Others Dreams in Action) organisation promotes these narratives. They affirm that their hybrid identity is the product of their socialisation in the United States combined with the Mexican culture they recognise as part of their historical identity.

This trans-local activism, among other activities, involves organising campaigns to make their causes visible and to defend their right to feel part of both societies (the United States and Mexico). Some examples are the campaigns deployed by the diaspora organisation Deportados Unidos en la Lucha (DUL) (Deported United in the Struggle). DUL was founded in Mexico City by a Chicago-based mother who was deported after living in the Windy City for more than fifteen years; she left her children with friends in Chicago. DUL promotes the right to motherhood as a ‘remote mom’. This organisation refers to the figure of the ‘remote mom’ to show how fathers and mothers fight for their rights to be with their children who were born and are growing up in the

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18 Oviedo 2019, 3.
19 Oviedo 2019, 10.
20 Anderson 2019.
21 López, Varela Huerta and Hernández Cruz 2020.
United States. With campaigns such as ‘Hugs no Walls’ and ‘Fight for Hugs’, these grassroots organisations promote family reunification and the right of parents to be with their children who remain in the United States. As part of its activities, DUL organises virtual meetings with various organisations in Mexico and the United States to design strategies to defend their right to reconnect with their daughters and sons who are growing up without their families.

3.4 Fourth Case Study: Chicagotlan: Finding Tenochtitlan in Chicago

Chicagotlan is an invented word that combines Chicago and Tenochtitlan (an Aztec city previously settled in the territory that is currently the historic centre of Mexico City). In the commemoration of the 500-year anniversary (1521) of the fall of Tenochtitlan to the ‘European conquerors’, a group of Chicagoans of Mexican descent organised the Chicagotlan cultural project. The project’s objective was to sensitisise and create dialogue with the young generations of Mexican Americans and with ‘Chicxanx Chicagoans’ about the colonial legacy of those events and reflect on the cultural and historical resources that are part of their collective identity.

The project elaborated a virtual and printed map to locate the symbolic presence of Tenochtitlan in Chicago. In addition, they organised dance events, museum exhibits and panel discussions. With the map, the project identified symbols of the Aztec culture in restaurants, streets, schools, mosaics and murals in the city. The project found 47 sites in Chicago (community spaces, religious buildings, murals, mosaics, shops, institutions and archaeological sites, for example, in the Newberry Library and the Art Institute of Chicago). Whilst these symbols were located in different parts of Chicago, the most significant presence of the symbols was identified in neighbourhoods with a historical Mexican presence, such as Pilsen and Little Village. Through these activities, the Chicagotlan project sought to demonstrate and recognise that the presence of Mexico, and particularly of Mexico City, has played a part in the construction of a cosmopolitan Chicago.

4 Rethinking Urban Diplomacy and Foreign Policy of Cities from a Deterritorialised Perspective

In the previous section, qualitative evidence was provided to demonstrate the diversity of trans-local and non-linear dynamics displayed by the diaspora community of Mexico City in the United States, mainly in Chicago. This comprised information on deterritorialised political rights; representative offices abroad; a sense of belonging to two places; transnational communities and
families; the rights of families to be united in the face of deportation; and the recognition of how people in motion contribute to the development of cities of which they are not natives.

In accordance with the trans-local dynamics exposed previously, it is relevant to initiate a more in-depth reflection on urban diplomacy and the city’s foreign policy in the face of global human mobility that challenges the territorialised perspectives on city diplomacy. Recently, Constantinou and Opondo have wondered about the balance between sedentary thinking and nomadic thinking for a cosmopolitan dialogue in diplomacy. For his part, Ferrajoli affirms that human mobility is about redesigning the national spaces of law and politics towards transnational spaces. At the same time, Eun points to the need to think about international relations with deterritorialised views in the face of limited global pluralism.

Given the perspectives mentioned above, it is necessary to rethink the urban diplomacy, foreign policy of cities and global human mobility from a deterritorialised perspective. Today, the local is positioned as the most convenient scale for pursuing global agendas (global development agendas, climate change, urban agendas). However, given particular perspectives on territory, citizenship and foreigners, territorial views can promote positions and attitudes that exclude people who are not natives of those territories. Historically, it can be evidenced how foreign policy and diplomacy have been used to exclude or marginalise human groups inside and outside of nation states by appealing to specific interpretations about sovereignty and territory. Both Weber (citizenship) and Walzer (rights) contributed to building the theoretical framework of modern political thought. Nevertheless, this denies rights to those who, by origin or birth, are not part of the territories where they reside.

Following the evidence presented earlier, it is held that a city’s foreign policy requires the design of participation and inclusion mechanisms so that the plural voices of people involved in global human mobility, who flow between cities, are taken into account according to their experiences and knowledge. Given this, the foreign policy of cities faces the challenge of recognising the trans-local lives of diaspora communities. This trans-local perspective on cities’ foreign policy suggests the need to redesign the social and institutional relations that flow both outside and within nation states. This institutional and

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22 Constantinou and Opondo 2021, 329.
23 Ferrajoli 2018, 90.
24 Eun 2021.
social redesign of the relationship between society and a city’s foreign policy is relevant to those diasporas who simultaneously define themselves as part of two places and appeal for a hybrid sense of belonging.

Inclusive urban diplomacy is necessary in a setting that intensifies the feelings towards and attitudes against foreigners. In accordance with the analysis of the trans-local dynamics of the diaspora from Mexico City in Chicago, it is concluded that local actions remain isolated and will be ineffective if the global context in which they occur is not considered.\textsuperscript{27} That is, lives in motion require understandings and policy frameworks that see in the deterritorialised perspectives and the trans-local dynamics normalised phenomena within spaces (territories) that have been observed as sedentary and stable. A deterritorialised perspective on inclusive urban diplomacy invites the acknowledgement that localities and territories (cities) are not closed entities and that their development is not only due to their native population. From this perspective, any locality and its inhabitants can be said to have been enriched through cultural, commercial and social exchange with other societies over time. Regarding diasporas, this reflection leads to the contention that inclusive urban diplomacy could be a socio-political tool to promote the encounter between natives and foreign residents, thus recognising the reality of the mutual and plural enrichment between people, societies and cultures.

5 Conclusion

This essay has discussed and highlighted the role of diasporas in the foreign policy of cities and urban diplomacy from a deterritorialised perspective. To summarise, there is an urgent need to rethink the socio-political function of urban diplomacy concerning global human mobility given the current autochthonous and nativist multi-scale context that rejects free movement and promotes negative attitudes towards foreigners (e.g., multinational companies, immigrants or tourists). Territories and localities that deny co-habitation between resident foreigners and natives in the face of the global human mobility phenomenon promote isolated localities. These ways of understanding human coexistence foster dysfunctional institutions and foreign policy of cities frameworks that detract from open societies, of which contemporary cities are part in a context of emerging ‘planetary urbanisation’.\textsuperscript{28}

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\bibitem{28} Taylor 2019, 522; Curtis and Acuto 2019, 3.
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