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TRANSATLANTIC CONNECTIONS AND CIRCULATIONS IN THE 20TH CENTURY: THE URBAN VARIABLE

‘American city’ and ‘European city’ are familiar terms to us all. They suggest architectural landscapes and forms, glimpsed through movies, magazines or vacations. They also suggest atmospheres, ways of living that one perceives both as different and similar. In both cases, it is through the comparison we develop between sets of pictures or sensations that we are able to create two categories that we label as “American city” and “European city”. Both categories also contribute to our collective discussions about the fate of cities.¹ In the debates about the kind of lives we want to live in cities these images assert

¹ E.g the ‘Ende der Urbanisierung’ forum organized by H-Soz-U-Kult in September 2006 at <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/index.asp?id=665&pn=texte#note1>, accessed October 6th 2006

themselves as powerful tools to arouse acquiescence or fear, to create agreements and disputes. As personal impressions or as collective categories, however, ‘American city’ and ‘European city’ are not instant products, and we are constantly referring to a historical pool of connotations, definitions and values when we use them.

This pool is full of comparisons and confrontations made in the past, beginning when the New World had cities of its own that travelers between continental Europe, the English colony and the Motherland could measure against those across the Ocean. This makes for centuries of criss-crossed observations that have sedimented into conversations, official reports, correspondences, newspapers articles, travel accounts or fictional texts written by the best and brightest as well as by the humble and the anonymous. Travel accounts make clear that urban life and cities were compared as much as political, social or economic features,² if only because travelers left from and arrived in buzzing city ports. But our categories of the “European” and “American” city, especially when used in discussions among architects, planners, urban managers, lay activists or historians, have roots in a more specific

² For comparisons between French and American cities, see the material gathered by Hélène Trocmé, *la ville américaine vue par les v`yageurs américains à la fin du XIX° siècle*, thèse de 3° cycle en histoire, université de Paris 1, 1975 and the numerous urban aspects in Jacques Portes *Fascinati`n and misgivings. The United States in French Opini`n 1870-1914*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2000, or G de Bertier de Sauvigny, *La France et les Français vus par les v`yageurs américains 1814-1848*, Paris : Flammarion, 1982

branch of this transatlantic conversation. It is “at the birth of the modern world” as a time of transnational processes, causations and circulations, that they came of age.³ This wide comparative endeavor also embraced cities from the rest of the world, especially those in imperial lands. But the “comparison and contrast” pattern may have been at its peak when applied to “European” and “American” cities.

From the second half of the 19th century, the city has been the object of a dedicated comparative attention, and projects for changing the situation at home began to be extracted from the observation of cities across the Ocean. Gertrud Schlichter, Daniel Rodgers and Axel Schäfer may have been the first to pinpoint this transatlantic urban interchange.⁴ This was when what was characteristic of the “European” or the “American city” began to be disputed and discussed in order to be used in the management, government and politics of urban societies. This debate not only touched upon questions and answers, but also the identity of those who were asking the questions and

³ Christopher Bayly, *The birth of the modern world, 1780-1914 : global connections and comparisons*, Malden, MA : Blackwell Pub., 2004

⁴ Gertrud Almy Schlichter, *European backgrounds of American reform 1880-1915*, Ph. D, University of Illinois, 1960 ; Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic crossings. Social politics in a progressive age*, Harvard UP, 1998 ; Axel R Schäfer, *American Progressives and German social reform, 1875-1920*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2000

suggesting the answers. This was the moment when elected officials, political leaders, social activists and architects invented themselves as urban experts through the observation of cities in other lands. We are still grappling with the legacy of this moment when a specific trade in urban ideas, designs, regulations was developed out of this mutual observation.

There are many valid ways to approach this question. One can focus on a specific theme, moment, or direction in these exchanges. The different contributions in this volume illustrate this diversity. My task is a bit different, in the sense that I want to suggest how these specific themes, moments, and directions are embedded within a wider structure of patterns, structures and actors that created order in the exchange. To do so, I will begin by stressing how much the directions are part of a fabric of connections and circulations that sometimes reach beyond the modern age, beyond the Atlantic and beyond the urban aspects.

First, this interchange is not a purely modern feature. Through the mechanisms of imperial then national construction and competition, views and ways to conceive, organize, manage, design, describe or live urban life have been shipped many times across the Atlantic. The cities

of the New and the Old worlds, and in the former case this concerns the urban sites of North as well as of Central or South America, have been connected by comparisons, by flows of administrators and migrants, by legislative and juridical frameworks since the late 16th century. Though this area of the Americas is out of our current focus, the fascination that the Spanish settlers and visitors felt for cities like Mexico was very much similar to the hopes and aspirations of those who envisioned America as the 'City on the hill'. We should not forget that the Southern hemisphere 'American City' was also compared with European cities.⁵ These imperial connections still bear fruit: the current contribution of Catalan planners and sociologists to strategic municipal planning in Uruguay and Argentina derives from the structures of language, culture and politics that are still operating decades after the former Spanish empire evolved into independent nation states.⁶ It is important to keep in mind that the decades which form our chronological focus in this issue do not stand aloof from the

⁵ Serge Gruzinski, *Les quatre parties du monde. Histoire d'une mondialisation*, Paris, La Martinière, 2004 ; Jérôme Monnet, *La ville et son double. La parabole de Mexico*, Paris : Nathan, 1993 (see especially chapter 1, « Une histoire des représentations urbaines XVI^e -XX^e siècles »). For a development on 'south Atlantic' urban connections in the modern age, Arturo Almandoz Marte, *Urbanismo europeo en Caracas (1870-1940)*, Caracas : FUNDARTE/ Alcaldía de Caracas/ Equinoccio, 1997

⁶ Sébastien Velut & Silvia Robin, « Entre Barcelone et Porto Alegre : la gestion municipale à Montevideo et Rosario », *Géocarrefour*, vol.80, n.3, 2005, p.207-214

patterns that emerged in these connected histories of the Atlantic world, connections which neither began nor ended with the 19th century, and which endured beyond WW2.

Second, the operation of the Atlantic urban interchange is to be considered together with other intertwined Atlantic crossings of many sorts. Urban matters were discussed as ways to access beauty, to organize social order, to achieve a certain idea of government, to fulfill national glory, to establish certain living standards, to win market shares. This latter aspect is often left behind, but there was an Atlantic market for lighting provision, transportation and waste management in cities from the second half of the 19th century, well before the recent growth of the conglomerates that now preside over the destiny of urban waters from India to Europe and South America.⁷ Those who engaged with urban aspects included businessmen as well as physicians, lawyers, municipal technicians, scholars, migrants, administrators and diplomats. Their worldviews, their actions, their aspirations and their limits evolved out of the dynamics of mass migration, the expansion of firms and banks, the struggle of nation states for status and power, the development of research universities

⁷ One example with Samuel J Martland, 'Progress illuminating the world: street lighting in Santiago, Valparaiso and La Plata 1840-1890', *Urban History*, 29, 2; 2002

and the professionalisation process. The urban dialogue between American and German urban reformers, extensively surveyed by Daniel Rodgers and Axel Schäffer at the turn of the 19th century is a reminder of this situation: municipal governments and city planning experiments were often discussed and compared as elements in a social reform package that also included social insurance or economic regulation. While they were promoting urban autonomy, zoning, city planning, administrative reform or the municipal ownership of utilities, American Progressives such as Richard Ely, Frederic Howe, Frank Goodnow or Edward Bemis were also installing the university professor as an important figure in the public sphere, just like the German professors they had trained under.⁸ The trade in urban ideas was not merely an exchange about city things. It was part and parcel of the discussions about the organization of human societies, and there was a clear connection of these exchanges to the stir of universal aspirations and ideologies, from socialism and liberalism to pacifism.⁹

Third, the transatlantic urban interchange was part of a wider space of circulation for 'urban' items, a space that connected its protagonists

⁸ See also Dorothy Ross, *The origins of American social science*, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1991, chapter 3.

⁹ Pierre-Yves Saunier 'Taking up the bet of connections: a municipal contribution', *Contemporary European History*, special issue 'Municipal connections ', v.11, n.4, November 2002, p.507-527

and circuits with other regional basins. Ideas, technical devices, words, images and designs did not circulate calmly like cartons in a container between a European port and an American one. Nor did they stop short when they reached the Pacific Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea or the Ural Mountains. The protagonists and the goods of the transatlantic urban trade engaged with other regional, and for some aspects global, markets of urban ideas and ideals. To pick up one among many intriguing trajectories, the Japanese economist Seiki Hajime studied in Germany for several years and traveled through Belgium and France before coming back to Japan via New York, Chicago and the West Coast.¹⁰ As a figure of Japanese social reform and a mayor of Osaka, he relentlessly connected his Japanese endeavors to what he had observed in the Atlantic world. The space of circulation that we are considering this morning is also an invitation to propel our attention well beyond the Atlantic world, and not to consider the latter in isolation. It is not a mere Atlantic history of the urban dimension that is required here.

This being said, our focus on European and American cities between the 1890s and the 1950s is also an opportunity to scrutinize the

¹⁰ Jeffrey Hanes, *The city as subject. Seki Hajime and the reinvention of modern Osaka*, Berkeley : University of California Press, 2002

possible specificities of this moment and region within the seams of history. And indeed, this is a peculiar time, theme and space we are dealing with. Briefly said, the last decades of the 19th century are those where urbanization was perceived and defined as a common present and future context for the Old and the New World.¹¹ In those years, the Atlantic nexus was conceived as the core of global urbanization, and those who coped with this process for questions of business, power, government or knowledge considered it a privileged space for comparisons, action and inspirations. It was the moment when the urban variable gained in autonomy as a specific domain, both in the professional, political or social national spheres, and in the transatlantic trade of non material goods. This social division of the interchange work was partly based on the perception of this common urban fate of the Atlantic world. Accordingly, the ‘urban question’ was shaped from national as well as from transnational grounds. Though this may have not yet been fully considered, many professions, disciplines and policies connected with the city were shaped through transnational interchange, and notably its transatlantic basin. The fields of housing, urban public health (visiting nursing, urban

¹¹ Contemporary statistical surveys of urbanization such as those by Alfred Legoyt (1867) or Emile Levasseur (1887) in France, Adna Weber in the US (1899), do resolutely embrace a number of countries on both sides of the Ocean and frame the ‘growth of cities’ as a transnational and transatlantic process.

dispensaries), sanitation engineering, policing, fire fighting, unemployment, city planning, urban sociology and municipal urban government itself were such specializations of the social urban domain that thrived on transnational circulations and connections as much as from national demands and contexts.¹²

For who wants to heed the call, this angle can deliver new and complementary insights to the history of transnational phenomena as well as for local and national histories. But many hurdles stand in the way. Two obvious caveats deal with the identification of the protagonists of the transatlantic interchange, its geography and chronology.

The protagonists of the transatlantic urban interchange were very versatile. This is true for the span of their characteristics, and for the range of roles they assumed in the circulation they shaped and

¹² Clues and leads in Christiane Crasemann Collins., *Werner Hegemann and the Search for Universal Urbanism*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2005; Colette Chambellan, *Le Musée Social en son temps*, Paris: Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure, 1998; Christian Topalov, *Naissance du chômeur 1880-1910* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1994); Kathryn Kish Sklar, Anja Schüler and Susan Strasser (eds.), *Social Justice Feminists in the United States and Germany: A Dialogue in Documents, 1885-1933* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); *Contemporary European History*, special issue 'Municipal connections', v.11, n.4, November 2002; *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, special issue 'Medicine as a Social Instrument: Rockefeller Foundation, 1913-45' Vol. 31, No. 3, 2000; Shane Ewen, 'the internationalization of fire protection: in pursuit of municipal networks in Edwardian Birmingham', *Urban History*, 32, 2, 2005, p.288-307.

maintained. Scholars and elected officials, ordinary migrants and nomadic professionals, civil servants and ordinary travelers, lay private reformers and political activists contributed to the Atlantic cross traffic of urban knowledge throughout the modern age. Governmental agencies of different sorts have taken their part in it, from the role of consular networks in circulating information to the conscious attempts to make the urban sphere one aspect of national cultural diplomacies and soft power strategies,¹³ from the involvement of municipal urban governments themselves to the growing place taken by intergovernmental organizations from the moment the League of Nations was established. Think tanks, political parties and trade unions, utilities firms - which market was cross national since the middle of the 19th century, philanthropic foundations are met by whoever has paid attention to the transatlantic urban interchange. Here, the general trend one can observe between the middle of the 19th century and the middle of the 20th is a trend of specialization and institutionalization. Increasingly, urban interchange has generated professionals and institutions which aspired to organize and sometimes

¹³ Jessica Gienow-Hecht, 'German-American cultural relations 1870-1914: a historiographical retrospective', in Frank A. Ninkovich and Liping Bu, Ed.. *The Cultural Turn: Essays in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations*. Chicago: Imprint Publications, 2002.

monopolize the interchange itself.¹⁴ A salient feature of this organizational pattern was the growth of voluntary associations. Some were focused on a very specific urban sub-field, others had a broader focus, but most of them wanted to structure and control the 'Urban International' as a field where urban questions were defined, discussed and answers suggested. Groups such as the International Federation of Garden Cities, the International Union of Local Authorities and the International Housing Association, the Association Permanente des Congrès de la Route, and the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne put their imprint on the urban agenda from the 1910s. Free riders did not disappear, but their activity tended to be integrated somehow in the operation of an institution of some sorts, with its rules and organizational cogs. This trend has not affected the breadth of roles that individuals and institutions can endorse. According to specific strategies and tactics, an agency or an individual could choose or be led to act simultaneously or successively as broker, gate keeper, translator, conqueror, educator, exporter, importer, intermediary, trend setter or knowledge producer. This wide range of characteristics and roles has a very practical consequence for researchers in the field:

¹⁴ A general overview is proposed in Pierre-Yves Saunier, -'Sketches from the Urban International. Voluntary societies, international organizations and US Foundations at the city's bedside 1900-1960', *International Journal for Urban and Regional Research*, (Grande-Bretagne), vol.25 (2) June 2001, p.380-403

if you focus on one or few professions or social groups, or if you put an preemptive emphasis on some sort of role, then you are likely to miss aspects that are crucial to your concern to reconstruct the structure, operation and impact of the urban interchange. Incidentally, this is also true for the sources that can allow us to study the urban interchange. To name but a few, study tours, congresses, private correspondence, governmental reports, professional expatriation and print material such as periodicals or books must be scrutinized together and not separately, as if they were the hardware and software of urban knowledge.

What about the geography and chronology of the transatlantic urban interchange? Some evaluations are clearly at odds with one another. Daniel Rodgers, in his *Atlantic Crossings*, has stressed that the interest in Old Europe by US actors who wanted to change the urban landscape at home was at its peak in the years 1890-1910, and that it was prominently oriented towards Germany and Great Britain. Jean Luc Pinol, in a chapter of *L'Histoire des villes européennes* (Paris: Seuil, 2003), writes that after decades of strong interest by Americans, the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exhibition was a turning point in the orientation of cross Atlantic traffic, the watershed of a trend that was

to culminate with the Americanization of European urban ideals after WW2. These contradicting evaluations provide an opportunity to stress that when one focuses on the big picture and neglects the specific mechanisms and impact of the Atlantic urban interchange (Pinol), or when one considers the interchange from only one vantage point (the United States in Rodger's case), the results fail to address the specific historical forms of the interchange. Throughout the modern age in fact, European and North Americans have been selecting, packing and adapting urban experiments, images, regulations and concepts according to geographies and chronologies that resort to ad hoc individual or collective strategies. It is not only that 'there is no such things as two travelers who would see the same thing, or see it with the same eyes', as famous and not so famous travelers would say.¹⁵ The gaze of our urban travelers or missionaries was heavily polarized by the structures of their journeys and surveys, their professional and social trajectories, and their strategic use of the foreign references on the domestic scene: they privileged a number of 'ideal' cities in a limited number of countries (in Europe) or regions (in the USA). Late 19th American progressive reformers focused on British and German cities and mostly shunted social experiments in Belgium, Scandinavia

¹⁵ James Fenimore Cooper, a residence in France, London, Richard Bentley, 1836, quoted in Bertier de sauvigny p.24 (my translation)

and in ‘autocratic’ Southern Europe, while European visitors rarely set foot in Southern cities. Chicago or New York, Ulm, Düsseldorf or Glasgow were on top of the charts, but there were many competing charts. Many versions of the ‘European’ and the ‘American’ city were in currency between the 19th and 20th century.

To these competing or separate geographies of connections and circulations also added competing and separate chronologies. The underlying pattern for these is not that each specialized urban subject matter had its own tide chart, going one way then another. It is often assumed that US architecture and architects were oriented to European architecture, cities and training institutions until the early 20th century, before the flow reversed in the 1900s and America became the ‘Scenes of a world to come’.¹⁶ But even in this specific section of urban matters, it is striking that while French architects under a Delano and Aldrich Scholarship were able to discover the USA from 1926, young Americans with modernist leanings like Gordon Bunshaft or Louis Skidmore still found a lot to learn from Europe in the mid-1930s while they roamed the continent with their Rotch fellowship. Similarly, it is the European housing situation and the expertise of European housing

¹⁶ Jean-Louis Cohen, *Scenes of the world to come :European architecture and the American challenge, 1893-1960* Paris:Flammarion/ Montreal : Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1995

specialists that Catherine Bauer, Lewis Mumford or the National Association of Housing Officials showcased to push American governmental authorities to develop a housing policy, despite the fact that at the very same moment some European architects were fascinated by the possibilities of a taylorized construction of housing units for their country or city. However briefly sketched here, a similar picture would emerge if we were considering city planning, road and traffic engineers, social settlements or district nursing: at the very same moment and on both sides of the Ocean, different protagonists committed themselves to create and maintain specific transatlantic flows to subvert domestic situations in professional, political or cultural terms, or to fulfill some universal aspirations. The geographies and chronologies of the transatlantic urban interchange cannot be captured in simple images of flows that followed one direction for some decades and then went the other way. Such flows were in fact always selective, multidirectional, and had their own geography and chronology, with knots, inflections, re-directions. Current research that explore the operation, impact and structure of connections and circulations are beginning to stress how much they were rhetorical and practical strategies you cannot capture within the limits of ‘Americanization’ or ‘Europeanization’.¹⁷ It does not mean that these chronologies and

¹⁷ Among these, Sonja Dümpelmann, ‘American system and Italian beauty:

geographies were not embedded into such geopolitical or economic or cultural contexts, but it is true that they did not merely go with their streams.¹⁸

In order to be able to consider the operation and impact of those transatlantic circulations, I would like to suggest that one way to escape the pitfalls of limited typologies and the traps of narrow or oversized chronological and geographical sketches, is to pay attention to circulatory spaces and regimes as a whole. To do so, I will build from what I know in terms of the interchange that took place about and among municipal governments 1850 and 2000, beyond the Atlantic region.¹⁹ Here, my purpose will be to identify the regimes, the configurations of intermunicipal exchange, i.e sets of long term

international exchange in park planning in the twentieth century', Conference at the Bavarian American Academy, 2005; Stève Bernardin and Sébastien Gardon 'Representing a transnational cause ? municipalities as road traffic regulators', European Association of Urban History, Stockholm Conference, 2006

¹⁸ Incidentally, it means that the urban variable can contribute to increase our understanding of transatlantic cultural, political and economic traffics, contrasting or complementing recent works like Rodgers' *Atlantic Crossings* or Victoria De Grazia 's *Irresistible empire : America's advance through twentieth-century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass. : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005) or Rob Kroes and Robert Rydell's *Buffalo Bill in Bologna : the Americanization of the world, 1869-1922* (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2005)

¹⁹ Factual elements are available in Pierre-Yves Saunier, 'La toile municipale aux XIX^e et XX^e siècles : un panorama transnational vu d'Europe', *Urban History Review/Revue d'Histoire Urbaine*, vol.XXXIV, n.2, Spring 2006 printemps, p.163-176

patterns and relatively stable interactions between mutually identified protagonists. My contention is double: on the one hand, I suggest that the interchange in municipal matters is a good window on the interchange in urban matters, and on the other I contend that those regimes are the frames that shaped and oriented the connections, transfers, circulation and other flows in intermunicipal relations.

The first regime is a regime of informal international transfers dating from the late 19th century and the early 20th century. Selective borrowing or imposition are the most frequent processes of exchange that can be observed. As they often take place between two geographically defined points, or between a geographically defined point and a series of others, transfers is a convenient though approximate way to define the flows that develop under this regime. Originally, this regime was developed in the European²⁰ and North Atlantic context, but quickly expanded towards Latin America, North

²⁰ Marjatta Hietala was the first to pay a specific attention to this with her work on Finnish and Scandinavian cities. See Marjatta Hietala, Services and Urbanization at the Turn of the Century. The Diffusion of Innovations (Helsinki, SHS, 1987) ; “Transfer of German and Scandinavian Administrative Knowledge : Examples from Helsinki and the Association of Finnish Cities” Jahrbuch für Europäische Verwaltungsgeschichte, 15, (2003) 109-130 ; “La Diffusion des Innovations : Helsinki 1875-1917”, Genèses, 10, (Javier 1993), 74-89

Africa, the lands Down Under and the Middle East,²¹ most often following imperial tracks. The selling of services, the exchange of know hows as well as the definition of urban problems and municipal government canons has ever since been pulsing through the channels that have then been opened, though around changing cores and in contested geographies. The paradigm of this regime, its social and cultural engine, is emulation to cope with current urban problems as a 'modern metropolis' should, and its actors were mostly municipal technicians, municipal elected officials as well as those who had to define and tackle urban affairs at the national level. Its impact is felt through the travelling of technologies, regulations, designs, organized and maintained by peer to peer contact. For the Atlantic realm, the volumes by Frederic Howe or Albert Shaw on municipal government of European cities, or the interest paid by Dutch municipal officials to the US city manager plan, bear witness of the operation of this regime.²²

²¹ Nora Lafi (ed), *Municipalités méditerranéennes. Les réformes urbaines au miroir d'une histoire comparée (Moyen-Orient, Magrehb, Europe Méridionale)*, Berlin, Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2005

²² Albert Shaw, *Municipal government in continental Europe*, New York : The century, 1895, Frederic C. Howe, *European cities at work*, New York : Charles Scribner, 1914. Both volumes had a significant impact in the USA and beyond (see Federico Lucarini, *Scienze comunali e pratiche di governo in Italia*, Milano, Giuffré, 2003, p.427-459). About the interest paid by some leading figures of Asterdam municipal administration for the city manager plan, see for example Arie Keppler, 'De City-Manager', *De Gemeente. Orgaan van de Vereeniging van Sociaaldemocratische Gemeenteraadsleden* 16 (1923) 121-123. Thanks to Stefan Couperus for this information.

The second regime is one of structured transnational organization. It was sketched on the eve of WW1, and took an enduring form in the 1920s. Under its spell, the field gets formalized with dedicated long lasting institutions that act as stages and stagers of the interchange in municipal matters. These transatlantic clearing houses, specialised institutions and individuals, contribute to create, orient and feed webs through which information is selected, winnowed, changed, translated, adapted, selected. Members of municipal governments are one of the players in these networks, hard gamers if ever, but also striving to control them alongside an increased number of protagonists. Intergovernmental Organizations and Philanthropic Foundations played a major role in setting up the regime itself,²³ while the emphasis that was put on technical and administrative aspects of municipal urban government opened avenues for scholars to embark as experts. The organisations of municipalities are the spearhead of this regime, in a thicker and thicker fabric where the hegemony of the International Union of Local Authorities, created in 1913, was disputed after World War Two by new organisations that adopted a different stance, defined

²³ Pierre-Yves Saunier, *'Selling the idea of cooperation. The US Foundations and the European components of the Urban International (1920s-1960s)*, in Giuliana GEMELLI (ed.), *American Foundations and large scale research: construction and transfer of knowledge*, Bologna: Clueb, 2001, 219-246

a new circulatory space or introduced a different political creed.²⁴ Under this regime, the definition and diffusion of ‘one best way’ solutions tends to substitute to the variety of ad hoc imitations, borrowings and imposition. What is at stake is a definition of universal tools, words, ideas, professionals and policies to cope with the City as a regional and global fact. In this regime, the interplay between the different municipal organizations on one hand, and the world order on the other, is a crucial one. Indeed, one of the major stakes that the municipal organisations are contesting about is to be recognised as the speaking voice of municipalities in the world, and to sit at debates that had been the exclusive domain of the national states. The creation, in 2004, of a new intermunicipal organization called ‘United Cities and Local Governments’ is clearly the expression of this ambition to make the voice of cities heard by the United Nations Organizations and the other intergovernmental organizations such as the World Bank.

The third regime could be labeled as the global and regional competition maze. Its growth in the 1980s took place hand in hand with

²⁴ on IULA, see Patrizia Dogliani, “European Municipalism in the First Half of the Twentieth Century : the Socialist Network”, Contemporary European History, 11, 4 (2002), 573-596, and Renaud Payre and Pierre-Yves Saunier, « L’internazionale municipalista : L’Union Internationale des Villes fra 1913 e 1940 », *Amministrare*, anno XXX, gennaio-agosto 2000. . On the new organizations and their relationship wit IULA, Oscar Gaspari, “Cities Against States ? Hopes, Dreams and Shortcomings of the European Municipal Movement 1900-1960’, Contemporary European History, 11, 4 (2002), 529-548.

major changes in the political world order, in the international political economy and in urban governance in several national and regional settings, the result being an explicit research of economic competitiveness by individual cities which resorted to collective strategies to achieve this goal.²⁵ In Europe only, more than 40 thematic networks have been created to band municipalities together by issues, by public policy sector, by size, by regions, by features. Those networks often include business firms and regional governments side by side with cities. Often tailored for a very specific aim and very much concerned with lobbying at Brussels, they have been thriving on a market oriented discourse of competition, including the competition among their members and among the networks. Urban mayors feature prominently in their activities while the administrative or technical branches of municipal governments are mostly side kicks that provide backstage logistics or behind the scene expertise. These European features are roughly valid for other regional scenes and for the global arena, though it is of course ridiculous to assert this in a mere short phrase. The variety of partners that have bet on cities to develop their strategies (utilities firms, regional and global IGOs) is still fueling the developments and operation of this regime.

²⁵ See the assessment of these changes and their impact in Patrick Le Galès, European cities : social conflicts and governance, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2002

These three regimes are not strictly temporal, they intertwine rather than succeed to one another, their protagonists and features can recess in the background or come to the fore in an uneven manner. There are of course many continuities of discourse, practice and personnel that I won't even suggest here, and the enmeshment areas between the different regimes are of very special interest. My point is that those regimes, when their study is expanded beyond the mere municipal government sphere as in this article, are all in operation today, with their actors, structures and values rooted in time. They can provide powerful tools to frame and contextualize our approaches of the Atlantic urban interchange, and to appreciate the current discussions and debate around the notions of 'European' and 'American' cities. They need should be taken into consideration together with economic globalization or governance changes to appreciate the current internationalization of cities. They may provide a key, as well, to find the urban variable, the specific contribution of cities to the making of the modern world, so deceptively pursued by urban historians since the 1970s.

