'City Diplomacy' and Twinning: Lessons from the UK, China and Globally

'City Diplomacy' and Twinning: Lessons from the UK, China and Globally

Michele Acuto, Mika Morissette, Dan Chan, Benjamin Leffel

City Leadership Initiative, Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy, University College London

January 2016

Contents

Abstract

This report was commissioned by the Foresight Future of Cities Project within the UK Government Office for Science and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to provide a systematic analysis of the most important forms of international involvement by global cities today and how these manifest in China and in the UK. Analysis and literature review was conducted by the City Leadership Initiative (CLI) at University College London in collaboration with researchers in China and the United States. We discuss in particular twinning, how it has evolved to be more strategic, and how, hand in hand with this evolution, comes a parallel development of 'city networks'. Investigating this broader landscape of international relations by UK and Chinese cities (i.e. 'city diplomacy'), we highlight the major shapes and impacts of these networking activities. Drawing parallels with the broader landscape of city diplomacy and international comparators, we consider how this applies to China and to the UK, including the role of the central government and national city networks in structuring this. We base this report on evidence based taken from urban studies and international relations literature and on independent research conducted on 42 cities across the world, including second-tier cities in China and the UK.

1. Methodology

The City Leadership Initiative has conducted a number of studies on international city involvement and on relations between cities and networks. The first of these studies looked at 180 of the most visible city networks in order to map their structures and scope. The second, in collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO), investigated the landscape and challenges of city diplomacy, especially in relation to the WHO Healthy Cities network and its quarter-century experience of city networking. Another smaller-scale project involved comparative case studies of the international engagements of 31 international and British cities of varying sizes, including the ten members of the British 'Core Cities' network, a network created to represent the interests of some of the larger and more economically prominent British cities. On top of this, CLI has created thematic reports for networks themselves (C40, WHO Healthy Cities, Core Cities) as well as for UN Habitat on how cities are achieving the specific goals set out by individual networks[1]. Insights from these studies is also included below. We have supplemented these strands of research with an additional 11 Chinese cities (see Map 1), those recently rated by the Shanghai Institute for International Studies as being the most international among Chinese cities, to this report[2]. This report is based on evidence taken from all these projects, as well as research conducted on UK and Chinese cities more specifically.

Further details of any of the existing projects on which this report draws are available on the City Leadership Initiative website: www.cityleadership.net.

Map 1: Map of cities used in this research
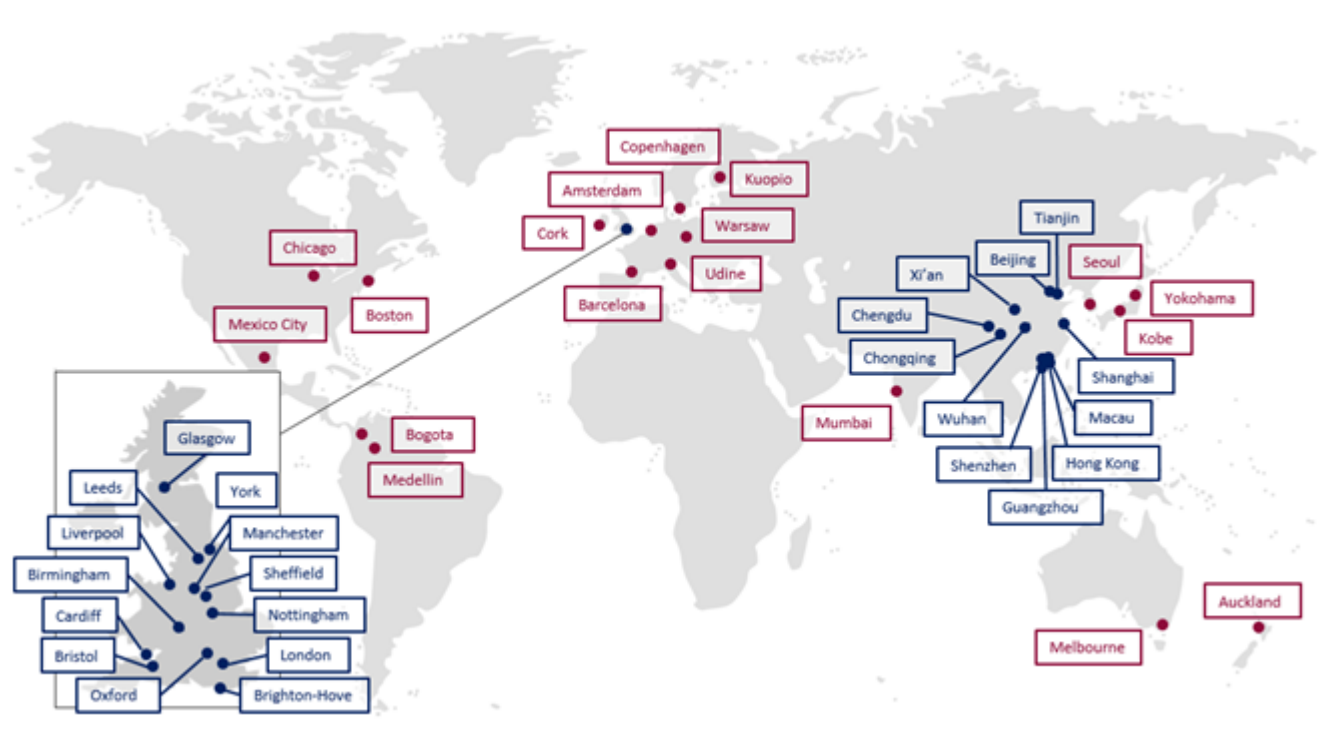
---

2. City Networks Globally

2.1 Global Landscape and Key Literature

Despite the limited recognition, 'city diplomacy' and more broadly networking are widely **common activities for cities** big and small. Globally, there might be more than two hundred 'city networks' (formal organisations for cooperation among local governments) today, covering all sorts of thematic foci from climate to health and security (see Figure 1), and this number seems destined to grow (see Figure 2). One significant finding of CLI's current research on city diplomacy to date is that among cities studied across various projects, regardless of size, almost all cities have some form of governance structure in place to manage engagements with other national or international cities. With two-thirds of the global population now living in cities, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the needs of urban areas and cities are responding by developing their capacity to connect with other cities, national governments and even international organisations.

Box 1: Key terms in this report

City Diplomacy:

'Diplomacy' describes mediated relations between representatives of polities (traditionally states, but also sub-national political bodies), and between these and other non-governmental political actors. Cities, as polities, can be said to carry out diplomacy. Van der Pluijm and Melissen (2007) define 'city diplomacy' as "the institutions and processes by which cities, or local governments in general, engage in relations with actors on an international political stage with the aim of representing themselves and their interests to one another."

City Twinning:

'Twinnings' or 'sistering' arrangements are formal agreements of understanding between two cities, usually based on a written memorandum of understanding concluded through their mayors. These memoranda can be based on several things, ranging from broad declarations of friendship to more specific agreements on business cooperation or partnerships on issues such as education or the environment. All, however, are created to denote some form of special relationship between the two cities.

City Networking:

Here, we use the term 'city networks' to refer to formal organizations facilitating cooperation amongst cities and between cities and other private or public entities. These include associations of three or more cities which meet periodically to discuss issues of mutual concern, lobby lawmakers or work on joint initiatives. These include be both international institutions and domestic institutions created to represent cities in national politics, and vary in scope.

It is important to point out that "city diplomacy" is not new. If we understand it as the mediated or negotiated relations of city representatives with other political communities (states, regions and other states) as well as non-governmental bodies (business, community groups, advocacy coalitions), 'city diplomacy' is a well-established practice of cities the world over. With millennial roots and a vast amount of pre-modern examples in cases like the Italian city-states, and as late as the 19th century, it was still common for independent city-states to coexist and manage relations with larger states. Yet of course city diplomacy does not pertain to city-states alone: the theme has gathered recognition in the past decade both in the practice and in international theory, as cities have progressively engaged across national boundaries and beyond local

limitations. This is what is known as '***paradiplomacy***', a term which first appeared in the writings of Ivo Duchacek and Panayotis Soldatos in the 1980s to refer to international activities of regional federal governments which bypass the state-level,[3] and which was expanded, in the 1990s and 2000s, through the writing of academics such as Andre Lecours, Virginie Mamadouh or Herman van der Wusten to refer to the international activity of cities and their networks.[4] Typical of the 1980s and 1990s, this research has received renewed and **sprawling attention** in the last few years. In particular, international relations and urban studies scholars, spearheaded by the analysis of environmental networks by Harriet Bulkeley, Michele Betsill and colleagues, have been in the past years probing the impact of cities on the structures of global governance (as with Sofie Bouteligier, Noah Toly and Taedong Lee), the development of international orders (Simon Curtis), and highlighting the role of cities in world politics (Michele Acuto, David Gordon or Benjamin Barber).[5]

In this sense, we must appreciate the scholarly and practical landscape of international engagement by cities as far wider than 'city twinning'. For many years, especially since post-War and Cold War periods, 'city twinning' in particular, as a form of formalised collaboration between two municipalities in different states, has sprawled the world over.[6] Perhaps the biggest contemporary development, especially in the last few years, has been that of cities seeking to add strategic value to existing twinning arrangements, or even move past twinnings and form multi-city coalitions capable of representing urban interests on a global scale. If "city networks", as formalised cooperation mechanisms between cities, existed since the early days of city diplomacy, the extent and connectivity of these is now nearly unprecedented. Until recently, the bulk of city-level international relations were in fact made of post-war twinnings created to be figurative tokens of international cooperation. While some cities have made efforts to manage these relations strategically (see below), a large portion of these relationships remains principally symbolic, and is primarily based on cultural exchanges.

Some cities, like Yokohama in Japan, are dis-investing from twinning in favour of investing more into theme-specific networks (in Yokohama's case, networks which focus on port-cities and East-Asian development). New York, for its part, decided to convert its many 'sistering' arrangements via a single network management body, Global Partner's Inc., which meets periodically to discuss issues such as police brutality, anti-corruption measures and urban health.

---

[3] Duchacek, Ivo D. (1990) 'Perforated Sovereignties: Toward a Typology of New Actors in International Relations', in Hans J. Michelmann and Panayotis Soldatos (eds), *Federalism and International Relations: The Role of Subnational* Units (Oxford: Clarendon Press)

[4] See, for example: Lecours, Andre (2008) 'Political Issues of Paradiplomacy: Lessons from the Developed World' (Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', Discussion Papers in Diplomacy Series) or: Mamadouh, Virginie, and Herman van der Wusten. (2015) "The Paradiplomacy Of Cities and Regions: Transnational Relations Between Sub-State Political Entities" In. Dittmer, Jason, and Fiona McGonnel (eds.) *Diplomatic Cultures and International Politics* (London and New York: Routledge)

[5] See Acuto, M. (2013) *Global Cities, Governance & Diplomacy: The Urban Link,* London: Routledge; Bouteligier, Sofie. "Inequality in new global governance arrangements: the North–South divide in transnational municipal networks." *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 26.3 (2013): 251-267; Lee, Taedong. "Global cities and transnational climate change networks." *Global Environmental Politics* 13.1 (2013): 108-127; Curtis, Simon (ed.). *The Power of Cities in International Relations*. London: Routledge, 2014; Barber, Benjamin R. *If mayors ruled the world: dysfunctional nations, rising cities*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013; and Acuto, M. (2013) "City Leadership in Global Governance" *Global Governance* 19 (3): 481-98.

[6] Jayne, Mark, Phillip Hubbard, David Bell (2013) "Twin Cities: Territorial and Relational Geographies of 'Worldly Manchester." In *Urban Studies* 50(2):239-254

Figure 1: Geographical scope of a global sample of 180 existing networks
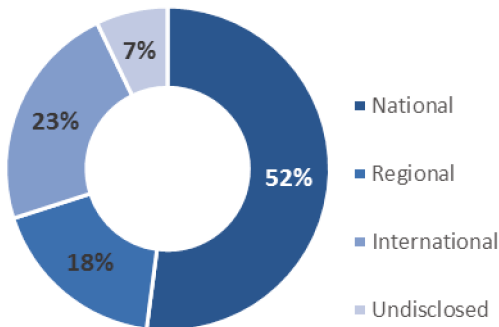
Figure 2: Number of networks formed per year (based on 180 networks in Figure 1)
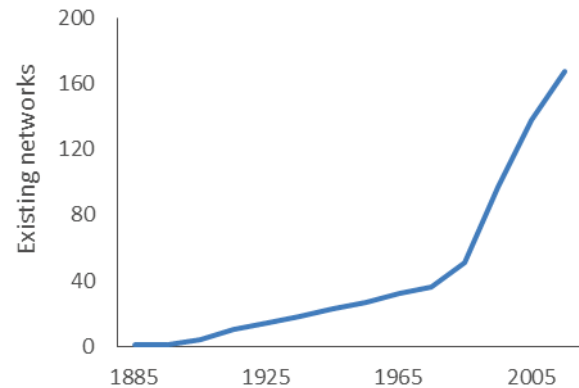
It would be inaccurate, however, to assume that city networks are a newer fad than city diplomacy and city twinnings. Some of the oldest and still existing networks in Europe and Japan were founded more than 100 years ago. Yet the phenomenon has **picked up speed in recent years**. Most city networks remain national as a testament to this history (Figure 1). Since the late 1980s, however, increased advocacy of city networks like UCLG or ICLEI coupled with the growing attentiveness of international platforms such as the UN, the World Bank or the world Health Organization to the importance of cities, has made it possible, if not inevitable, for even small cities to act internationally. It would also be equally misleading to think of city networking and diplomacy as quintessentially 'global' initiatives. Successful examples of networking range from the national, for example, the Local Government Association (LGA) in the UK campaigning with national government to create new laws on 'legal high' drugs, to the upper 'echelons' of the international, as with the participation of cities as special interest groups organised by United Councils and Local Government (UCLG), The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) and C40 in the Sustainable Development Goal negotiations or the December 2015 Post-Kyoto Climate Talks in Paris.

There are, however, mounting concerns that **resource-constrained cities** could be overwhelmed by the multitude of twinning and network arrangements available to them. In a selection of 180 of the most visible city networks, for example, CLI found almost 50 of these to be related to climate change. Among these, five key initiatives (C40, the Climate Change Alliance, ICLEI, UCLG and the World Mayors Council on Climate Change) held between them almost 30 events and meetings in 2014 alone. Participating in networks offers a more direct and higher added-value way to connect with more cities, but these facts highlight the need for cities to approach commitments strategically.

2.2 Why city 'diplomacy'?

The general consensus of among those studying city governance is that it is getting harder, if not impossible, for cities, including smaller cities, to avoid forming international connections.[7] Whilst still limited and often side-lined by more popular writing on globalisation and cities, there

---

[7] Friedman, John and Goetz Wolff (1982) "World city formation: an agenda for research and action" In. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 6(3): 309-344

is today a solid bedrock of analysis that has been looking at the active capacity of cities to 'go abroad'. In this sense, cities are treated as capable of forming international connections, developing partnerships and creating institutions (such as networks, treaties and policy frameworks) that chart the more-than-local engagement of local governments. International initiatives by cities are also attracting increasing amounts of attention outside the academic field of urban studies, in particular from scholars of international relations, environmental studies or development studies who are all looking to find a way to end the deadlocks of state-level international politics.[8] Within this strand of analysis, city twinning is treated as a **subset of a much wider landscape of 'diplomatic' and 'networking' activities** by cities.

The influential international relations scholar Hedley Bull defined diplomacy succinctly as "the conduct of relations between sovereign states with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means". So why would cities need to care about the practice of diplomacy if, after all, it is a state affair? Decades, if not nearly a century, of contemporary diplomatic studies scholarship might suggest the contrary. Whilst we regularly associate the conduct of foreign affairs with states, ministers and prominent leaders, much of the literature in international relations and social sciences more generally has now regularly ascribed the capacity to perform on international stages to many actors beyond states. NGOs like Oxfam or the Red Cross added lobbying and advocacy to their list of activities decades ago while it has always been recognized that businesses and the private sector are influential players in international negotiations ranging from the agreement of maritime laws to the establishment of international pharmaceutical standards. Cities are now increasingly following suit by forming political coalitions such as the C40 which address political issues states have not or cannot come to agreement on.[9]

Even when we consider a classic state-centric definition of diplomacy, we can find plenty of room for maneuver for cities. Although state-focused, Bull divided diplomacy into five core functions, each of which can be, and often is, replicated by cities or other non-state actors: *facilitating communication*, *negotiating agreements*, *gathering information*, *preventing conflicts* and symbolizing the *existence of an international society*.[10] Borrowing from Bull, and from the variety of scholars now engaged in discussing the diplomatic possibilities of cities, we will consider in this section how cities exercise these functions to achieve their aims. Rogier Van der Pluijm and Jan Melissen of the Netherlands Institute of International Relations have described the aims cities wishing to deploy 'diplomacy' as two-pronged: on one hand, cities are increasingly taking over state-level diplomacy, similarly to how NGOs or corporate lobbies have carved a niche for themselves in the past; on the other, they are also tackling issues traditionally ignored by states such local infrastructure needs or bottom-up approaches to peacekeeping.

---

[8] See, for example: Bulkeley, Harriet, and Vanesa Castan Broto (2013) "Government by experiment? Global Cities and the governing of climate change" In. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38(3): 361-375. And: Falkner et al. (2010) "International climate policy after Copenhagen: Towards a 'building blocks' approach." *Global Policy* 1(3)

[9] Ver der Plujim, R. and Melissen, J. (2007) "City Diplomacy: The Expanding Role of Cities." Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations

[10] Bull, H. (1995) *The Anarchical Society*. New York: Columbia University Press. The latter function is perhaps the most challenging for cities and analysts alike: how do cities symbolize the evolution and current existence of the "international society"? How do they contribute to, and shape, norms of international relations and orders of world politics? While still requiring much more in-depth thought, these questions have already spurred important debates on the role of cities in international orders. See for instance Curtis 2011.

This of course implies thinking, principally, of **cities as political communities** and thus as 'polities'. In this sense, 'local government' becomes a category of fuzzy boundaries as representatives of boroughs, municipal, metropolitan and even regional authorities have been 'speaking for cities' on international stages. Yet, it is more and more recognized in its potential to shape international processes and global agendas. This is however not just an academic whim: cities themselves have gone a long way to **testify as to the effectiveness** of their networking activities. For instance, the latest *Climate Action in Megacities* issued by the C40 group (in collaboration with ARUP and UCL), has evidence that, while climate action by states is at a stall, C40 cities have put in place over 8,000 climate actions, leveraging over $2.8 billion in funding and impacting millions of urban dwellers worldwide.

Hence city diplomacy, as we illustrate more in depth throughout this report, is far from a sporadic and peculiar activity. In a CLI-WHO study of 180 city networks, 25% met at regular intervals at least once a year or more, with a further 20% scheduling irregular meetings and conferences, and over 44% of them producing joint policies. How can cities better leverage the effects of these vast amounts of interactions with other cities, and how can diplomacy contribute to the effective integration of city leadership in global agendas? To answer these questions we need first and foremost to unpack the importance of a 'diplomatic' view onto the external engagement activities of cities, by taking a closer look at the examples of UK-China city relationships.

3. UK and China Compared

Despite the links between cities in the two countries, there are stark contrasts in how cities in each consider relations with the other. In the UK, government organisations such as the LGA or para-government bodies such as "Core Cities" and "Key Cities" (See Box 2 below) exist to promote the strength of cities in and of themselves as they attempt to court opportunities in the EU and in China. In China, on the other hand, central government has a much tighter control on international initiatives by Chinese cities which, in their eyes, exist only as a supplement to state-level international affairs. The frantic pace at which Chinese cities conclude international twin-cities agreements can be explained both by the sheer size of these cities and the fact that they have few other opportunities to engage as cities with international governments.

3.1 City Diplomacy in the UK

The Core Cities are relatively well connected – all save Sheffield are taking part in at least one international network (ranging from ICLEI or the Covenant of Mayors to more specific networks such as WHO Network of Age-friendly Cities or the Atlantic Arc Cities) and all are connected to at least one national network such as the Local Government Association (LGA) or UK Healthy Cities, aside of course from Core Cities. Four of the Core Cities have furthermore recently hosted international city-network events.

It is interesting to see this in conjunction with the fact that a few cities, especially some in the grouping of Key Cities including Wallingford or Doncaster, are making moves to reduce their number of symbolic or cultural twinnings. This is important because each of the Core Cities save Birmingham (and London independently) has one Chinese sister *(Table 1)*. Overall, **most UK cities surveyed (46%) actively manage twinning arrangements strategically**, as for instance by creating joint projects, by staying in contact regularly and by creating a platform for local businesses to interact *(Figure 3)*. Even when no explicit strategy is available, guidelines or visions for the city's internal engagement are embedded in other strategies or acknowledged explicitly by city councils (what is termed here as "partial strategy"), With up to 36% of UK cities having some form of partial international engagement approach. Research on the UK-Chinese twinnings in Table 1 also confirms that cooperation by UK cities with their Chinese sisters is well established with a Chinese 'twin' for almost all UK cities reviewed.

Table 1: Selection of British cities and any official Chinese 'twins'

UK Cities	**Chinese** Cities
LEEDS	HANGZHOU
CARDIFF	XIAMEN
GLASGOW	DALIAN
SHEFFIELD	ANSHANG
NEWCASTLE	TAIYUAN
BIRMINGHAM	n.a.
BRISTOL	GUANGZHOU
LIVERPOOL	SHANGHAI
MANCHESTER	WUHAN
NOTTINGHAM	NINGBO
LONDON	BEIJING
OXFORD	n.a.
YORK	n.a.

Figure 3: Existence of an international affairs strategy in UK cities
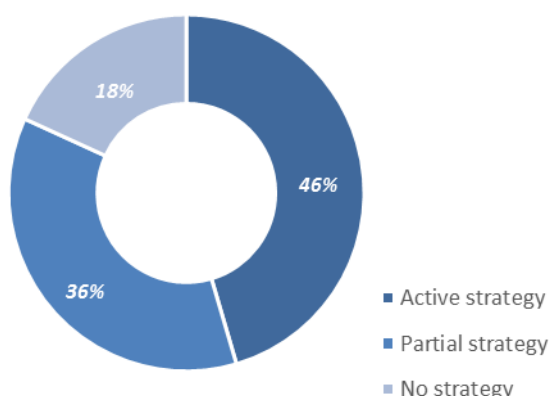
Twinning remains **a widespread activity**. More generally, the average number of twins among the ten Core Cities and London is 7. Chinese Cities seem particularly active on the twinning front, where this average number is 25 among the eleven 'core' Chinese cities. This is something that might not be overly surprising considering important differences in size and available resources between British and Chinese cities *(Figure 4)*. However, it is important to note that UK cities are moving towards more strategic and topical partnerships or broader-scale multi-city regional projects – a key feature of city diplomacy we return to in the following pages.

Box 2: Domestic networks of cities in the UK

Core Cities Network

Established in 1995, Core Cities is an advocacy group formed of ten of the largest and most economically active cities in the UK outside the Greater London Area, including Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, Liverpool and Leeds. The network's main activities consist of policy advocacy and research: it was an important participant in the negotiation of the 2011 Localism Act and is active in representing larger UK cities at Westminster in the current debates on Devolution.

Key Cities Network

Key Cities was formed in 2013 during the ongoing discussions on Devolution in order to represent the interests of 26 mid-sized cities including Oxford, Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Brighton-Hove and York.

On top of national-level policy advocacy, the group is also involved in research on the day-to-day management of cities, addressing issues such as local finance in the wake of government cuts, urban employment and revitalizing city-centres.

Local Government Association

The LGA is an independent and non-partisan government organization tasked with representing the interests of local councils in central politics. Established in the 1990s, it was created to simplify and consolidate the medley of district, council, county and metropolitan representation organizations.

The LGA is also involved in coordinating best practices across English and Welsh local councils, and has a particularly strong public-health branch.

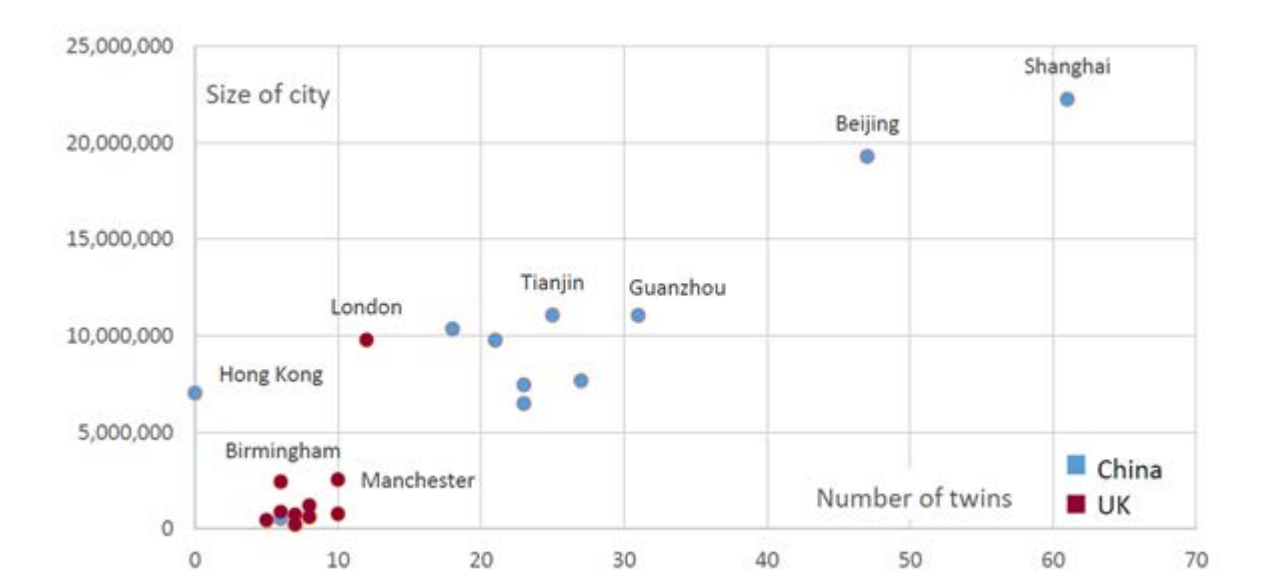**Figure 4.1: Size of cities and number of twins**

Figure 4.2: Close-up on UK cities

Networking patterns also differ to some extent. This is another area where UK Cities differ from Chinese cities: while **Chinese cities engage in fewer network activities** (not least because of the central government's tight control over international initiatives), more of them participate directly in bigger networks such as UCLG or the C40. In the UK, on the other hand, very few large British cities are direct members of a sample of large networks considered for this study (*Figure 5*). Curiously, as a UK model of networked and **collaborative network-to-network diplomacy** instead of city-to-networks collaboration, membership to UCLG is in fact conducted through the intermediary of the Local Government Association. The differential factor often discussed in the UK between the Core Cities and the capital, however, appears at least principally not critical in the case of city networking – once again proving (as with the literature) that 'city diplomacy' is not reserved to large cities. For a city of its size and compared to similar-

sized Chinese cities which are much more active internationally such as Tianjin or Guangzhou, London has comparatively few important international commitments apart from its participation in the C40. Most mid-sized UK cities prefer smaller networks such as the Commonwealth Local Government Forum.

Figure 5: Sample network membership among eleven British and Chinese cities
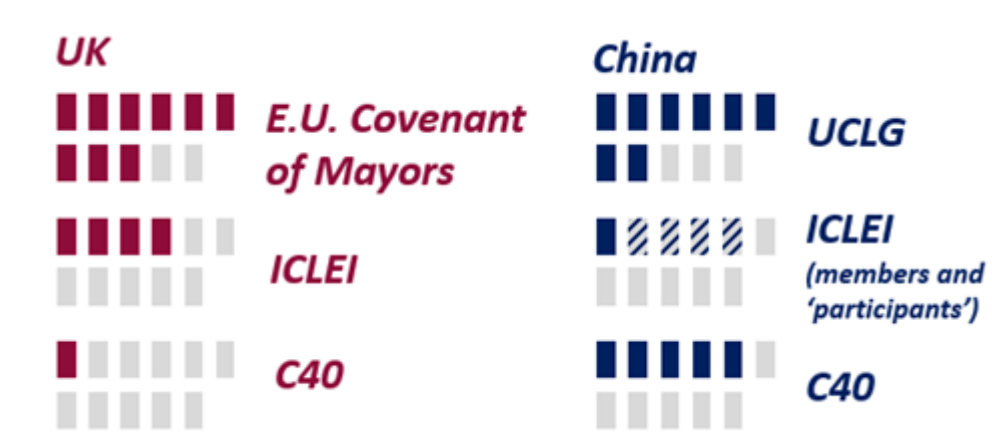
The **EU plays an important role** in enabling Core or Key cities in the UK to form international connections. This generally takes the shape of indirect incentives (for funding, regional partnering or even research cooperation) but there are also more direct cases of support. In the case of Brighton-Hove, for example, EU city-based initiatives and networks allow the city to access funding for environmental and cultural projects it would not otherwise be funded for through the national government. Consequently, Brighton-Hove has created a very visible and well organised 'International Team' relative to its size, in large part to manage funding and communications with EU initiatives. Birmingham, Glasgow and Leeds are also examples of cities with dedicated teams charged with managing funds from the EU for specific civic projects; while Bristol has an actual physical office in Brussels to ensure the city is represented in the regional urbanism plan.

3.2 City diplomacy in China

City diplomacy, in particular city twinning, has been well-recognised in Chinese literature. Most prominently and recently, the "City Diplomacy Taskforce" [城市外交课题组] of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) published "A Research Report on the Vitality Index of Chinese Cities in International Communication" [城市对外交往活力指数研究报告] in July 2015.[11] It proposed "four pillars" of city diplomacy in China: (1) identity; (2) leadership—the decision-making mechanism of foreign affairs at the local level, and the coordination mechanism between the central and local governments in foreign affairs; (3) policy issues; and (4) diplomatic channels.

---

[11] In the original Chinese version, SIIS used the term "city diplomacy" [城市外交]; it was somehow translated as "international communication" in English. See
http://www.siis.org.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=130&id=17

Box 3: Domestic Network Representation of Chinese Cities

The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries	**Chinese Association of Mayors**	**Cities Development Initiative for Asia and Citynet**
CPAFFC was founded in 1954 to manage cultural exchanges between China and the world. Although technically a NGO, the Association has strong government backing and ties not only to central government but also to a wide network of municipalities across all of China's provinces and autonomous regions. Among other things, it is instrumental in brokering twinning arrangements for cities and controls their involvement in international networks.	Similarly to the CPAFFC, this network is also tightly connected to the central state, and is currently headed by the Jiang Weixin, who is also Minister of Housing and Urban-rural Development. Among other things, the Association is instrumental in coordinating meetings between groups of Chinese mayors and European mayors. It is also active on behalf of Chinese cities in the UN, especially within UN Habitat which, despite being a cities-based platform, Chinese cities have little independent access to.	Cities Development Initiative (a project set up between cities by the Asian Development Bank) and Citynet (a network spanning across Asia set up by Yokohama in the 1980s) are two of major city-to-city development projects in Asia. Although Chinese cities participated in both to a certain extent in the past, their participation has cooled in recent years.

In general, **the Chinese literature on city diplomacy is now well developed**, and defines city diplomacy as a tool to attain national diplomatic goals, such as Xiong Wei and Wang Jing's *City Diplomacy: A Theoretical Debate and the Features in Practice* [城市外交: 理论争辩与实践特点].[12] A case in point is the sister-city relationship between Tianjin and Kobe. As the first pair of sister cities in China, it served to foster the newly-established diplomatic ties between China and Japan in the 1970s. As Zhao Kejin and Chen Wei argued in *City Diplomacy: The Role of Global Cities in Diplomacy* [城市外交: 探寻全球都市的外交角色], city diplomacy should only focus on non-sovereign issues and communication only with the authorisation and mandate from the central government.[13] There are a few Chinese research initiatives focusing on particular city cases. For example, Yang Yong used Guangzhou as the lens to study city diplomacy in China in his paper *Chinese City Diplomacy in the Age of Globalisation—A Case Study of Guangzhou* [全球化时代的中国城市外交—以广州为个案].[14]

Chinese cities seem, not just comparatively, **structurally well equipped for city diplomacy**. All Chinese cities have a "Foreign Affairs Office" to coordinate their sister-city programmes (*Figure 6*). Having a highly centralised political system and strong emphasis on national sovereignty, it is impossible for them to have physical offices abroad. Hong Kong and Macau, being "Special Administrative Regions," are the only exceptions. Hong Kong has 12 "Economic and Trade Offices" around the world, including London.[15] In general, these offices engage with

---

[12] http://www.cqvip.com/qk/88623X/201301/50273655.html (p. 14)
[13] http://www.cnki.com.cn/Article/CJFDTotal-WJXY201306005.htm (p. 69)
[14] http://d.wanfangdata.com.cn/Thesis/Y1415158
[15] http://m.www.gov.hk/en/about/govdirectory/oohk.htm

the national governments and focus on bilateral trade. Both cities do not have a dedicated office to coordinate city diplomacy.

Figure 6: Presence of a dedicated 'International Affairs' team within the city

At the national level, all 656 Chinese cities are ex-official members of the state-organised "China Association of Mayors." The Association assists Chinese cities in networking with their foreign counterparts.[16]

At the international level, all of the 11 cities in this study except Macao are **members of at least one major international city network**, such as UCLG,[17] C40[18] and CITYNET.[19] Guangzhou, Co-president of UCLG, participates in UCLG's conferences and workshops on a regular basis, such as a recent conference in Wakatobi, Indonesia.[20] Hong Kong, Steering Committee Member of C40, is a member of four C40 networks, namely the Connecting Delta Cities Network, Private Building Efficiency Network, Low Emission Vehicles Network and Sustainable Solid Waste Network.[21] Shenzhen hosts the "Global Mayors Forum," which claims to have "good cooperative relationships with 3,461 big and medium-sized cities."[22]

However, the **central government retains significant control** over foreign affairs at the local level. For instance, the state-organised "Chinese People's Association for the Friendship with Foreign Countries" coordinates Chinese cities' participation in UCLG.[23] In another example, while Shanghai is a funder of the Asian Development Bank (ADB)'s Cities Development Initiative for Asia (CDIA), the central government has rejected its plan to initiate an "infrastructure exchange" through the Initiative. Shanghai had ceased its contributing to CDIA in March 2015.[24] This may explain the general inactivity of Chinese cities in these international city

---

[16] http://citieschina.org/about/
[17] Members of UCLG: Guangzhou (Co-president), Beijing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Shenzhen, Tianjin and Xi'an
[18] Members of C40: Hong Kong (Steering Committee Member), Beijing (East Asia's Regional Office), Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Wuhan
[19] Member of CityNet: Wuhan
[20] http://issuu.com/uclg-aspac/docs/uclg_aspac_newsletter_vol._23_april (pp.18-19); http://www.guangzhouaward.org/565/content_403.html
[21] Christine Loh, Under-secretary for Environment, interviewed by Dan Koon-hong Chan, July 2015.
[22] http://www.globaylmayorsforum.org/index.php?case=archive&act=list&catid=241
[23] http://en.cpaffc.org.cn/index.html; http://www.gzwaishi.gov.cn/uclg/uclg.html
[24] CDIA China Strategy 2014-2017 (pp.6-8)

networks. In possible contrast to the function of, in the UK, the LGA or other networks of networks, **Chinese cities do not rely on these networks to "network"** with foreign cities.

Chinese cities are nonetheless particularly active in city twinning. In general, they have forged ties with 20 to 30 foreign cities, including UK cities (see Table 1). Beijing and Shanghai stand out with 47 and 61 pairs of sister cities respectively. Hong Kong is the only exception without any sister cities. Being an independent member in a number of international organisations, such as ADB, APEC and WTO, the city usually engages with national rather than municipal governments, from bilateral trade to policy learning.[25]

However, the majority of the sister-city relationships remain for the most part of symbolic nature. In most cases, apart from occasional visits, limited information was found on active and ongoing cooperation between Chinese cities and their foreign counterparts. Many of them forged these ties just for the sake of expanding their "friendships" around the world. While this might partly be a function of available information, lack of clear evidence speaks to the **often latent nature of city twinning** – a feature common between Chinese and UK cities.

Table 2: Major city twinnings between Chinese and UK cities

Chinese Cities	UK Cities
BEIJING	LONDON
CHENGDU	SHEFFIELD
CHONGQING	LEICESTER
GUANGZHOU	BIRMINGHAM, BRISTOL
HONG KONG	n.a.
MACAO	n.a.
SHANGHAI	LIVERPOOL, LONDON
SHENZHEN	n.a.
TIANJIN	n.a.
WUHAN	MANCHESTER
XI'AN	EDINBURGH

Of course, we wish not to underplay the potential influence of city networking per se. Rather, networking via twinning still seems to offer **important international bridging functions**. A number of cities, for instance, have drawn our attention. According to Beijing's Foreign Affairs Office, the city has launched 114 "concrete cooperations" with 37 of its sister cities from 2009 to 2014, such as the cooperation between the Bank of Beijing and the International Netherlands Group (Amsterdam), and the Beiqi Foton Motor and the City of Moscow. It aimed to assist Beijing businesses to "go global" and attract foreign investment. In addition, the city has adopted a strategy to learn from its sister cities in addressing urban challenges.[26]

In another example, Chongqing has an official strategy for each of its sister cities. Some of them are very specific. For instance, the city seeks to establish a trade office in Dusseldorf, Germany and organise trade exhibition on the "New Silk Road Economic Belt" in Antwerp, Belgium.[27]

---

[25] For instance, Hong Kong is negotiating with ASEAN (ten Southeast Asian countries) for a free-trade agreement.
[26] http://bjrb.bjd.com.cn/html/2014-06/03/content_184746.htm
[27] http://www.cqfao.gov.cn/news.php?no=20140416165029

Moreover, Guangzhou and Bristol are working together on a "smart city" programme. In December 2014, the two cities applied to the UK FCO's China Prosperity Strategic Programme Fund for this purpose. In March 2015, Guangzhou extended its cooperation with Bristol's working partners—San Sebastián, Spain and Florence, Italy—in the European Commission's Smart Cities and Communities programme.[28] Tianjin is also working with Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia on the "Dongjiang Port Area," one of the "Pilot Free Trade Zones" in China.[29] Despite the symbolic friendships, Chinese cities are, at the very least, *opened* to bilateral cooperation in trade and urban development with their sister cities.

Hence, overall, city twinning does offer important chances for transnational cooperation. Recent research on medium-sized Chinese cities, for example, has shown that on an aggregate, and so long as twinnings are well maintained they can have **practical benefits for urban economies** (and possibly national). Ben Leffel has for instance highlighted (***Figure 7.1 and 7.2***) the effects of twinning between UK cities and two sample Chinese cities, Qingdan and Jinan. Pairing UK exports to the formal establishment of twinnings, Leffel points out how clear shifts in networking gears takes place in these cities. These twinnings are relatively recent, and as is the case for twinnings made since 2000, they were made not in the spirit of symbolic markers of international cooperation as characterized sistering relationships in the past, but rather as an international channel through which citizens could derive practical (mostly economic) benefit. City twinning, in this case, can **have important impact in directing entrepreneurial collaborations**. In both these cases, the city acted as a '**mediator**' helping to introduce local businesses to distributors in the UK. Further research might be needed to ascertain whether this effect has similar significant effects on cooperation between larger cities (like Manchester, Liverpool, Beijing or Shanghai) but these preliminary results point at an already important lesson for Key Cities in the UK.

---

[28] http://www.gzfao.gov.cn/Item/8790.aspx; https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/china-prosperity-spf-bidding-round; http://ec.europa.eu/eip/smartcities/index_en.htm
[29] http://city.ce.cn/wmlmlb/201302/20/t20130220_639120.shtml; http://www.dongjiang.gov.cn/html/dj/portal/index/index.htm

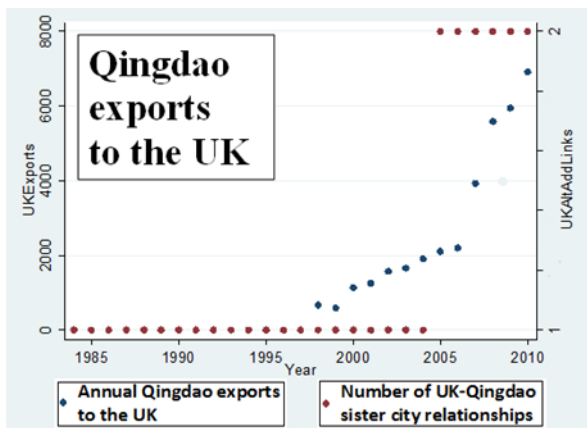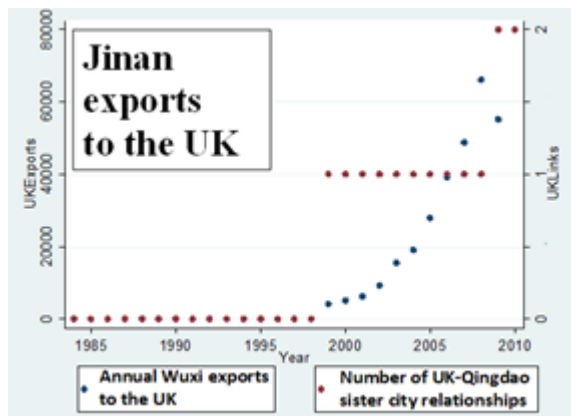**Figure 7.1: Increases in exports from Qingdao to the UK post-twinning**

Figure 7.2: Increases in exports from Jinan to the UK post-twinning

4. UK and China in a Global Context

If we consider the lessons above in a global context we can see that the UK and Chinese cities are not alone in trying to create well-managed ties. In order to allow for this broader global view, we focus here on comparing the discussions above on UK and Chinese cities to a sample of medium and large global cities, mostly drawn from other research projects conducted by the City Leadership Initiative. Some of these cities have even installed actual physical offices in China. Chinese cities, however, have a very peculiar profile internationally, both in the scale of their twinning projects and in the highly structured way they organize their relations.

4.1 Comparing structures of city diplomacy

It is not uncommon for larger global cities internationally to have substantially long lists of twin cities. Seoul, for example, has 23 while Barcelona has 27 (**Figure 9**). Many of these relations are old, created in specific political contexts (the end of the Second World War, apartheid South Africa, during the Israel-Palestine conflicts) as a show of support and international cooperation. Furthermore, it is relatively **rare for cities to 'un-twin'** as Doncaster did in 2009 with its five sisters, meaning that these relations tend to accumulate over time without any grand strategy.

All the cities studied had some form of policy body coordinating international relations. This is probably epiphenomenal, however: the cities chosen for this study were those presenting interesting international relations in the first place.

On the other hand, there was variance between highly centralized and organized structures (as we see in China) and those which split international relations between several teams (Seoul). Interestingly, the albeit limited data suggested that there *is **no correlation between a highly organized central international relations office and actual involvement or success in international activity.*** Quite to the contrary, we found that the leaders of higher added-value technical projects (such as participation in the C40 or organizing the International AIDS Week) tended to be cities where these were organized by the team with a specific technical competency (ie: environment, data management, economic planning, etc.) rather than a dedicated international team. This is just one further proof that international activity is becoming simply part of what cities now do in their day to day activity (and that each team should be prepared to work internationally), rather than something unique.

For many cities, including Melbourne, Copenhagen, Yokohama or Amsterdam, *international affairs fell mainly within the remit of the business and economic affairs of the city*. In some cases, such as Melbourne, these teams were also in charge of international environmental activities through projects to encourage a greener and more sustainable city economy.

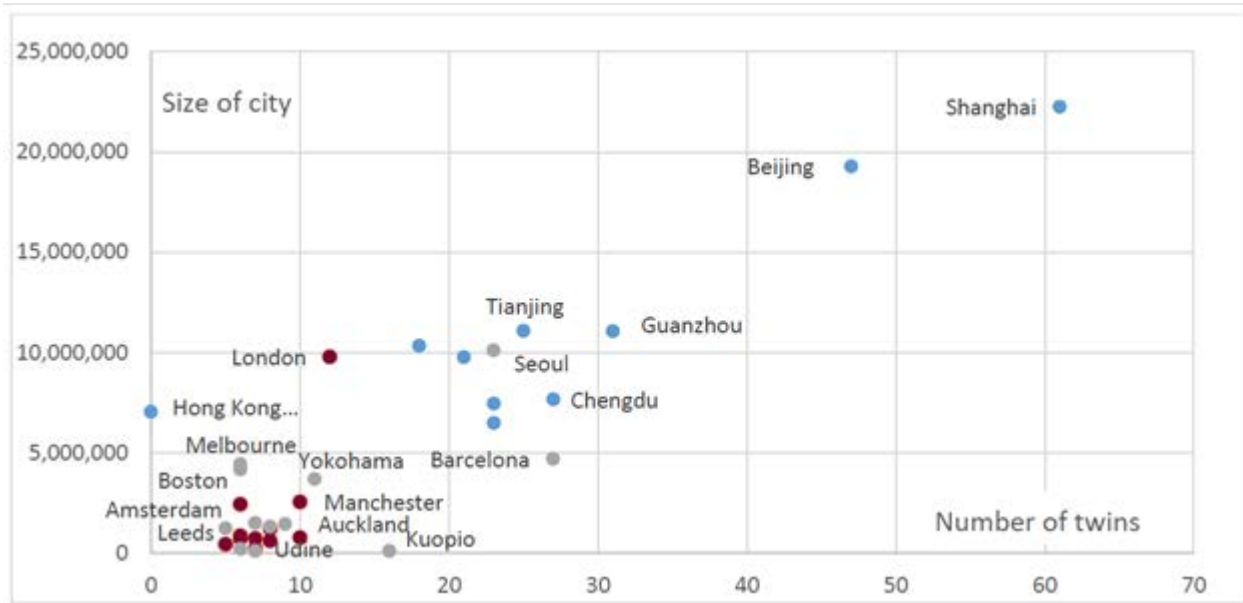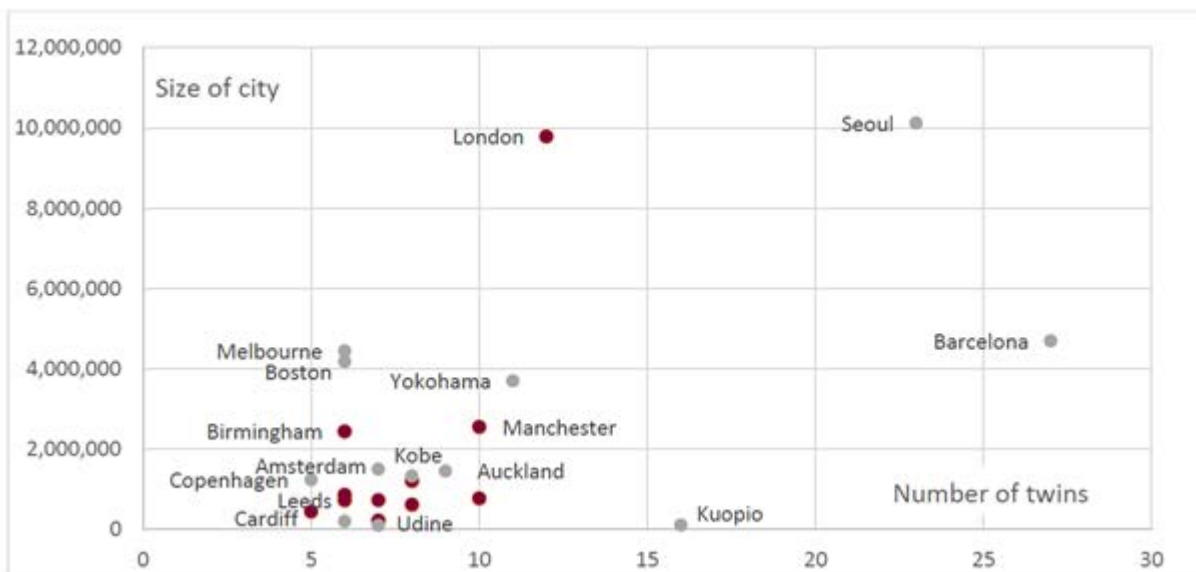**Figure 8.1: Size of city and number of twins (world)**

Figure 8.2: Close-up for world and UK cities

# 4.2 Comparing network efforts

However, it became apparent through our comparative case studies that while almost all cities have ad hoc relations with these older twins, many have made a concrete effort to manage relations with their more recent twins. These relationships are often forged based on a **specific mutual interest** such as water management between Copenhagen and Beijing or managing the Roma community between Leeds and Brno.

**Table 3: A selection of international cities and their major Chinese twins**

Global Cities	Chinese Cities
AMSTERDAM	BEIJING
AUCKLAND	GUANGZHOU
BARCELONA	n.a.
BOSTON	HANGZHOU
CORK	SHANGHAI
COPENHAGEN	BEIJING
KOBE	TIANJING, SHANGHAI (has offices in both)
KUOPIO	SHANGHAI
MELBOURNE	TIANJING (has office)
SEOUL	BEIJING
YOKOHAMA	SHANGHAI (has office)

Figure 9: In an international sample, fewer had dedicated strategies than the UK

- Active strategy
- Partial strategy
- No strategy
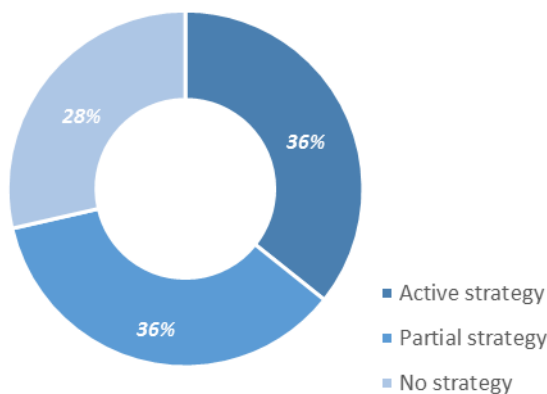
This seems to be especially true with twins in China: Kuopio, Finland (17 *ad hoc* twins in total) tightly manages relations with Pudong in Shanghai for the benefit of its business community; both Melbourne, Australia and Kobe, Japan have actual business offices in Tianjing while Yokohama has similar offices in Shanghai; and Copenhagen framed its twinning with Beijing within a wider initiative for Sino-Danish cooperation, cementing the 2012 relationship largely on mutual agreements on sustainability and water management. This consideration also further substantiates the preliminary findings on the mediatory capacity of cities highlighted above. If in the cases of Jinan and Qingdao twinning with UK cities had had a positive effect on urban economies, this 'middle man' role is not a peculiarity of UK-China relations, as demonstrated by research by Ben Leffel on Jinan and Changsha with Australian twins. In short, then, these examples of growth post-twinning both validate the **continuing importance of bilateral city diplomacy** but also the fact that Chinese and UK cities should be taken in context of wider possibilities for cooperation (***figure 10.1 and 10.2***).

**Figure 10.1: Australian imports affected by Chinese twinnings**
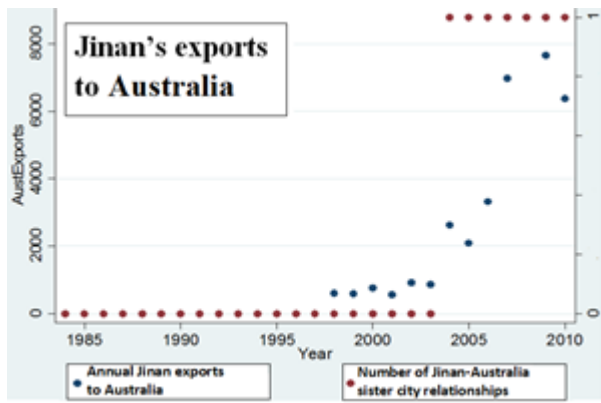
Figure 10.2: Australian imports affected by Chinese twinnings
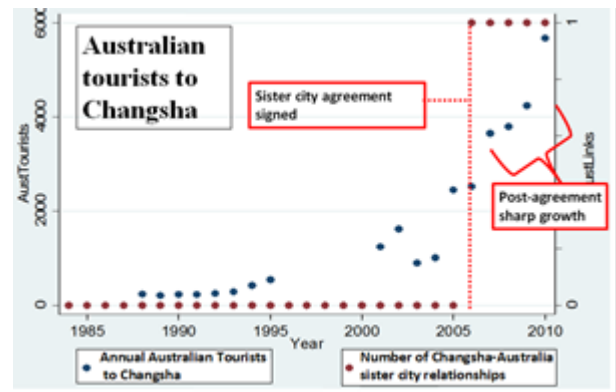
UK and Chinese cities seem to be **lagging behind on some major networking initiatives**. Large international city networks tend to play a much bigger part in the international(ising) activities in our sample of global cities. For instance, when we considered participation in the three major governance and climate change networks (UCLG, ICLEI, C40), UK and Chinese cities presented a much more limited participation than counterparts like Amsterdam, Copenhagen or Melbourne. Notably, Chinese cities have made an important recent effort at joining the C40 Climate Leadership Group, but broader participation especially beyond the environment remains limited (see Figure 11).

Yet **networking might inspire further networking**. Among the cities studied, we noticed that participation in one of the big networks (UCLG, ICLEI, C40) seems to be a likely factor for connection with the others. While this was limited to the bigger cities (Amsterdam, Barcelona, Copenhagen, Melbourne and Seoul), smaller cities such as Kobe, Cork, Kuopio or Udine (which were not members of UGLC, ICLEI or C40) were more involved in health initiatives. Seoul was probably the most engaged city in the study, taking a leading role in the three big networks as well as being engaged in an Asia-Pacific regional Healthy Cities initiative and Age-Friendly Cities. Also interesting to note were cities like Kuopio or Yokohama which focused on fewer networks which yielded better results for them.

Figure 11: Sample major network membership by British, Chinese and Global cities
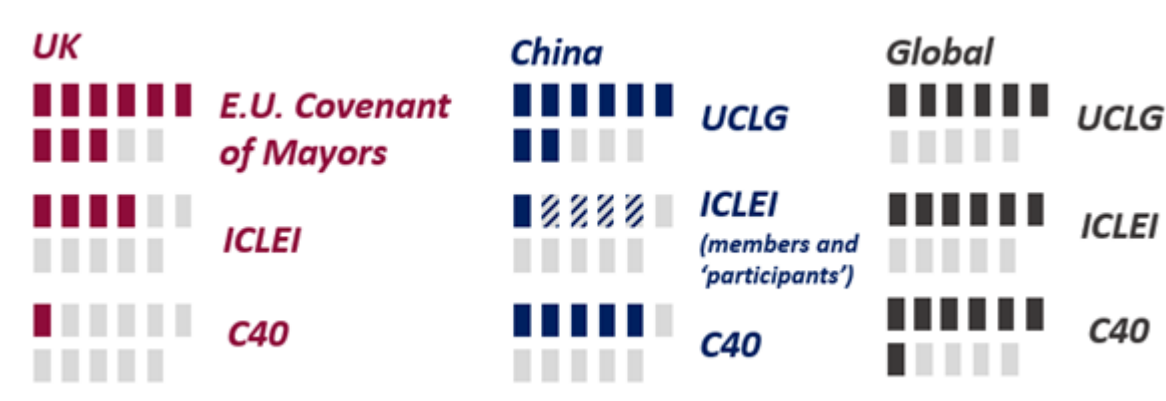
5. Recommendations and summary of findings

This summary review of literature, shape and activity of city diplomacy in UK and Chinese cities paves the way to both a possibility for more systematic analysis on city networking, but also greater attention by national government, national city networks and local governments themselves as to the possibilities of city diplomacy. In our account, the evidence discussed above has four major implications for UK policy at home and abroad:

1. First, **city diplomacy offers vast possibilities for internationalisation***:* The landscape of city diplomacy is both well established and long-lived, but also covering a vast variety of themes of critical national importance.

2. Second, **city diplomacy requires effective structures and formal commitments**: latent and symbolic twinnings have limited impact on urban economies, but an analysis of international standards and comparative performances, along with the expanding importance of international links for all types of cities, all point at the need for well-designed internationalisation plans and effective governance structures for international cooperation.

3. Third, **city diplomacy must become more strategic**: evidence of the effectiveness of well-calibrated twinnings, but also increasing resource constraints and the expanding number of networked initiatives by cities, all point at the need for a more strategic approach to external relations. Several cities have already take some important steps in this direction, but both national government (as facilitator) and national networks (in their capacity to 'network networks') can do much on this front.

4. Finally, regarding Chinese cities in particular, we have seen that, to the extent that the central Chinese government allows it, **Chinese cities are eager to partner with the rest of the world, but UK cities will need to bring concrete economic benefits to the table** or risk being lost in the long list of committed and strategically adept global cities interested in forming links with China.

Bearing these three lessons in mind, evidence above can be summarized as follows:

*   ***Cities are getting more international:*** The academic consensus is that it is getting harder, if not impossible, for cities to accomplish governance, economic and wellbeing goals without considering international action. It is also getting harder for international institutions such as the UN, the WHO or the World Bank to ignore the needs of cities.

*   ***This is backed by existing and developing policy structures:*** A significant portion of cities have a centralized international offices (see the case of the Chinese cities), while several which do not have a central office still participate actively in high scale international activities (see the case of Seoul).

*   ***Networks are offering wider possibilities than twinnings:*** More cities are moving away from bilateral twinnings founded mainly on the principles of cultural exchange and mutual understanding, and towards networks which allow them to coalesce with more cities at once on specific goals such as the environment or health.

- ***Chinese cities follow different patterns which EU cities cannot and should not emulate:*** The Chinese central government holds a tight grip on international relations, including network participation by cities, and twinnings. For this reason, it is not uncommon to find Chinese cities with upwards of 30 twins. The strategic room for manoeuvre in Chinese cities might at present be limited, but some level of comparison with the UK are still possible.

- ***The remaining twinnings must become more strategic to survive:*** Those twinnings which do persist, or those which are newly created, tend to be more strategic and focus on a particular topic of mutual interest between cities (such as business connections or solving a mutual problem such as pollution or vulnerable minorities).

- ***Cities are becoming more strategic in their external relations:*** This is especially the case between UK or other European cities and their Chinese twins which offer important business outlets. While relationships with other twins may not be maintained, European cities make a strong effort to maintain relations with China.

References

Acuto, M. (2013) "City Leadership in Global Governance" *Global Governance* 19 (3): 481-98.

Acuto, M. (2013) *Global Cities, Governance & Diplomacy: The Urban Link,* London: Routledge.

Bouteligier, Sofie. "Inequality in new global governance arrangements: the North–South divide in transnational municipal networks." *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 26.3 (2013): 251-267

Bulkeley, Harriet, and Vanesa Castan Broto (2013) "Government by experiment? Global Cities and the governing of climate change" In. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38(3): 361-375.

China Association of Mayors (2015) 您的当前位置: 协会简介 – 协会简介. Available at: http://citieschina.org/about/

Curtis, Simon (ed.). *The Power of Cities in International Relations*. London: Routledge, 2014; Barber, Benjamin R. *If mayors ruled the world: dysfunctional nations, rising cities*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013

Duchacek, Ivo D. (1990) 'Perforated Sovereignties: Toward a Typology of New Actors in International Relations', in Hans J. Michelmann and Panayotis Soldatos (eds), *Federalism and International Relations: The Role of Subnational* Units (Oxford: Clarendon Press)

Foreign and Overseas Affairs Office of Chongquin Municipal People's Government (2014) 2014 年度重庆市友好城市交流合作推进事项计划表. Available at: http://www.cqfao.gov.cn/news.php?no=20140416165029

Friedman, John and Goetz Wolff (1982) "World city formation: an agenda for research and action" In. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 6(3): 309-344

Government of Hong Kong (2015) "Offices Outside Hong Kong" In *GovHK*. Available at: http://m.www.gov.hk/en/about/govdirectory/oohk.htm

Jayne, Mark, Phillip Hubbard, David Bell (2013) "Twin Cities: Territorial and Relational Geographies of 'Worldly Manchester." In *Urban Studies* 50(2):239-254

Lecours, Andre (2008) 'Political Issues of Paradiplomacy: Lessons from the Developed World' (Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', Discussion Papers in Diplomacy Series)

Lee, Taedong. "Global cities and transnational climate change networks." *Global Environmental Politics* 13.1 (2013): 108-127

Mamadouh, Virginie, and Herman van der Wusten. (2015) "The Paradiplomacy Of Cities and Regions: Transnational Relations Between Sub-State Political Entities" In. Dittmer, Jason, and Fiona McGonnel (eds.) *Diplomatic Cultures and International Politics* (London and New York: Routledge)

Shanghai Institute for International Studies. (2015) 城市对外交往活力指数研究报告. Available at: http://www.siis.org.cn/index.php?m=content&c=index&a=show&catid=130&id=17

SIIS Research Team on City Diplomacy (2015) *A Research Report on the Vitality Index of Chinese Cities in International Communication.* Shanghai Institute for International Studies. Available at: http://www.siis.org.cn/uploadfile/2015/1022/20151022070459148.pdf

UCLG (2015). *Local Governments Newsletter*. pp.18-19Available at: http://issuu.com/uclg-aspac/docs/uclg_aspac_newsletter_vol._23_april

Ver der Plujim, R. and Melissen, J. (2007) "City Diplomacy: The Expanding Role of Cities." Clingendael: Netherlands Institute of International Relations

王皓(2014) 北京与50座城市建立国际友好城市关系 In Beijing Daily

杨勇 (2007) 全球化时代的中国城市外交——以广州为个案的研究

熊炜 and 王婕 (2013) 城市外交：理论争辩与实践特点. In 公共外交季刊2013(1) P.14. http://www.cqvip.com/qk/88623X/201301/50273655.html

赵可金 and 陈维 (2013) 城市外交:探寻全球都市的外交角色. In 外交评论(外交学院学报) 2013 (6): pp69