

Bringing the City Back In:

Three Scandinavian Capitals and Eurocities Membership: A Quest for Autonomy

by

Solveig Grønnestad

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR (PhD)



Faculty of Social Sciences
Institute of Media and Social
Sciences 2024
University of Stavanger

NO-4036 Stavanger
NORWAY
www.uis.no

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ISBN:978-82-8439-226-4

ISSN:1819-1387

PhD: Thesis UiS No. 750

Acknowledgements

Suddenly, more than seven years of work has ended. It has been a challenge, but most of all a privilege. Although I have spent countless hours inside my own head, I have many people to thank:

First, the informants who have shared their time with me, agreed to let me observe meetings, and interview them. I will also thank colleagues and PhD. fellows (old and new) at the Institute for Media and Social Sciences, among others: Stine, Veronika, Solveig, Feodosia, Erik, Renée and Eleni. A special thanks to Tine, for moral support and hours of conversation; and to Ben for taking the time to read through and comment upon substantial parts of my thesis.

Thanks also to my colleagues: Ann-Karin Tennås Holmen, Gunnar Thesen and Ragnhild Johanne Sjurseike, who have provided me with valuable experience by allowing me to contribute to their courses in various manners.

I will also thank my lovely family (mamma, pappa, and Randi) for inspiration, tons of encouragement, and babysitting. Thanks to my family in law (Unni and Ole-Gaute) for support, and to Hanne for the weekly evening writing sessions.

A great thanks also goes to the University of Copenhagen for my research stay, and especially to Anne Bach Nielsen for sharing ideas and literature, and for the hard work as my co-author. Thanks also to Jacob Aars and Bjørn-Tore Blindheim for valuable feedback on my 90 percent seminar.

My main supervisor, Arild Aurvåg Farsund: You deserve a huge thanks for your thoroughness. You have helped me make sense of the ideas spinning in my head and made me go the extra mile. Thanks for being a supportive critic all these years and for being my co-author. Thanks also to Anne Elisabeth Stie, my enthusiastic co-supervisor. You have filled me with energy and helped me see the relevance of my work.

Sondre: Thank you for knowing not to ask about my progress, for listening to my long monologues, and for being more supportive and interested than anyone could ask for. Finally, thanks to my wonderful kids, Idunn and Johan, for much welcomed diversion from writing.

Summary

Cities are international actors. In the past 10-20 years researchers have started to speak of a ‘foreign policy’ for cities. This is in many ways a paradox as most cities are contained within a state. Foreign policy has long been a state prerogative. Admittedly, international cooperation and interaction between cities has a long history, yet researchers argue that we now see something new: The rate at which new cities are engaged internationally differs, and the shape that this takes is changing. While city-to-city cooperation used to be the preferred form of international city engagement, the main channel today is that of Transnational Municipal Networks (hereafter TMNs). These are networks of cities cooperating across state borders. Thus, what we have seen in the past 10-20 years is that cities are becoming more organized in their international efforts.

This dissertation investigates cities’ engagement in TMNs. The purpose is to understand more clearly why and how cities participate. This is carried out, first by looking into their rationale for participating in the TMN and what they seek to achieve by doing so. Second, the specific configuration that this takes and the organizational elements of these forms of cooperation are studied. Further, the thesis investigates how these questions relate to the concept of autonomy asking: “*How can cities’ membership in a TMN can be understood as a search for autonomy?*” This is broken into two questions:

- 1) *Why do cities seek autonomy through TMNs?*
- 2) *How can TMNs can enhance cities’ autonomy?*

These questions are examined by focusing on three case cities that are all Scandinavian cities: Copenhagen in Denmark, Oslo in Norway, and Stockholm in Sweden. The three cities are members of the European TMN, Eurocities. The research questions are addressed in three research articles. Article 1 investigates participants’ reasoning for their city’s membership in TMNs and enquires into the logics behind the

participation. Article 2 studies the organizational qualities of Eurocities and how this affect membership behavior. Article 3 studies why cities engage in lobbying towards the European Union (EU) and what affects their choice of lobby channel.

Lobbying is only one of several components in TMNs' activities, yet in the case of Eurocities, it is an important channel for cities that want to influence EU legislation. Another side of TMN membership is the importance of identity formation and legitimation. Some participants do not have clearly stated goals, but they value the internal and external legitimacy that come with TMN membership. Thus, the engagement is not only fueled by a strategic calculus but also by a drive to be where the other important cities are.

The overarching argument in this thesis is that cities engage in TMNs in a quest for autonomy, specifically more autonomy in the shape of opportunities. This is understood as autonomy to take on new responsibilities, to perform one's tasks adequately and handling the new challenges that cities face. The sense of a common fate and a shared responsibility does not necessarily imply that participants always have a clear view of what they want to achieve, but they gain a sense of increased opportunities that may or may not be realized.

A TMN like Eurocities is well suited to increase autonomy through opportunities because it does not require cities to cede self-rule while having the resources and organizational capacity to produce change and even address the EU should the member cities wish to do so. Article 2 addresses the specific organizational configuration of a TMN like Eurocities and argues that it may be fruitful to view it as a meta-organization, that is, as an organization with other organizations as members. On a range of parameters, such as structure and membership requirements, meta-organizations lie somewhere in between a network and an organization. For member cities, this is important because Eurocities has a comparatively large secretariat and organizational capacities, while it does not have access to the full menu of sanctions

that some organizations do to streamline participation. Therefore, member cities in this TMN may wield their membership in many ways and up- and downscale their activities as and when they like while remaining members. Applying a meta-organizational perspective also helps explain why identity formation plays such an important role in Eurocities.

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Part 1

“Today it is obvious that municipalities and counties have legitimate interests in international questions. That was not the case 20 years ago” (Interview 21, 2016).

1 Introduction

Over the past 10-20 years researchers have started to speak of a ‘foreign policy’ for cities (Curtis & Acuto, 2018, p. 9). Although not an entirely new phenomenon, cities’ international engagement is rising. This is interesting elucidating the fact that foreign policy has for centuries been the preserve of the state and therefore mostly beyond the competence of the subnational level (Curtis & Acuto, 2018). Yet today cities are seen as important partners in several areas, such as human rights and migration but especially in all types of policy issues related to climate change. In fact, cities are now so involved that when the United States withdrew from the Paris Agreement, several of the largest cities were quick to assert that they would continue to uphold the international agreement and work towards climate change mitigation regardless (Curtis & Acuto, 2018; Herrschel & Newman, 2017, p. 12; Szpak et al., 2022). Cities today engage internationally with other cities, Non-Governmental Organizations (hereafter NGOs), businesses and international organizations on a range of policy issues.

This thesis takes as a given the fact that cities seek to achieve *something* through their international engagements and that Transnational Municipal Networks (hereafter referred to as TMNs), have become important for a reason. What drives this, may vary between cities and change over time. Attempting to capture the essence of participation, however, the thesis argues that it may be valuable to view cities’ memberships in TMNs as a search for more autonomy in the form of opportunities. Moreover, it argues that TMNs are well suited to provide this type of autonomy. The literature on cities’ international engagements (see Andonova et al., 2009; Bulkeley & Newell, 2015; Busch & Anderberg, 2015; Fourot et al., 2021; Funfgelt, 2015; Lee, 2019; Papin, 2019; Rashidi & Patt, 2018) suggests that cities join TMNs for the following reasons:

- Branding – to attract business and create jobs
- Fund-seeking for financing activities in the city
- Lobbying and interest representation towards international organizations
- Knowledge-sharing among members with similar challenges
- Capacity-building to meet various challenges in the future and build resilience

In addition, a few newer contributions (see Caponio, 2018; Huggins, 2018a; Mocca, 2018) point to a more symbolic form of motivation. Article 1 of this thesis (Grønnestad & Nielsen, 2022) argues along the same lines, that TMN participation has a discursive component and that an important rationale for participation is the search for legitimacy for the city's own policies both externally and internally.

The above-mentioned list refers to goods that cities may seek through their international endeavors using various means. Herrschel & Newman (2017), for instance, argue that this can be done in three main ways: (1) through transnational networks for cities, (2) unilaterally, or (3) through formal cooperation with international organizations. Earlier research has to a larger degree focused on “city twinnings”, which is a form of city-to-city cooperation. For most cities today TMNs are the most important platform. TMNs are also the most successful type of actor in providing all the above-mentioned functions combined (Herrschel & Newman (2017). It should be added, however, that formal cooperation with international organizations, such as the Council of Europe or the United Nations (hereafter UN) also mostly happens through TMNs. TMNs are described as networks of cities crossing state borders. The numbers of TMNs have risen markedly over the past 20 years and was approaching 300 (Curtis & Acuto, 2018), but is likely more now. This thesis studies how cities use TMNs to enhance their autonomy seen as opportunities. More specifically, it studies autonomy related to participation in one such TMN, namely the European network for big cities called Eurocities.

The cities studied are the three Scandinavian capital cities of Copenhagen in Denmark, Oslo in Norway, and Stockholm in Sweden.

1.1 Aims and research questions

This thesis entails three articles bound together by a discussion chapter. Article 1 studies the judgements Eurocities' participants from the different member cities make concerning their city's membership. Theoretically this article builds on new institutional perspectives. It concludes that aspects of the TMN membership certainly have rational components yet argues that a discursive institutional perspective improves the understanding of how and why cities join and remain in TMNs.

Article 2 joins the debate on “the nature of the TMN beast” and engages in discussion regarding conceptualizations of TMNs. The article questions the common characterization of TMNs as primarily networks. By drawing on the concept of meta-organizations, the article points to traits that are hard to explain when a TMN such as Eurocities is understood solely as a network. Such traits are the level of organization and the important role of a fast-growing and very capable secretariat. Members also find leaving Eurocities unappealing because they do not want to be left out of a “good society”. The article points to how the above-mentioned traits may be more precisely explained by a meta-organizational perspective. This perspective also better accounts for the large variation in membership engagement that is tolerated in Eurocities.

The third article focuses on whether and how the Scandinavian cities engage in lobbying towards the EU. The article asks which channel the cities use and what may explain their choices. The article finds that all three cities engage in lobbying albeit through different channels, and that using Eurocities as a channel to the EU is most important for non-EU member cities such as Oslo. Theoretically this adds to the “third generation” of multilevel governance (Szpak et al., 2022) by finding that even smaller cities with little tradition of EU lobbying have in fact

become lobby actors. The articles are presented at more length in chapter 5.

In addition to the specific aims of the three articles, which all focus on different questions regarding why cities engage in TMNs and the form that this engagement takes, this thesis argues that what cities seek through their international engagement is more autonomy. The importance of gaining autonomy when acting on the international scene and addressing some of the most pressing contemporary issues have been stressed by Bulkeley et al. (2018, p. 703):

“Cities are increasingly being positioned as essential to tackling some of the world’s major challenges, from global environmental issues to economic development and political security. Yet the extent to which cities have the capacity to respond is contested. The capacities of such cities to foster wellbeing, sustainability and justice are intimately related to ways of understanding and practicing autonomy”.

Several transnational issues, such as climate change, migration, as well as the covid pandemic are all examples of problems that have landed on the cities’ tables as many aspects of these challenges must find local solutions. In addition, many problems such as poor air quality or homelessness arise more often in large cities. As noted by Bulkeley et al. (2018) regarding the above, cities are forced to cooperate. Handling these problems therefore implies a pooling of sovereignty, even though cities are not sovereign actors. I will return later in this thesis to the idea of implied sovereignty in the absence of real sovereignty. The idea of pooling sovereignty is developed within the context of the state but bears resemblance to what we now observe between cities.

Despite their diversity, cities share some common sets of values that they need to realize. These values, often seen as the core concept of self-government, are according to Kjellberg (1995) autonomy, democracy, and efficiency. All three concepts are important for cities in their international engagements and international experience, and knowledge

sharing may increase the efficiency of the production of goods and services in the city. Yet, I will in this thesis argue that the overarching concept behind the increasing participation of cities on the international scene is the search for more autonomy. According to Baldersheim et al. (2019) local decision makers must have a certain level of autonomy in order to be held accountable by the local level electorate. If they cannot make choices, it makes little sense to answer for their actions nor to participate internationally. Therefore, a minimal degree of autonomy is a prerequisite for international engagement, but the search for more autonomy is, I argue, also a driver for TMN participation as well as a possible outcome.

Recent literature assessing the autonomy of regions and local governments (e.g., Baldersheim et al., 2019; Hooghe et al., 2016) differentiates between autonomy in the sense of self-rule and shared/interactive rule. The first variant concerns the local level's freedom from state interference and measures political and fiscal discretion, institutional depth, and policy scope. The second variant concerns local or regional governments' chances of influencing the national government.¹ This is measured as inclusion in legislative processes, constitutional change, participation in intergovernmental meetings and in setting tax revenue. While one could expect that these scores would affect cities' abilities or propensities to take part in TMNs, researchers have found that there is broad participation despite large variation in scores on these parameters (Szpak et al., 2022). According to Szpak et al. (2022, p. 63-64) cities in federal systems tend to have more self-rule than cities in unitary systems. Yet this has not kept cities in unitary systems from engaging internationally and participating in TMNs. Therefore, while a minimal level of autonomy is needed to

¹ Shared/interactive rule should not be confused with pooled sovereignty. The first concept concerns the local level's chances of influencing its national government, while the second refers to merging resources and appearing united in international forums.

participate internationally, large variations in autonomy exist between members.

Both self-rule and shared/interactive rule are decided within the context of the state. The two forms depend on the specific constitutional arrangements in the respective country. Cities can advocate for more of this in international forums, putting pressure on their respective states, but on their own they have few possibilities to change this. What they can do is try to compensate for the lack of influence over the national policymaking process by bypassing it altogether and find more direct routes to the EU, as argued by Callanan and Tatham (2014) as well as article 3 of this thesis.

When I argue that cities participate in TMNs to increase their autonomy, it is therefore not autonomy in the sense of self-rule that I refer to. Draining from Kjellberg (1995) and Agranoff (2018, p. 24), autonomy can be seen both as freedom *to* and *from* something (clearly inspired by the philosophical tradition of thinkers such as Isaiah Berlin). In the case of cities, it implies freedom from central state interference and freedom to use various means to realize subnational interests and values, not merely implementing orders from above. The first aspect, freedom from the central state is not, it seems, the main motivation for, nor affected by participation in TMNs, unless used to make a supranational organization, such as the EU or the Council of Europe (e.g., through the European Charter of Local Self-Government) put pressure on the states for more local self-determination or self-rule. This does happen, but recent contributions (e.g., Acuto & Leffel, 2021; Herrschel & Newman, 2017; Szpak et al., 2022) suggest that this is not the main driver of TMN participation. The second aspect, freedom *to*, is however affected by TMN participation.

Municipalities today are expected to be attentive to local needs and find the proper solutions to local problems. Consequently, autonomy involves something more for cities than merely a “tug of war” with the national level over legal competence. This familiar struggle for freedom from the

central state, to gain more self-determination, is what is mostly referred to when measuring local autonomy (Baldersheim, 2018), yet it falls short of explaining why cities join TMNs and what they may gain through membership. Some researchers (e.g., Acuto, 2019; Bassens et al., 2019; Gordon, 2019) have instead viewed internationalization as a tool for cities to make use of with explicit reference to agency.

The argument in the research literature is that TMNs provide cities with new arenas to lobby, to seek funding and to gain new knowledge which make them strategic international actors (Acuto, 2019; Gordon, 2019). There is some evidence that TMN membership can increase agency, and the existence of such pursuits is backed by the findings of article 3 in this thesis. However, this thesis argues that a different view of autonomy should be added, namely autonomy as *opportunities* or choices (see Fossum et al., 2023). This is a conception of autonomy that is broader and therefore captures a greater variation in cities' attachments. Article 1 in this thesis stresses that not all forms of TMN participation assumes a strategic-rational form in the sense of pursuing predefined goals. What they all seek however, is to have more opportunities and to have access to the ideas that exist "out there". While Fossum et al. (2023) uses such an interpretation of autonomy in their study of so-called "third EU countries", such concepts have not been used to characterize the international engagement of cities. The main argument of this thesis is that the concept of autonomy in the TMN and local government literature should be re-interpreted, and some new connotations added.

Autonomy as *opportunities* is a positively defined concept but is less output-focused than that of agency. It may be about solving existing tasks better, but it also puts a stronger emphasis on possibilities that may or may not be realized. Fossum et al. (2023, p. 2) understands autonomy as "having choices and an ability to will choices". Seeing autonomy as opportunities is a conception of autonomy that offers valuable points of explanation for the pursuit of cities in TMNs and seeks to add a new

dimension to the understanding of cities' international engagement through TMNs.

The articles collectively prepare the ground for the following research question:

How can cities' membership in a Transnational Municipal Network (TMN) be understood as a search for autonomy?

The main research question is addressed through the following two sub-questions:

1. Why do cities seek autonomy through TMNs?
2. How can TMN membership enhance a city's autonomy?

These questions will be pursued further in chapter 6, which is the discussion chapter.

1.2 Addressing the research gaps

The research on local governments in the public administration literature within political science is substantial, especially on issues such as governance and networks (e.g., Klijn, 2008; Marcussen & Torfing, 2007; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007). When it comes to cities or local governments as international actors, however, the discipline of political science has showed little interest. The study of cities as international actors is still largely dominated by the disciplines of urban studies, geography, and environmental studies (Acuto et al., 2021; Curtis, 2021). However, this might be about to change.

The title of this thesis pays tribute to Theda Skocpol's (1985) iconic work "Bringing the State Back In" where she argued for a "paradigmatic reorientation" in favor of a state centered rather than a purely society centered perspective (Skocpol, 1985, p. 4). Recently, researchers have started to challenge the state centered approach, arguing that it is too

dominant and thus have tried to usher in a new turn, a city centered perspective (see Amen et al., 2011; Caponio, 2018; Curtis & Acuto, 2018; Curtis, 2021). A substantial new contribution is that of Szpak et al. (2022) on the role of cities in international relations. Here they discuss cities' motivations for international engagement and the tools available to them. This thesis builds on this still relatively nascent research field and is an attempt to bring the city back into the core of political science.

Today, we have some knowledge of the shape that cities' international engagement takes and why TMNs were created. However, the central question of which justifications cities make in their TMN engagements remain insufficiently answered. As such, this is the topic for article 1. Considering that TMNs have been around for quite some time, and that they have been subjects of a growing field of research from different disciplines over the past 10-20 years (though not much in political science), the question of why cities join these networks and the rationale for continued participation came surprisingly late. This first happened around 2018, with the works of Caponio (2018), Huggins (2018a), and Mocca (2018). Until recently, much research on cities' rationales for participation has at best been implied. Most research explaining why cities join TMNs have tended to focus on a few tangible functions advertized by TMNs themselves as factors that pull cities to participate.

There has therefore been little room for studying city-specific rationales and especially variation (Huggins, 2018a). Existing research take for granted that participation serves a specific purpose that is mainly strategic. As a reaction, a few researchers have, over the past few years started to investigate the argument for participation from a city level perspective (see Caponio, 2018; Huggins 2018a; Mocca, 2018). Yet, many questions connected to how and why cities participate in TMNs, and possible variation is still poorly understood. Some interpretations and suggestions are provided in article 1.

The question of autonomy in relation to TMNs, which is the central topic of article 2, is mostly touched upon indirectly by researchers in their discussions of various TMNs and their structures and enforcement mechanisms (see for instance Acuto & Leffel, 2021; Gebhart & Günther, 2021; Haupt et al., 2020; Nielsen & Papin, 2021; Nguyen Long & Krause, 2021). Increasingly the TMN literature seems also to be discussing the conceptualization of TMNs and their many configurations. For example, some TMNs are developing into elaborate organizational structures (Acuto & Leffel, 2021; Nguyen Long & Krause, 2021). A few researchers (e.g., Gebhart & Günther, 2021; Haupt et al., 2020; Nielsen & Papin, 2021) have started an investigation into the level of autonomy that TMNs have. Yet, the role member cities have in these TMNs are mostly addressed indirectly. Little attention has been paid to the possible implications of TMNs becoming more organized, and the loss or increase of autonomy for cities entering them. This is further investigated in article 2.

There is a rather substantial literature on local and regional interest representation in the EU and the choice of lobby channel (e.g., Beyers & Donas, 2014; Callanan, 2012; Callanan & Tatham, 2014; Högenauer, 2014a, 2014b; Tatham, 2008; 2010; 2011). Yet until the contribution of Huwyler et al. (2018) most research had concluded that the local and regional levels did not lobby the EU by circumventing the national government, what is referred to as bypassing. The literature has stressed that regions, which had been the main study object, preferred to lobby in cooperation with their national governments.

In the past few years, however, research has found that bypassing does occur, and that it is more common than lobbying through the national government (Huwyler et al., 2018). Although most of this research has focused on regions or regional offices (e.g., Beyers & Donas, 2014; Callanan, 2012; Callanan & Tatham, 2014; Högenauer, 2014a, 2014b; Tatham, 2008; 2010; 2011), there is a growing interest in the engagement of cities. Huwyler et al. (2018) have studied differences among larger

data sets of cities and regions. Moreover, Mocca (2020) and Guderjan and Verhelst (2021) have found that the largest cities also lobby the EU, bypassing their national governments in the process. Until recently, however, only Panara (2022) appears to have studied subnational lobbying from the European Economic Area (hereafter EEA) and the European Free Trade Association (hereafter EFTA) members, but again, the focus is only on the regional offices. There is therefore no research on cities from the EEA in this context. Moreover, there is very little research on Scandinavian cities in relation to the EU. Until recently, there has not been much of a reason to expect a high level of engagement from these cities as they are parts of strong unitary states which have traditionally shown little room for lower levels of government to engage internationally (Gidlund, 2000, p. 238). However, this research was conducted some time ago, and the situation has changed for subnational actors, including the larger cities. As such, the Scandinavian cities warrants a closer look, to see whether they have evolved beyond this understanding, and whether theory is not supported in practice. This is in the focus of article 3.

Lastly, a growing amount of literature on cities' international engagement suggests that cities' participation in various international forums is related to a quest for autonomy (see Aust & Nijman, 2021; Ljungkvist, 2014; Szpak et al., 2022). Although this research also treads rather lightly on the topic of autonomy, it proposes that cities' autonomy is strengthened through TMN participation. *How* autonomy is to be understood in this context is however not always clear, and there is still ample room to investigate how and why autonomy is strengthened through membership in TMNs. This is addressed in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

1.3 The articles connected – cities and TMNs as actors.

The three articles that form this thesis have their own distinct research questions, which are explained at length in the methodology section (chapter 4), with the design of each article also explained there. Within this thesis, the articles inform a larger discussion on cities' autonomy as parts of the international community and as members of TMNs. In article 1 and 3, the cities are the main study objects, while in article 2, both Eurocities and the member cities are study objects. Consequently, in this thesis the focus is both on the city level and TMN level, which are different units and levels of analysis, a slightly challenging balancing act. The main aim is to understand the role of autonomy in TMN memberships, yet I argue that to do this, we need to understand what kind of organizational entities we are dealing with.

Despite the research articles examining only a few dimensions of cities as international actors, it is important to be clear that they are not “corporeal actors” with a single will (Ljungkvist, 2014; Buhmann, 2022). They are rather “composite actors” (Scharpf, 1997) where the individual actors share some common goals and are shaped by the institutional context. As explained by Scharpf (1997, p. 54):

“The term “composite actor” will thus be reserved to constellations in which the “intent” of intentional action refers to the joint effects of coordinated action expected by the participating individuals. In other words, the use of actor-theoretic concepts above the individual level presupposes that the individuals involved intend to create a joint product or to achieve a common purpose”.

This understanding is both used by rational choice institutionalists, as well as the discursive institutionalists, which are parts of the theoretical frameworks used in this thesis, although the implications vary slightly. In the latter view, the idea of the international city produces a stronger collective identity that evokes certain expectations of action not only

based on rational calculus (Ljungkvist, 2014). In the words of Le Galès (2002, p. 10) “Cities are to some extent social structures and institutions that guide actors’ anticipations, structure their interests, and influence their view of the world”. Policymaking and international participation is however in both the rational choice and discursive institutional perspective legitimized by referring to the city as a collective with certain identifiable interests. When I use the terminology “city” in this thesis, cities are therefore understood as composite actors.

1.4 The Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured in two parts:

Part One consists of chapters 1-7, with Part Two being the actual three articles. The following chapter (chapter 2) proceeds with a description of the role of cities in international relations and a short historical overview, as well as information on TMNs, with a particular focus on Eurocities. Then follows a theory section (chapter 3), where the three theoretical concepts that are used in this thesis are discussed. These are new institutionalism, multilevel governance and meta-organization theory. Next there is a methodology chapter (chapter 4) where methodological considerations and approaches are presented, such as use of expert interviews, the study of documents and the role of observation. Chapter 5 presents the three articles somewhat more at length, while chapter 6 discusses the research questions posed in this thesis, namely *how cities’ international engagement and membership in a Transnational Municipal Network (TMN) can be understood as a search for autonomy*. Lastly, chapter 7 sums up and concludes the thesis.

Part two is made up of following three research articles:

Article 1: Grønnestad, S. & Nielsen, A. B. (2022). Institutionalizing City Networking –Discursive and Rational choice Institutional Perspectives on membership of Transnational Municipal Networks. *Urban Studies* 59(14), 2951–2967.

Article 2: Grønnestad, S. & Farsund, A. A. Moving Beyond Networks: Transnational Municipal Networks as Meta-organizations.

Article 3: Grønnestad, S. Scandinavian Cities as EU Lobbyist: The Use of Local, National and Transnational Lobby Channels.

2 Cities in international relations

This chapter serves as a background chapter and presents the position that cities have had and have today in international relations. Moreover, it discusses the TMN as a concept and presents some similarities and differences between the most familiar TMNs. This is followed by a presentation of Eurocities, the TMN that serves as a case in this thesis. Finally, the three case cities (Oslo, Stockholm, and Copenhagen) are presented.

2.1 Explaining the rise of Transnational Municipal Networks (TMNs)

Cities have over the past 10-20 years become more involved in international relations. They have established international relations offices within their city administrations to manage relations with other cities and various actors internationally (Aust & Nijman, 2021; Curtis & Acuto, 2018; Durmus & Oomen, 2022; Herrschel & Newman, 2017). One estimate shows that 70 to 80 percent of the world's cities partake in some form of international activity, such as city twinning, connections to a network or international organizations (Lara, 2020). The most important channel for cities engaging internationally is through Transnational Municipal Networks (hereafter TMNs), where they have direct membership (Heinelt & Niederhafner, 2008; Herrschel & Newman, 2017). TMNs are networks or organizations of cities engaging in many different activities across country borders.

TMNs are, however, not new phenomena. Networks for trading goods have for instance existed for centuries (Stone, 2012), yet city-to city cooperation, so-called "twinning", with low levels of organization were for a long time the most common form of city diplomacy (Acuto & Leffel, 2021; Bansard et al., 2017; Gordon, 2018; van der Heijden, 2010). Today, participation in TMNs is more common. New TMNs have

been created, and some of the older city-to city initiatives have been formalized into membership organizations, transforming into TMNs (Curtis & Acuto, 2018). Thus, what we have seen over the past 20 years is an increasing formalization of cities as international actors and a higher level of organization of cities' international engagement. Moreover, the TMNs themselves have developed. In the words of Le Galès (2002, p. 108): "Once easygoing social occasions, they [TMNs] have become subject to the rationale of audit and evaluation". The quote is now 20 years old, and the development has accelerated since then. Curtis & Acuto (2018) have estimated that there existed approximately 60 active TMNs in 1985. By 1999 these had doubled. In 2018, the estimate of TMNs were somewhere between 250 and 300. TMNs have developed globally, involving cities from countries all over the world.

The increased engagement of cities is often seen as a response to the effects of more globalization in the post second world war era, especially after the collapse of the Bretton Woods institutions in the 1970s. The latter incident is also seen to explain the increasing number of TMNs from the 1980s onwards (Curtis & Acuto 2018; Curtis, 2021; Garcia & Judd, 2012; Griffiths, 1995; Herrschel & Newman, 2017; Payne, 2010). The neoliberal system that replaced the Bretton Woods system made cities, the homes of large multinational corporations, more important. It became important for cities to be attractive venues for investment, and consequently, more and more cities were led to internationalize to attract important companies (Curtis & Acuto, 2018; Curtis, 2021; Garcia & Judd, 2012). The global climate regime has also created a sense of obligation to engage in transnational climate resilience or mitigation strategies from the city level. According to Barber (2017) the leadership of many cities argue that states have failed their part of the social contract when it comes to handling the climate crisis.

The increased participation of cities must also be seen as a response to the strengthening of intergovernmental organizations, such as the United Nations (hereafter UN) and World Trade Organization (hereafter WTO),

and a more inclusive tone towards cities from these organizations (Curtis, 2021; Kübler & Pagano, 2012). In addition to these global phenomena, the specific development of the European Union (hereafter EU), with the adoption of the subsidiarity principle in the Maastricht Treaty, and the creation of the Committee of the Regions are also pinpointed to explain the involvement of cities in the EU (Marks, 1993; Payre, 2010). The establishment of the single market contributed to this development as well as the establishment of the regional policy with the structural funds (Kübler & Pagano, 2012). With the continued increase in EU legislation, cities in the EU are to a large extent subject to EU law, which affects services provided on the local level. (Callanan, 2012; Verhelst, 2018). Lastly, Payre (2010) and Colombo and Groenleer (2021) also point to domestic factors in some European states since the 1980s, such as the rolling back of the state, with functions being decentralized to the local level, while simultaneously reducing funding of local governments. This has pushed some local governments to look to the EU for funding and solutions to common problems.

Research on the increasing participation in TMNs also draws on the literature on so-called wicked problems (Kemmerzell, 2019). These are problems with unclear mechanisms that are complex and hard to define, that cross policy sectors (and often country borders), that require joint action, and will have severely negative consequences unless handled well (Læg Reid & Rykkja, 2022; Peters, 2017; Rittel & Webber, 1973). Cities are increasingly forced to deal with similar or at least very complex issues, such as homelessness or global warming that require the effort of numerous actors, and that warrant new ways of thinking (Barber, 2017). Thus, many contributions draw on the literature on network governance, where the increase in TMNs and TMN members are seen as the international equivalents of network solutions on the national and subnational level (see Bansard et al., 2017, although the authors are slightly critical to this usage).

2.2 The city in a state-centric field

Although cities have played important roles in the history of international relations, states have for a long time been the dominant actors. This is, for good reasons reflected in the state centrism of the whole discipline of political science, and especially in the field of international relations, with references to the Westphalian order (Acuto et al., 2021). The phenomenon is also vividly illustrated by Kübler and Pagano (2012, p. 116): “With the creation of modern nation-states, cities were squeezed to the very bottom of the new constitutional architectures – where they remain until the present day”. Consequently, the national government has been the only actor to represent the state in international fora (Curtis & Acuto, 2018; Godet & Orsini, 2021; Scholte, 2004; Herrschel & Newman, 2017).

In large parts of the history, however, cities and leagues of cities were the dominant form of organization, and cities were responsible for their own security and diplomacy, with extensive interaction between them. Examples of such are found in the ancient Greek and Roman city states, which were also where the phenomenon of diplomacy was first developed (Szpak et al., 2022). In more recent times, Rokkan and Urwin (1983) refers to the strong cities that existed in the center of Europe as the “city belt”. The Hanseatic league in the 12th to 14th century serves as a good example of cities handling both internal and external relations. The Hanseatic cities were independent units that coordinated their defense and trade policies through treaties. Another example is the city republics in the northern Italy (Kübler & Pagano, 2012; Le Galès, 2002;). Several institutions that later became important for the functioning of the emerging states in Europe were first developed in the cities (Le Galès, 2002).

Over the past 10-20 years, the city’s importance in international relations has been rising (Curtis & Acuto, 2018; Herrschel & Newman, 2017; Kübler & Pagano, 2012). This has led some scholars to postulate the dawn of a new urban era, challenging the dominating state centric

approach (e.g., Barber, 2017). While there is little evidence to support such a bold presumption (see Aust & Nijman, 2021; Curtis & Acuto; 2018; Curtis, 2021; Stone, 2012), something has changed, although incrementally. While cities do not challenge the predominance of the state as such, they have carved out a space for themselves on the international arena and in multilevel governance systems such as the EU. The larger cities today perform their own diplomatic activities² (Acuto, 2010; Beaudouin, 2021; Curtis & Acuto, 2018). This process seems to happen in parallel with, not at the expense of the role of states on the international scene, although the interpretation of this varies. Most students of cities' international relations argue that in an international system of governance, there is room for a diverse set of actors that cut across multiple territorial and functional layers (Curtis & Acuto, 2018; Durmus & Oomen, 2022; Godet & Orsini, 2021).

While states have sovereignty and are international legal personalities, the same is not true for cities. A core tenet is that in the international anarchy, there is no authoritative actor above the state. Consequently, states are natural players on the international arena (Beaudouin, 2021). While states are internally different, they all share certain core state powers (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2016) which make them similar in important respects. Such core powers are military and police force, border control, as well as public revenue and administrative power. For subnational actors such as cities, this is different. While many of them have substantial administrative and financial powers, there is always at least one layer above (Kübler & Pagano, 2012). Cities do not command military or police forces and they do not have anything equal to state sovereignty (Baudouin, 2021). However, they do have autonomy both in the sense of self-rule and shared rule (Baldersheim, et al., 2019). Autonomy is one component of the sovereignty principle (see Krasner, 1999) which means that some fundamental principles are shared between

² This applies especially for the big cities, as the smaller cities do not command the same number of resources (Herschel and Newman, 2017).

states and cities. Yet cities are internally very diverse, which might reflect the fact that the idea of the city remains so unspecified compared to the idea of the state. Cities are not considered parties in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. Agreements between cities are therefore not treated as part of international law (Colombo & Groenleer, 2021). Yet, according to a host of researchers (Blank, 2021; Curtis & Acuto, 2018; Colombo & Groenleer, 2021; Curtis, 2021; Durmus & Oomen, 2022), cities are increasingly operating “as if” they were international legal persons, in many respects” (Blank 2021, p. 113).

2.3 The city as an international actor

According to Curtis (2021) 66 per cent of the world’s population will be living in cities by 2050. In the EU this number is already higher, with 75 per cent living in cities today (Tatham et al., 2021). 28 cities have populations above 10 million, thus exceeding that of about half of the world’s states. The most important business centers are located in cities (Klabbers, 2021). According to Szpak et al. (2022), most city authorities are responsible for the basic security of their residents, such as transportation, housing, integration, water, waste management, and sanitation. Despite its importance, a city is not easily defined. One may refer to it as a physical (built) entity, as an area for consumption of goods and services, and as an area for work employment (Parr, 2007). But it is also a local political administrative entity with authority to plan, develop and manage an urban area.

Using a crude dichotomy, cities around the world are either a form of self-government, or an instrument for the state to deliver services on a lower territorial level (or a mixture of both) (Baldersheim, 2018; Cartier, 2021). In most cases cities have a certain level of self-government (Kübler & Pagano, 2012). However, both cities and regions’ jurisdictional autonomy varies greatly from country to country. Some have primary legislative powers, while others do not (Panara, 2022). The areas under local government jurisdiction also vary as well as the room

for local level initiatives. To illustrate, in Great Britain local governments are only allowed to initiate activities and legislate in areas where they are explicitly authorized by the Parliament (Peters and Pierre, 2012; 72). This runs contrary to the Scandinavian countries where the authority is negatively defined, meaning that local authorities can undertake a variety of activities of their own choosing in addition to the ones they are obliged to by law, provided these activities are not explicitly given to any other authority (Baldersheim, 2018). The strength of cities therefore varies with their size, economic muscles, and political competencies. According to Szpak et al. (2022, p. 231) the cities' financial situation along with perceived challenges is more important than their national political systems to explain cities' presence on the international scene.

Therefore, despite this variation in cities' capabilities, the idea of cities as international actors has gained legitimacy over the past years in international organizations such as the UN and the EU (Kübler & Pagano, 2012). One example from the UN is that cities have been given accreditation and a seat in various UN bodies through the UN Habitat programme (Durmus & Oomen, 2022). The largest TMN, The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) association has a clear lobby mission towards the UN and has an influence on how UN programs are developed (Kübler & Pagano, 2012). Eurocities, which is the TMNs studied in this thesis, is the most influential TMN in the EU, and has played a part in the EU's Urban Agenda (Gebhart & Günther, 2021).

2.4 A foreign policy from the city level

According to Curtis and Acuto, (2018, p. 9): "To speak of a 'foreign policy' for cities has only become meaningful in the last decade or so". The phenomenon of cities' international engagement goes by many different names. Terms such as "city diplomacy" and the "foreign policy of cities" are used (Curtis & Acuto, 2018; Ljungkvist, 2014). Others (e.g., Herrschel & Newman, 2017) speak more vaguely of "cities as

international actors”. Despite different labels, they all point to the same practices, which can, using the words of Curtis and Acuto (2018, p. 12) be defined as: “[...] mediated ‘international’ relations between rightful representatives of polities (cities in this instance), that result in agreements, collaborations, further institution-building, and cooperation across boundaries”. Cities engage across state borders with other cities, businesses, NGOs, and international organizations, such as the EU and the UN. They increasingly participate in international initiatives on climate issues, human rights issues, migration issues, mobility, and various other social, cultural, and economic issues (La Porte & Pavón-Guinea, 2018).

Cities have gained a status as vigorous and effective policymakers, especially in relation to climate change mitigation. The then mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg already in 2013 declared: “We’re the level of government closest to the majority of the world’s people. While nations talk, but too often drag their heels—cities act.” (Bloomberg city lab). Another such example, also from the US, is how cities have taken the lead in following conventions to which the government is not a signatory. While the US government has not signed the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, many American cities, among them San Francisco, Los Angeles and Washington DC., have implemented this convention within their own jurisdictions. There is even a grassroot organization in the US for the promotion of CEDAW in American cities (Durmus & Oomen, 2022; Grigolo, 2019).

Cities also show that they are handling pressing contemporary matters, exemplified by the fact that through the TMN Eurocities, a group of mayors from the Executive Committee visited Kyiv in august 2022 in the middle of the war to meet with the Ukrainian President, Zelenskyj (Eurocities, 2022; Aftenposten, 2022). European mayors have committed to contributing to the rebuilding of Ukrainian cities after the war.

The foreign policy of cities must in its nature be different from that of states Mocca (2020). Cities lack the formal authority of states to pursue aims internationally. Yet, most states have empowered their cities to partake in international initiatives with the condition that they do not explicitly break with the foreign policy of the state (Baudouin, 2021). Perhaps the most striking example of cities challenging the foreign policy of the state is that of local governments in the US imposing economic sanctions on businesses trading with Myanmar in the 1990s. These sanctions were imposed even though this broke with the practice of the federal government. When tried in the Supreme Court, however, the action of the local governments was declared unconstitutional (Grigolo, 2019; Ljungkvist, 2014). Yet, it shows that the lines are not always perceived as clear and that some cities do push for a more autonomous role in international affairs. Cities are not signatories of such agreements as the Paris Climate Agreement, yet this does not stop them from implementing policies within their own jurisdictions. Szpak et al. (2022, p. 36) also stress the room for maneuver that lies here stating that: “[...] implementation without or with formal accession is a matter of degree rather than kind”.

Variations between cities in different countries are striking also when it comes to local governments’ autonomy and possibilities to be international actors. While some states in the US have made laws against cities participating in TMNs, Brazilian cities are highly encouraged to internationalize and act as “paradiplomats”. They are even supported by a federal unit in this work (Colombo & Groenleer, 2021).

Cities as international actors have mainly been associated with low politics (Cartier, 2021). However, cities do on occasions touch upon more “classical” foreign policy issues. One example is the 2008 World Conference of City Diplomacy in the Hague where cities discussed conflict prevention, peace building and post-conflict reconstruction (Nijman, 2016). Yet, when speaking of a foreign policy for cities, it does

not relate to sovereignty, but to political practices and direct political relations with actors in other countries. Although lacking the sovereignty that states have, a similar concept, namely that of autonomy is central for cities in TMNs (Baudouin, 2021). This point is also stressed by Curtis and Acuto, (2018, p. 9):

“If aligned in logic to the traditional notions of ‘foreign policy’ circulating in IR theorising, the foreign policy of cities is however, to some degree, unlike that of states in that it relies even more extensively on specific forms of ‘network power’ – the ability to convene and lead coalitions of actors towards specific governance outcomes – and far less on sovereign forms of power”.

2.5 A multilevel and networked polity

Cities have thus emerged as international actors, being indeed subordinate to the national government, but at the same time having a certain leeway to act on the international arena (Mocca, 2020). This leeway, it is argued, is exactly what is being provided by networks in an increasingly polycentric and multilevel governance structure (Curtis & Acuto, 2018; Godet & Orsini, 2021; Scholte, 2004). According to Godet and Orsini (2021, p. 26) traditionally weak actors may put issues on the international agenda through network-like configurations. Organizations and networks are necessary tools for cities to operate internationally, especially in the EU multilevel governance system. Cities emulate states’ behavior in international relations through signing agreements, mostly in the shape of memoranda of understandings (so-called MOUs) (Durmus and Oomen, 2022; Nijman, 2016). Moreover, intergovernmental organizations serve as role models for the creation of TMNs (Nijman, 2016). Thus, the higher level of organization and formalization of TMNs, the more the dynamics seem to mimic that of international organizations.

Cities engage in TMNs on a global scale, but engagement becomes especially important when there is an influential organization to which cities must adhere. The EU is perhaps the most prominent example of

such an organization (Curtis & Acuto, 2018). The following quote illustrates this:

“The EU, with its explicit and broad platform for local and regional engagement with the European institutions and modes of governance, offers here a very special framework of internationality. IOs may serve as amplifiers of individual cities’ interests and policies, to project them up to the global scale, and thus give them more influence on global governance” (Herrschel & Newman, 2017, p. 96).

Local and regional interests are increasingly taking on the role as policy makers in the EU (Callanan, 2012; Verhelst, 2018). The “Europe of the regions thesis” has been abandoned, as subnational actors did not turn out to be as powerful actors in the EU system as were once postulated (Moore, 2008; Tatham & Thau, 2014). Yet, researchers still speak of “the regions in Europe” (Moore, 2008), as municipal and regional governments nevertheless gain increased attention and engage in lobbying (Beyers & Donas, 2014; Moore, 2008; Tatham, 2017). The launch of the Urban Agenda in 2016 is one such concrete example of increased subnational involvement encouraged by the EU Commission (Acuto et al, 2021).

The state-centrism is, as mentioned above, being challenged, especially from subnational levels in the EU (Curtis & Acuto, 2018; Godet & Orsini, 2021; Herrschel & Newman, 2017; Marks et al., 1996; Scholte, 2004). Moreover, EU legislation is not to be regarded as foreign policy, and national governments are no longer able to act as gatekeepers. This does not however mean that all cities and regions take part to the same degree. First, regions are often stronger than cities and have more important organizations representing their interests towards EU. This is especially the case for the group of regions with legislative powers, hereafter referred to as the REGLEG-group (Tatham, 2018). The stronger regions in Europe are especially those in Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Spain, which have great financial, political, and organizational discretion and may even on occasion represent the state governments in

the Council (Hooghe & Marks, 1996; Dickson, 2014; Tatham, 2018). However, if national authorities have not granted these subnational units the rights to participate in their place (implying high degree of shared rule), and they are not members of the REGLEG, there are few formalized arenas for subnational actors in the system of the EU (Knodt, 2012). The Committee of the Regions is the exception as the only formal channel for cities and regions in the EU system, but this is only a consultative organ (Piattioni & Schönlaue, 2015) and has gained a reputation of favoring regions over cities. However, the larger cities, and especially the cities that are situated in strong regions do sometimes have muscles to act as paradiplomats (Dickson, 2014) promoting their interests in the EU system. Article 3 of this thesis argues however, that through Eurocities, although not a formal part of the EU system, cities are given the chance of speaking directly to the EU Commission and the European Parliament, using the more informal lobby channel.

2.6 Why do cities join TMNs?

In this thesis, three main rationales for cities to engage in TMNs are identified:

- 1) Because of more complex interdependence – new border crossing problems and an international labor market (Garcia & Judd, 2012; Szpak et al., 2022).
- 2) Because they need external funding (Callanan & Tatham, 2014; Colombo & Groenleer, 2021).
- 3) Because cities are affected by legislation produced outside the state's border (E.g., in the EU) (Callanan & Tatham, 2014; Szpak, 2022)

A response to the first point is to engage in TMNs to exchange and produce new knowledge, to commit to joint standards, but also to promote the city to attract resources and business. A response to the second is to use TMN membership to apply to EU funding through

various funds and programmes.³ A response to the third problem is lobbying.

Cities with extensive legislative competences need external input on the political decisions they need to make. This speaks in favor of both politicians and public officers taking part in TMNs. However, many cities have limited self-rule, but implement a wide array of services and policies made on the national and even supra-national level (Baldersheim, 2018). In these cases, cities need technical information on how to interpret the legislation, how to best solve the problems that arise in the implementation process, or they engage to influence the decisions that affect them. This explains why even cities with lower levels of self-rule (in non-federal systems and strong unitary states) find it necessary to take part in TMNs. According to Szpak et al, (2022, p. 231):

“The similarity of threats and challenges they [cities] face is far more important in relation to international collaboration than is the legal position of local governance. Presumably, their financial situation is more important than the political system, as it determines the potential scope of international cooperation”.

In addition to the three main reasons for TMN membership listed above, Szpak et al. (2022) also stress that TMNs can produce unpartisan solutions that may enhance the common well-being of residents in cities with different political cultures.

2.7 TMNs: Characteristics and functions

A TMN is generally described as a network of cities across state borders (Busch, 2015), where the term “transnational” implies that TMNs are not international actors, in the sense of facilitating cooperation *between* states, but rather crossing states. Coleman (2012, p. 675) stresses how

³ Some researchers (e.g., Callanan and Tatham 2014) merge interest representation that seek to influence policies and EU regulation with seeking funding (termed regulatory and financial mobilization).

term transnational points to supra-territoriality where “relations are formed, and transactions are made without being limited by the territorial boundaries of states”.

Kern and Bulkeley (2009) in their seminal article defined TMNs according to three characteristics. First, to qualify, a TMN must have cities as main members, and these must be autonomous units free to join or leave. Second, it is defined by a non-hierarchical, horizontal, and polycentric structure, where membership is seen as a form of self-governance. Third, members will to a large degree directly implement decisions taken by the TMN themselves (Kern & Bulkeley 2009, p. 309-10). Busch (2015) has also added that a TMN must include more than two cities and it needs a certain formalization. Lastly, (Bush, 2015 and Funfgelt, 2015) argue that to qualify as a TMN, it must also have a certain level of organization and staff.

While the term TMN is used in this thesis, as it is the mostly used term (see for instance Bansard et al., 2017; Davidson et al., 2019; Hakelberg, 2014; Kern & Bulkeley, 2009; Toly, 2008), the same phenomenon also goes by the name of transnational city network (TCN) (see Caponio, 2018; Fourot et al., 2021; Gebhardt & Günther, 2021). Moreover, when occupied with climate issues, the term transnational municipal climate network (TMCN) is also applied (see Bush 2015; Haupt & Coppola, 2019).

TMNs are claimed to serve different functions. The research literature broadly highlights five overarching ones, although few TMNs perform all of these. First, TMNs may serve the purpose of representing cities’ interests internationally, often in the shape of lobbying, but also as general agenda-setting, by putting the light on important policy issues (Andonova et al., 2009; Fourot et al., 2021; Funfgelt, 2015). Second, TMNs, may facilitate the joint formulation of policies or joint initiatives that cities can implement themselves (Andonova et al., 2009; Rashidi & Patt, 2018). Third, TMNs can have a capacity-building function in the sense of offering advice, finding partners, or contributing to funding

activities in the member cities (Andonova et al., 2009; Busch, 2015; Fourot et al., 2021; Papin, 2019;). Fourth, TMNs can facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practice between cities and between cities and external partners (Bulkeley & Newell, 2015; Fourot et al., 2021; Lee, 2019; Papin, 2019;). Fifth, TMNs can help cities brand and promote themselves in a search for resourceful actors and companies (Busch & Anderberg, 2015; Funfgelt, 2015).

TMNs are however not unified phenomena. They may be case specific, (e.g., only deal with climate or human rights issues) or multi-purpose and deal with several policy issues. ICLEI, which is a global TMNs devoted to sustainable development, is an example of the first category, while Eurocities, with its six main policy fields, is an example of the latter. Further TMNs may have a global membership base or regional one (covering only one continent). ICLEI and the very renowned TMN C40, which have many of the worlds' largest cities and take a broad approach to tackling climate change, are two examples of the former. Eurocities is an example of a regional, European TMN. Citynet is an example of a prominent Asian regional TMN (Niederhafter, 2013). Some global TMNs have several regional offices, such as ICLEI with 16, and C40 with two.

Moreover, TMNs may have a political steering mechanism (e.g., a board of mayors), such as Eurocities, or may be more apolitical (e.g., run by a foundation). The latter was the case of the TMN Resilient Cities Network (formerly known as 100 Resilient Cities), which worked broadly to provide cities with resilience strategies against various challenges (Grønnestad & Nielsen, 2022; Resilient Cities Network, 2023). TMNs further vary in their inclusion criteria. While some admits only cities as regular members or members of the steering committees, others include private organizations or NGOs in various manners. Examples of TMNs with diverse membership are for instance the TMN C40 and Resilient Cities Network (although the latter is in a restructuring process). TMNs further vary in their level of organization. There are differences in

structure, mandate and degree of supervision and enforcement mechanisms (for an overview and comparison, see Bansard et. al., 2017; Haupt & Coppola, 2019).

Although many cities are members of TMNs, this does not apply to all. There is an abundance of TMN member cities in North America and Europe (Bansard et al, 2017; Haupt & Coppola, 2019). Consequently, when studying why cities get involved in these TMNs, most researchers have looked to Europe and North America. Very few cities from the African continent are members of TMN, with a slight exception for South Africa. Moreover, it is often the largest cities that have the resources to join and be active within TMNs. In fact, resourceful cities are often members of several TMNs simultaneously (Haupt & Coppola, 2019; Nguyen Long & Krause, 2021). A TMN such as ICLEI has a high number with its 2500 member cities and regions. C40 on the other hand has just below 100 member cities. This is a bit less than Eurocities, with its 130 full members, but C40 has a few more “mega cities” as it attracts cities from all parts of the world.

Giest and Howlett (2013) differentiates between “high profile” and “in-depth” TMNs where the former work more broadly to raise awareness, while the latter have a more limited and specific scope. Eurocities, C40 and Resilient Cities Network are all examples of high profile TMNs, while ICLEI is an example of in-depth TMNs. There is also extensive cooperation between different TMNs, many of which have the same members. Thus, networks and organizations, NGOs, and foundations all cooperate in what Nguyen Long and Krause (2021) have termed “meta networks”. In 2011, the TMNs C40 and ICLEI for instance engaged in a partnership that included the World Bank and the foundation Bloomberg Philanthropies (Ljungkvist, 2014).

According to Haupt and Coppola (2019), “high-profile” TMNs tend to have large secretariats and more money, yet these TMNs still have varying, though quite developed organizational features. What they have in common is that they cover a broader spectrum of policy areas, use a

wider variety of tools, or perform more varied functions than many other TMNs. Haupt and Coppola (2019, p. 136) concludes that “this is not enough to infer a stronger level of effectiveness on behalf of the first [high-profile TMNs] but is enough to put in discussion that binary understanding”.

Researchers have been rather selective in their choice of TMNs. The largest, richest, and most influential ones are those with either many cities or few, but big and rich cities. Thus, C40, Resilient Cities Network, Eurocities, and ICLEI seem to be among the most studied TMNs. This thesis does unfortunately not correct this bias. The choice of TMN for this thesis is based on the characteristics of Eurocities and its role in the EU multilevel governance. This offers many avenues for research, a topic which is pursued in the methods chapter.

2.8 TMNs and international organizations

Even though cities share many challenges, these are not addressed in the same manner or to the same degree by all TMNs. Some TMNs are mainly occupied with handling common problems, such as migration or climate change, and consequently this is reflected in their main tasks or functions. Other TMNs work to influence decisions made by international organizations. This is also stressed by Szpak et al. (2022, p. 70):

“City cooperation seems slightly different concerning international city networks that closely cooperate with or are even part of intergovernmental institutions, such as the EU [...]. In this context, sub-state actors, including cities, take part in decision-making processes as a compulsory part of the legal procedure of asking for an ‘Opinion’”.

An important implication of a states’ membership in the EU is the degree to which EU legislation affects the local level. Thus, cities have incentives to engage in lobbying activities directed at this specific institution. This makes Eurocities special compared to many other

TMNs. Admittedly, Eurocities' activities are not all linked to the EU, but the lobbying is often linked. Thus, the development of Eurocities itself is closely connected to the development of the EU, with new legislative areas being covered. Eurocities started as a rather loose information exchange between the second largest cities in a handful countries and has ended up as "the main urban policy lobby" (Schultze, 2003, p. 131). Since this quote, the secretariat has grown even more, counting today 89 members of staff⁴(Gebhardt & Gunther, 2021). Thus, Eurocities follows a trend of increased city interaction globally, but it is special in that it develops with the changes of the EU. Despite extensive cooperation between the EU and Eurocities, per now Eurocities has no formalized access to the EU (La Porte & Pavón-Guinea, 2018).

Eurocities' main asset is that it is the largest TMN representing big city interests in the EU, as stressed in article 3. It may seem that it is more pertinent for TMNs to develop organizational features with stronger secretariats when they have a strong international organization, such as the EU, as their significant other. As it is not possible for cities to join such international organizations, they must be able to cope with them in a different manner. Something along this path of reasoning is also suggested by Herrschel and Newman (2017, p. 13):

"Cities and regions, rather than ceding power to IOs, may sense greater advantages to be gained from networking with, rather than being "subordinate" to, them. This, they try to achieve through boosting their own international presence directly and increase their bargaining power – both politically and economically" (Herrschel & Newman, 2017, p. 13).

⁴ For comparison, the European Commission counts 32 000 members of staff (European Commission) while a UN organization such as the WTO counts 600 (WTO). ICLEI, which is one of the largest TMN with 2500 members (cities and regions) has a staff of 500 people spread around 24 offices (ICLEI), while the Resilient Cities Network (former 100 Resilient Cities) with its 97 member cities counts 37 members of staff (Resilient Cities Network).

The EU provides a reason for TMNs to become more organized, as it provides cities with a wealth of policies to implement. It is a natural response to recruit highly competent administrative personnel in the TMN, as illustrated by Szpak et al. (2022, p. 67):

“[...] it is the organizational capacity and other means at their disposal that allow international networks to play an important role in strengthening member cities. This leads us to the role of the secretariat whose function as an important part of international city cooperation is very often forgotten”.

The same tendency appears to be present in TMNs that have similar international organizations as their significant others, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Herrschel & Newman, 2017, p. 53). Thus, the organizational environment affects the functions performed by TMNs, which again account for a large part of their internal structures (Szpak et al., 2022). In discussing the administrative capacities, the importance of political science and organizational theory is evident.

2.9 Eurocities

Eurocities can trace its origin to a conference arranged by 11 cities in 1986, where the aim was to discuss the economically difficult situation that many cities found themselves in. In 1989, the cooperation was formally established, and in 1991 Eurocities got a more fixed structure with its own secretariat (Heinelt & Niedhafner, 2008; Griffiths 1995; Verhelst, 2017). The purpose for establishing Eurocities was to draw the EUs attention to specific city issues, a purpose that has only accentuated since then. Eurocities is a general purpose TMN, working within fields such as mobility, economy, culture, social affairs, and the environment to mention some. The areas of interest have grown considerably (Verhelst, 2017). La Porte and Pavón-Guniea (2018, p. 54), stress that Eurocities has a reputation of being among the most active TMNs. Today Eurocities has 130 full member cities. When associate members are

included, the number is 200. The associated members do not meet the formal requirements for membership, often not fulfilling the size criterion, yet are granted a partial membership in a few subnetworks. Full membership in Eurocities is reserved for cities that are seen as important regional centers with an international significance within the EU or EEA. Members must have 250 000 inhabitants or more and a government that is democratically elected. In addition to the full members, Eurocities also has a host of associate partners, which are mainly businesses, often of the type that provides public services. Eurocities is funded partly by membership fees (approximately 50 percent) and partly from grants, mainly from the EU (Eurocities, 2019)⁵.

Table 1: Eurocities' structure and functions.

Territorial scope	Regional (European)
Specialization	General purpose
Members	130 Cities are full members. 70 are associate members
Main functions	Capacity-building, knowledge-sharing, interest representation, (and some policy formulation and promotion).
Membership available for	Cities in the EU or the EEA that have democratically elected governments and serve the functions of regional centers, with more than 250 000 inhabitants.

⁵ In 2019, Eurocities had an income of EUR 5.6 million. More than half of this came from grants (mainly from the European Commission), while EUR 2 million was self-financed through membership fees (Eurocities, 2019; Gebhardt and Günther, 2021).

Funding arrangements	Membership fee (approx. 50 percent of the income) and grants from the EU Commission.
Decision making	The General Assembly is the highest body and elects 12 members to sit in the Executive Committee, which appoints the director of Eurocities' secretariat in Brussels.
Actor composition	Public, with only cities as full members. However, private, and civil society actors may be engaged as partners.

2.9.1 Decision making in Eurocities:

An important and common feature of many well established TMNs is according to Acuto (2013) that they are made up of two systems, one political and the other technical. This also applies to Eurocities. The political leaders meet at summits, the political forum meetings, and draw the big lines, while the technicalities are planned and performed by administrative officers from the member cities. The latter participate in working groups and meet in technical forum meetings.

Going into further detail, Gebhardt and Günther (2021) identify three groups of actors that operate in the Eurocities system: First, the “city representatives”, which is a term that covers both political and administrative representatives. These are sent out by their cities to represent them in Eurocities. How they carry out this work varies, depending on whether they have a defined mandate, their expertise, and whether this expertise is of a general or more specific character. Administrative officers participate more often than politicians. The second group mentioned by Gebhardt and Günther (2021) is the permanent staff working in the secretariat in Brussels. The secretariat's job is to promote Eurocities, to communicate between members and forward the joint positions of all its members to other organizations, such as the EU. The third group listed are advisers and experts that assist in

the drafting of position papers and help share their knowledge on behalf of the cities or Eurocities as a whole. This group has various connections to Eurocities and may be employed by the member cities, by private companies or other organizations (Gebhardt & Günther, 2021). The actors studied in this thesis are administrative officers from the member cities (the first category) and members of the secretariat (the second category).

Organizationally, Eurocities is structured in six subnetworks and below them are presently 39 working groups. The subnetworks are called forums and have specific thematic focus areas, as illustrated in figure one below. Each forum is led by one city for a three-year term. The forums arrange their own political and administrative meetings, each of them held once a year (although some variation may occur). The working groups share knowledge and positions before they are discussed in forum meetings. In addition to these rather permanent working groups, there are also a few more temporary working groups. Participants in working groups are administrative staff from the member cities or associated partners. The same people also attend forum meetings, but once a year they are accompanied by politicians (Eurocities, 2023; interview 18, 2018). It is possible for a city with a special interest in a field to be chair of a working group or even to establish a new working group together with a few partner cities. To avoid “silofication” Eurocities has recently established nine so-called “working areas” to enhance cross-sectoral cooperation. This is not reflected in the articles in this thesis, as this is a recent change.

The figure below is a visualization of the subnetworks as they were at the time of the interviews.

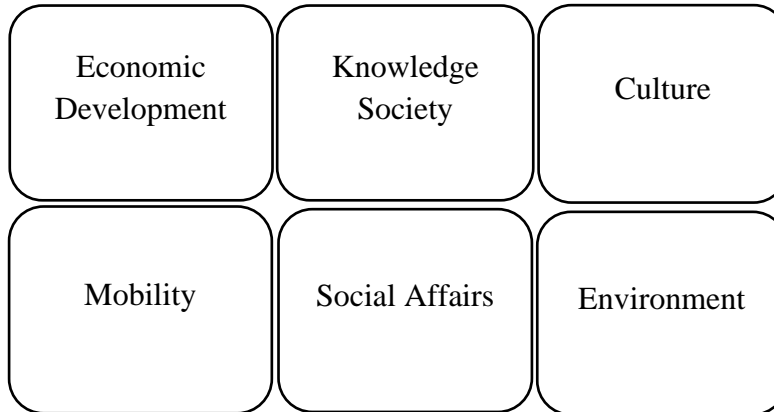


Figure 1: Overview of Eurocities’ forums and working groups at the time of the interviews (2018-2019).

Eurocities’ working mode for influencing EU policy is through so-called “position papers” where the policy positions of Eurocities are laid out. These are often first discussed and drafted at the working group level. Next, the position is presented in the forum that it belongs to thematically. If the forum decides that it is of political relevance, the position paper is presented to the Executive Committee (hereafter Ex. Com). More technical position papers are not treated here but circulated directly to the member cities (Interview 18, 2018 and interview 19, 2018). Political issues as well as resolutions are taken to the General Assembly and adopted there⁶.

The Annual Conference hosts both politicians and public officers. This event is held on various locations every year and is a three-day event. Most importantly it hosts the General Assembly, but it also hosts plenary sessions on topical issues and other smaller sessions on for instance policy updates.

⁶ During the time of the interviews this function was performed by the Annual General Meeting (AGM). This no longer exists but is referred to in the articles.

The General Assembly decides statutory details, the budget, and approves elections to the Executive Committee (hereafter Ex. Com). 12 members are elected to the Ex.Com., which makes the running strategic decisions and formally appoints the head of the secretariat in Brussels (Verhelst, 2017, and Eurocities correspondance). An organizational chart of the main bodies is illustrated below.

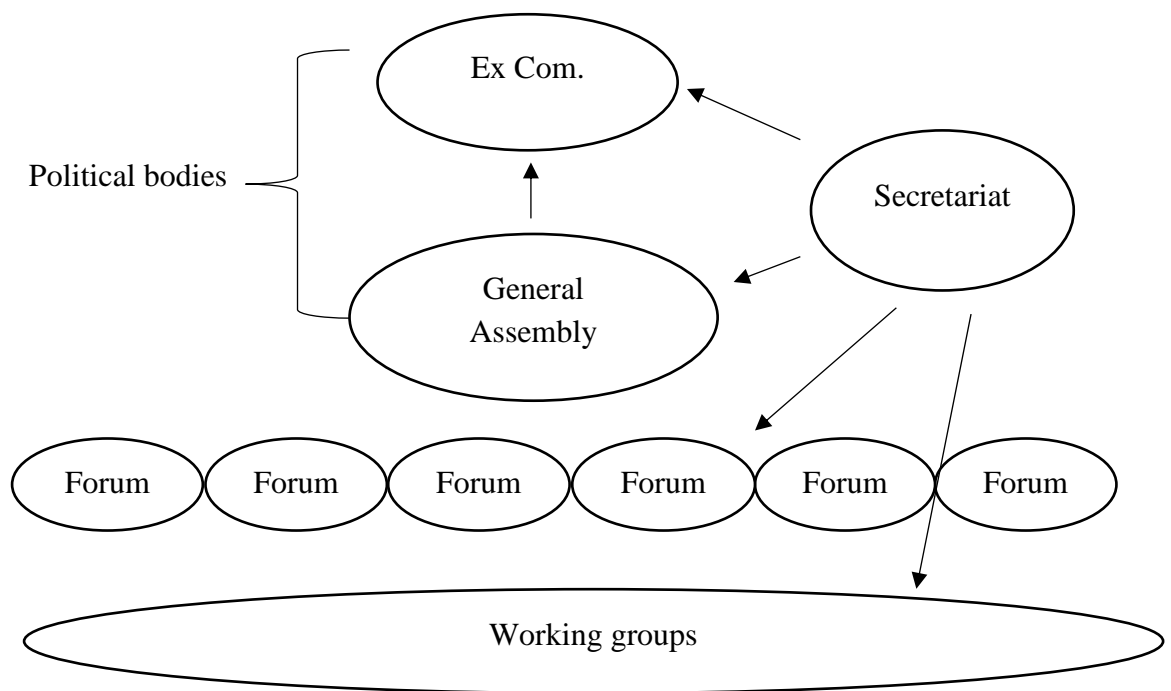


Figure 2: Eurocities organization. Author's visualization

2.9.2 Eurocities and the EU

Eurocities aims to be the main lobby actor for cities in the European Union (Gebhardt & Günter, 2021). In this role, it targets all relevant EU institutions. Which one is relevant, might vary from case to case. Overall, however, the Commission and the European Parliament seem to be the most frequently contacted and visited institutions (Interview 18, 2018 and interview 19, 2018). Heinelt and Niederhafner (2008) stress that the European Parliament often needs input on how to assess the proposals laid before it by the Commission, while the Commission, permanently understaffed, needs expert input. This applies in the preproposal phase, as well as to create acceptance of the policy proposals made by the Commission, by legitimating it from the urban point of view. Heinelt and Niederhafner (2008) also stress how the members of Eurocities can act as “[...] watchdogs’ for the Commission insofar as they can provide the Commission with information about the implementation process, or, more precisely, about the ‘proper’ application of rules”. (Heinelt & Niederhafner, 2008, p. 176). There is also extensive cooperation between the Commission and Eurocities in more informal manners, such as in arranging seminars (Interview 18, 2018). From the Eurocities’ secretariat it was estimated that around 30 per cent of the work performed by Eurocities could be related to lobbying (Interview 18, 2018). However, much of the non-lobby work is also related to the EU in some sense, such as providing the member cities with information about laws in the making in the EU, interpreting already adopted EU laws, and seeking funding through various sources connected with the EU.

It does, however, warrant mentioning that there is variation between working groups within Eurocities in their working mode and activities. Informants from the working group Green Areas and Biodiversity argued that they had little reason to engage in lobbying towards the EU because “their” areas of expertise were not subject to much EU regulation. Interpreting EU laws and regulations as well as lobbying therefore played a lesser role in this working group. Knowledge sharing was more

important. For members of this working group, Eurocities was not very different from many other TMNs stressing mainly the cooperative component.

2.9.3 Eurocities as a lobby channel

Several informants responded that they had connections to other, more issue-specific networks in addition to Eurocities. Yet, for Oslo and Stockholm, Eurocities was the main lobby channel. As stressed above and in article 2, a TMN with the traits of a meta-organization is a more resourceful type of organization than a network over time. This is because of the large secretariat and the organized knowledge, which again makes the TMN more autonomous. Eurocities itself also engages in cooperation and signs positions together with other networks or stakeholder groups. As an example, Eurocities joined forces with the umbrella association CEMR and Municipal Waste Europe in the effort to lobby the Waste Framework Directive.

The downside with higher levels of organization, is that with permanent members in Eurocities, a city cannot only form coalitions with cities that it agrees completely with. Sometimes decisions must reflect the lowest common denominator, as article 2 discusses. More ad hoc networks therefore provide the chances of meeting with like-minded actors. Umbrella associations for both cities and regions on the other hand, are more heterogeneous and therefore have an even harder time representing all members equally well (Heinelt & Niederhafner, 2008) as also argued in article 3. A solution for many members therefore seems to be a mixture of using Eurocities in cases where there is agreement, and going elsewhere when the position made by Eurocities deviates or is too vague.

According to some of the informants, issue-specific networks with a narrow focus, have more specific knowledge in certain areas. However, networks are often more limited in time, and rarely have the possibility to build the same capacity across policy fields. In Eurocities, there is a secretariat with memory that may stick to a strategy over time. Many

officers in the secretariat have also worked in different parts of the EU (Payre, 2010). They therefore often know the EU well. In a multilevel governance perspective, all types of actors do in principle have access, yet the lobby literature suggests that access is more easily obtained for resourceful actors that know how to navigate the system (Beyers & Kerremans, 2012; Klüver et al., 2015).

2.9.4 Joining and leaving Eurocities

Article 1 in this thesis illustrates that whether participation in Eurocities is viewed as a strategical choice that can be undone, or something that is taken for granted, varies with the interviewee. His or her field of expertise, but also the policy field's connections with the EU and its importance for the local politicians matter. These factors all seem to affect how the membership is judged by the individual. Despite variation in engagement, most cities tend to remain, as Eurocities' own overview indicates stability in membership. Around five member cities leave every year, while a few more new members join, and some previous members re-join. Only during the economic crisis in 2008 did slightly more cities, especially in South Europe, leave due to tight financial budgets (Eurocities internal document and correspondence). Overall, considering the full membership of 130 cities, these numbers do indicate stability, and there has been a steady increase ever since the start. Yet, there is ample room for variation in commitment within the structure of a meta-organization such as Eurocities (Fourot et al., 2021). Copenhagen had for example downscaled its involvement in Eurocities while remaining. It is not given that Eurocities will be the main organization for every international activity of the city. When the city has a very clear idea of what it wants to achieve, the effort seems more tailored to various TMNs or stakeholder groups.

2.10 The cities

For cities in Europe, membership in the EU impinges on their action space. The EU directly affects the services provided on the municipal level (Callanan, 2012; Verhelst, 2018). This development, referred to as “download Europeanization” (Huggins, 2018b) is therefore something that is especially interesting when studying cities as members of Eurocities, as they have the EU as their “significant other”. It may not be equally relevant when studying other TMNs. As the municipal level is often responsible for the implementation of EU programs and policies, (Hamedinger & Wolffhardt, 2010, p. 20; Huggins, 2018b), the EU is a central part of TMN participation. For the Scandinavian countries, this is especially so, as the Scandinavian municipalities are extensive welfare producers (Baldersheim, 2018; Hendriks et al., 2011; Sellers & Lindstrøm, 2007). The three Scandinavian cities studied here score relatively high on indicators of autonomy from the state, defined as the power to manage their own affairs (self-rule) (Baldersheim, 2018; Colombo & Groenleer, 2021). This is combined with extensive local expenditures (Le Galès, 2002; Hendriks et al., 2011). When compared to other European municipalities, their chances of shaping the position of the national government (shared/interactive rule) are medium (Baldersheim, 2018; Ladner et al., 2015;). Because of their similar scores on many such parameters, Loughlin et al. (2011) and Lindstrøm (2016) argue in favor of a Scandinavian model of local government based on the following three traits that they all share (Lindstrøm, 2016, p. 414):

- Their relationship with the central government is hierarchical.
- They have a rather significant amount of autonomy.
- They have an internal organization stressing collective responsibility⁷

⁷ Some of these traits are shared with local governments in other countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands (Lindstrøm, 2016).

The EU has reached the local level in both Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. In Norway, it has been estimated that 49 percent of the agenda in the local or regional council meetings are affected by the EU in some sense (Indset, et al., 2018). These numbers are 43 percent in Denmark (LGDK, 2020) and 47 percent in Sweden (SALAR, 2018). The cities are affected by EU laws when procuring commodities and services, as owners of companies, as producers of services, and as members of international organizations and programs (St.meld.nr 23, 2005-2006, p. 31). Consequently, the line between foreign and domestic affairs is getting blurred. (Trondal, 2005, p. 5).

Espiñera-Guirao (2020) differentiates between three modes of TMN involvement by cities. Using these categories on the three Scandinavian cities of Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm helps visualize the variation between them in membership behavior. The first category is “the Bywatcher”, which denotes a city lacking a significant capacity to participate actively in the TMN’s activities due to scarce resources. None of the three cities studied were in this category. The second category, “the Silent Silo” denotes cities that have dedicated resources to TMN participation, often with an international office, but lacks a coherent international strategy steering the work in the TMN, or do not coordinate the efforts between various departments in the city administration. Copenhagen at the time of the interviews may be placed in this category, as it lacked an international strategy then⁸ and did not put the same effort as the others into coordinating the participation in Eurocities. In some ways, Copenhagen was a dormant member of Eurocities, though this did not seem to apply to its membership of the TMN C40, where it was on the contrary very active. Thus, contrary to “the Bywatcher” the “Silent Silo” has the resources but may be lacking the will or capacity to engage equally in all parts of its international work.

⁸ Since 2021 Copenhagen has got a new international strategy.

The third category is “the Strategist”. For these cities, TMN membership is reflected in intensive participation, both politically and administratively. Thus, it implies the involvement of prominent politicians in boards and committees. In addition to a well-staffed international office, and an international strategy that guides participation, the city also coordinated the participation across sectors and policy fields. Stockholm may be placed in this category, with an international strategy and close coordination across policy fields. The city arranged regular meetings with all administrative Eurocities participants to share information and steer the effort. Moreover, Stockholm had highly engaged politicians, with the mayor of Stockholm being a member, and even leader of the Executive Committee for many years.

Oslo may be placed somewhere between the second and the third category, as it had an international strategy and a rather extensive involvement. The city was also a chair of a several working groups. However, the level of coordination between sectors and departments in the city was low. Informants also saw the strategy as rather too general and hard to operationalize. For a long time, the political level was not very engaged in Eurocities, but this changed in 2020 when the mayor of Oslo became the first ever Norwegian member of the Executive Committee (Østlandssamarbeidet, 2023).

Espiñera-Guirao (2020, p. 228) stresses that the role of cities in TMNs vary over time:

“[...] after several years, a strategist city may reduce its city diplomacy effort and restrict it to very selected opportunities and become a bywatcher. The model which includes moving from one scenario to another is as flexible as local policy is, to account for constant changes of local or EU level policy priorities”.

The data in this thesis also reflect this phenomenon. Copenhagen had moved from a Strategist before 2012, to a Silent Silo approach, while

Oslo seem to have moved more in the direction of a Strategist since the time of the interviews. Further information on the characteristics of the three case cities is provided in the methods chapter.

3 Theoretical frameworks

This thesis makes use of different theoretical concepts or frameworks, as no theory can fully explain all aspects of TMN participation. The following chapter presents the theories used in the three articles. The theoretical frameworks used are multilevel governance, new institutionalism, and meta-organization theory.

Whether these should be termed theories or concepts/frameworks is disputed. The meta-organizational perspective will not be treated as a comprehensive theory. It is rather a concept within the larger field of organizational theory (Bor, 2014). Multilevel governance and new institutionalism are sometimes referred to or treated as theories. Marks and Hooghe (2000) and especially Piattoni (2010) insist that multilevel governance is a comprehensive theory. Others (Jordan, 2001; Mocca, 2019; Peters & Pierre, 2004;) argue that it is not. Some (e.g., George, 2004, p. 117; Stephenson, 2013) claim that it does not really matter if multilevel governance serves the purpose of uncovering new knowledge or helps overcome complexity. If seen as a theory, multilevel governance is a more descriptive, “covering law” type of theory (see DiMaggio, 1995; Palmer et al., 2008). In this thesis it will serve the function of a theoretical framework or concept. It is useful because it helps explain the EU polity that the cities form part of, as argued in article 3.

New institutionalism is by Palmer et al. (2008, p. 758) classified as a theory because “the new institutionalism has developed a multitude of measurable concepts and empirically verifiable relationships to describe and explain organizational phenomena”. Here, Lowndes (2001) and Davies and Trounstine (2012) disagree. For the sake of clarity and to not cause unnecessary confusion, new institutionalism is referred to as a theoretical framework or concept in this thesis. These terms are used interchangeably. Both multilevel governance and new institutionalism are treated as middle-range concepts (following Davies & Trounstine, 2012; Immergut & Anderson, 2008; Warleigh, 2006, p. 83).

Theoretical frameworks

The three theoretical frameworks are used to answer the different research questions. Neither can offer any explanations of why TMNs were created in the first place. That is however beyond the scope of this thesis.

Table 2: Articles, research questions and theoretical concepts.

Articles	1	2	3
How do participants in TMNs reason around their city's membership in TMNs?	New institutionalism (Rational choice and discursive institutionalism)		
How can the meta-organizational perspective explain the dynamics between the members and the organizational core of the TMN and provide explanations for membership behaviour?		Organization theory (Meta-organization framework)	
What can explain cities' choice of lobby channels to the EU and how is this linked to their level of autonomy?			Multilevel governance

3.1 Multilevel governance

A substantial part of TMN theorizing has had a governance focus, drawing on variants of network governance or policy networks (see Bulkeley & Newell, 2015; Lee & Van de Meene, 2012; Niederhafner, 2013; Nielsen & Papin, 2021). Most frequently used is perhaps multilevel governance (see Atkinson, 2001; Caponio, 2018; Kern & Bulkeley 2009; Pierre, 2019). Europeanization is also much used in concert with multilevel governance to analyze the European TMNs (see Kern & Bulkeley, 2009; Payre, 2010; Pierre, 2019; Verhelst, 2017). Here, the focus has been on how subnational actors have been affected by EU regulation (download Europeanization) which in turn makes them seek to exert influence on the EU (upload Europeanization). This is often done together with other actors in the EU system that share some of their views.

Multilevel governance is among the mostly used theoretical frameworks in studies of TMNs, almost regardless of the research question. It is also applied on TMNs outside Europe (see Betsill and Bulkeley, 2006; Caponio, 2021) despite being coined to explain the involvement of the subnational level in the EU's Cohesion Policy (Caponio and Jones-Correa, 2018; Warleigh 2006;). The concept of multilevel governance is relevant for the study of TMNs in the EU because it describes the EU polity as a system where the state is no longer the only actor in governance processes.

However, as this thesis builds on data from interviews with administrative officers, not the political level of the cities, a multilevel administrative (MLA) perspective might at first seem more adequate (see Trondal & Bauer, 2017). Yet, the multilevel governance perspective is chosen in article 3 for two reasons. First, because it studies processes of interests representation, a bottom-up approach, not policy implementation or coordination issues related to this. Second, although article 1 unpacks the cities as members of TMNs in studying the rationale for engagement, it does not go into detail on the internal administrative structures of the

cities and how this relates to other administrative systems in the EU. This is the main contribution of the multilevel administrative perspective. Although one and the same city has TMN participants with varying rationales for engagement (see article 1), the city is largely treated as one, although composite unit. Moreover, as in the multilevel governance perspective, the focus of article 3 is on venues for interest representation.

The early literature on the role of subnational interests in the EU tended to study regions, which led to the formulation of the theoretical framework of multilevel governance. Marks and Hooghe in their many publications (Hooghe & Marks, 1996; Marks, 1993; Marks et al., 1996) coined multilevel governance to account for how lower levels of government, such as regions, could bypass their national government in EU issues and go directly to EU institutions such as the Commission or the European Parliament, using what was termed “extra state channels”. Multilevel governance was launched as a descriptive theoretical framework stressing that the state was no longer the only actor in governance processes (Stephenson, 2013), and that the EU was, in the words of Marks (1993, p. 392):

“[...] a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers – supranational, national, regional, and local - as the result of a broad process of institutional creation and decisional reallocation that has pulled some previously centralized functions of the state up to the supranational level and some down to the local/regional level”.

This implied a reorientation of the traditional dichotomy between the domestic and international (Bache & Flinders, 2004; Piattoni, 2010).

Although the “Europe of the Regions” thesis waned in the 80s, there was still optimism on regions’ possibilities for influencing policies, giving name to the somewhat more moderate phenomenon called “Europe *with* the Regions” (Hooghe & Marks, 1996). After a period of

more investigation, however, the research (Beyers & Donas, 2014; Callanan & Tatham, 2014; Högenauer, 2014a, 2014b; Tatham, 2008, 2010, 2011), suggested that regions mostly did not bypass their national governments and that so-called “intra state channels”, where regions lobbied through their own national governments, were more important than bypassing. Adding to this, regions’ role in the EU remained limited, despite a formal strengthening of the Committee of the Regions in the Lisbon treaty in 2009. This consequently led to a nuancing where regions became one among many types of interests that sought to channel their voices to the EU, often through their national governments (Huwyler et al., 2018).

After this phase, multilevel governance went into a second phase (Stephenson, 2013) and assumed a stronger governance focus, stressing the role of non-state and private actors, opening the state-society gates (Piattoni, 2010). However, the role of subnational actors may again be changing. First, recent literature on subnational interest representation has in a large survey found that extra state channels are more important than intra state channels in regional lobbying (see Huwyler et al., 2018; Tatham, 2018). Second, while cities have been close to absent from this research, in the past few years new research suggests that cities do lobby and that they do this bypassing their own national governments, although mainly the largest cities do this (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021; La Porte & Pavón-Guinea, 2018; Mocca 2020). Interestingly, both the research on cities and on regions now argue that these actors use alternatives to the national government route, suggesting a strengthening of the multilevel governance perspective, while also adding a new aspect, namely the role of cities. This is also suggested by Szpak et al. (2022) where they argue that cities make for the “third generation” of Multilevel governance. A common definition of multilevel governance today is therefore that authority has shifted from the state, upwards to the EU and downwards to subnational units (the multilevel aspect) but also sideways to other types of (non-state) actors (the governance aspect) (Bache, 2012;

Piattoni, 2010). The role of non-state actors does, however, fall outside the scope of this thesis.

In the EU multilevel governance system, formally autonomous actors may choose to cooperate and pool resources as they are often bound together in complex interdependent relationships (Trondal, 2021, p. 62). Moreover, as stressed by Callanan (2012) it is unproductive for single actors to compete for access and attention rather than cooperating with actors that have similar views. Thus, the multilevel governance structure means first, that cities must have a certain level of autonomy; and second, that increased autonomy is gained through interacting with other actors.

The result of multilevel governance is that it is possible for subnational actors, such as cities, to take part in governance processes of the EU (Stephenson, 2013,) thus bypassing the national government. Both multilevel governance and the general lobby literature (e.g., Bouwen, 2002; Klüver et al., 2015) rest on an exchange-based foundation, where stakeholders engage to achieve or prevent certain outcomes. Blom-Hansen (2005) and Stephenson (2013) argue that multilevel governance shares elements with rational choice institutionalism with the actor-centered perspective.

The EU system of collective decision making between states may have the effect that individual national governments lose some control. Thus, while all multilevel governance theorists agree that states remain the most central actor, they are no longer the only actors in the EU and may struggle should they wish to retain the position of gatekeeper for subnational actors in EU issues (Bache & Flinders, 2004; Marks & Hooghe, 2000; Piattoni, 2010). This does, however, not mean that the development has been unintended or unwanted by national governments.

There is an inherent functionalist premise in the multilevel governance perspective: “[...] multilevel governance is a functional adaptation to the benefits of scale diversity in the provision of collective goods” (Hooghe & Marks, 2020, p. 822). When collective goods are produced at various levels among various actors, they all need to engage to influence their

conditions. This explains why multilevel governance is seen to enhance interest representation and bypassing. Multilevel governance sees stakeholders as compelled to engage, crossing state borders in the process, because of new areas falling under EU's competence, thus affecting more and more actors and levels.

It is because of this ability to explain the EU polity that the framework is used in article 3 attached. Using multilevel governance, it is possible to explain the importance that TMNs hold for their members in relation to the EU.

3.2 *New institutionalism*

New-institutional theory has been remarkably absent among students of TMNs. Huggins (2018a) applies new-institutional theory in his discussion of British and French cities' motivation to participate in European city networks and concludes that participation in TMNs is rationally motivated. In addition, a few TMN researchers have used elements of new institutionalism, though more implicitly. Motivations of strategic and symbolic nature for TMN participation has been studied by Caponio (2018) and Mocca (2018), though their findings diverge. Where Caponio (2018) argues that TMN participation has mainly a symbolic function, Mocca (2018) finds that rational drivers best explain participation.

Article 1 focuses specifically on the institutional logics that play out inside a TMN. Lowndes (2001, p. 1985) explains the connection between organizations and institutions in the following manner: “[...] organisations have their own internal institutional frameworks that shape the behaviour of people within them. Institutions are sets of rules that exist within and between organisations, as well as under, over and around them” (Lowndes, 2001, p. 1985). Consequently, although analytically distinct units, organizations, meta-organizations, but also networks, may develop institutional dynamics and internal logics, that may be explained

through new institutional frameworks (Ansell, 2006; Laurie-Djelic & Sahlin, 2012; Lowndes, 2001; Peters, 2019).

New institutionalism sees institutions as created by political actors but also placing constraints on these very same actors (Lowndes, 2001; Davies & Trounstine, 2012). Put generally, new institutionalism sees institutions as “[...] rules, structures and norms that create and enforce cooperative behavior among individuals and groups” (Davies & Trounstine, 2012, p. 52). Which of these aspects that are stressed, varies between the different variants of institutionalism. The new institutional theoretical framework is therefore a label that harbors very different assumptions of the mechanisms that drive action within institutions. There is dispute among new institutionalists of (1) who the relevant actors are, (2) what motivates them, (3) what it is that makes an institution legitimate, (4) how an institution should be defined, (5) how goals are formed and evaluated, and (6) how learning happens. It also varies whether the formal or informal aspects are stressed. Whereas the discursive and sociological/normative variants put most emphasis on the informal aspects, the rational choice variant tends to focus on the formal institutions (Peters, 2019).

What the new-institutional frameworks share is a focus on institutions and a conviction that institutions shape behavior through structural constraints, such as rules, or cognitive constraints or standards (Aspinwall & Schneider, 2000; Palmer et al., 2008). They all agree that institutions need to have a certain level of legitimacy and that they tend to persist over time (Davies & Trounstine, 2012; Peters, 2019). The new institutional perspectives used in article 1, rational choice and discursive institutionalism, are explained in detail there. It is therefore very briefly accounted for in the following.

The rational choice institutional perspective sees institutions as consisting of rules and structures. Institutions are created to overcome collective action issues. Actors within this system of rationality build their behavior on a goal-oriented “logic of consequentialism” (March &

Olsen, 1989). Seen through the lenses of rational choice institutionalism, TMNs offer opportunities to access resources or to influence decisions outside the local sphere. Joining and remaining depends on specific goals, and outputs are weighed against efforts and costs connected to TMN membership. Thus, output legitimacy, defined as effectiveness, is important in this perspective. Preference formation happens prior to cities joining TMNs. Moreover, preferences are considered not to be significantly affected by the institutional involvement (Peters, 2019).

The discursive institutional framework does not see institutions as having a settled structure but sees them as a process of shared communication patterns (Peters, 2019; Schmidt, 2015). Although this perspective also sees preferences as largely predefined, participants will modify or change these preferences, as they interact with other members (Schmidt, 2015). Ideas are therefore formed through interaction among the members and forwarded by norm entrepreneurs or social agents (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Keck & Sikkink, 1998). In this perspective, having success as TMN members depends more on a legitimate process, on the throughput legitimacy (see Schmidt, 2013), than on outputs, as argued in article 1. Cities are thus not only members of TMNs because of collective action issues, but because of the collective as such.

Institutional perspectives explain the cities' justification for joining the TMN, for individual participants' reasoning for participation, and for choosing the right lobby channel, as we have discussed in article 1 and 3 attached. The rational choice institutional perspective is used to explain how the pursuit of clear goals induce participation. The discursive perspective highlights processual factors that make cities remain in TMNs over time, despite varying goal fulfilment, by changing the way members think.

3.3 Meta-organizations

It appears that a meta-organizational perspective has not been used by TMN researchers, despite discontentment with the network definition. Instead, some researchers of TMNs (such as Acuto & Leffel, 2021) argue for understanding TMNs as institutions. Others merely raise the question without offering alternative interpretations. However, the concept of more structured network administrative organizations (NAOs), originally coined by Provan and Milward (2001), has a place in the literature. The NAO perspective has been developed further by, among others, Provan and Kenis (2008) and Nguyen Long and Krause (2021). The latter have applied the NAO perspective on TMNs. Article 2, however, argues that the meta-organizational perspective can offer better explanations of the characteristics of TMNs than the NAO perspective can.

Some TMNs may be seen as meta-organizations assuming institutional traits and logics. The terms network, institution and organization are often used uncritically. In fact, the latter term, organization, has for a long time been almost abandoned from organizational theorists' vocabulary, Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) argue, giving in to the terms network and institution, seen as two opposites. There are however good reasons to reclaim the organization term, and even to use it in a broad sense to capture positions along a continuum from much to less organization. In the word of Ahrne and Brunsson (2011, p. 84): "The concept of network and institution are often used in such a broad sense that they risk concealing important elements or organization in contemporary society". While the TMN literature has presented TMNs as networks, we argue in article 2 that applying a meta-organization framework may provide a more thorough understanding of at least some types of TMNs, such as Eurocities.

Again, much space will not be devoted to explaining the meta-organizational perspective, as this is done in much detail in article 2. Rather, the main concepts will be explained. First, meta-organizations

are organizations consisting of other organizations. This might seem paradoxical, as meta-organizations are autonomous actors with autonomous, and often more powerful actors as members (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2005, 2008, 2011; Ahrne et al., 2019). The argument that a TMN such as Eurocities can be seen as a meta-organization affects views on membership, rules of actions, how to monitor the members, the reservoir of positive and negative sanctions, and the level of hierarchy (Ahrne & Brunsson 2011, p. 83-84). The result is that meta-organizations in principle seem to have access to the same organizational elements as regular organizations, but in practice they will often have difficulties using them. Meta-organizations generally seek to avoid using sanctions, thus allowing reluctant or passive members to remain.

Article 2 leans on Zyzak and Jacobsen (2019, p. 1352) which describe meta-organizations as “[...] not pure networks, but rather a form of cooperation somewhere in the middle between a hierarchy and a network”. This suits the description of Eurocities, as it is among the most developed TMNs (Gebhardt & Gunther, 2021). By viewing Eurocities as a meta-organization, we can make sense of (1) the elaborate organizational structure with a fast-growing secretariat, that (2) coincide with variation in commitment among members, (3) the tendency for members to remain despite low level of involvement, as well as (4) the lack of enforcement mechanisms on Eurocities’ part.

Following the recent upsurge in research discussing the classification of TMNs (see Acuto & Leffel, 2021; Gebhart & Günther, 2021; Haupt et al., 2020; Nguyen Long & Krause, 2020; Nielsen & Papin, 2021), the question of autonomy necessarily ensues, as we argue in article 2 attached. The argument is that by seeing TMNs as meta-organizations the power balance between members and TMN becomes visible. Using this perspective is necessary because the organization of the TMN affects behavior and the environment that cities as political actors operate within. In the logics of Olsen (2009, p. 5) the organizational structure contributes to creating order and predictability. Thus, to understand how

and why certain things happen, we need to understand the organizational structure.

3.4 The scope conditions of the different theoretical concepts: Applications and limitations

The following sections will discuss how the three theoretical frameworks are used in this thesis, each of them highlighting certain aspects of the research questions.

3.4.1 Scope conditions of multilevel governance

A general challenge of the multilevel governance contributing to reducing the clarity of the concept is the normative turn it has acquired in EU settings (Caponio & Jones-Correa, 2018; Stephenson, 2013). From being a rather analytically neutral term, it has become a highly sought ideal for advocates of subnational interests in the EU and a buzzword in the EU parlance (Bache, 2012; Mocca, 2019). This was reflected in the Commission's Whitepaper on EU Governance in 2001, as well as in the Committee of the Regions' Whitepaper on Multilevel Governance in 2009 (Bache, 2012). This has greatly affected TMN researchers, to the extent that nearly all seem compelled to refer to the term multilevel governance to a greater or lesser degree. This tendency is by Mocca (2019) referred to as "the ubiquity of the level". Stephenson (2013, p. 817) describes the popularity of the concept among EU scholars in the following manner: "[...] multilevel governance has been thrown around by scholars like a favourite coat – a staple item in the European political science wardrobe, but perhaps one worn so often that it has now become threadbare".

Multilevel governance also suffers from the criticism that relations between actors are not specified (Mocca, 2019). The perspective rather sees engagement as a reaction to EU integration (top-down

Europeanization), which induces cities to influence the EU in return (Dickson, 2014), however, this may not necessarily be the only reason for European TMN engagement and need not be what motivates cities to remain members.

Judging the usefulness of multilevel governance on TMN engagement, Mocca (2020) states:

“[...] the multilevel governance approach does not seem to be capable of uncovering the reasons underlying the participation of local authorities in TMNs, inasmuch as the multi-tiered and multi-actor structure of the EU constitutes the backdrop to, rather than the cause for, the engagement of local authorities in TMNs”.

The consequence is that multilevel governance is a tautology when used to explain why cities become involved in TMNs (Mocca, 2019, p. 276). This critique is partly met by Hooghe and Marks (2020) where multilevel governance is seen as a rational response to transaction costs, decisional costs, informational costs, and infrastructural costs. This answer does, however, hinge on a rational choice assumption, downplaying other potential explanations for engagement. A discussion of the boundaries between these two theoretical frameworks will follow later.

Although pointing to the controversies and confusion around multilevel governance in the research community, the aim of this section is not to devalue the contribution of multilevel governance in general, only to argue against its usefulness in explaining why cities join and remain in TMNs and the interaction between members. It is highly useful when the aim is of a more descriptive character; to describe the structure that cities can take part in through TMNs, as several researchers have done (e.g., Kern & Bulkeley, 2009; Pierre, 2019). This is also how it is used in article 3. Multilevel governance highlights certain governance functions that cities may achieve through this system. Consequently, this thesis uses multilevel governance as a concept that describes “the nature of the EU political system” (Warleigh, 2006, p. 91) and its actors. It is a

framework that lays out *how* cities can mobilize, bypassing the central government. It draws the map over the landscape that make cities' engagement possible and provides the possibility for a direct route, with the state no longer acting as a gatekeeper. The aim with combining multilevel governance with institutional theory is, as called for by Heinelt (2008), to study the actors (their perceptions, demands, rationales etc.) involved in this process.

3.4.2 The scope conditions of new institutionalism

There is an obvious challenge between giving institutional accounts of an observation and falling into the trap of anthropomorphizing collective actors such as cities (see Peters, 2019). This is a danger in institutional explanations. It is however more pressing for the discursive institutional framework than for the rational choice institutional framework, as it tends to see discourses rather than individuals. According to Hall and Taylor (1996) a common critique of sociological institutionalism, that applies equally well, if not more, to the discursive institutionalism, is that it tends to over-focus on macro-level processes, so that “the actors involved in these processes seem to drop from sight and the result begins to look like action without agents” (Hall & Taylor, 1996, p. 954). This thesis sees the city as a composite actor (Scharpf, 1997), composed of individual actors with leeway to practice their TMN engagement in quite distinct ways, depending on such factors as which policy issues they handle, where they work in the city, and which working groups they are part of in Eurocities.

The main challenge is to not infer “a will of the city” from a handful of interviews, while at the same time avoiding methodological individualism, an assumption closer to the rational choice perspective. Although closer to individuals, Peters (2019) argue that the rational choice institutional perspective does not necessarily practice methodological individualism. Finnemore and Sikkink (1998) seem to disagree here. Following Peters (2019) however, and stressing the

institutional component, rational choice institutionalists see the institutional setting (through rules) as shaping the behavior of different actors, and that it may make them appear more similar. Yet, in the actor-centered perspective of Scharpf (1997), individual actors have a certain degree of agency to work to maximize their gains although restrained by the institutional setting. Rational choice and discursive institutionalists never really agree on this balance, which means that this tension is also baked into this thesis and seems rather unescapable. It is in this landscape between discussing the rules, norms, and discourses that the cities as composite actors are part of; and explaining individual participants' strategic/rational or norm-based actions within the institutional setting of Eurocities that the thesis operates. What is new is the stronger focus on the discursive aspects of TMN membership compared to earlier research on TMNs.

3.4.3 Scope conditions of the meta-organization perspective

Article 2 of this thesis argues that it may be clarifying to view Eurocities as a meta-organization rather than a network. Drawing the lines between a network, a meta-organization and a full organization is, however, not always a straightforward task. Kerwer (2013) and Ahrne et. al., (2019) for instance portray the EU as a meta-organization rather than a full organization, a characteristic that some students of the EU might disagree to. Because the meta-organization is something in between a network and a full organization, there will necessarily be room for interpretations and disagreement here. Which characteristics one chooses might also depend on the relative importance one grants the different elements. Whether or not members must be similar, is for instance a debated topic, also among adherents of the meta-organization perspective (see Cropper & Bor, 2018).

One might also ask whether the meta-organization merits a distinct label. Researchers such as Nguyen Long and Krause (2021) have argued that

viewing TMNs as networks, with what they refer to as NAOs, that is formalized administrative units, help account for the mismatch between many TMNs and the idea of networks as lacking a decisional and managerial center. Yet, with such a wide apparatus for describing networks as both formalized and informal, both having and lacking hierarchies, and both having and lacking secretariats (to mention but a few discrepancies) (see Isett et al., 2011 for elaboration), one can argue that the network concept may fail to uncover important organizational elements. As argued in article 2 there is therefore a need for a more precise term for a TMN with the organizational traits of Eurocities. To explain this type of TMN, and especially the dynamics between members, the meta-organization perspective is helpful.

3.5 How the three perspectives speak with each other

The three theoretical frameworks in this thesis are complementary, rather than overlapping or competing. First, as stressed, multilevel governance explains why it is possible for cities to engage in the EU. It says little about why cities choose to do this. As the multilevel governance perspective rests on a “thin” exchange-based foundation, both organizations and institutions may seem absent (Trondal, 2021). Thus, we need to open the structures within the multilevel governance system to study the opportunities and constraints provided by specific organizational entities and the institutional logics that play out there. This is where both organizational theory and new institutionalism is useful. Combining these perspectives should not be far-fetched, as Marks et. al., (1996) argue that the multilevel governance perspective is an actor-centered perspective, and hence has an institutional dimension to it (Stephenson, 2013). By combining the multilevel governance perspective with the meta-organizational perspective from organizational theory we may open the “black box” of the TMN as an actor in the EU multilevel governance. Understanding the organizational

constraints of TMNs makes clearer the role it may play. Having done this, one may also study the institutional processes that play out inside TMNs. The discursive institutional framework offers explanations for identity formation that resembles the logic that, according Ahrne and Brunsson (2011), may develop within a meta-organization. The structure of the meta-organization may account for how identity is formed and how it ties its members to the organization (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2005). Thus, while multilevel governance is necessary to account for the opportunity structure that TMNs are part of, and new institutionalism is used to explain rationales and justifications for membership, the meta-organizational perspective explains what type of organizational entity we are dealing with. Moreover, it explains how the organizational structure may contribute to producing the type of actor behavior and logics described by some of the new institutional perspectives. The meta-organization concept concerns the intra-organizational dynamics in the TMN as such, between members that are also organizations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2008, 2011; Ahrne et al., 2019). Thus, inter-organizational dynamics (between cities) become intra-organizational dynamics (within the TMN).

Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) argue for the value of studying dimensions of organization along a continuum rather than studying organizations as something given. Such a move makes it easier to differentiate between organizations, networks, and institutions. This is because it points to specific structural traits that may be present to a greater or lesser degree. While a network often implies a lack of organization, and institutions are independent of organization (it rather points to practices), organizations are organized to various degrees, spanning from partial to full organization. In this way, one may spot “organization outside formal organizations” (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011, p. 88). In contrast, the institution (here understood as a unit) that individual members operate within, is a result of evolution rather than choices made to achieve something. Institutions may evolve with organizations, as behaviors or routines that are taken for granted. Thus, there is a connection between

these concepts, which makes the study of institutional practices, and institutionalist analysis natural parts of organization studies, but the concepts are analytically distinct, as also stressed by Lowndes (2001). Ahrne and Brunsson (2011, p. 100) argue that organizations are the homes of institutional practices and informal networks, and even claim that “[...] it is doubtful that formal organization could function without these additional ordering principles [...]” yet they stress that these practices and traits *are* not the organizations. Here, the institutional theoretical frameworks and meta-organization framework may complement each other.

4 Methodology

This chapter briefly presents the philosophical foundations for this thesis. Further, it explains some methodological considerations and the design of each article and the whole thesis. In this chapter there is also a substantial account of the case cities studied and their political systems and common characteristics. Lastly, the chapter discusses the methodological challenges, amongst them the interviewing of experts, before providing some reflections.

4.1 Considerations on ontology and epistemology

Ontologically and epistemologically, this thesis is placed within critical realism, but mainly following the interpretation of Collier (1994). Building on an ontological realist view, the thesis accepts that there exists a real world of natural phenomena independently of the researcher's recognition of it. To Collier, this also applies to social phenomena, a position which is not shared by all critical realists (Jessop, 2005). This thesis largely follows Collier in seeing the distinction between natural and social phenomena as superfluous:

“Of course, there is a vast difference in time scale between the ‘relative endurance’ of social structure and of natural ones» however: “For everyday purposes the contrast between unchanging nature and changing society works well enough. But it is not a difference of principle, only of degree” (Collier 1994, p. 244-245).

However, epistemologically, to a critical realist, scientific knowledge is limited and fallible. This is not to claim that all explanations are equally good. Epistemological relativism must be distinguished from judgmental relativism (Jessop 2005, p. 42-43). To a critical realist, some explanations are more plausible than others. Collier (1994) claims that various factors, which may be the aspect of time, limited measurement tools, and human flaws inhibit our ability to produce knowledge that we

will all agree on: “We will not reach consensus because we will continue to make too many mistakes” (Collier 1994, p. 260).

As a critical realist the aim is to uncover the social causes of a certain behavior. Thus, reasons or rationales, may be seen as causes (Jessop, 2005; Kurki, 2007). The possibility of studying social causes while also including discourses, structures and norms is also stressed by Kurki (2007, p. 364). Where this thesis departs from social constructivism, is that it sees causes as having an ontological reality. Only then does it make sense to argue that one can give plausible explanations for processes that we observe (Kurki, 2007, p. 365). The aim is therefore to study the meaning of socially constructed practices and ideas for different actors’ behavior, while simultaneously acknowledging strategic interests. As for many critical realists, this thesis points to an interaction of causes that may be captured by using different theoretical frames.

4.2 Design and case selection

This thesis investigates the capital cities of Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm and their involvement in Eurocities. It attempts to say something meaningful about how and why cities seek autonomy through TMN participation. It does not, however, build on detailed information on all cities’ participation in all types of TMNs. It goes without saying that with 300 TMNs and various types of cities from all over the world, covering them all is an impossible endeavor for one researcher. A fruitful way out is therefore to understand the limited amount of data in the light of existing research on different cities and TMNs. Yet, it is an important reservation that the thesis mainly studies one network and three cities, which are all Scandinavian capitals. As such, and as briefly touched upon in the case description, they are all important welfare providers, as much of these tasks are delegated to the local level (Atkinson & Zimmermann, 2016; Baldersheim, 2018; Sellers & Lindstrøm, 2007). Thus, all the results may not be directly applicable to the average city, if such a thing

may even be said to exist. Comparison between cities across countries is notoriously difficult, even though almost all municipalities have responsibility for at least a narrow set of functions, such as housing, welfare, education, and environment (Goldsmith, 2012). There are still great variations between cities in different countries, but also within some countries, in how these functions are carried out, how the city is administered and its relations with the national government (Garcia & Judd, 2012; Goldsmith, 2012). Yet, parts of this challenge may be ameliorated by discussing the findings against those of other researchers who have investigated similar research questions in the same, or in different TMNs and in different cities. In all three articles, the findings are therefore put into context and discussed against existing research in the field.

For this thesis, and especially for article 3, it was important to select a TMN that work closely with the EU. This means that lobbying may play a more prominent role in Eurocities than it does for most other TMNs. Eurocities is a natural choice for studying lobbying in the EU as it is ranked among the most influential and organizationally developed TMNs. This is because it has the largest member cities and a sizeable secretariat (Gebhardt & Günther, 2021; La Porte & Pavón-Guinea, 2018). Other popularly studied TMNs are C40, ICLEI, and the Resilient Cities Network.

The three articles in this thesis mainly focus on Eurocities, but article 1 also includes the Resilient Cities Network, formerly known as 100 Resilient Cities. More information about the design and rationale for including data on this TMN is presented in section 4.3.1 where the design of the articles is discussed.

Eurocities is close to average in size, as a medium-sized TMN (Haupt & Coppola, 2019). For the purpose of article 1, which is to investigate the reasoning of TMN engagement more generally, and across policy fields, Eurocities is a relevant choice because it covers many different policy fields and works to avoid “silos”. Moreover, it is a public driven TMN,

which applies to most TMNs (Haupt & Coppola, 2019), created, and governed by the member cities. However, Eurocities has a strong and relatively large secretariat (Gebhardt, & Günther 2021) compared to TMNs created and driven by private initiatives.

To the list of characteristics above it must be added that Eurocities is organized in both an administrative and a political part, which is not something that applies to all TMNs, and which gives it a more complicated structure than that of some other TMNs. Eurocities is also among the oldest of the larger TMNs, which suggest that it has undergone a development over time, as studied in article 2. These characteristics implies that the analysis of Eurocities as a meta-organization may not apply equally well to all types of TMNs, but this is also discussed in article 2. Lastly, Eurocities covers most of the functions that TMNs may perform, though to various degrees. Thus, in choosing Eurocities, different observations may be made from the study of one single case.

4.3 The three case cities: Copenhagen, Oslo, and Stockholm

The case cities in this thesis are the three capital cities of Oslo, Stockholm, and Copenhagen. These cities were selected because they are all capital cities with the required resources to participate in transnational networking. Although not a matter of necessity, larger cities are often better positioned to engage internationally (Acuto & Rayner, 2016; Goldsmith, 2012;). The three cities selected in this study are not metropolises or world cities, but they are large enough to have an international office as a part of the municipal administration. Moreover, they may be regarded as “old” members, as they joined in 1992-93, within two years of Eurocities establishing a permanent office in Brussels. Another consideration is that with Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm, all the Scandinavian capital cities are represented. These cities are well placed to get involved in Eurocities’ activities, as they are

responsible for the provision of many of the welfare services that the Scandinavian welfare system offers (Baldersheim, 2018). Thus, they might be expected to be among the cities that are most affected by EU directives and regulations, and hence have an incentive to engage to find new means to provide efficient services and to influence new EU policies.

As pointed out by Wolman and McManmon (2012) responsibility for a large set of functions does not necessarily imply that the local level spends much of its funding on this. However, in the Scandinavian countries, extensive responsibility is also paired with a substantial local level spending. The local governments expenditures in Norway in 2020 amounted to 18,6 per cent the GPD, while in Sweden the number was 25,3 per cent and in Denmark as high as 34,4 per cent. Apart from Finland, no other of the 80 countries in IMF's index came close to these numbers (IMF Governance Finance Statistics database).

The Scandinavian municipalities have several roles. First, they are producers of welfare services (Hendriks et al., 2011; Le Gales, 2002;). As Scandinavian municipalities, the three cities have the authority to provide a range of public services on their own initiative, but they are also bound by law and regulations to offer an extensive array of basic welfare services (Baldersheim & Rose, 2011; Blom-Hansen & Heeager, 2011; Lindstrøm, 2011). The three cities largely provide the same basic welfare services, which are: elementary and pre-school education, health care services, social services, individual and family care, support and service for those with disabilities, elderly care, waste management, water and sewage. Second, they facilitate services such as culture and leisure activities, parks and green areas, libraries, housing regulation, and industrial and commercial development/city planning, local transport, as well as attending to various environmental issues (Copenhagen city, 2022; Oslo city, 2022; Stockholm city, 2022). Third, they are a part of the national governmental apparatus, a segment in the chain of

implementing politics on the local level. Fourth, they are democratically elected decision-making bodies, close to the everyday lives of its people (Aarsæther & Vabo 2002; Blom-Hansen & Heeager, 2011; Hendriks, et al., 2011).

While the most important subnational level in many EU countries is the regional level, in Scandinavia, the municipal level is the provider of most welfare services below the state level. Consequently, the municipal level in Scandinavia has many tasks and administers a large part of the public budget (Baldersheim & Rose, 2011; Hendriks et al., 2011). Some of these tasks may also be performed by municipal companies or through intermunicipal cooperation (Copenhagen city, 2022; Oslo city, 2022; Stockholm city, 2022). The city of Oslo is both a municipality and a county and therefore performs both municipal and county functions (Baldersheim & Rose, 2011; Oslo city, 2022)

The three cities are rather similar in size, and geographic location, and they joined Eurocities at approximately the same time. The largest of the cities, Copenhagen has just below 1,4 million inhabitants, while Stockholm has approximately 1 million and Oslo 700 000 inhabitants. Stockholm became a Eurocities member in 1992, while Oslo and Copenhagen joined in 1993⁹. Important differences in regards of their Eurocities membership, is the fact that Oslo is situated in a non-EU, but an EEA country. This is of importance to article 3, where lobbying is discussed. Another point worth mentioning is that there had been almost no political presence from Copenhagen in Eurocities between 2012 and the time of the interviews in 2018/2019.

Overall, the cities studied here are very similar, which might restrict the number of generalizations that can be drawn from the interviews to other Eurocities members. The extent to which this is a limitation varies with

⁹ Information gained through correspondence with Eurocities' secretariat

the topic studied. Article 1 points to overlapping mechanisms with Nielsen (2020) in a study of the cities of Vejle, Porto Alegre and Chennai in the TMN called Resilient Cities Network. As this article treats justifications for TMN engagement more generally, it is likely that the conclusions may find resonance in other cities, both in Eurocities and other TMNs. The same claim can be made about article 2. In article 3 however, properties of the cities studied will necessarily put a limitation on the number of generalizations that can be drawn, as this also discusses the relationship between the cities and their respective national governments.

4.3.1 International engagement

Today, the three cities have an international strategy explicitly stating the purpose of their international engagement. The three strategies draw up the main challenges and suggest some overarching solutions, but they do not go into any details on policy areas or suggest tools to handle specific challenges. When the work on this thesis started, only Oslo and Stockholm had adopted such strategies. Copenhagen adopted the current international strategy in 2021. All three strategies share three main components: Branding, knowledge sharing and lobbying. Under the branding umbrella, the city of Stockholm stresses the following:

“All City administrations and companies should contribute to the positioning of Stockholm as Northern Europe's leading sustainable growth region and strengthen the City's position as The Capital of Scandinavia” (Stockholm city. International strategy, 2020)

Knowledge sharing, understood as the importance of obtaining new knowledge, and learning from the best examples, was equally stressed by all three. There was also an altruistic component here, which is visible in the following quote from Copenhagen's international strategy: “The sustainable urban solutions should not only contribute to sustainable development in Copenhagen – they should also contribute to

sustainable development of the world’s cities and promote realisation of the UN’s global goals” (Copenhagen city. International strategy, 2021).

Lobbying is also given much attention by all. The strategy of Stockholm highlights that both monitoring and lobbying is the responsibility of the different city administrations and companies. They are responsible for doing this in their respective areas of work. This also applies to Oslo, but interviews with public officers in Copenhagen revealed that although lobbying is important for the city, it is mostly taken care of by the national association of local governments, Local Government Denmark (LGDK). This is discussed more at length in article 3 of this thesis.

The three cities are members of several TMNs, as illustrated in the table below. Only networks and organizations that fulfil the requirements for a TMN, with a secretariat and fixed members, are listed here. Drawing the line between joint initiatives and TMNs is not always straightforward. There are many ways of organizing cooperation. As the table illustrates, the three cities are members of many of the same TMNs.

Table 3: Overview the cities and their TMN memberships.¹⁰

	Copenhagen	Oslo	Stockholm
TMNs	Eurocities	Eurocities	Eurocities
	C40 Climate Leadership Group	C40 Climate Leadership Group	C40 Climate Leadership Group
	ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability (and Procura+	ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability (and Procura+	ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability

¹⁰ This table builds on available data from the three cities, yet there is no guarantee that the cities have a full overview of their membership in TMNs.

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	which is an ICLEI subnetwork)	which is an ICLEI subnetwork)	
	Nordic Safe Cities	Nordic Safe Cities	Nordic Safe Cities
	CNCA Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance	CNCA Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance	CNCA Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance
	International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN)	International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN)	International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN)
	Rainbow Cities Network	Rainbow Cities Network	
	String	String	
	Mayors for Peace	Mayors for Peace	
	Fast Track Cities	Fast Track Cities	
		WHO Global Network for age-friendly Cities and Communities	WHO Global Network for age-friendly Cities and Communities
		Strong Cities Network	Strong Cities Network
		ECCAR European Coalition of Cities against racism	ECCAR European Coalition of Cities against racism
		Metrex	Metrex

		Intercultural Cities Programme Council of Europe	POLIS
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4.3.2 *The political system of Copenhagen*

The three cities studied in this thesis have rather similar political systems. I will however briefly outline the main structures of the political systems in each of the cities.

The city of Copenhagen has an “intermediate government system”. This is made up of a supreme body, which is the City Council, chaired by the Lord Mayor, who also sets the agenda for the meetings. The City Council has 55 members, elected every four years. There are also seven Standing Committees, each chaired by a Vice Mayor. The seven committees are elected by proportional representation. This ensures that a simple majority cannot take all the seats in a committee, which secures that minorities are heard in the administration of the tasks. Six of the Standing Committees have 11 members, while the Finance Committee has 13 members. These members are the six Mayors of the Standing Committees, plus the Lord Mayor, as well as six members of the City Council. The committees can make final decisions within their respective areas, thus reducing the number of issues that must be dealt with by the City Council (Copenhagen city, 2022).

4.3.3 *The political system of Oslo*

The city of Oslo has a parliamentary system, where the City Government is the executive body. The City Government has extensive decision-making powers because of the parliamentary system, but answers to the City Council, and its configuration depends on that of the council. The City Government is governed by the Governing Mayor and up to seven Vice Mayors. The City Government makes propositions to the City

Council and is the head of the administration. It also carries out decisions made by the City Council. The City Council has 59 members, elected every four years. The Mayor of Oslo is the chair of the City Council. The budget and overall policies are determined by the City Council, and it also performs supervisory functions of the City Government and the administration (Oslo city, 2022)

4.3.4 The political system of Stockholm:

The city of Stockholm has 101 elected representatives that make up the City Council. The members are elected every four years. To govern, a majority of 51 seats is needed. The Mayor and Vice Mayors are appointed by the City Council. Nine Vice Mayors, as well as the Mayor are from the majority, while five are from the opposition. They make up the Council of Mayors, which draft matters for the City Executive Board. The City Executive Board is made up of 13 members from both the majority and the opposition. Its main task is to provide the City Council members with the necessary facts to make decisions. The City Executive Board ensures that decisions are executed, monitored, and evaluated (Stockholm city, 2022).

4.3.5 Political and administrative participation in Eurocities

As mentioned, Eurocities is a TMN made up of two tracks, one administrative and one political. Although the decision to join Eurocities is a political decision, whether to participate in the administrative parts of Eurocities, such as the administrative forums and working groups, are decisions that are decentralized to the administrative management of the different sectoral departments in the city administration. In most cases, whether to participate in working groups where up to the individual administrative officer.

At the time of the data gathering, only Stockholm had a political presence in Brussels, being member of the Executive Committee. Oslo formally took part in most political forum meetings. Despite this, Eurocities was not seen as politically important by Oslo at the time of the interviews, as explained by the international office. Rather, for Oslo, Eurocities was seen as a predominantly administrative TMN compared to the TMN C40, which were viewed as more political. For Copenhagen, as mentioned, there was no political attendance at the time of the interviews. The situation for Oslo seems to have changed somewhat since the data was gathered, as the governing mayor is now a part of the Executive Committee.

4.4 Design of the articles

This thesis is built up around three research articles with their own distinct research questions and consequently partly their own designs. The following sections elaborate on the different designs of the three articles.

Article 1 is a merge between two different datasets belonging to two different research projects. First, it is based on the dataset from Eurocities and the three Scandinavian capital cities. Second, it is based on the dataset from the PhD project of Anne Bach Nielsen from the University of Copenhagen (the co-author of article 1). This includes the cities Vejle (Denmark), Chennai (India) and Porto Alegre (Brazil), which are all members of the global TMN, formerly called 100 Resilient Cities (100RC), now called the Resilient Cities Network. For this reason, the TMNs differ on certain parameters such as thematic fields, purposes, membership conditions and decision-making processes. What the datasets have in common, is a shared method, building on semi-structured interviews, observations, and documents. Altogether, this made up 51 semi structured interviews. In addition, although the variation between the cities is more striking than the similarities, the cities are similar in the sense that they were members from early in the

networks' history, and they were all at some point in time actively engaged in network activities. Apart from this, the cities are located in various parts of the world, in very different states, and they are of different sizes. The constraint with this design is also addressed in article 1.

The aim of this article was to raise the level of abstraction and point to some general tendencies that cities share despite being members of very different TMNs and despite great internal variation between the cities. Although the two projects were designed independently, the same questions were asked of rationales for TMN engagement. The two projects had many shared findings, which point to some general institutional mechanisms that hold across very different TMNs. The purpose was not to compare the cities on every specific variable, as many of these could not be controlled, but rather to discuss a more generalized rationale that was present among very different members of both TMNs. What this design also allowed, was to illustrate how different two TMNs may be, and for the purpose of this thesis, to highlight what makes Eurocities special.

Article 2 is based on a review of the latest research on the configuration of TMNs to illustrate the ongoing debate on “the nature of the TMN beast”. In addition, we have also used existing research articles on Eurocities' organization, membership-requirements and working mode. Moreover, documents accessed from Eurocities' secretariat and website were used. These included lists of members entering and leaving, annual budget reports and strategic documents. This data was also coupled with interviews with participants from the three Scandinavian member cities, as well as members of Eurocities' staff. These interviews were included to argue how Eurocities could be seen as a meta-organization from the member cities' point of view and which implications membership in such an organization have for its members.

Article 3 is based on interview data from the three Scandinavian cities. A comprehensive comparison is restrained by a lack of full control of

several variables. This is because the cities have slightly different organizations, with officers in different positions, combined with the fact that the three cities were not equally active in all parts of Eurocities, and that the political dimension of TMN membership varies between the cities and over time. Article 3 therefore points to differences between the three cities in a broad sense and suggest mechanisms contributing to this, but it cannot account for all possible aspects of these differences. It therefore suggests some questions for future research. However, given the low amount of research on the topic of subnational lobbying in the EU, even such cautious suggestions should be of value.

4.5 Data gathering

4.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

The data for this thesis is based on 23 semi structured interviews with 24 experts working in or with cities and their relations to TMNs. Three of the interviews were with two informants simultaneously and two interviews were conducted with the same person twice. Some interviews were also later followed up by e-mail communication. In addition, 12 background interviews were conducted with informants that are not quoted directly. These were amongst others, with the leaders of the Norwegian regional Brussels offices and participants in Eurocities' working groups from businesses providing public services. Moreover, interviews with municipal umbrella associations and Brussels offices, were conducted. For a full overview of the interviews, see the appendix. The interviews were anonymized.

The main informants included public officers in the three member cities, as well as officers in Eurocities' secretariat, and Local Government Associations. Informants were anonymized and only referred to by city and date of the interview. These had a duration from 30 minutes to 1,5 hours. The informants were approached through e-mail communication

or by phone, and they were informed about the main topics for the interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, before being analyzed. The text processing program Nvivo was used for this purpose. The interview followed an interview guide that was derived partly from research articles, partly from a handful of preliminary interviews, but also motivated by mere curiosity or lack of existing data in a particular field. In the process of analyzing, some predefined categories were used, derived from theory, but new categories that emerged during the analysis would also influence the ensuing interviews. The issue of analyzing interviews will be discussed later.

Most of the interviews were conducted by phone, while four were conducted face-to-face. Gathering data over the phone does come with some limitations, as pointed out by Christmann (2009, p. 170):

“[...] due to lacking non-verbal elements interaction partners must organize the interaction process exclusively by way of language and voice, due to which conversations on the telephone require much more attention in respect of what is happening linguistically than immediately personal interaction [...]”

The researchers' awareness of social cues revealing attitudes independently of the informants' verbal reasoning is left out when conducting interviews over the phone. Thus, any interpretation of the informant's facial reaction to a question was not possible (to see if the topic induced irritation for instance).

Despite these drawbacks, phone interviews worked out well. This might be related to the fact that the informants were experts in their field and were used to talking about their work in a rather generalized manner (see Döringer, 2021). The rationale for using the phone interviews was mainly a pragmatic one, as informants were spread over three cities in three different countries, in addition to the offices in Brussels. It was generally difficult to group all interviews in one city within the same week or two. As many respondents also often had to reschedule, the

flexibility that phone interviews provided was valuable. In addition to face-to-face and phone interviews, there was also correspondence with several informants over e-mail to access documents, receive updates, or to follow up on minor issues that needed further investigation.

Informants in the tree articles are all administrative officers rather than politicians. This decision was made because administrative officers are more frequently in contact with Eurocities. Early interviews with international officers in Oslo and Copenhagen, revealed that for these two cities, Eurocities was mainly a network for the public officers, while politicians attended relatively seldom in Oslo and not at all in Copenhagen. For Stockholm the situation was a bit different, as the mayor was involved in the Executive Committee. However, even here, the main activity was conducted by the public officers. Public officers can participate over time and across changing political administrations. They also participate in all types of activities, while politicians only attend the semi-annual meetings. According to Acuto and Leffel (2021, p. 1762) there has been an excessive focus on the mayoral summits, especially in the media, while the administrative side has been downplayed.

4.5.2 Snowball sampling

Finding the relevant informants turned out to be a cumbersome task, as none of the three cities had lists of who partook in lobbying or who their Eurocities participants were. Participation was also sometimes fleeting. As a result, finding informants was time-consuming. The interviews started with the head of the international office in each of the three cities. They were then asked to point out people who worked with either lobbying in general, or with Eurocities. For Oslo and Stockholm, the forums where the international office considered the participation to be most intensive were selected. These were the Environment forum, the Mobility Forum and the Social Affairs Forum. Copenhagen only participated in the Environment forum and the Mobility forum at the time

of the interviews. After interviewing the international office, a snowball method was used. New informants were traced through interviews, various meetings, minutes from meetings in Eurocities' working groups, and through Eurocities' secretariat.

On some parameters, the opinions of the informants varied a lot within each city. The articles seek to be transparent about this. The main interviews were conducted over the course of one year, from early 2018 to the beginning of 2019. Background interviews were conducted a year prior to these main interviews, but a few were also conducted after. Two of the relevant informants declined the invitation to participate.

4.5.3 Interviewing experts

Conducting the interviews came its own distinct challenges because of the type of informants used, namely experts. The term expert does not necessarily refer to an academic expert, but someone who has a particular expertise in a certain field (Andersen, 2006). Bogner & Menz (2009, p. 54-55) define experts as someone who has:

“[...] technical, process and interpretative knowledge that refers to a specific field of action, by virtue of the fact that the expert acts in a relevant way (for example, in a particular organizational field or the expert's own professional area). In this respect, expert knowledge consists not only of systematized, reflexively accessible knowledge relating to a specialized subject or field, but also has to a considerable extent the character of practical or action knowledge, which incorporates a range of quite disparate maxims for action, individual rules of decision, collective orientations, and patterns of social interpretation”.

The informants in this thesis were experts, not only because of their educational and professional backgrounds (these varied a lot), but because they possessed very specific and exclusive knowledge on the social practices within their respective city, on lobbying, and on Eurocities. Quite often in the methods literature, the terms “expert” and

“elite” are used interchangeably to describe the same type of interviews. For practical purposes these are very similar (Littig, 2009, Döringer, 2021). Some informants may also tick of in both categories. There is, however, a difference in that the term “elite” implies a link to power and privilege that the term “expert” does not (Odendahl & Shaw, 2001, p. 301; Döringer, 2021). Experts may have interpretive power (e.g., setting the frames within which politicians make decisions), but they do not have formative power (Littig, 2009).

When interviewing experts, the aim is often to uncover social or political processes of some kind. Thus, experts are not primarily relevant as private persons, but because they represent a specific group, such as for example public officers (Döringer, 2021). This was also the case in this thesis. However, the data sought was not only neutral facts about incidents and sequence, but also the informant’s own judgements of their city’s and their own role in Eurocities. Therefore, their opinions and experiences mattered.

Interviewing experts turned out to be something quite different from interviewing one’s peers. The researcher-informant relation was often asymmetrical as the informants had more expertise in their field. Interviewing experts may require that the researcher has a high level of knowledge. The interviews may turn out differently depending on the context, as stressed by Döringer (2021, p. 267)

“The interviewer can be seen, for instance, as a co-expert when the expert assumes that the interviewer is familiar with the field and its practical conditions. In contrast, other types are characterized by a more asymmetrical interaction, for instance, when the interviewer is considered a layperson who is naïve about the field of research”.

Both interview settings described in the quote occurred in this project. On several occasions, the informants asked control questions to check the level of knowledge and how much details to provide. Similar experiences are described by Littig (2009, p. 103). Thus, it became very important to read up as much as possible before the interview. This

sometimes proved hard, as much of this experience is built on tacit knowledge. However, elements that could indicate knowledge of the field were introduced to the questions to gain trustworthiness (see also Christmann, 2009, p. 162). Appearing knowledgeable was comfortable there and then. It also often made the informants go into more details. There is however always a danger as a researcher of appearing to know more than what is the case. The consequence of this is that valuable context and basic issues are not explained, only implied, and that too much time is devoted to details, so that the bigger picture is lost (Bogner & Menz 2009). This happened on two occasions, making it necessary to return to the informants for a shorter follow-up interview.

Another consideration was to balance between being what Littig (2009) terms an accomplice versus a critic. It was important to be able to ask critical questions, while not frightening those who seemed a bit uncomfortable when they felt their own responses were becoming value laden or critical. In this respect informants varied a lot. On occasions, it was also necessary to ask “naïve” questions to get reflections and judgements that did not come when informants spoke freely and to ensure some comparability across interviews.

4.5.4 Drawing inferences from semi structured interviews. Reflections on representativeness and validity

Comparison was sometimes challenging within the semi structured interview format. Seeking the flexibility that the open questions and possibility to pursue emerging topics provided, meant that the wrapping, but also the content of the different interviews, varied slightly. Although using an interview guide and making sure to ask the questions listed there, some questions were also tailored to individual experts to keep them interested, or because the context and their experiences varied. Not all informants would be able to answer all questions. Because the informants were so comfortable with talking freely about their work,

they would often preempt some of the questions and answer them in the “wrong” order. It was preferred that they talked freely, yet it was necessary to ensure that the relevant questions were sufficiently answered, even if the question formulation ended up varying slightly. Moreover, the interview guide was somewhat moderated to suit the individual informant. Although the literature on such challenges with interviewing experts is scarce, Wicker and Connelly (2014) report having the same challenges with their elite informants. They write that their interviews “turned out to be somewhat messy in practice” (Wicker & Connelly, 2014, p. 8).

As a result, the interviews are not entirely comparable on all parameters, although most topics are covered in all the interviews. Through a higher level of abstraction, some general tendencies are recognizable across cities and TMNs. Tavory and Timmermans (2014, p. 78-79) refer to this as “intersituational variation”, which means that the situations studied are dissimilar, yet “some aspect of meaning-maker is similar enough to warrant inclusion in a set”.

The number of informants from the three cities were not equal. From Oslo there were eight informants, while there were five from Stockholm and only three from Copenhagen. For Copenhagen the lower number was mainly because the city had withdrawn its engagement in many parts of Eurocities’ work. Consequently, there were fewer participants to interview. In addition to this, one person in Copenhagen also declined to participate, thus making the numbers even lower. Adding to this, was also a more general issue, namely that while some participants were very motivated to attend all meetings, others would send different people depending on the topic that was being discussed at the meeting. This difference also explains why there were more informants from Oslo than from Stockholm. Moreover, some informants had just attended one or two meetings, while others had years of experience.

Because of the semi structured interview format, new issues would sometimes come up during interviews. They could also come up in

observations of meetings, in agendas, or minutes. In some of those cases, the new information had to be verified through other informants and sources. Sometimes follow-up interviews were necessary for this purpose. This resulted in two interviews with some informants, such as the international officers of the three cities. Part of this work with validating the information was also conducted through e-mails, both with public officers in the cities and with Eurocities' officials in the secretariat. There is however a difference between verifying the data and verifying the interpretations of the data and the use of theories. Although the empirics must be recognizable, the use of theories can not be up to individual informants.

4.5.5 Studying documents

To answer the question of why the three cities joined Eurocities in 1992-1993, official documents accessed from the official website of each municipality were used. In the cases of Oslo and Stockholm, these were possible to find through a search on the years before accession (Oslo city council, 1993; Stockholm city council, 1992). There was however little memory of this time in the municipal organization today. In the Case of Copenhagen, it was not possible to find any documents prior to 1998. The administration, which were very helpful, were also unable to provide documents from the accession year but found a document of a recommendation to the city council to chair Eurocities' Mobility Forum from 2006 (Copenhagen city. Council case, 2006). They also found an orientation concerning Copenhagen's election as president of Eurocities in 2010 (Copenhagen city. Note to Economy Department, 2010). These documents were used as evidence of the city's stance at that time and to demonstrate the change that the city underwent after 2012. However, it is not possible to state what the official motivation for Copenhagen's enrolment in 1993 was, other than from interviews with administrative officers that were not employed there at the time.

In addition to these documents, an overview of membership turnover from Eurocities' secretariat, as well as annual reports, strategic documents, and minutes from working group and forum meetings were used as data. Moreover, Eurocities' position papers were studied, along with the international strategies of the three cities.

4.5.6 Gathering data through observations

The data in this thesis also builds on observations from one semi-annual Eurocities meeting in the environment forum hosted by Oslo in October 2019. This was one of the first meetings where Eurocities' new strategy was presented. This meeting resulted in field notes and conversations with Eurocities participants from different cities. It was a good occasion to discuss a range of topics centering around Eurocities on a more general level. It was also useful to watch a meeting in person to gain a better understanding of the format. Although serving as valuable background information, observations play a lesser role in this thesis than both interviews and documents. Observations are not referred to in any of the articles, but it provided valuable context. A visit to the headquarters of Eurocities served the same purpose. Interviews were conducted by phone at a later point in time.

4.6 Analyzing the data

The interviews were transcribed within few days using the text-processing program Nvivo. They were also coded and briefly analyzed along the way. This continuous interaction with the data, facilitated the discovery of pieces of information that was not as expected or that stood out from other interviews. Some quotes led the thoughts onto a certain theory which induced new questions. In the first part of the analysis all relevant aspects of the interviews were labeled, using predefined and new categories. Examples of such were reflections on usefulness, strategic behavior, functions served by Eurocities, motivations, perspectives on time and development, and thoughts of quitting to

mention some. The second part of the analysis was done at a later stage, after all the interviews had been conducted. In this phase passages from different interviews that had similar views on the same topics were grouped and put into the same category. As an example, all passages from informants that felt Eurocities was of direct relevance to their own work were grouped. Sometimes a passage would contain many reflections or different types of information, and in such cases several labels were attached to the same passage. Thus, the same quote was sometimes used in different argumentative settings.

5 Articles – summary and results

This chapter presents a brief overview of the three articles. Aspects of their main findings will be discussed more at length in the next chapter (the discussion chapter).

Article 1: Grønnestad, S. & Nielsen, A. B. (2022). Institutionalizing City Networking –Discursive and Rational choice Institutional Perspectives on membership of Transnational Municipal Networks. Urban Studies. 59 (14), 2951–2967.

This article studies the reasoning of participants in two different TMNs. It analyses the judgements they make for their city's membership in the TMN building on new institutionalism. The conclusion is that parts of the members' reasoning certainly have rational components. Yet, a discursive institutional perspective improves the understanding of cities' membership of transnational municipal networks, adding to the research of Huggins (2018a). The discursive institutional framework helps uncovering important aspects of transnational municipal network participation that are motivated by a different logic than that of measurable output. We argue that cities in both Eurocities and 100 Resilient Cities (now Resilient Cities Network) use transnational municipal networks as sources of internal and external legitimacy. Thus, they use TMNs as a means to legitimize their position in domestic politics and their international position.

The article seeks to accomplish two theoretical aims: First, it argues for the usefulness of new-institutional theories in TMN research instead of the (often implicit) functional or instrumental explanations that are much used. Second, it argues that important aspects of cities' engagement in TMNs are missed when analyzed only from a rational choice perspective (as is often implicitly done). Moreover, this is also the case in Huggins (2018a), as the sociological institutional account does not address all

necessary aspects of TMN participation. A discursive institutional perspective explains how cities remain engaged in TMNs because of the ideas and practices they represent.

Empirically and methodologically the contribution in this article lies in analyzing the judgements for participation among participants that are members of two TMNs from two different research traditions. Eurocities has traditionally “belonged” to the Europeanisation literature (Hamedinger & Wolffhardt, 2010), while 100 Resilient Cities has “belonged” to the sustainability tradition (Leitner et al., 2018). Our claim is that it is possible to identify some mechanisms that apply in such different settings and draw some general conclusions about TMN participation.

Article 2: Grønnestad, S. & Farsund, A. A. Moving Beyond Networks: Transnational Municipal Networks as Meta-organizations.

This article addresses the latest discussions on conceptualizations of TMNs and question the common characterization of TMNs solely as networks. We base the article on one TMN, namely Eurocities and data from the three cities of Copenhagen, Oslo, and Stockholm. The main theoretical contribution is the claim that it may be fruitful to view at least a certain group of highly developed TMNs as meta-organizations, which are organizations with other organizations as members. The article seeks to illustrate how the network perspective falls short in explaining important organizational elements, such as the role of the growing secretariat. Another contribution lies in explaining membership dynamics and behavior.

The article concludes that by seeing Eurocities through a meta-organizational framework, structures that allow for variation in participation and make members persist are better understood than if we insist on understanding TMNs as networks. This allows us to make sense

of the mentioned, but until now rather unexplored sides of TMN membership, such as why some cities remain members despite little engagement. This can be explained with the need of the meta-organization to recruit and keep as many relevant members as possible. Because many TMNs lack mechanisms for sanctioning unwanted behavior (Haupt & Coppola, 2019), streamlining membership is difficult and this strengthens the autonomy of the members relative to that of the TMN. Even in those instances where TMNs have some such enforcement mechanisms, using them has proved hard.

Lastly, although the literature on TMNs (see Kern & Bulkeley, 2009) has stressed the fact that cities are free to join or leave as they please, certain mechanisms in meta-organizations tend to affect members identity and make it unattractive to leave. This was a central finding in our data and is connected to the fact that membership is very clearly defined. When so many of the actors that members compare themselves with have joined, membership appears self-evident even with varying levels of engagement (Ahrne & Brunsson 2005, p. 439).

Article 3: Grønnestad, S.

Grønnestad, S. Scandinavian Cities as EU Lobbyist: The Use of Local, National and Transnational Lobby Channels.

Article 3 studies whether the Scandinavian cities engage in lobbying towards the EU and how this is carried out. A rather restricted view on lobbying is applied here, understood as inside lobbying,¹¹ through actors that engage with EU decision makers. The article studies this through interviews with administrative officers in the three case cities, which are Copenhagen, Oslo, and Stockholm. Further the article investigates the

¹¹ The literature on lobbying differentiates between direct forms, such as consultations, and indirect forms, such as using the media. The first is referred to as “inside lobbying”, while the latter is referred to as “outside lobbying” (De Bruycker and Beyers, 2019; Junk, 2015; Rasch, 2018).

cities' choice of lobby channel and the justification for this choice. This is an open question because cities have little formalized access to the EU system and further because the Scandinavian cities and regions traditionally have refrained from engaging in EU lobbying (Gidlund, 2000). Three possible channels are presented: one local, one national, and one transnational. These are not mutually exclusive. The article concludes that lobbying the EU is important for both Copenhagen Oslo, and Stockholm, but that they value different channels.

Three main contributions are presented: First, the article aims to broaden the application of the multilevel governance perspective by studying the role of cities in the EU. Particularly relevant is how their choices of lobby channels relate to their level of autonomy and their inclusion in national EU decision making processes. Second, studying the role of TMNs for cities lobbying the EU, the article aims to add to the research literature on EU lobbying. Eurocities is seen as an important lobby channel, contrary to what has been argued before. Third, the article aims to illustrate why and how alternatives routes (such as TMNs) may be especially important for cities in EEA countries that are closely involved in the EU, yet not EU members.

Theoretically, the study adds to the “third generation” of multilevel governance (Szpak et al., 2022) which broadens the multilevel governance perspective. In addition, the article argues that although autonomy is often mentioned in TMN research, the concept is underspecified. This is remedied by discussing different concepts of autonomy in relation to TMN membership and EU lobbying. The main argument is that cities seek to broaden their autonomy through bypassing when they cannot get their message across to EU decision-makers via their local government associations or through interaction with their national government.

6 Discussion and concluding remarks

This chapter returns to the research questions posed at the start of this thesis. Based on some of the findings of the three articles, the chapter discusses the overarching question of how cities' international engagement and membership in TMNs may be understood as a pursuit for more autonomy. In doing this, it investigates why cities seek autonomy through TMNs, before moving on to a discussion of how TMN membership enhances autonomy.

6.1 Why do cities seek autonomy through TMNs?

In her 1985-chapter Skocpol wrote: "States necessarily stand at the intersections between domestic sociopolitical orders and the transnational relations within which they must maneuver for survival and advantage in relation to other states" (Skocpol, 1985, p. 8). This ushered in a new era for states in political science research. Today, the same quote could be used to describe the situation for many cities as they have become important international actors (Curtis & Acuto, 2018; Herrschel & Newman, 2017). While Scandinavian cities having offices in Brussels was seen as unusual twenty years ago, this is no longer the case.

The introductory chapter discussed how cities are different from states and explained their traditionally limited role in international relations. All states that are recognized internationally as such are automatically given the status as international actors, and as such they have sovereignty. This is not the case for cities. They need to actively promote themselves and join other cities in organizations and networks to try to become international actors.

Autonomy is therefore a more precise term than sovereignty when speaking of cities in international relations as the former is so intertwined with the perception of the state. In the words of Szpak et. al., (2022, p. 235): "there is no need for cities to be sovereign. Their independence

and/or autonomy are more relevant terms”. Yet, it may also be fruitful to demarcate against the term independence. While independence may be seen as the opposite of interdependence, independence also has connotations to a controlling state, referring to a freedom from (a negative definition), while autonomy may also point to possibilities (a positive definition). In the words of Fossum et al. (2023, p. 2):

“With *autonomy* we refer to will and ability to pursue what an actor takes to be its preferences. This may or may not be under conditions of independence”. And further: “[...] an actor (a person, a state, an international organization, etc.) may be reliant on others and yet still pursue an autonomous interest and course of action.”

Therefore, cities may pursue autonomy beyond the state border even though they are not independent of their respective governments, nor sovereign. But why do they seek *more* autonomy? The research literature on cities’ international engagement has suggested that this is because they increasingly face complex (or even wicked) problems that cross borders (Bulkeley et al., 2018; Kemmerzell, 2019). This perception is visible in the international strategies of the three cities studied here and was acknowledged by many informants. It can be illustrated with the following quote from the international strategy of the city of Copenhagen:

“Copenhagen aims to listen and reach out in order to understand and be inspired by international mega-trends, philosophies and state of the art. This is essential for resolving the city’s current challenges and staying out in front going forward” (Copenhagen city. International strategy).

The international strategy of Oslo also stresses how the international work of the city is not only seen as legitimate, but that it is perceived as truly necessary in today’s globalized world (Oslo city international strategy, 2010).

Cities are increasingly portrayed as important actors in solving complex problems that may also cross borders, as described in chapter 2 of this

thesis. Thus, they see themselves compelled to engage internationally because of the interdependence between them and with other international actors. An often-mentioned example was that complex interdependence makes cities passive recipients of EU legislation unless they engage actively. For cities today, the relevant question is not only which tasks the local level has, but which tools and knowledge the city has got to handle these tasks. And the answer to this may not be found in the national context. Sometimes there is no natural “partner city” within the same country to learn from. One example from the research literature concerns cities in small countries that have only one big city with an airport. Such cities will often look abroad to find other cities with airports that they can learn from (Niederhafner, 2013).

A similar challenge building on data from this thesis, was making Oslo an age-friendly city. This implies working on challenges for the elderly across policy fields. At the time when Oslo started working on this topic, the administrative officer found no other city in Norway to look towards (Interview 7, 2018). Thus, it was necessary to look outside national borders, to TMNs such as Eurocities, and the WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities, for tools, experience, and inspiration. These examples show that Cities, such as Oslo, Stockholm and Copenhagen seek autonomy understood as opportunities because they continuously face new and complex tasks that must be handled, thus prompting them to consult similar cities for advice. In this sense, they are *pushed* towards TMNs when searching for solutions.

Although the challenges outlined above is an important explanation for why cities seek more autonomy through TMNs, newer research (Fourot et al., 2021), (as well as article 1 in this thesis) suggest that cities do not always know which problems they seek solutions for, only that they should be where the other important cities are. Thus, TMNs, when they are well established, may *pull* cities towards them. This does not have to be because of the explicit functions they advertise but may just as well be because they offer a community of cities that is perceived as

legitimate and empowering (as we have argued in article 1). Cities thus also pursue rather unspecified opportunities and may seek autonomy as opportunities without entering a TMN with predefined problems they need to solve. Participants from the cities not only *have* to be there, but they also often *want* to be there. Sometimes they also feel that they *should* be there (see article 1). The increased responsiveness towards local needs as well as a growing awareness of cities' potential roles in international relations, therefore, suggest that cities also pursue autonomy understood as opportunities more generally. The discursive component is evident in the sense that most public officers have heard the same story of how cities can be laboratories for change when states fail (e.g., in climate issues) or that cities are important because they are the level closest to people and their everyday life.

6.2 How can TMN membership enhance a city's autonomy?

The official arguments of cities joining TMNs are often much the same as those of states joining international organizations: to reap certain benefits that they would not otherwise do; to solve collective action issues, to make and affect legislation, to increase their legitimacy and take part in good society, and to develop new norms (Andonova et al., 2009; Huggins, 2018a; Mocca, 2018; Rashidi & Patt, 2018). To achieve many of these goals, they must be able to act in concert, and this may require sacrifice in the sense of ceding discretion to the collective. Cities enjoying self-rule may therefore bind themselves to transnational agreements in areas where they are free to do so. This will in most TMNs produce a need to weight the value of cooperation against the possible loss of autonomy in the sense of self-rule (Haupt & Coppola, 2019). Tatham et al. (2021, p. 614) argue that among subnational governments there is “[...] a tension, and occasional struggle, between a desire for autonomy and an acknowledgement of interdependence”.

Today, we see TMNs with stronger organizations, larger secretariats, and seemingly more governance tools at their disposal (see Acuto & Leffel, 2021; Davidson et al., 2019; Haupt & Coppola, 2019; Nguyen Long & Krause, 2021). Article 2 argues that with a stronger secretariat and more decisions taken by TMNs in political forums and executive bodies, the TMN can make decisions on behalf of all the members. This, one may expect, will strengthen the autonomy of the TMN relative to its members and may affect the self-rule of the members. Yet too much of this may lead to member cities leaving, which they are free to do at all times (Kern & Bulkeley, 2009). Thus, there must be a balance here that the cities are comfortable with. This inherent paradox is illustrated by Ahrne et. al., (2016, p. 9) in the following quote although formulated to illustrate the dynamics of international organizations:

“[...] the members and the meta-organization are victims of a paradox. The members must be autonomous actors, although belonging to an autonomous organization; and the meta-organization must be an autonomous actor, even though its members are autonomous. In practice, this paradox makes the meta-organization and its members compete for autonomy, leading to severe and intricate problems of actorhood”.

Here, we see a parallel between cities and states as international actors. Although their powers cannot in general compete with that of states, the dynamics between cities and the TMNs resemble that of states and international organizations.

The question is thus whether membership in TMNs provide tools for addressing the problems cities face. If they do so without placing too high constraints on the members, cities gain more than they lose. Through participation in TMNs, cities are given access to a whole new field of actors. As Acuto (2010) argues, it makes sense, even from a rational choice institutional point of view, to cede some autonomy (as self-rule) in a negotiation process if the gains are seen to outweigh the costs, what is referred to as “sovereignty bargains” (Litfin, 1997; Mattli,

2000). This is even more the case if cities are not bound by decisions with which they disagree, making the costs low.

The research literature (Gebhardt & Günther, 2021) and the findings in this thesis suggest that for members of Eurocities there is autonomy to gain rather than to lose through membership. TMNs increase cities' autonomy in the form of opportunities because they allow them to have a say in more policy fields (as argued in article 3) and give them tools to handle their own challenges. Through increasing the level of organization, cities have autonomy internationally in a manner that they would not otherwise have. Together, they can face the European Commission and the European Parliament. Despite a rather elaborate structure, because of the low level of supervision and the lack of enforcement mechanisms, cities can merely choose to opt out of the aspects of their Eurocities membership that they do not like while remaining. This is not as easily done in all types of TMNs (see Bansard et al., 2017; Haupt & Coppola, 2019), which means that in some TMNs, this may pose a real dilemma. In Eurocities however, there are very few binding restrictions on members. Eurocities is a meta-organization allowing members to retain much autonomy, understood as self-determination, because the structures allow for variation in participation. This was evident in the example of Copenhagen's downscaling of their activities, as discussed in all three articles.

Another trait that is shared between states in international organizations and cities in some types of TMNs is that some members are more influential than others. This is, according to Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) a trait that characterizes a meta-organization. These strong and influential members do not need the meta-organization as much as the weaker ones because they can do better on their own (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011). Just like small states need international organizations more than the stronger states, (see Corbett et al., 2021), Herrschel & Newman (2017) argues that small cities need TMNs more than the strong cities:

“[...] this type of collective action may be of lesser importance for established global cities like London with the desire and resources to act independently, but it is vital for cities further down the hierarchy, as a means of seeking influence and/or gaining credibility as locations of economic activity and opportunity, and as credible actors at that level of engagement” (Herrschel & Newman, 2017, p. 52).

This trait was also present in Eurocities from the start, as it was created to serve the so-called “second cities” the number two in line after the capital city in size and importance. It seems that the need for cooperation weighted more heavily on these cities. Although open to the largest cities, interviews with Eurocities officers, as referred to in article 1 shows that the smaller cities were often very visible in the network and could assume important positions within it.

Although TMN participation weighs cooperation over competition, several informants in this study did stress that cities were in constant competition with each other over investments and business. Yet, Acuto (2010) and Bulkeley et al. (2018) suggest that while this is the case, it does not create much conflict inside the TMNs, nor does the interviews from Eurocities indicate a high level of conflict. The interviews that form the basis for this thesis indicated that Stockholm saw Copenhagen, Oslo, and several other cities as competitors, yet had no problems with engaging in extensive information and knowledge exchange with these very same cities. Ljungkvist (2014) also stresses that cities’ international engagement for a long time has been understood primarily as a battle over economic resources, but that this gives a very limited picture of the reasons for cities’ engagement in international relations as well as its dynamics. The rather old debate over cooperation versus competition seems dead, as the new literature states that successful cities do both (Lara, 2020).

6.3 Avenues for future research

Despite stressing the value of TMN membership as a possible provider of autonomy, this thesis do not claim that TMN membership is the *only* important solution to complicated problems that cities face. Bansard et al. (2017) have for instance studied TMNs operating in the climate field and conclude that many goals are not met, and that thus far TMNs supplement, but have not proved adept at replacing, more traditional forms of international mitigation actions. Clearly, more research is needed on the effects of TMNs on the city level. Moreover, studies of such effects should investigate what difference TMNs make in designated fields. This has been done in the field of migration (see Caponio 2021; Durmus & Oomen, 2022; Oomen 2020) and in climate change mitigation (see Bansard et al., 2017; Busch, 2015; Lee & Koski, 2014). Yet, more research is needed on the specific outcome from TMN membership in the many other policy fields in which they operate, such as mobility, culture, and health, to mention but a few.

Second, building on article 1 in this thesis, future research should also investigate how preferences are formed in cities as members of TMNs, that is whether preference formation is endogenous or exogeneous. Cities are members of different TMNs, but at the same time they are part of a larger discursive logic on cities' roles in international relations. Do TMNs, being secondary structures have enough "muscles" to socialize their members and affect their preferences?

Third, there is an obvious need to discuss the democratic aspects of TMN membership. This need is twofold; first one should ask how much autonomy is ceded to the TMN? This is especially pertinent in TMNs with permanently hired consultants working on the city level, such as The Resilient Cities Network used to have (Nielsen, 2020), but article 2 suggests that this may be an issue in several TMNs. It may even become an issue in Eurocities. The near universal dilemma in public administration between capacity and democracy should therefore also present itself for cities in TMNs.

A second democratic issue is where to draw the line between administration and politics. Which aspects of the work related to TMN membership should be decided by politicians and which should be handled by administrative officers? How do participants in TMNs act when representing their city and how do they understand their role? The literature suggest that accountability is an issue in governance networks (see Lægreid & Rykkja, 2022; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005), as well as in multilevel governance arrangements (Papadopoulos, 2010). There is reason to suspect that many of the same accountability concerns apply to cities in TMNs, which demands a closer look.

6.4 Practical and theoretical and contributions

For practitioners, this thesis highlights some of the possible gains from taking part in TMNs, such as getting input on how to solve challenges, or advise on how to implement EU legislation. As stressed in article 1 and 2, however, the gains also depend on what the city makes of its membership and that merely being a member is no guarantee for results on the city level. Second, it illustrates that engaging in lobbying is possible for cities. It observes that not only national agencies and ministries (Egeberg et al., 2003) or public officers at the regional level (Högenauer 2014a, 2014b; Tatham, 2017) are invited into dialogue with the European Commission or the European Parliament, but that this also applies to public officers at the municipal level should they wish to get involved. Circumventing the central level seems important for the Commission also in issues related to the local government. Third, it shows that the perceived lack of autonomy is greater in non-EU cities, such as Oslo, which may make the need to lobby more urgent.

The main theoretical contribution of this thesis is the emphasis on autonomy. This thesis tells two stories of the importance of TMNs. The first is a story of unsolved problems pushing cities to participate. A similar picture is presented in article 3 (and is one of two interpretations in article 1) and shows how cities may use Eurocities to find solutions or

as a lobby channel and even circumvent the national government in EU issues. It therefore presents a strategical use of Eurocities, much in line with the rational choice institutionalist perspective (as discussed in article 1). This finds resonance in much of the existing literature on TMNs, which has tended to stress the importance of agency and coupled this to output and strategic calculation (see Bassens et. al., 2019; Gordon, 2019).

However, article 1 presents a view of participation in TMNs where the picture is more nuanced and where there is less focus on output and predefined goals. With the story of cities as international actors and the role that TMNs play in this consolidating, membership appears evident even for participants that experience little immediate output (this is illustrated through the discursive institutional perspective in article 1). Yet, a broad concept of autonomy may be able to capture this variation. Because even those participants who could not point to specific output saw a value in having access to the international community of cities. Therefore, an interpretation of the concept of autonomy that focuses on having more opportunities that may or may not be realized, captures the variation that exists. Eventually we may land on an answer to the question of why cities participate in TMNs: Because they *can*, because they *need to*, and because they sense they *should*.

7 References

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Part 2

8 Articles

8.1 Article 1

Institutionalising city networking: Discursive and rational choice institutional perspectives on membership of transnational municipal networks

Solveig Grønnestad 

University of Stavanger, Norway

Anne Bach Nielsen

University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Abstract

This article analyses participants' reasoning for their city's membership in transnational municipal networks and the extent to which this changes over time. Theoretically, we build on new-institutional theory and conclude that although parts of the members' reasoning have rational components, a discursive institutional perspective improves the understanding of cities' membership of transnational municipal networks. This perspective uncovers how important aspects of transnational municipal network participation are motivated by a different logic than that of measurable output. Cities use transnational municipal networks as sources of internal and external legitimacy, to legitimatise their position in domestic politics and their international position among other 'global' cities.

Keywords

institutional theory, local government, networks, place branding, theory, transnational municipal networks

Urban Studies

2022, Vol. 59(14) 2951–2967

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DOI: 10.1177/00420980211061450

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Corresponding author:

Solveig Grønnestad, Department of Media and Social Sciences, University of Stavanger, Kristine Bonnevis vei 22, 4021 Stavanger, Stavanger 4036, Norway.

Email: solveig.gronnestad@uis.no

摘要

本文分析了参与者对其城市在跨国市政网络中的成员资格的论证, 以及这种论证如何随时间而变化。从理论上而言, 我们建立在新制度理论的基础上并得出结论认为, 尽管成员的部分论证具有合理的成分, 但论述制度论的视角能让我们更好地理解城市为何参与跨国市政网络。这个观点揭示了, 在一些重要方面, 城市参与跨国市政网络是由与可衡量输出不同的逻辑驱动的。城市利用跨国市政网络作为内部和外部合法性的来源, 以使其在国内政治中的地位以及在其他“全球”城市中的国际地位合法化。

关键词

制度理论、地方政府、网络、地方品牌、理论、跨国市政网络

Received October 2020; accepted October 2021

Introduction

Scholars have long been interested in the particularities of city governance by studying network organisations that assemble cities across national borders, often labelled transnational municipal networks (TMNs) (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Lee and Koski, 2014). Until recently, most studies on TMNs have focussed on their functions (Andonova et al., 2009; Niederhafner, 2013), results of their activities (Bansard et al., 2017; Busch, 2015) and cooperation with other international actors (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Toly, 2008) somewhat losing sight of their members. In the words of Payre (2010: 263) '[TMNs] represent a kind of “black box” that is only rarely opened'. Our aim in this article is to open this black box by shedding a light on cities' reasoning for becoming and remaining members of TMNs. The degree of independent authority to engage in TMN activities varies greatly among city governments (Stehle et al., 2020). Even when city governments have the autonomy to set standards and develop independent initiatives, they have limited resources to spend on activities other than delivering core services. When they still choose to do this, it is interesting both for the research community as well as for practitioners to understand *how participants reason around their city's*

membership in TMNs and the extent to which their reasoning changes over time.

The article has two theoretical aims: First, we argue in favour of using new-institutional theories in TMN research instead of the often implicit functional explanations that are much used. Second, we argue that important aspects of cities engagement in TMNs cannot be explained solely by reference to rationally motivated action. A discursive institutional perspective is necessary to pinpoint how cities engage in TMNs because of the ideas and practices they represent.

New-institutional theory points to the importance of rational and normative behaviour rules to guide, decide and constrain members' behaviour and thus provides an obvious, yet remarkably absent, theoretical framework to analyse cities' TMN engagement. One exception is Huggins (2018) who directly applies new-institutional theory to understand cities' motivation for TMN participation. Based on rational and sociological new-institutional theories, he concludes that participation in TMNs is rationally motivated. While some of his findings are confirmed by our study, we argue that a fine-tuned set of institutional theories give a more nuanced picture of TMN enrolment and participation. Although parts of the members' reasoning around TMN membership have rational components, a discursive

institutional perspective is useful to display the search for a normative, process-oriented type of legitimacy.

Empirically, our contribution lies in analysing the reasoning among participants from two TMNs that 'belong' to different research traditions. Eurocities has played a prominent part in the Europeanisation literature (Hamedinger and Wolffhardt, 2010), while Resilient Cities¹ (hereafter 100RC) belongs to the sustainability tradition (Leitner et al., 2018). We argue that it is nevertheless possible to draw some general conclusions about TMN participation. Our point of departure is therefore a multi-sited case study of six cities and their membership of the regional and European TMN, Eurocities and the global TMN, 100RC. We show how participation is justified both at point of entry and over time across these networks that are both active in the same time period and how reflections about the participation are similar in six different cities.²

In the following, we will discuss how previous research has theorised TMNs and present our new-institutional framework. Then, we will discuss the methodological limitations and the implications of our theories on the members' justifications for their participation. Eventually, we will sum up with conclusions.

Theoretical framework: New-institutional perspectives

Although city networking is an old phenomenon, the number of TMNs has been growing over the past 20 years (Bansard et al., 2017; Van der Heijden, 2010). Today, TMNs are engaging in most policy areas relevant to cities, both with a regional and a global reach (Mocca, 2018). TMNs accommodate complex interconnections between local actors, global politics and transnational

networks, which are not bound to a particular space nor a particular context.

Following a host of researchers (Fünfgeld, 2015; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Niederhafner, 2013), we define a TMN as a form of organisation constituted of cities (but often also with other associated actors) that is horizontal, polycentric and with voluntary participation. As it is transnational, it also means that cities are involved directly at an international level (Busch, 2015). TMNs cooperate with each other and with other actors at international or regional levels without having to consult national governments (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009). Furthermore, some form of organised cooperation and communication is required, often in the form of a secretariat (Fünfgeld, 2015). Kern and Bulkeley (2009: 310) also add that members of TMNs directly implement the decisions that are reached. Niederhafner (2013) stresses that TMNs have low exit costs and that instruments to supervise and enforce the implementation of decisions are not always available. This last trait varies from TMN to TMN; however, recent studies show that formal and club-like steering mechanisms are implemented in some TMNs (Haupt and Coppola, 2019; Nielsen, 2019).

Beneath a magnitude of articles analysing TMNs based on their functions, a functionalist explanation is often implied. The literature suggests five overarching functions that TMNs may have: First, representing cities' interests internationally as well as more general agenda-setting (Andonova et al., 2009). Second, formulating policy or taking joint initiatives (Andonova et al., 2009; Rashidi and Patt, 2018). Third, a capacity building function, such as attracting funding, offering advice or finding partners (Andonova et al., 2009). Fourth, exchange of knowledge (Bulkeley and Newell, 2015; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009). Fifth, to help cities promote and brand themselves (Busch, 2015).

These functions of TMNs are often seen as incentives for cities to participate (Mocca, 2018), however, this does not necessarily have to be the case. Huggins (2018: 1267) stresses that although we often know what the stated purposes of TMNs are, we do not necessarily know the logic and motivation for participation on the subnational level, as these might not match. Operating only with the very tangible functions given by the TMNs themselves, it is sometimes hard to explain why some cities become and remain members. In addition to this critique, other theoretical frameworks also have limitations. Mocca (2019) argues that Multi Level Governance (MLG), focussing on the inter-level, overlooks the dynamics that take place at the municipal level (the intralevel), thus downplaying local agency. Although network governance frameworks are sometimes combined with institutional frameworks, on their own they are less apt at analysing expectations, perceived output and change (Betsill and Bulkeley, 2004).

The number of articles studying the logic of TMN participation from an institutional framework is low compared to those using MLG or Network Governance. One explanation could be that the networked organisation is typically described as being based on non-hierarchical coordination and the exchange of trust or resources (Börzel and Panke, 2007). This is what separates networks from other forms of governance, such as hierarchy, which use command and control mechanisms, or markets, which use self-coordination (Powell, 1990). In this article, we follow Ansell (2006) as well as Peters (2019) in arguing that it may well be fruitful to view many types of networks as institutions. Although this may seem contradictory because, in the words of Ansell (2006: 75) ‘the term “network” tends to imply informality and personalism, while “institutionalism” suggest formality and impersonalism’,

he argues that a network may well be considered an institution if it has a ‘[...] stable and recurrent pattern of behavioural interaction or exchange between individuals or organisations’. Consequently, TMNs can be understood as institutions (Acuto and Leffel, 2021) because of the stability of their interactions and organisational structures. A sense of common values also seems to be present, as we will return to towards the end of this article.

We seek to add to this line of research by analysing participation according to two common but different variants of new institutional theory: a rational choice variant and a discursive variant (Peters, 2019).

A rational choice institutional perspective on TMN participation

As being a member of a TMN can be a costly affair, both in terms of membership fees and in lost working hours and travel, it is reasonable to assume that member cities have clear thoughts of why they want to join and that they also evaluate their membership. Rationalist approaches embody a ‘logic of consequentialism’ (March and Olsen, 1989) where actors are treated as *goal-oriented and strategic*. This implies that actions are based on a cost/benefit analysis. Actors hold a prominent position in the rational choice institutional framework. Especially in the *actor-centred perspective* of Scharpf (1997), individual actors have a certain degree of agency and try to maximise their gains although restrained by the institutional setting.

From this perspective, TMN engagement is largely seen as an opportunity to access additional resources and to exert influence outside the strictly local municipal sphere. For cities to enter and remain in TMNs, they must therefore meet their goals, and outputs from TMN membership are weighed against

efforts and costs (Börzel and Panke, 2007). Consequently, the rational choice perspective draws on what Scharpf (1997) terms *output legitimacy*, defined as effectiveness. This may be *internal* output legitimacy (Raube and Tonra, 2018), implying measurable outputs for internal use in the member city, for instance in the shape of new tools, resources or policies. Alternatively, it may be *external* output legitimacy (Raube and Tonra, 2018), implying that cities are able to affect policies in other member cities or shape the TMN as a whole. In this perspective, preferences are formed exogenously, so that participants know what it is they want to achieve from being a member of a TMN, and these preferences are not affected by the institutional involvement (Peters, 2019). However, *rules or changed incentive structures* may lead to changes in behaviour. Seen in this perspective, we can assume that cities join a TMN because they want to realise specific aims and that participants evaluate the gains of their participation building on the ‘logic of consequentialism’. Thus, cities remain members if the membership leads to outputs and gains outweigh the costs.

A discursive institutional perspective on TMN participation

In supplement to rational choice institutionalism, we also draw on what is referred to as discursive institutionalism. This framework points to the value of collective identities (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Discursive institutionalism considers institutions as a process of shared communication patterns rather than a settled structure (Peters, 2019; Schmidt, 2015). As with rational choice institutionalism, it is assumed that cities enter TMNs with some degree of predefined preferences, however, because participants are exposed to other members, they will modify or change these preferences (Schmidt, 2015).

Ideas are the product of interaction among the members and large diversity of members may lead to large diffusion of ideas. The interactive character of this approach implies that different members may value aspects of the activity differently because of variations in commitments (Peters, 2019).

Frames affecting behaviour are created and forwarded by norm entrepreneurs or social agents (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). Norm entrepreneurs engage actors in social learning processes, which essentially persuade them to redefine their identities and values. Scholars basing their analysis on this framework are therefore concerned with how policies change norms and build identities and how policies resonate with citizen values (Koopmans, 2004; Risse, 2010). Seen from this perspective, we can assume that cities join TMNs not because of the measurable results, nor the functions that TMNs advertise, but because of the community and what they represent. In other words, the *throughput legitimacy* (Schmidt, 2013) that TMNs offer. According to this discursive institutional view, measuring success therefore depends more on a legitimate *process* than on outputs (Schmidt, 2013).

This may be *internal* throughput legitimacy (Raube and Tonra, 2018), which means that TMN participation is used to legitimise practices and policies in the member city, meeting the norms of the city’s own constituents. However, it may also be *external* throughput legitimacy (Raube and Tonra, 2018) when network proceedings and what goes on in the ‘black box’ of the TMN are judged as valuable and fair. Consequently, legitimacy can be associated with normative and moral justifications (see Greenwood et al., 2008 for an elaborate discussion). Invocations of collectively valued purposes and suppositions about the meaning of a city’s TMN activities provide a basis

for TNM membership and may protect cities' decisions to remain members despite the lack of immediate outputs.

TMN participation and the diverging features of new-institutionalism

In Table 1 below, we have summarised the main features of the two strands of new-institutional theory that we use to inform the analysis.

Our two frameworks have different views on actors within institutions. While the rational choice institutional framework stresses the role of individual action, the discursive framework focuses on both individuals and their normative context (Peters, 2019). In addition to individuals within the six cities, the cities themselves can be viewed as actors, although composite (Scharpf, 1997).

Learning in TMNs also takes different shapes in these two perspectives. The rational choice perspective harbours a

definition of learning in line with Hakelberg's (2014: 114). Here learning in TMNs is defined as an active, rational practice that occurs 'when policy-makers in a given jurisdiction react to dissatisfaction with the regulatory status quo by looking elsewhere for a more effective solution to a policy problem'. In this view, learning is 'rational lesson-drawing', with a focus on outputs and the ability to improve regulation (Hakelberg, 2014: 114). Conversely, in the discursive perspective (Lee and van de Meene, 2012: 204) learning is the result of discussions of 'the nature and interpretation of the policy problem'. Thus, in this perspective, learning is a commitment to a process, and problems are not readily defined in advance.

Huggins (2018) applies a rational choice and a sociological version of new-institutionalism to understand why British and French cities participate in European city networks and find little explanatory power in sociological drivers for engagement. Along with Huggins (2018), a few TMN researchers have touched upon

Table 1. Features of rational choice and discursive institutionalism.

	Rational choice institutionalism	Discursive institutionalism
Actors	Individuals	Individuals affected by other actors and norms
What legitimates an institution	Common problems	Common ideas
View on institutions/how to define an institution	Aggregated rules/fixed structure	Process and shared communication patterns
Internal logics/compliance	Logic of consequentialism/regulative	Cognitive compliance
Goal formation	Exogenously formed and fixed until goal is met	Exogenously formed (to various degrees) but changing due to socialisation
Goal evaluation	Output based	Process based
Motivation	Concrete aims/interests	Ideas as source of interests
Forms of legitimacy	Legitimacy connected to output (<i>output legitimacy</i>)	Legitimacy connected to practices (<i>throughput legitimacy</i>)
Learning	Seeking an effective solution to a predefined problem	Results of different interpretations of a vaguely defined problem

elements of new institutionalism: Caponio (2018) and Mocca (2018) have both studied motivations of strategic and symbolic nature for TMN participation. Caponio (2018) concludes that TMN participation mainly serves a symbolic function, while Mocca (2018) finds most support for rational drivers. Most of the research literature however points to the strategic aims, concrete outputs, and common problems as central for cities' motivation to join a TMN and to stay members. These drivers contrast with our findings of the importance of throughput legitimacy, which is better explained by the discursive institutional perspective.

Methodology

The profound changes in global politics make multiple scales and levels of analysis important for social qualitative research (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2016). In this article, we study the reasoning and processes associated with TMN engagement by examining the interconnections through a processual approach with several units of analysis comprising two networks and six different cities. The two TMNs were part of two different research projects, which is why the cities also differ on a few parameters (see Table 2). We have merged two different datasets building on semi-structured interviews, observations and documents. One dataset comprises the cities Vejle (Denmark), Chennai (India) and Porto Alegre (Brazil), which are all members of the global TMN, 100 Resilient Cities (100RC). The other comprises Copenhagen (Denmark), Oslo (Norway) and Stockholm (Sweden) who are members of the regional TMN, Eurocities. The fact that these three Eurocities-members are all Scandinavian cities and therefore quite similar does admittedly put a restriction on the number of generalisations that can be drawn.

Following Ragin and Becker (1992: 1) our cases are both 'similar enough and

separate enough to permit treating them as comparable instances of the same general phenomenon'. Our goal is to develop a thorough understanding of the rationalisation of TMN engagement at the city scale. We seek to capture a large amount of empirical complexity, to generalise, theoretically rather than statistically, from qualitative work and to challenge some of the profound assumptions around TMN participation currently existing in the scholarly work on TMNs. We do not seek to find out which of the six cities offer the best fit with each of the two new-institutional frameworks. For that, our case selection is not systematic enough. Although some differences between cities and TMNs are commented upon, our aim is not to conclude that one city is more rationally oriented than the other. Rather, by raising the level of abstraction, we treat them all as data and try to discover some general tendencies that hold across very different TMNs and very different cities.

As illustrated in Table 2, the two networks are different in terms of type, purpose, membership conditions and decision-making processes. However, both networks are contemporary and part of the TMN landscape from 2015 to 2019 when all data were collected. For all the selected cities, across the two datasets, they are similar in the sense that all the cities were members from early on in the networks' history providing us with the opportunity to look at the rationalisation of TMN participation over time. Furthermore, all cities were actively engaged in network activities indicating explicit reflections on participation. The cities do however vary when it comes to city size, geography, autonomy to make decisions and the number of TMNs they are engaged in.

Altogether, we draw on 51 interviews from different representatives from the six cities, as well as employees from the TMNs' secretariats. Informants were primarily city

Table 2. Overview of the two networks and the cities included in the dataset.

Characteristics	Eurocities	I00RC
Timespan	1989–	2013–2019
Geographical scope	Regional (European)	Global
Focus	General purpose	Specialised (resilience-building)
Main functions	Capacity-building, knowledge-sharing, interest representation	Capacity-building, knowledge-sharing
Who can be a member	Cities in the EU or EEA that are regional centres (i.e. of a certain size)	All cities (but still restricted and exclusive due to competitive application process)
Funding	Membership fee	Heavily sponsored by The Rockefeller Foundation
Membership base	200 Cities	100 Cities
Membership requirements	Few (possible to be a non-active member)	Extensive. Cities expected to document results and to spend 5% of local government budgets on resilience initiatives.
Wielding membership	International office in the city or single administrative officer depending on city size. The running contact is mostly between administrative staff and the working groups.	The Chief Resilience Officer (CRO) organisationally placed in the local management had a facilitating role promoting cooperation between municipal administrations and between the municipality and the private and civil society
Decision making	Political governance body representing member cities The Annual General Meeting (AGM) consists of mayors from all the member cities and elects 12 members to sit in the Executive Committee. This committee also appoints the director of Eurocities' secretariat in Brussels.	Governance body not driven by a political leadership and not only representing member cities. Run by a dedicated number of I00RC teams in each global region and with headquarters in New York City. A committee of mayors with 11 members, had a mandate to advise the network without formal decision-making powers.
Actor composition	Public. Only cities are full members. Private and civil society actors are engaged as partners.	Public. Only cities are full members. Private and civil society actors are engaged as partners.

staff responsible for the city's participation, however, informants also comprise policy-makers, NGOs and private sector actors who were directly involved in the city's TNM membership. We applied a snowball sampling method for locating relevant informants within the municipal administration after having the initial conversations with contact officers for the network in each city. The interviews were semi-structured and centred around the following topics: motivation to join, ambitions for continued

membership, evaluation of outputs, functions filled by the TMNs, legitimacy and cities' roles, branding and changes over time.

Analysis

The rationale for TMN enrolment and participation

When studying motivations for joining and remaining in TMNs, Huggins (2018) finds a link between documents and stated

motivations in interviews, which he sees as indicative of a rational choice institutional approach. Our findings are different in that these do not always harmonise. Joining seems best explained by the rational choice institutional perspective while remaining is best explained by the discursive institutional perspective. One reason for this might be that only arguments of a certain character (rationally oriented) are considered appropriate when arguing in favour of joining a TMN. This is not the same as claiming that these were the true or only reasons. Identification with other members and a wish to be a part of the club might also motivate enrolment, even if our data does not strongly indicate this. Nevertheless, both the documents we studied and shorter conversations about the rationale for participation tended to stress output-based (rational choice) arguments. At the surface, rational choice seemed to best capture the reasoning for joining the TMNs. However, when we asked about the internal dynamics and workings of the TMN engagements, such as the Eurocities working groups, and what participants thought about their actual role as participants in both TMNs over time, answers were less problem based and output focused.³

For both Eurocities and 100RC, and following the rational choice institutional perspective, the reasons given in strategical documents for TMN participation were tied to concrete aims for cities and the presence and influence of certain enthusiastic individuals trying to maximise the utilities of the city within their field. The three Eurocities-members, Copenhagen, Stockholm and Oslo had very similar motivations for joining or taking on positions in the network. The exchange of information on developments in the cities and the EU, as well as possibilities for interest representation towards the EU were highlighted (Copenhagen City Council Case, 2006; Copenhagen Note to the Economy

Department, 2010; Oslo City Council, 1993; Stockholm City Council, 1992).⁴

Similar rationales are found within Chennai, Porto Alegre and Vejle when interviewees were asked to reflect on the reasons for joining and being a member of 100RC. Access to funding, expertise (e.g. consultants) and information exchange were all highlighted as functions that make the TMN attractive to members. In Chennai, for example, the 100RC application was tied to risk management as the city is facing various risks from climate change, urbanisation and globalisation trends and the tools and network expertise that 100RC membership could bring seemed like a good way to develop and share experiences. In Porto Alegre, the funding potential and access to network partners were emphasised and in Vejle, the city-to-city exchange and capacity building activities were listed as the main reasons for participating in 100RC activities.

Despite these rather specific functions described above, when asked in more detail, continued participation was not always tied to issues that the participants sought solutions to. For many informants, the network was most important in that it served as a safety net and a source of potentially important information. Keeping the conversation going was often more important than direct solutions to predefined problems, which characterises a discursive mode of action. Several informants focussed on personal relations, the role the TMN played as a meeting place and the importance of knowing the culture of the working group in the context of Eurocities. They stressed the value of the process as much as, or even more than, the outputs:

The older one gets, the more one realizes that the informal advantage is quite significant [...] like talking to others on one's own level other places in Europe (Stockholm 2018, civil servant, translated by authors.).

Moreover, while Huggins (2018) argues that the sharing of best practice serves a rational function in that it is mainly about improving cities' positions (as a form of external output legitimacy), we also find that in both 100RC and Eurocities members share experiences where projects were less successful or even considered an outright fiasco (Oslo 2018, civil servant). This is hard to explain from a purely rational choice perspective.

Goal formation, evaluation and change

How goals are formed in connection to TMN participation varies in our data. Here, the two institutional frameworks pull in the same direction in that they assume some degree of predefined preferences but may also both allow change of some kind. New goals may be developed because one has reached one's initial goals (Scharpf, 1997), or because one changes one's goals without reaching them (Peters, 2019). In our cases, the goals, even if strategically formulated, were vague and had to be concretised by the individuals attending meetings and network activities. Thus, even the decision to become a member is only on a very general level based on a rational calculus, as also stressed by Mocca (2018: 212).

Although there are some overarching goals stated in the international strategies of the cities, they only mention types of activities or functions they expect TMNs to fill, such as those TMNs advertise on their websites. Therefore, at a very general level, goals are formed exogenously, but they are made concrete by the individuals attending the meetings and participating in network activities. These participants did come to the networks with expectations but were also often influenced by the dynamic within them so that they found themselves involved in projects they had not planned. One example is when a member of staff from Porto Alegre went to a 100RC workshop on the value of

cryptocurrency together with other 100RC cities and partner organisations. The outcome of this workshop was a pilot project on the integration of digital currency in the city development plan for one of the boroughs selected for the resilience strategy.

While the rational choice framework takes as given that utility maximisation is the primary motivation of individuals, we see that goals are often vaguer and when asked about utility, some informants found it hard to give examples. The quote below illustrates this conflict between the two competing logics that nevertheless exist simultaneously:

I actually like the resilience concept. But we had expected the actions coming out of the membership to be more oriented towards concrete solutions and initiatives. But when we have visits and events [within the TMN] we talk big words about resilience. And that is fair enough. Just not what we expected it to be (Vejele 2018, local business representative, translated by authors.).

The interviewee is conflicted about the outcome of the city's membership when asked to evaluate it and points to a discrepancy between the expected and actual outcome of network participation. However, the quote also shows how participants sometimes do strategically reflect around their membership and judge relative gains and costs using logic of consequences in line with the rational choice assumption. Moreover, cities that do not find TMN membership useful do change behaviour in the sense of leaving some working groups or downscaling their activities. This was the case for the Southern European cities in Eurocities after the financial crisis hit in 2008. Because of the membership fee in Eurocities, a few cities had to withdraw from the whole network when city budgets got tighter (Eurocities' secretariat 2018, civil servant). A parallel in our data is that Copenhagen used to be a very active member of Eurocities and was president of the Executive Committee from 2010 to 2012

but has downscaled its effort the past few years. The following quote sums up the general sentiment:

For a long time, we have felt that we have shared a lot of our knowledge about sustainable growth in cities. That was ok because we got to promote Copenhagen. Now, the management also demands that we learn something. But if you cooperate with a city that doesn't have any solutions, there is not much to learn. Lately, we feel that we have given more than we have received (Copenhagen municipality 2018, civil servant, translated by authors.).

Because of this, the city has prioritised putting more effort into another TMN, namely the global environment network C40 (Copenhagen 2018, civil servant). Today, only a handful of people from Copenhagen attend one or two Eurocities-meetings a year.

In the context of 100RC, the network only sponsors staff and activities for a maximum of 3 years. Afterwards, the programme is supposed to sustain itself in each of the cities.

In all three 100RC cities activities were downscaled to suit the public purse in each of the cities, and to meet the level of ambition in changing governments. In Porto Alegre, for example, projects and goals in the resilience strategy were adjusted to the wishes of a new local government, and the possibility of attracting external investments to fund the projects.

With the number of TMNs available, cities are in a good position to choose between different providers of functions (see also Bansard et al., 2017; Mocca, 2018). Despite this, none of the six cities in our study report having considered leaving their TMNs. All six cities have remained members when governments have shifted. The cities have adjusted their behaviour within the network rather than quit, as illustrated by the following quote:

It goes a bit up and down for most cities. For instance, Stockholm has not been so active in the mobility group for a few years, but then suddenly they are there and do things (Copenhagen 2018, civil servant, translated by authors.).

To this observation, a rational choice theorist would add, as Scharpf does, that even a rational choice institutional perspective allows membership despite few returns over a short time or in some areas for the purpose of reaching more overarching goals, described as the '[...] ability to forgo present satisfaction for future gains' (Scharpf, 1997: 58). Thus, remaining is rational and necessary for the cases where they suddenly need TMNs to lobby on their behalf or push through their interests (see Van Bever et al., 2011). We have examples of such reflections in our data (Stockholm 2018, civil servant), however, this is not the main message. While TMN participation is dynamic for all the cities in this study, we clearly see that there is a core of general commitment that is hard to explain only with reference to strategic long-term thinking. Copenhagen has not been interested in withdrawing its membership in Eurocities altogether. Having a foot in the door still seems valuable.

While cities do not remain in TMNs they have no use for, the idea of what is useful is also shaped by their involvement in TMNs. For these informants, the network was not primarily about getting new ideas or representing their interests, but just as much about legitimating policies and ideas within the city administration, a form of internal throughput legitimacy. Therefore, some informants even saw it as valuable or felt obliged to attend all meetings in cases where they did not have much to contribute or expected much in return. Cities have different challenges, and therefore sometimes have little to learn and little that can be directly implemented in their administration, as the following quote indicates:

When one represents Oslo, Helsinki or Stockholm, places with strong welfare societies, where most services are well structured, provided by the state and tax financed, it may be hard to get excited about innovative ideas that other cities have been forced to come up with because there is no welfare system in their state. So, we do not always have the same challenges (Stockholm 2018, civil servant, translated by authors.).

Yet, participants seem to hold on to the idea that it is demanded that they learn how things are done elsewhere. This same informant stressed how she nevertheless valued meetings to see how other cities solved their own, specific problems.

Forms of legitimacy in TMN participation

Although the rational choice perspective sees concrete output as the foundation for legitimacy in an organisation, in both Eurocities and 100RC, several city staff had no clear expectations as to what they would achieve as a TMN member, other than gaining knowledge and seeing how 'things are done elsewhere' (Copenhagen 2018, civil servant). Despite this, both TMNs were highly regarded by almost all participants. Remaining (irrespective of goal attainment) could be a non-decision for withdrawal (Mocca, 2018), a FOMO-argument (Huggins, 2018) or organised learning (Lee and van de Meene, 2012). Learning and a fear of missing out on potentially important information, coupled with a general fear of not being on the same platforms as other important cities, were repeatedly mentioned by our informants. In addition, many also have a fear of appearing self-righteous. It is not necessarily easy to distinguish between a wish to learn and a fear of missing important information. In the interviews, they tended to overlap, as explained by the following:

Hearing about what other cities have done is important. We are not necessarily the best at everything here. We can always do our work better and propose new solutions. We would just encapsulate ourselves if we did not participate internationally. You cannot get too much cooperation in my field (Copenhagen 2018, civil servant, translated by authors.).

Whether these are the same or different phenomena depends on how learning is defined. As discussed in the theory section, it may be of a rational type or a more cognitive type. We did see learning of the rational, output-oriented type in our data. One example of this was Oslo's engagement in the work on age-friendly cities, where they sought solutions on how to help the elderly to use and travel around in the city. However, most of the learning was of a cognitive/discursive type where issues need to be defined in the TMNs to be grasped and solved (see also Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Peters, 2019). Thus, the TMNs also provide both the language and tools to deal with issues cities face. Cognitive/discursive learning is in our data connected to throughput legitimacy (see also Schmidt, 2013) in the sense that adding legitimacy to various practices seem to be at least as important as having common problems.

In addition to participation as organised learning, the value of the association with other important cities contributes to explain continued membership. This is an example of external throughput legitimacy where interaction with other cities is seen as valuable in itself.

A Eurocities informant said that the city agenda is very 'in' at the moment and that there is a hype around cities that they should 'do something' (Copenhagen 2018, civil servant). This, 'something' is rather unspecified. Membership seems important because the TMNs are often not open to any city,

giving the impression of belonging to an exclusive ‘club’ and a position of power. Cities care about international attention since it boosts local perceptions of internal throughput legitimacy (see Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). This type of legitimation is illustrated in this quote from a Eurocities working group member:

To know how other cities work can help us show the politicians how they work like or different from other cities. And then the heads of office might think ‘aha’, that is exciting. Because you know, it brings status when you can show that what you suggest is not something that you or a single administrative officer in the city have thought up, but that they do it in other cities as well. (Stockholm 2018, civil servant, translated by authors.).

Cities do not choose solutions against their better judgement only because they are considered appropriate, nor do norms stop cities from leaving TMNs. Yet, norms shape *how* members engage and make leaving the TMN appear unattractive. In the case of 100RC there generally seems to be a normative component in the cities’ membership. Holding on to ideas of building city resilience is important both within and outside city administrations when the political and economic surroundings are constantly changing. 100RC provides a legitimate base for discussing city resilience when political realities change. This has been the case in Vejle as well as in Porto Alegre where the political steering has changed during 100RC membership. In Porto Alegre, the city government changed completely from a far-left-wing government to a far-right-wing government in late 2014. However, due to the reputation of the Rockefeller Foundation as well as the ‘association’ with big and prestigious cities such as New York City, the new administration decided to stay in 100RC and continue with the resilience programme.

According to the discursive institutional perspective, norm entrepreneurs play an important role in shaping TMN membership. One example of such were from the Eurocities working group on Waste. In this group there was a selection bias, as member cities tended to have a pro-environment attitude. This might not be unexpected in other environment working groups, but waste management does affect most cities and is heavily regulated by EU law. Cities irrespective of their stance on environmental issues would therefore be expected to have an interest. However, the cities that were frontrunners in waste management, would often dominate, and tended to resemble an environmental lobby organisation in the words of one informant (Civil servant, Oslo municipality, 12.07.2018). Thus, there were very clear role models, which could make it difficult to put forward diverging interests.

The fact that some cities have a position that far exceeds what could be expected considering their economic role or population size, could also be seen as a form of norm entrepreneurship (Toly, 2008). In the TMNs, normative ‘currency’ is sometimes redistributed. These cities do not force their experiences on others, but they gain a reputation and have the ears of much bigger cities. They thus get an audience that they would not otherwise have, as illustrated by these informants:

It doesn’t always depend on the size of the city. Guimaraes in Portugal has for instance been very active on biodiversity and green areas. So, it shows that with the right policies and priorities, even a small city can make itself heard among the big cities such as Frankfurt or London (Stockholm 2018, civil servant, translated by authors.).

And further:

Athens, Copenhagen, Barcelona are all capital cities, and they all have branding. But cities

like Vejle or Thessaloniki are the second-tier cities, the cities which actually characterize most cities across the world, or at least here in Europe. For them, 100RC is a window to the world (100RC regional office, 2018, programme manager, translated by authors.).

Being present at the international stage and being visible among other important cities creates both external and internal legitimacy. Although some informants stressed that legitimacy is a currency that can be rationally traded to reach concrete goals (as a form of external output legitimacy), we also see that it is valued in itself. As Acuto (2010: 441) points out, cities connect the local sphere with the international and TMNs provide a space for cities to become international actors. Most people have heard the story of how global issues should be solved locally and that cities have a role to play here: a narrative which is also mirrored in the Paris Agreement from 2015 and in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015: Article 7, 2020). This was also a recurrent message in our material. Being a member of a TMN could therefore also be viewed upon as being a part of a 'trend' in the international society.

Conclusion and final remarks

In this article, we have analysed six cities' justifications for joining and remaining in the TMNs Eurocities and 100RC. Seen against the assumptions drawn from two new-institutional perspectives, joining TMNs seems best explained by the rational choice institutional perspective, while remaining is both explained by the rational and discursive institutional perspectives. The formal explanation for why the cities join TMNs is different from the one that emerges over time. A similar conclusion is reached by Fourot et al. (2021) in a recent study of urban transnational activism in French

cities. In line with our observations of the six cities' engagement in Eurocities and 100RC, they argue that TMN memberships in French cities are increasingly characterised by different forms of 'passivism' over time. While the concept of passivism is different from concepts found in discursive institutionalism they both help us uncover cities' reasoning for joining and remaining in network activities over time. Decisions based on throughput legitimacy are, however, not to be misunderstood as disengagement or disappointment. Our data show that for some participants, satisfaction with the process can count just as much as the measurable outputs in valuing TMN membership. TMN membership is a way for cities to foster specific identities and to legitimatise their position in an increasingly urban world as also pointed out early on by Griffiths (1995). No matter how dynamic the attachment to TMNs might seem, there is nevertheless a general commitment to the idea of cities as norm entrepreneurs and the importance of keeping the conversation going.

Membership over time does not automatically mirror the functions advertised by the TMNs (e.g. lead to visible tangible outputs or fulfil the expectations that participants had upon entry). Nor does it automatically lead to a membership justified exclusively by discursive notions of legitimacy. Instead, we argue that we should pay attention to the diverse, co-existing and sometimes competing institutional logics that evolve.

These findings are likely to have implications for the study of membership of other TMNs. First, it affects the type of actions we can expect from cities as members of TMNs. Second, it changes what type of outputs cities can expect to achieve. Our article indicates that students of TMNs must consider the discursive aspects when judging their value or studying results. Further research is needed to fully grasp the consequences of how different logics legitimises

decisions and actions connected to TMN membership. This includes research into the explanative power of the institutional framework between cities in the same TMN and between different TMNs. Further research is also needed on the dynamic processes of joining, remaining in and leaving a TMN and what condition these actions have.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful for the comments from three anonymous reviewers and the editors of this journal. We are also thankful for the effort of Arild Aurvåg Farsund in reading and commenting upon this work.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Solveig Grønnestad  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5196-5740>

Notes

1. In 2019 the network changed its name to Global Resilience Cities as a part of an internal restructuring, however our data is from 2015 to 2019, thus preceding this change.
2. We understand a 'city' as the local political-administrative entity with authority to plan, develop and manage an urban area. In new-institutional theory, organisational entities, such as city administrations or TMNs may have agency as collective or composite actors (Scharpf, 1997). In our case, this implies coordination between individual TMN members and their colleagues, but also between the administrative and political levels within each city.
3. Even though we treat cities as composite actors, we do not see them as fully holistic actors. There is often an official version that was the foundation for the political decision

to join the TMN, which differ in style and content from the reasoning of individual administrative officers. However, the sum of individuals reasoning is relevant when politicians decide to remain or leave.

4. In the Case of Copenhagen, there are no documents available online prior to 1998 and the administration were unable to provide documents from the accession year. We therefore base our data on a recommendation from 2006 to the city council to chair the Eurocities mobility forum as well as an orientation concerning Copenhagen's election as president for the whole network in 2010.

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8.2 Article 2

Moving Beyond Networks: Transnational Municipal Networks as Meta-Organizations

Solveig Grønnestad, Department of Media and Social Sciences,
University of Stavanger.

This article is not included in Brage due to being in submission.

8.3 Article 3

Scandinavian Cities as EU Lobbyists: The Use of Local, National and Transnational Lobby Channels

Solveig Grønnestad, Department of Media and Social Sciences,
University of Stavanger.

This article is not included in Brage due to being in submission.

9 Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1: Informants

Number	Position	Organization	Date
1	Public officer	Municipality of Oslo	19.11.2018
2	Public officer	Municipality of Oslo	12.07.2018
3	Former public officer	Municipality of Oslo	06.06.2018
4	Public officer	Municipality of Oslo	17.04.2018 and 31.10.2019
5	Public officer	Municipality of Oslo	05.06.2018
6	Public officers (two informants in same interview)	Municipality of Oslo	27.09.2018
7	Public officer	Municipality of Oslo	25.10.2018
8	Public officer	Municipality of Oslo	26.10.2018
9	Public officer	Municipality of Stockholm	11.05.2018 and 29.10.2019
10	Public officer	Municipality of Stockholm	10.01.2019
11	Public officer	Municipality of Stockholm	25.09.2018
12	Public officer	Municipality of Stockholm	30.05.2018
13	Public officer	Municipality of Stockholm	05.11.2018
14	Public officer	Municipality of Copenhagen	20.03.2018 (and multiple e-mails)
15	Public officer	Municipality of Copenhagen	17.09.2018
16	Public officer	Municipality of Copenhagen	14.05.2018

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17	Public officers (two informants in same interview)	Local government association, LGDK (Local Government Denmark) Denmark	09.05.2018
18	Policy adviser	Eurocities Brussels office	04.05.2018 (and multiple e-mails)
19	Policy adviser	Eurocities Brussels office	04.09.2018
20	Public officer	Local government association, KS (Kommunenes interesseorganisasjon) Norway	12.12.2016
21	Public officer (two informants in same interview)	Local government association, KS (Kommunenes interesseorganisasjon) Norway	15.09.2016
	Background interviews:		
22	Former CEO	Avfall Norge	05.06.2019
23	Administrative staff	Working at BIR and attending Eurocities meetings for Bergen Municipality	20.05.2019
24	Public officer	KS Bedrift	06.06.2019
25	Public officer	Greater Copenhagen EU Office	28.03.2018
26	Public officer	Stavanger Region European Office	27.09.2016
27	Public officer	South Norway European Office	22.11.2016
28	Public officer	Mid-Norway European Office	06.12.2016

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29	Public officer	West Norway European Office	27.04.2017
30	Public officer	Oslo Region European Office	27.04.2017
31	Public officer	North Norway European Office	28.04.2017

9.2 Appendix 2: Acronyms and abbreviations

AGM: Annual General Meeting (of Eurocities)

CEDAW: Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Commission: European Commission

Ex. Com: Executive Committee (Of Eurocities)

EEA: European Economic Area

EFTA: European Free Trade Association

EP: The European Parliament

EU: European Union

ICLEI: Local Governments for Sustainability

IO: International Organization

KS: Local government Association Norway

LGDK: Local Government Denmark

MLG: Multilevel governance

MO: Meta-organization

NAO: Network Administrative Organization

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

REGLEG: Regions with Legislative Powers

SALAR: Swedish Local Government Association

TMCN: Transnational Municipal Climate Network

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TMN: Transnational Municipal Network

UCLG: United Cities and Local Governments

UN: United Nations

WTO: World Trade Organization

9.3 Appendix 3: Information letter

Request to participate in the project: Cities as international actors.

The purpose of the study:

I am a PhD. Fellow from the University of Stavanger, Norway. The purpose of this study is to examine cities' international activities, interest representation and membership in international networks. I am interested in studying whether and how the Scandinavian cities work to influence decisions in the EU in areas of importance to them, as well as other aspects of their international engagements. This topic has not been much studied, which means that you can provide valuable information. Lobbying from a local perspective is especially a field where there is need for more research. In this study, I am especially interested in your city's Eurocities membership, but also network participation and lobbying in general and through other channels.

I would like to ask you to participate in an interview about your work and how this relates to the EU or other international issues of importance to you.

How the information will be treated:

All personal information will be treated confidentially. I will only use the information for the purposes that I have explained to you above. Only my supervisor and I will have access to the data (name and place of work). If you do not want to be identifiable in the final publication, I will respect your wish. The project will according to the plan end in January 2021. The data that have been gathered will be anonymized and stored for possible follow-up studies.

Your rights:

If you are identifiable in the data, you have the right to:

- See which personal data that we have on you
- Correct the personal data that we have
- Claim that the personal data on you be deleted
- Ask for a copy of your personal data
- Send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority if you are dissatisfied with how your personal data have been treated

Voluntary participation:

Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason. Should you withdraw, all personal data on you will be deleted.

On commission by the University of Stavanger, The Norwegian Centre for Research Data has judged that this project is in accordance with rules on personal information protection.

If you have any questions, please contact Solveig Grønnestad, tel. 41674418.

9.4 Appendix 4: NSD approval

Solveig Grønnestad
Institutt for medie-, kultur- og samfunnsfag Universitetet i Stavanger
Postboks 8002 Postterminalen
4068 STAVANGER

Vår dato: 16.09.2016

Vår ref: 49580 / 3 / BGH

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 24.08.2016. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

<i>49580</i>	<i>Norske kommuners interessehevdning i EU</i>
<i>Behandlingsansvarlig</i>	<i>Universitetet i Stavanger, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
<i>Daglig ansvarlig</i>	<i>Solveig Grønnestad</i>

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 30.03.2020, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Kjersti Haugstvedt

Belinda Gloppen Helle

Kontaktperson: Belinda Gloppen Helle tlf: 55 58 28 74

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.



INFORMASJON OG SAMTYKKE

Utvalget informeres skriftlig og muntlig om prosjektet og samtykker til deltakelse. Informasjonsskrivet er godt utformet, men det må tilføyes at datamaterialet skal lagres frem til 2026 for mulige oppfølgingsstudier og at datamaterialet vil anonymiseres/slettes etter 30.06.2026.

DATAINNSAMLING

I følge meldeskjemaet består datainnsamlingen av intervjuer og observasjon. Dersom det blir aktuelt å registrere personopplysninger under observasjon, forutsetter personvernombudet at de som registreres får informasjon og samtykker til deltagelse.

INFORMASJONSSIKKERHET

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at du/dere behandler alle data i tråd med Universitetet i Stavanger sine retningslinjer for datasikkerhet. Vi legger til grunn at bruk av privat PC er i tråd med disse.

PUBLISERING

Det oppgis at personopplysninger skal publiseres. Personvernombudet legger til grunn at det foreligger eksplisitt samtykke fra den enkelte til dette. Vi anbefaler at deltakerne gis anledning til å lese igjennom egne opplysninger og godkjenne disse før publisering.

PROSJEKTSLUTT OG ANONYMISERING

Forventet prosjektslutt er 30.03.2020. Ifølge prosjektmeldingen skal innsamlede opplysninger da oppbevares med personidentifikasjon 30.06.2026 for oppfølgingsstudier/videre forskning. Innen denne datoen skal lydopptak slettes og datamaterialet anonymiseres.

Vi minner om at ny bruk av datamaterialet krevet ny melding til personvernombudet.

9.5 Appendix 5: Interview guide

This interview guide is for a varied group of informants: Officers from Eurocities' secretariat, public officers from the three cities, informants from the local government associations, and other relevant stakeholders.

Interview guide for Eurocities' secretariat

Before we start, do you have any questions?

- First, can you tell me a bit about your job in Eurocities' secretariat?
- How long have you been working in Eurocities?
- Do you administer the work of Eurocities' Working Groups (WGs)?
- Are all the WGs equally active?
- Do the WGs work in the same manner or are there significant variations between them?
- Is it possible to spot any differences between Oslo, Stockholm and Copenhagen's engagement in Eurocities? And in the Working Groups?
- What would you say are the most important functions that Eurocities has (for its member cities)?
- Do you know whether any enquiries about the members' opinions of Eurocities have been made?
- As member of Eurocities, does one pay the same fee regardless of the number of subnetworks (forums) one participates in?
- Has any city ever quit Eurocities? Do you have a record of this?
- Do you have an overview of when the different member cities joined Eurocities?

I want to ask you some questions about lobbying

- How much of your work would you say is related to lobbying?
- Is it easy to get meetings with Commission officers or MEPs?
- Do you think the way of lobbying from a network such as Eurocities is different from or similar to how business interests or NGOs lobby? Do you use the same strategies? Is it easier or more difficult to get access?
- Do you have any form of cooperation with NGOs or other organisations?

I now want to ask some questions about the Working Group:

- Would you say that the work done by the Working Groups has been successful? Is it possible to measure success at all?
- Can you describe the lobbying process?
- Has Eurocities been working with other stakeholders?

Interview guide public officers in the municipalities (not all questions apply to all):

Before we start, do you have any questions?

- First can you describe your position and what it is you work with?
- Is much of your work EU related?
- Do you attend meetings in Eurocities? If yes; How often? And in which thematic subgroup? (forums or working groups?)
- Is it correct that you have been chairing a working group in Eurocities?- (not relevant for all informants)
- Did Eurocities turn out as you expected?
- How would you describe the way your city works in Eurocities? (is based on strategical long-term planning or is it more ad hoc?)
- Who sets the goals?
- Do you think that your city gains a lot from its membership in Eurocities?
- Do you have any idea how many people work with Eurocities in your department?
- Have you spotted any differences between the member cities in level of engagement or manner of working?
- Are you ever in direct contact with the Commission or the EP?
 - (if yes; which types of cases, and how do you work in these cases?)
- Does your city try to influence the EU trough lobbying?
 - If yes; How do you do that?
- Let's say Copenhagen/Oslo/Stockholm wants to influence new EU legislation, do you think you will be most successful working

directly through a network like Eurocities, or going through the national government (or other channels)?

- Has your city used the membership in Eurocities (or other channels) to pursue a goal that go against the opinion of the central government?

Interview guide heads of the international office in the cities (not all questions apply to all):

Before we start, do you have any questions?

- First can you describe your position and what it is you work with?
- How long have you had this position?
- Can you describe how EU issues are organized in your city?
- Have you been working like this for a long time?
- Could you mention some EU cases that have been of particular interest to your city lately?
- Does your city engage in EU lobbying?
- How long have your city been a member of Eurocities?
- How would you characterize the way your city works in Eurocities? (is based on strategical planning or is it more ad hoc?)
- What does your city expect to gain from the membership in Eurocities?
- Do you think that your city gains a lot from this membership?
- Does your city have any form of regular evaluation of the membership?
- How is it determined which working groups your city attends and not?

- How is the membership in Eurocities organized? Are there for instance a regular number of meetings between participant from your city? If so, how often and how are the meetings conducted?

Since you have worked in the Eurocities secretariat I would, also like to ask you a little bit about how decisions are made (not relevant for all).

- Do you often have to involve politicians in decisions?
- Are there many decisions taken by the network? In forums or are most of it done in the WG by administrative officers?
- Do you try to influence the EU? / Do you use Eurocities for lobbying purposes?
- If yes; How do you do that?
- How many people work with Eurocities in your city?
- In your opinion, are there differences between the member cities in level of engagement (in Eurocities)?
- Your city is also member of the network C40. Which network is most important?

I also have some questions about lobbying:

- Besides the work in Eurocities, are your city ever in direct contact with the Commission or the EP? (if yes; which types of cases, and how do you work in these cases?)
- Do you meet regularly with national authorities to discuss EU issues?
- Let's say your city wants to influence new EU legislation, do you think it will be most successful working directly through a

network like Eurocities, or going through the national government?

- Has your city used the membership in Eurocities to pursue a goal went go against the opinion of the central government?

Interview guide local government associations:

Before we start, do you have any questions?

- First can you describe your position and what it is you work with?
- How long have you had this position?
- Can you describe how EU issues are handled in your association?
- Have you been working like this for a long time?
- Could you mention some EU cases that have been of particular interest to you lately?

I also have some questions about lobbying:

- Are you ever in direct contact with the Commission or the EP? (if yes; which types of cases, and how do you work in these cases?)
- Do you meet regularly with national authorities to discuss EU issues?
- Let's say your association wants to influence new EU legislation, how do you proceed?
- Have you pursued a goal went go against the opinion of the central government?