THE POLITICS OF TRANSNATIONAL MUNICIPALISM FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION.

AN URBAN ANALYSIS

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by

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Abstract

In the last thirty years, European local authorities have played a pro-active role in the realm of sustainable development, taking part in several European initiatives and projects and setting up municipal networks. The latter, which connect cities scattered across Member States, may focus on specific environmental issues, such as sustainable mobility or energy, or include sustainable development in a wide range of policy priorities. These socio-ecological urban networks (hereafter SEUNs) have attracted growing academic attention. However, the bulk of the literature is located within Geography and Urban Studies, and it is more focused on the structure of the networks, the process of decision-making, and the policy outcomes than on the drivers of cities' membership of SEUNs. Within this debate, the contribution of Political Science has been scant, and the political and economic drivers of cities' engagement in European socio-ecological municipal networks have been overlooked. Understanding why local governments decide to participate in these networks is important for two main reasons: firstly, it contributes to shedding light on how contemporary local political elites govern cities within the European context; secondly, it allows us to understand why European cooperation for sustainable development has become a dominant discourse in urban politics.

Conversely, this thesis adopts an urban approach to isolate the urban-level economic, political and institutional factors that impact on local authorities' participations in European socio-ecological urban networks. Using a nested research design that combines a quantitative and qualitative analysis, the thesis seeks to shed light on the factors and motivations underlying the choice of cities to participate in European networks for sustainability. The results show that cities' European commitment to sustainable development is part of a broad strategy to achieve urban regeneration. Therefore, participation in SEUNs is not necessarily motivated by environmental preoccupations but is functional to achieve economic and political objectives.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research background

In the last thirty years European local authorities have pro-actively participated within the European Union through projects and cooperative inter-urban organisations. The intensification of relations among European cities was encouraged by several factors, in particular the increased autonomy given to local governments by the devolution of powers from the central state, the cutbacks on public expenditures and the EU emphasis on the role of cities to foster a more democratic involvement of citizens. Thanks to these processes, local governments have acquired more autonomy and political influence, therefore increasing their independence from upper-level authorities.

Before the first of half of the 1980s, cities did not have a prominent role in the European Community (Le Galès, 2002: 76). In the following decades, they were incorporated within the EC/EU, as signalled by the establishment of funding and projects for local authorities, the development of consultative practices between local governments and European institutions and the creation of urban organisations and networks (Le Galès, 2002). The latter have multiplied over the years and have become a means for cities to be part of the EU system. These networks - known in the literature as "Transnational Municipal Networks" (hereafter TMNs), "intergovernmental" or "inter-urban" networks (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009: 313) - group together cities scattered across member states. These organisations have peculiar characteristics: they connect the local and supranational levels; they do not have a hierarchical structure with leading members, but are "horizontal and polycentric"; their membership is not-binding, so that members can withdraw any time and participants are directly involved in both decision-making and decision implementation (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009: 309-310).

Underpinning TMNs is the idea of "transnational municipalism", which represents "the co-ordination of local services and civic identity, and the sharing of best practices, across national boundaries" (Ewen, 2008: 103). Transnational municipalism as a political practice overcomes the traditional dichotomy of local/global, in that it implies the inter-connection of the sub- and supra-national level, while both dimensions keep their distinctive characteristics. In so doing, cities located in different nation-states generate a transnational space, where they mutually exchange practices and experiences and undertake collective action without (or nearly without) the interference of the central state.

City networks are not a recent phenomenon. Inter-urban organisations were established more than a century ago (Ewen, 2008), and some examples of city networks date back even further (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009)[1]. City networks have been set up in various policy sectors, such as cohesion policies, childhood policies and transport. However, in the last two decades, especially in the European context, such organisations have proliferated in the realm of sustainable development, as they are deemed a crucial instrument to achieve a "socio-ecological transition" (Labaeye and Sauer, 2013: 1). These socio-ecological urban networks (thereafter SEUNs) are a sub-type of TMNs and focus either on specific environmental issues, such as sustainable mobility or energy (e.g. Climate Alliance, EnergyCities, ICLEI

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[1] It is argued that the one of the first examples of transnational city network was the Hanseatic League (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009: 309).

and Polis Network), or cover climate change and sustainability as part of a wider portfolio of activities (such as Eurocities, Metrex and Union of Baltic Cities).

While the number of studies on TMNs and in particular on city networks for sustainable development has burgeoned, some aspects of the engagement of cities in these organisations have been under-researched. The overcoming of the national authorities to implement a concerted action among local governments to tackle sustainability issues constitutes a political phenomenon that raises questions about the reasons for European inter-urban cooperation. Furthermore, the marked interest of local governments in TMNs for sustainable development calls for an in-depth exploration of the reasons why issues related to sustainable development are so important for cities and why they require the concerted action of cities at supra-national level.

1.2   Research rationale

Socio-ecological urban networks have attracted growing academic attention. However, the current research on transnational municipalism for sustainable development presents some limitations, in terms of the theoretical approaches and the methods employed to analyse the phenomenon. From a theoretical viewpoint, a first limitation is that in most of the accounts on TMNs the urban level has received little attention. Most authors conceive city networking as the result of globalisation and in the case of European cities, as the outcome of Europeanisation processes. In particular, the majority of the dedicated literature conceives SEUNs as a by-product of the multi-level governance within the EU (see for example Betsill and Bulkeley, 2006; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2005; Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009). From this viewpoint, it is claimed that the establishment of TMNs has been favoured by the multi-tier system mode of governance developed within the EU, which is characterised by the fractioning of competencies among different levels of governments and the involvement in the decision-making of non-public actors. By way of contrast, approaches focusing on cities as analytical units have been criticised by some scholars studying TMNs (see for example Bulkeley and Betsill, 2003; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2005) as being incapable of fully understanding the scope of this phenomenon, opting instead for a multi-level governance approach, which is considered to be a comprehensive framework to explore phenomena involving more than one governing level. Despite supra-national phenomena, such as European integration or globalisation, have facilitated the development of inter-city relations, the choice to join an international organisation still depends upon political, institutional and economic factors at urban level.

Secondly, much of the literature on TMNs belongs to the disciplinary domain of Geography, whilst Political Science appears to have been fairly silent on this topic. However, the creation of city networks at EU level is a highly political issue. The involvement of local governments at supra-national level opens up questions about the extent of cities' powers and on possibilities of new configurations of power. Additionally, the narrative of sustainable development displays the dominant political discourse centred on the rhetoric of making capitalism more human. Sustainable development, as it will be widely discussed later in this thesis, by encompassing the ideas of well-being, environmental protection, poverty eradication and equal opportunity, aims at coupling social and environmental justice with the logic of consumerism.

The marginalisation of transnational municipalism and TMNs can be explained by the relatively limited interest in cities within the discipline if compared to the wealth of studies on nation-states and international organisations. The explanations of "the marginalization of urban research" span

> "from unhealthy attachments to the project of saving the cities and the metropolitan reform movement, which has led to excessive rhetoric when providing analysis on the urban condition [...], to a lack of intellectual tolerance and the entanglement of advocacy and scholarship [...], to the determinism that characterizes the views of elite theorists, modern or neo-Marxism, and the pure rational decision-making approach [...], to the lack of conceptual clarity [...] and stagnation [...] of the subfield's preeminent theoretical development." (Sapotichne *et al.*, 2007: 79).

The relatively scarce attention to the urban dimension in Political Science has been due to the supremacy of the nation-state as a dominant object of study. Political Science has been concerned with the analysis of the "grand" national politics, and has mainly conceptualised cities as passive sub-national administrative units. By way of contrast, other disciplines, such as Geography or Anthropology, have widely focused on cities, localities and communities as analytical subjects. In this respect, Sapotichne *et al.* (2007: 78) depict urban politics as "a black hole", where "no ideas escape the event horizon surrounding the study of urban politics" and those "ideas developed outside rarely penetrate the subfield's borders."

Despite a general state-centred tendency in Political Science, there has been an increasing academic interest in cities, sparked by political and economic phenomena occurring at national and supra-national level (which will be discussed in the ensuing chapters). More importantly, a growing body of literature has begun to consider local governments as governing units distinctive from nation-states, endowed of their own decision-making capacity, and embedded in a specific political, socio-economic and cultural context. This characterisation of cities is evident in the terminology employed by several contributions to describe the city. Terms such as actors, players, policy-makers - instead of policy-takers (see for instance, Kern, 2009; Le Galès and Harding, 1998; Le Galès, 2002; Schultze, 2003), as implicitly assumed by much of state-centred theories - are just but few examples of epitomes used to define cities.

Thirdly, research on sustainability and climate change networks tends to emphasise the peculiarity of environmental policy. In particular, a relatively high number of studies on TMNs in the field of climate change tend to interpret the involvement of cities within the theoretical framework of global environmental governance. These accounts tend to be too "environmental", with the risk of overlooking the political aspects of transnational municipalism. Although various contributions on the topic emphasise the distinctiveness of environmental policy, this thesis draws on the assumption that environmental policy does not require a different set of political concepts. The policy-making process in the environmental realm entails the same stages as other public policy sectors (i.e. "agenda setting", "policy formulation", "implementation" and "evaluation"). Similarly, environmental policy-making involves a variety of state and non-state actors as other policy sectors do: as environmental associations and pressure groups have a voice in the environmental policy process, so trade unions and employers associations intervene in employment policy, or advocacy groups seek to make pressure on health policy. What distinguish environmental policy from other sectors are the policy instruments (e.g. green taxes, fiscal incentives etc.) as well as the politics and principles guiding environmental policy.

Furthermore, from an empirical viewpoint, research on local governments' involvement in SEUNs and TMNs is mainly qualitative, where case studies are widely used (Lee, 2013: 108). By way of contrast, there is little large scale research exploring the engagement of local governments in supra-national organisations and programmes. The relationship between cities and their involvement in sustainability initiatives has been explored by a small number of quantitative studies (see Portney and Berry, 2010; Krause, 2011; Castán Broto and Bulkeley, 2013). With regard to the specific topic of TMNs, only a few studies rely on quantitative methods (see Zahran *et al.*, 2008[2]; Sharp *et al.*[3], 2011; Lee, 2013[4]). Additionally, as Lee (2013) observes, most of large-scale studies only focus on US cities (see for instance, Feiock *et al.*, 2009; Krause, 2011; Portney and Berry, 2010; Sharp *et al.*, 2011; Zahran *et al.*, 2008). Other authors have explored global cities worldwide (see Broto and Bulkeley, 2013; Lee; 2013), while European cities have received little attention. Existing quantitative research does not provide an in-depth analysis of the impact of the urban dimension on cities' involvement in international initiatives. Moreover, there is a lack of studies combining qualitative and quantitative analysis of transnational municipalism. As it will be extensively discussed in chapter 4, this approach allows us to exploit the advantages of both methods to provide a thorough analysis of the drivers and motivations of transnational municipalism.

In light of the limitations discussed above, an *urban approach* to transnational municipalism in Europe seems to have greater explanatory value than analytical frameworks encompassing multiple governing levels, in that it allows a focus on the dynamics in place at urban level that may influence cities' participation in SEUNs. This approach focuses on the political, institutional and economic factors underpinning transnational municipalism to shed light on the reasons behind the choice of cities joining urban networks for sustainability. An analysis of transnational municipalism centred on cities does not dismiss the influence of international events on localities, since the local level has been affected by globalization and European integration. However, to understand why cities engage at supra-national level, the focus of the analysis has to shift from the organisation (i.e. the network) to the deciding actors (i.e. local governments). This implies that, rather than relying on international relations or multi-level governance theories, this thesis will draw on urban political literature to provide a thorough analysis of the urban political and economic background of European cities. From this perspective, rather than being conceived as the outcome of multi-tier system developed in the EU, urban networking is understood as an urban policy strategy to acquire competitiveness and undertake post-industrial restructuring operations.

Furthermore, to understand the motivations for cities to participate in European urban networks, it is necessary to distinguish the *network dimension*, which relates to the organisational structure of which cities are members, and the *thematic dimension* of the network, i.e. the relevance that the specific mission of a network plays as an incentive for cities to become engaged, which in this thesis is sustainable development. While the first dimension refers to both TMNs and SEUNs, the latter dimension pertains exclusively to SEUNs. This separation allows us to understand whether sustainable development as a mission of some networks provides an additional spur for cities to participate in these specific organisations. As will be discussed in the ensuing chapters, the sustainability dimension is seen as an

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[2] The study focuses on the Cities for Climate Protection (CCP).
[3] The network examines is the International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI).
[4] This study takes into account the C40 Climate Leadership Group (C40) and CCP.

added value of SEUNs. This means that from a theoretical viewpoint, cities' engagement in SEUNs is not contextualised in environmental politics, but within contemporary urban politics. This conceptual choice is reflected in the terminology adopted: while in the description and the analysis of network dimension (for example when examining the incentives derived from network participation) the terms TMNs and SEUNs can be used interchangeably, the exploration of the thematic dimension, whose aim is to understand the meaning and purpose of urban sustainability promoted within networks, only pertains to SEUNs.

The urban approach sketched out above – and outlined in much more detail in chapter 4 - was developed to examine the drivers and motivations for cities to participate in urban networks for sustainability. Understanding the motivations underlying SEUN membership is important to explain how urban politics has changed in the last three decades as a result of institutional, political and economic changes and why sustainable urban development is pursued by local policy-makers.

1.3   Aims of the study

The aims of this thesis are twofold. Firstly, this thesis seeks to critically interpret the motivations underlying the participation of European cities in municipal networks for sustainable development. This means that the interest of local authorities for European inter-urban cooperation in the field of sustainable urban development is not simply acknowledged, but is interpreted in light of the urban economic, institutional and political dynamics. In this sense, the choice to join an urban network may be motivated by political and economic reasons that go beyond environmental concerns. Secondly, this thesis aims to generate new data to cast further light on the phenomenon of local governments' engagement in SEUNs.

1.4   Research questions and methods

The overarching question that this thesis seeks to explore is:

Why do European local authorities join city networks for sustainable development?

Below this question are a number of sub-questions:

1. What factors predict the participation of European cities in SEUNs?
2. What factors impact on the propensity of European cities to join SEUNs
3. What are the motivations for European local governments to engage in these organisations?
4. Is city networking for sustainable development instrumental in delivering specific urban policies?

In light of these research questions, this thesis has two main aims:

1. to understand why cities join inter-urban networks for sustainable development;
2. to provide an empirical analysis in order to gain an insight on the relationship between SEUN membership and local strategies for urban regeneration.

In order to provide comprehensive answers, this thesis draws on three different and interconnected research methods: 1) a literature review, 2) a quantitative analysis and 3) a qualitative analysis.

The literature review serves the following purposes:

1. it defines the main concepts used in this study;
2. it provides an account of how transnational municipalism has been explored by different streams of literature;
3. it informs the analytical framework,
4. it formulates hypotheses against which to compare and contrast the empirical findings.

The literature review draws on a wide range of disciplines in the social sciences, including Political Geography, Public Policy, and Urban Politics. The latter makes an important contribution to this thesis, offering an in-depth reading of the structure of the city, and the economic and political dynamics operating in the urban context.

The analysis of the literature informed the development of the research hypotheses and assumptions. These hypotheses were tested through the adoption of a nested research design. This method entailed two inter-linked steps. The first stage consisted in a quantitative analysis. More precisely, a predictive model of membership obtained by running linear and logistic regressions was built to explore the factors impacting on network membership (see chapter 5). Additionally, the quantitative analysis provided data to build the knowledge base for the qualitative analysis as well as a preliminary explanation of the overarching question of this research.

In the second stage a qualitative analysis was carried out. Since the unit of analysis are cities (or more specifically urban political elites), seven European local authorities participating in one or more urban networks were selected for the small-N analysis. While the regression analysis predicted the factors impacting on the likelihood for local governments to join networks for sustainable development, the second method enabled me, on the one hand, to test the validity of the quantitative model derived from the regressions and on the other, to delve into the political and economic motivations underlying the decision to be part of networks dedicated to sustainable development.

1.5   Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured in two parts. After this introduction, the first part presents and discusses the main approaches adopted in the literature to examine the phenomenon of transnational municipalism (chapter 2 and chapter 3), while in chapter 4 an alternative theoretical framework to inform the empirical analysis is proposed. In the second part the empirical findings of the regression analysis and the qualitative analysis are reported and discussed. Specifically, in chapter 5 the methods and research techniques used are outlined. In chapter 6 the results of the regression models are presented and analysed, while chapter 7 presents the findings of the qualitative analysis. Chapter 8 provides a detailed discussion of the qualitative analysis. Finally, chapter 9 concludes the thesis by presenting the contribution of this thesis and providing final observations on the findings and the research process.

PART 1

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS TO TRANSNATIONAL MUNICIPALISM

Literature review

The first part of this thesis provides the theoretical framework of the research. Here, the main approaches adopted by existing research in the field of TMNs and transnational municipalism are discussed. The theoretical contributions reviewed in this study draw on various strands of Political Science, including International Relations, European studies, Public Policy, Urban and Local Politics. Additionally, literature sources from other disciplines across social sciences are included, primarily Political Geography and Urban Sociology.

Since the phenomenon of TMNs spatially stretches from the local to the European level and entails the coming together of different collective actors, the analytical focus may be either on the scale of the phenomenon, which may be sub- or supra-national, or on the organisational arrangements and policy objectives pursued by network members. Depending upon the research focus chosen, there are various strands of literature that may provide an insight into city networking. These contributions can be classified in three main approaches illustrated in Figure 1:

1. the *horizontal perspective*, which includes the Policy Network literature;
2. the *multi-scale perspective*, which characterises the literature on world/global cities and global governance, Europeanisation and Multi-level Governance, and
3. the bottom-up or *urban approach*, which draws on the theoretical underpinnings of the Urban Politics scholarship and explores the contemporary transformations that have affected cities.

Figure 1: Theoretical approaches to transnational municipalism
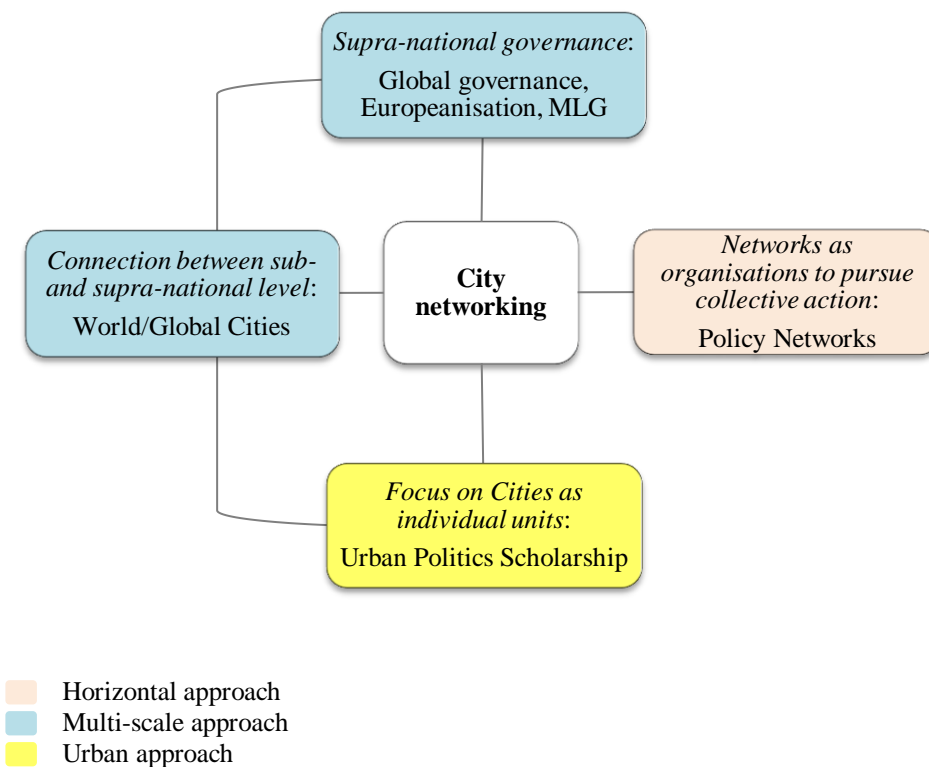
The existence of different analytical perspectives on transnational municipalism is reflected in the structure of the first part of this thesis. Before discussing the literature on the topic, chapter 2 presents the

definition and description of TMNs. In chapter 3 the literature on policy networks as well as the multi-scale approaches to transnational municipalism are reviewed and discussed. Drawing on the criticisms of these two approaches and on the contributions within Urban Studies, in chapter 4 the urban-centred approach is proposed as the analytical framework of this study.

2.   DEFINITION OF TRANSNATIONAL MUNICIPAL NETWORKS

2.1   Transnational Municipal Networks: an overview

In order to avoid any confusion, the main concepts that will recur in this study need to be clarified (see Figure 2). Transnational municipalism is a phenomenon entailing the development of linkages among cities located in different states. The outcome of such phenomenon are all the associative forms grouping localities, ranging from town twinning to urban cooperative networks, known as transnational municipal networks. As mentioned in the introduction, TMNs can be categorised in sub-types according to the policy issues tackled and the breadth of mission. While some TMNs focus on one single specific issue, such as urban security[5] or culture[6], the mission of other networks is more comprehensive, including social, environmental and economic themes. This latter type, which has been named here socio-ecological (SEUNs) is a sub-type of TMN and constitutes the research object of this study.

Figure 2: Transnational municipalism and TMNs
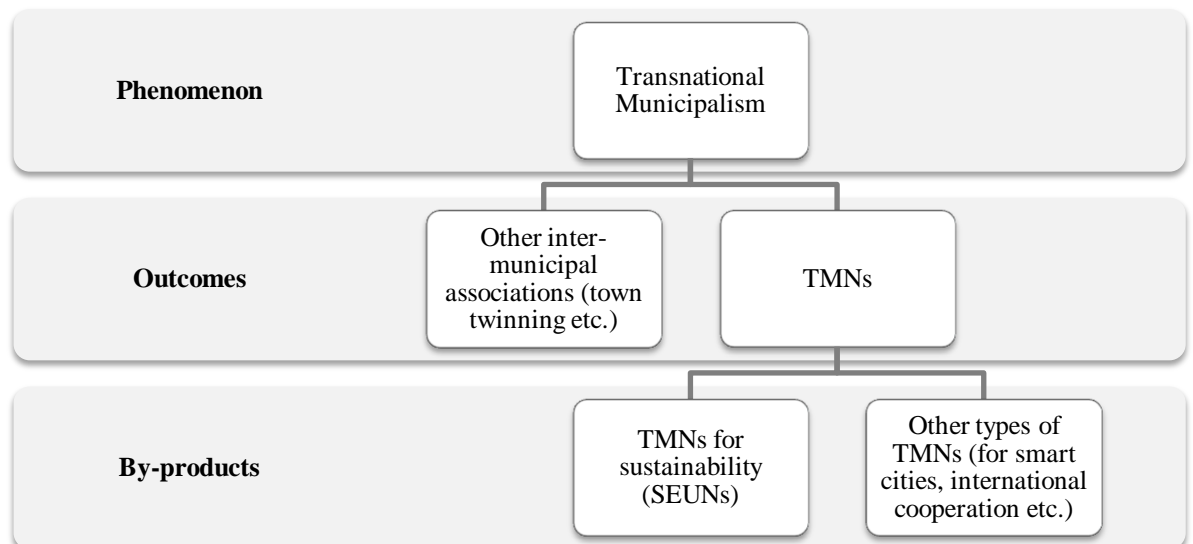
Having elucidated the concepts that will be employed throughout this research, it is helpful to illustrate the characteristics and functions of TMNs to better understand the drivers and reasons underlying the decision of cities to engage in such organisations. It should be noted that, since the transnational dimension of these organisations is discussed in the following chapter (see section 3.6.1), the attention here is drawn on the organisational structure and the type of membership that characterise these networks. In the following sections a description of the main characteristics and activities of TMNs is provided.

2.1.1   The features of Transnational Municipal Networks

The term network is widely used within Social Sciences to indicate a group of individuals linked by the willingness to pursue similar interests or common objectives. What distinguishes a network from other

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[5] European forum for urban security (EFUS).
[6] Les Rencontres.

organisational forms is the presence of "voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange" (Keck and Sikkink, 1999: 91).

Being a vague concept, the term network is defined by its geographical location and the type of actors involved. By taking into account the first criterion, networks have a domestic (i.e. local, regional or national), international or transnational spatial dimension. In this respect, Bulkeley and Betsill (2003: 202) argue that "the term transnational refers to activities/institutions/networks which take place across the boundaries of nation-states", while, drawing on Goldstein (2001)[7], the authors define international as "a particular level of activity primarily in the realm of relations between nation-states and their governments." In this sense, the difference between the latter two terms, which is broadly discussed in the next chapter (see section 3.6.1), rests on the presence (at the international level) or absence (in the transnational dimension) of nation-states in the network. Among these types of networks, transnational networks have attracted considerable attention, where transnational relations among individuals and cross-border collective action have been examined[8]. If the second criterion mentioned above is considered, transnational networks differ according to the type of actors they include, which can be public (state and non-state), private or both categories. In this respect, a useful typology of transnational networks has been developed by Betsill and Bulkeley (2004: 474-476), who identify the following categories of transnational networks:

- "epistemic communities", which are those organisations characterised by the presence of "experts who share a common understanding of the scientific and political nature of a particular problem". Within this type of network participants exchange information and knowledge thus engendering "policy learning";
- "transnational advocacy networks", which are "voluntary, reciprocal, horizontal structure" that encompass those actors at different scales and of different nature that share common visions, beliefs and knowledge, and
- "global civil society", which considers the move of governance from the central state to sub- and supra-national levels. While the first two accounts are state-centric, the third perspective takes into consideration the variety of actors that address a specific issue. However, as with the previous type, in these networks the use of knowledge, practices and beliefs is considered pivotal to exert an influence over global issues.

Andonova *et al*. (2009) have built a further taxonomy of networks, taking into account the nature of the agents participating in the transnational organisation[9]. In so doing, Andonova *et al*. (2009: 59-62) distinguish the following types of transnational governance networks[10]:

- "public transnational governance networks", set up by and devoted to public actors (that is sub-national authorities);

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[7] Goldstein, J. S. (2001) *International Relations*, 4th ed., New York: Longman.
[8] See for instance studies on transnational networks of migrants (Smith, 1994, 2001, 2003) and transnational social movements (Della Porta, 2007; Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005; Tarrow, 2001).
[9] Andonova *et al*. (2009: 62-66) also classify networks according to the different "governance functions" performed, as will be discussed in the next section.
[10] This three-pronged classification of TMNs can be also found in Bulkeley and Newell (2010).

- "private transnational governance networks", which include non-state and non-public actors, such as businesses, and
- "hybrid transnational governance networks", which encompass both public and private actors.

The last type of network is becoming a mainstream model for policy-making in the EU context. This holds true especially in the governance of environmental policy, where a wider range of stakeholders is involved (Andonova *et al.*, 2009; Bulkeley and Mol, 2003). Furthermore, it should be noted that some networks in which the majority of the members is made up of sub-national governments, are assuming more hybrid forms, with private actors (in particular, researchers, consultants and business associations) increasingly participating to public networks' activities.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, municipal transnational governance networks have grown in number in the last two decades. These associations have been variously defined in the literature as "intergovernmental" networks, "inter-urban" networks or "transnational" networks (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009: 313). Nonetheless, it is argued that the term transnational municipal network seems to be more appropriate than inter-urban or inter-government networks for two reasons: firstly, mainly local policy-makers and officials are involved in these networks; and secondly, the prefix "inter" indicates "connection between separate entities" (Bulkeley, 2005: 876)[11].

As highlighted in "network discourses", city networks have distinctive characteristics (Leitner and Sheppard, 2002), which are summarised in Table 1 below. Firstly, urban networks are endowed of a "topological spatiality", in that they group together members that used to be separated (Leitner and Sheppard, 2002: 497). Secondly, these networks do not have a hierarchical structure with leading members, but have horizontal organisational arrangements, in which decisions are taken collectively (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009). It should be noted that the horizontal structure of urban networks does not *per se* mean that all the members contribute to the same extent. While for some cities network participation equates with the payment of fees, for others it represents a pro-active engagement in the network's activities, and only a few local authorities seek to obtain leading positions (Payre and Saunier, 2008). Thirdly, networks are "polycentric"[12], insofar as decision-making and authority are distributed among several centres (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009). Fourthly, network membership is not-binding, allowing the members to withdraw any time (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009). This internal arrangement makes networks "flexible", in that they can undergo transformations in their organisation or in the composition and number of the members (Leitner and Sheppard, 2002: 497). Fifthly, city networks are "self-organising systems", insofar as they are structured by the linkages among members and as a consequence, they are also "path-dependent and evolutionary, and unpredictable in the medium run", in that they can be influenced by exogenous transformations (Leitner and Sheppard, 2002: 497). Finally, networks are "collaborative" groups in which the members cooperate to achieve common goals (Leitner and Sheppard, 2002: 497).

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[11] Despite this criticism to the use of inter-urban networks and transnational municipal networks as equivalent concepts, they will be used interchangeably in this study.
[12] It should be noted that polycentricism refers to the absence of spatial contiguity among members; this means that cities that are located in different countries are not necessarily bordering.

Table 1: Characteristics of TMNs

Characteristic	Description
Cooperation	Collaboration among network members
Flexibility	Networks can change overtime
Horizontality	Absence of hierarchical relations among members
Non-binding membership	Members can leave a network any time
Polycentrism	Several centres of authority
Self-organisation	Members decide their internal arrangements without any exogenous interference

Source: Bulkeley *et al*. (2003); Kern and Bulkeley (2009); Leitner and Sheppard (2002).

Bennington and Harvey (1994: 949-950) classify TMNs according to the specific interests they pursue, thus identifying four different types: 1) "sectoral interests", which indicate those TMNs focusing on the development of specific economic sectors[13]; 2) "spatial or territorial interests", which distinguish those networks grouping cities with similar characteristics, such as industrial sites (RETI), second European cities (*Eurocities*) and deprived neighbourhoods (*Quartiers en crise*[14]); 3) "thematic and policy interests", which characterise those networks dedicated to address specific questions, such as Green Links or the European Social Action Network, and 4) "peak organisations and supra-national networks", such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR), which include a wide number of local and regional authorities and have internal organisational arrangements.

Although the taxonomy proposed by Bennington and Harvey - which dates back to the 1990s - is still suitable to classify the different types of TMNs, it has been observed that the focus of the activity of transnational city networks has changed overtime: while initially TMNs used to deal with specific policy concerns, subsequently they shifted the focus of their activities towards the representation of members' objectives at EU level (Le Galès, 2002). Also the objectives of European TMNs evolved: established at the outset with the purpose of "peace and cultural exchange", they have turned their attention to European integration and economic growth; at the same time, they have shifted from being informal meetings (or "easygoing social occasions"), to organisations with a more systematic management based on efficiency criteria and have grown more interested in economic and political issues (Vion, 2001, in Le Galès, 2002: 108). This shift represents a change in attitudes towards the EU: while city networks originally represented "a Europe of communities embedded within their nation-states", today TMNs constitute the arena where "political and economic entrepreneurs" market local authorities to obtain financial and political benefits (Vion, 2001 in Le Galès, 2002: 108).

From an organisational viewpoint, city networks are formally structured with their own office, dedicated personnel, and are also endowed of financial resources (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003). Several TMNs are what is defined as "membership organizations", thus cities have to apply to become members and once accepted in the network – and after paying the fees – they acquire "the right to participate in its decision-making

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[13] For example, car industry (European Network of Motor Industry Areas), defence (DEMILITARISED) or cities with textile industries (RETEX) (Bennington and Harvey, 1994: 949).
[14] The *Quartieres en crise* network changed its name in Luden (http://www.ludenet.org/home).

processes" (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003: 244). Moreover, given their legal status of "associations", the rules and norms regulating TMNs comply with the legislation of the country where the central office of the network is based (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003: 244).

The activities of the networks are managed by various departments of local authorities, depending on the themes on which the networks focus. Within TMNs – especially the larger ones, such as Eurocities[15] - there are different working groups dealing with several aspects of sustainable development (economy, society, environment, culture). In general terms, international relations/European affairs departments manage the general aspects of networks membership, while other council departments (e.g. environmental departments) deals with specific themes of the networks according to their competencies.

The emergence of European city networks dedicated to specific issues reflects the compartmental organisation of EU policies (Goldsmith, 1993). However, in the last two decades, especially in the European context, such organisations have proliferated in the realm of sustainable development, as they are deemed a pivotal means to achieve a "socio-ecological transition" (Labaeye and Sauer, 2013: 1). It is argued that the role of supra-national intervention, such as the Agenda 21 or the initiatives of the European Commission, for example the *European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign*, has favoured the establishment of networks in the field of sustainability (Bulkeley, 2005). This type of networks, which can be labelled as Socio-ecological Urban Networks (thereafter SEUNs) include a variety of inter-urban organisations focusing either on specific environmental issues, such as sustainable mobility or energy (e.g. Climate Alliance, EnergyCities, ICLEI and Polis Network), or covering climate change and sustainability as part of a wider portfolio of activities (such as Eurocities, Metrex and Union of Baltic Cities) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: European Socio-ecological Urban Networks in proportion of total number of TMNs

■ SEUNs with comprehensive mission ■ SEUNs with environmental mission
■ Other TMNs
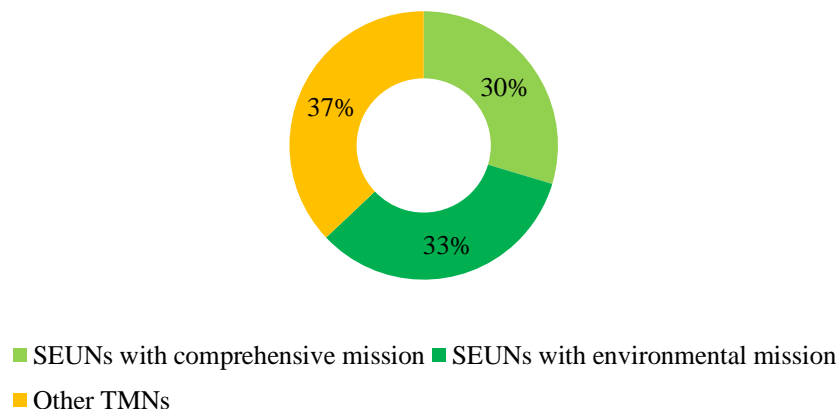
Source: data retrieved from city networks' websites.

Despite the general more or less explicit positive judgement about the role that TMNs play in the field of sustainability (see *inter alia* Betsill and Bulkeley, 2004; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2003), some authors point

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[15] Eurocities is one of the major European urban networks, grouping 130 cities and 40 partner cities across 35 countries. See: http://www.eurocities.eu/

out the instrumental nature of the interests pursued by networks. In this respect, Leitner and Sheppard (1999) argue that the interest on social and environmental aspects of some European inter-urban networks reflect the attempt of the EU to address bottom-up demands. As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4, the great interest of local authorities for sustainable development is not only a response to international programmes and agreements to safeguard the environment, but it is also motivated by political and economic reasons. In a similar vein, the very same features of inter-urban networks have been questioned. For Leitner and Sheppard (2002) the conceptualisation of networks made in "network discourses" as "non-hierarchical", "flexible", "self-organising" and "collaborative" does not represent real networks. By way of contrast, it is argued that "networks themselves exhibit tendencies towards hierarchy, inequality, imitation, and exclusion" (Leitner and Sheppard, 2002: 514).

In light of the characteristics previously outlined, it is difficult to define TMNs as a specific category of social networks. In this respect, with reference to TMNs in the domain of environmental policy, Bulkeley *et al.* (2003: 241) claim that, on the one hand, these networks display some features typical of social movements, as they are often rooted in the social fabric and are characterised by a "reformist" bent; on the other, they are embedded in institutional setting, developing linkages with governments at all levels. Yet, in light of their involvement in policy-making, TMNs can be considered "quasigovernmental organisations" (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003: 241). Setting aside any theoretical endeavours to place TMNs in a specific category of organisations, what really matters in understanding local governments' participation in TMNs are the activities they fulfil, which are described in the following section.

2.1.2   The activities of TMNs

A sizeable body of research in the field has explored the broad range of inter-urban networks' activities. Accordingly, it is possible to identity a set of functions – defined by Andonova *et al.* (2009) as "governance functions" – in which members are involved. Firstly, a pivotal function performed by networks is facilitating the exchange of information, practice and knowledge, as emphasised by several authors[16]. Information is used with different purposes within networks: while in some networks, the exchange of information is aimed at exerting political influence onto external actors, such as nation-states, in others it becomes "a means of governing", when information sharing, in the form of "norm diffusion, consensus building or changing practice", is aimed at network members (Andonova *et al.*, 2009: 63-64).

It is argued that information, experience (in the form of "best practice"), knowledge sharing and the "transnational policy transfer, diffusion and learning" are the constitutive elements of network governance (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003: 244). These three latter phenomena are distinct and different from each other and not necessarily interconnected. With regard to policy learning, this may derive as a result of knowledge and information exchange. In particular, policy learning (or "policy-oriented learning") is a process determined by changes in beliefs or attitudes that are engendered by previous knowledge and the

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[16] On the importance of knowledge and information exchange see: Andonova *et al.* (2009); Bulkeley and Betsill (2003); Bulkeley *et al.* (2003); Bulkeley and Newell (2010); Clarke (1990); Kern (2009); Keiner and Kim (2007); Kern and Bulkeley (2009); Le Galès (2002); Leitner and Sheppard (1999); Marshall (2005); Ward and Williams (1997).

willingness to achieve specific goals and entails "internal feedback" mechanisms, the understanding of "external dynamics" and the "increased knowledge" of the aspects of an issue (Sabatier, 1988: 133). In this sense, "learning is instrumental", in that it helps the participants to improve their knowledge of a given issue and to achieve their aims (Sabatier, 1988: 133). While representing the inclusion of the acquired knowledge within a value system, policy learning does not affect the "core beliefs" of a group, which are ultimately transformed by exogenous "perturbations in non-cognitive factors" (e.g. economic and political changes) (Sabatier, 1988: 133-134).

Following Sabatier's description of policy learning, it can be argued that the knowledge exchanged within networks will not produce policy change if this is not compatible with a member's founding value systems. This means that local governments are more likely to develop linkages and stable relations with other counterparts that share a common understanding of a given problem. This argument recalls the "homophily principle", which maintains that connections are more likely to develop between people sharing similar characteristics (McPherson *et al.*, 2001: 415-416). This principle, central to most of social network analysis, also underpins the linkages among TMN members: empirical evidence has shown that policy learning in TMNs is more likely to occur when cities have a common language and, at least in Europe and North America, are located in the same region[17] (Lee and Meene, 2012).

It is argued that, thanks to the flow of information and knowledge exchanged, TMNs may act as "innovators of policy initiatives" (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003: 243). In this sense, city networks may prompt policy innovation, which is a form of policy change[18]. In particular, policy innovation indicates the introduction of a policy by a government prompted both internally, by requests of organisations or institutional actors within the same political unit, or externally, as in the case of knowledge exchange between countries (Shipan and Volden, 2001). When policy innovation occurs between governments, this gives rise to policy diffusion (Shipan and Volden, 2001). Policy innovation may eventually lead to policy change. The latter is spurred by different institutional actors who share a common interest in a given policy domain and it occurs over a considerable time span[19] (Sabatier, 1988).

An analogous concept to policy diffusion is policy transfer. According to Dolowitz and Marsh (1996: 344-345), policy transfer, triggered by "elected officials, political parties, bureaucrats/civil servants, pressure groups, policy entrepreneurs/experts and supra-national institutions", refers to

> "a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, and institutions in another political in another time and/or place" (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 344-345).

The transfer of policy may be either "voluntary", when there are no adequate policies available to address a given issue, in concomitance of elections or "to legitimate decisions already taken", or the result of the "coercive" action of one government over another, both directly and (more often) indirectly (Dolowitz

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[17] By way of contrast, the authors did not find significant the impact of similar geographical structure on network formation (Lee and Meene, 2002).
[18] The other forms (or "ideal-types"') of policy change are: "policy maintenance, policy succession and policy termination" (Hogwood and Peters, 1982: 231).
[19] Sabatier (1988) specifies that policy change may occur over ten or more years.

and Marsh, 1996: 346-349). In this latter case, the presence of "externalities"[20] (or "functional interdependence"), technological innovations, the tightening of international economic relations, political competition among nation-states and the development of an "international consensus" over an issue are all factors that may prompt the transfer of policies (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 348-349).

According to Dolowitz and Marsh (1996), policy transfer, which entails the diffusion of different "objects", i.e. "policy goals; structure and content; policy instruments or administrative techniques; institutions; ideology; ideas; attitudes and concepts; and negative lessons", may occur in various ways: 1) the policy transferred may be reproduced exactly as it is ("copying"); 2) the architecture and aim of the policy may be replicated, but with some changes ("emulation"); 3) various policies from different countries may be integrated in a solution that better adapts to a specific context ("hybridisation" and "synthesis"), or 4) what has been done elsewhere may simply trigger innovative solutions ("inspiration")[21] (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996: 349-351).

Although acting as a potential means for policy transfer - or "policy mobility", as some authors define it (see Clarke, 2009) - it is highlighted that TMNs are primarily agents of "policy innovation and influence" and "policy learning", while only marginally fostering policy transfer (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003: 248). Therefore, within networks, the exchange of information, knowledge and experience of a policy issue may prompt policy innovation, with a limited chance to foster policy transfer and policy change. At the same time, it is suggested that local authorities can also affect EU policy-making by acting as competent actors in the field of urban policy (Kübler and Piliutyte, 2007).

In addition, to facilitate the flow of information, the networks enable "capacity building" and "policy implementation", by equipping the members with the practical skills, tools and financial resources to implement the initiatives promoted by the networks (Andonova *et al.*, 2009: 64; Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003: 243; Bulkeley and Newell, 2010: 56-57). By participating in networks, local governments have the opportunity to access competences and means in order to carry out network initiatives (Andonova *et al.*, 2009). In order to assist the implementation of programmes and initiatives supported by a network, local policy-makers and officials participating in TMNs can benefit from specific training, workshops and study trips (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003).

A further internal activity of TMNs is to set norms and procedures for the members. In the previous section it was pointed out that networks do not generally have binding rules regulating membership and network functions. Nevertheless, "rule setting" may be a central function to some networks, which establish rules for the members, drawn on international or national norms, or generate new standards to fill a lack of regulation (Andonova *et al.*, 2009: 65). More widely, TMNs have some forms of regulation, which entails "setting particular standards, such as goals for emissions reductions or certification schemes, establishing a particular basis for membership (for example, signing up to a specific program of actions or a code of conduct), or various means of measuring performance" (Bulkeley and Newell, 2010: 58). It is observed that TMNs develop norms and rules with the purpose of "govern[ing] by shaping the ideas and behaviour of their constituents", and in some cases apply sanctions to the members that do not

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[20] The authors explain that the presence of externalities (e.g. pollution) may prompt countries to cooperate to tackle a shared issue (Dolowitz and Marsh, 1996).
[21] See Rose (1993) for an exhaustive discussion of the different modes of policy transfer.

follow networks' regulations (Bulkeley and Newell, 2010: 58). Although voluntary associations, network members may set evaluation criteria or sign specific agreements (such as the Covenant of Mayors) that do entail binding rules.

In addition to the three "soft mechanisms" (Bulkeley and Newell, 2010: 56) outlined above, more political functions are fulfilled by the networks. One of these political activities is "coalition-building, which involves forming alliances with like-minded actors who share certain goals in a given policy area" (Bomberg and Peterson, 1998 in Happaerts et al. 2011: 325). A second political function that flows from the coalition-building potential of TMNs is lobbying, as a sizeable number of authors have emphasised[22]. By lobbying at national and supra-national level, local governments have the opportunity to influence directly national governments and international organisations to obtain support for network programmes and policies (Bulkeley and Betsill, 2003). Within the EU context, local governments have lobbied the Community institutions to either influence the requirements to apply for funding or to develop new funding schemes (Bennington and Harvey, 1994). Furthermore, the lobbying activities of TMN members are designed to leverage EU policies (Bennington and Harvey, 1994; Bulkeley et al., 2003). By lobbying jointly with other network members, cities put in place collective actions that allow them to influence EU institution, which would be challenging for one city alone (Heinelt and Niederhafner, 2008). By leveraging directly the EU institutions, cities act as "policy-makers", hence losing their traditional image of "policy-takers" accepting policies and rules from upper-levels (Kern, 2009: 12). In so doing, TMNs have enabled cities to "reclaim legitimacy for their role and function" (Bulkeley et al., 2003: 237). Furthermore, local authorities, by developing direct links with the EU institutions, can "bypass" the central state, which is sometimes perceived as an antagonist (Ward and Williams, 1997: 445).

Moreover, through networks local authorities can meet other European peers willing to set up project partnerships to bid into EU funding (Bulkeley et al., 2003; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Ward and Williams, 1997). In this respect, Bennington and Harvey (1994) point out the role of networks as a means for local authorities to access EU funding. In particular, it is argued that some networks rely on various types of funding, such as EU, national, local and especially from "individual research or action projects", to subsidise their activities and programmes (Bulkeley et al., 2003: 241). In this sense, it is claimed that many networks have a "business orientation", in that funding is a crucial component of the life of the networks (Bulkeley et al., 2003: 241).

Finally, some authors have also emphasised that participation in networks constitutes *per se* an important aspect for members. In this respect, Happaerts et al., (2010), exploring the involvement of regional governments in the nrg4SD network[23], found that participants stressed the importance of networking, which enables them to establish and keep linkages with other counterparts. Similarly, Niederhafner (2013), in a comparative study of European and Asian TMNs, found that for some organisations

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[22] See on this point: Bennington and Harvey (1994); Betsill and Bulkeley (2006); Bulkeley and Betsill (2003); Bulkeley et al. (2003); Clarke (2009); Ewen (2008); Happaerts et al. (2010); Happaerts et al. (2011); Heinelt and Niederhafner (2008); Kern (2009); Kern and Bulkeley (2009); Kübler and Piliutyte (2007); Labaeye and Sauer (2013); Le Galès (2002); Leitner and Sheppard (1999); Marshall (2005); Niederhafner (2013); Phelps et al. (2002); Ward and Williams (1997).
[23] Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development. See: http://www.nrg4sd.org/

networking represents a significant aim for TMNs, insofar it allows exchange of knowledge, practices and information among the members.

Table 2: Network functions: summary of the review of TMN research

Type of functions	Function
Formative functions	Capacity-building Information and knowledge sharing Networking
Economic functions	Funding
Political functions	Coalition-building Lobbying Rule-setting

While the networks undertake specific functions that allow cities to acquire more influence at EU level, Ward and Williams (1997) observe that networks of sub-national authorities are also instrumental for the EU, which can achieve a series of objectives through them. According to Ward and Williams (1997), these objectives are the following. Firstly, the involvement of local authorities provides competent views on given issues into policy-making therefore filling the "implementation deficit". Secondly, being the closest administrative levels to the citizens, the inclusion of local authorities in the EU policy-making can contribute to reduce the "democratic deficit". Thirdly, bringing together European areas with different levels of economic and social levels may assist the EU in addressing the regional economic differences. Fourthly, transnational networks of local authorities can foster European integration hence enhancing a "European identity". Finally, the presence of organised networks where the views and interests of cities are collectively represented reduces lobbying activities carried out by a plethora of individual local authorities.

The functions of the networks discussed previously are seen by several authors as the objectives of TMNs conceived as collective units. However, by shifting the focus of the analysis from the network to the individual actors involved, then such functions, or "structural goals" of networks (as defined by Niederhafner, 2013), may be seen as incentives for cities to participate in TMNs. Indeed, as mentioned before, the participation in inter-urban networks enables local governments to improve their knowledge about a policy issue, their technical skills to tackle it and possibly to pool resources and capacities to develop new solutions (see Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003). Similarly, by engaging in networks, cities have the opportunity to lobby at EU level in order to influence European policy-making. This viewpoint is shared by some authors. For example, Betsill and Bulkeley (2004), with regard to cities' engagement in the Climate Change Protection Programme (CCP), found that the highly committed local governments were attracted by the economic and political incentives and by cognitive and rule-making aspects that the network provided. Likewise, Betsill and Bulkeley (2004: 479-480) highlight the importance of "co-benefits"[24] for network members and argue that "the exchange and production of material and nonmaterial resources are indeed factors in securing network participation". Furthermore, Kübler and Piliutyte (2007) consider policy learning as a motivation for cities to engage in networks, in that knowledge and experience exchange reduces information and transaction costs and enables cities to be updated on European urban policies. In particular, the importance of "collective incentives" (such as

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[24] For example, Betsill and Bulkeley (2004) found that in by participating in the CCP programme, the co-benefits for the members are financial savings, better air quality and improved quality of life at city level.

gaining importance at EU level) and selective incentives (as for example acquiring competences in a policy area) associated with the participation in TMNs has been highlighted by some authors (see Kübler and Piliutyte, 2007, for the case of Eurocities). These aspects shed light on the capability of networks to act as means for collective action, through which cities can pursue common interests (see on this point Heinelt and Niederhafner, 2008).

2.2 Concluding observations

In this chapter the structural characteristics and functions of TMNs have been described. The literature on the topic reviewed in the previous sections showed the peculiar nature of these networks, which connect cities located in different countries that share common goals. TMNs are dynamic organisations, insofar as membership changes overtime, and free from any exogenous intervention in their internal governance. Furthermore, research contributions in the field helped to identify the various functions undertaken by TMNs, which can be systematised in three types: formative, political and economic functions. The networks enable cities to perform these activities in a more effective way than they would be able to do on their own.

The purposes of this descriptive chapter were twofold: on the one hand, to set out a working definition of TMNs; on the other, to gain an understanding of the activities in which cities are engaged. In turn, this latter aspect is particularly important to explore the motivations underpinning cities' engagement in SEUNs: acquiring an in-depth knowledge of the activities that local governments undertake within the networks is the first step to understand why they perform them.

Having provided a detailed description of how urban networks are organised and how they function, the review of the main analytical approaches to TMNs is presented and discussed in the following chapter.

3.   THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO TRANSNATIONAL MUNICIPALISM IN EUROPE

In this chapter the theoretical approaches applied in research contributions on TMNs are reviewed and discussed. As mentioned in the introduction, these can be grouped in two categories: the multi-scale approaches, which include those approaches encompassing different levels of analysis (from local to global), and the horizontal approach, constituted by the policy network approach. While the first group of frameworks is predominant in the literature on TMNs (especially multi-level governance, hereafter MLG), the policy network approach has not been widely employed. As a result, section 3.1 and 3.2 are mainly informed by theoretical contributions not specifically related to TMNs, thus relying on those streams of literature either providing a definition of the concept of policy network or an insight into the networks' internal dynamics – i.e. the collective action variant. Nevertheless, as will be discussed in the ensuing sections, this approach may offer some useful analytical insight in examining the participation of cities in SEUNs.

3.1   The horizontal approach: the network dimension

The first category of theoretical frameworks to transnational municipalism is constituted by the horizontal approach, where the focus of the analysis is on the network. The network dimension, also referred to in the literature as "meso-level" (see Marsh and Rhodes, 1992 in Rhodes, 2006), has peculiar characteristics. Firstly, its existence is intermittent, coming into being only when actors decide to join in collective actions. Secondly, the meso-level is transversal, cutting across different scales. Thirdly, its composition may be subject to change, in that the nature and the scale of the actors may vary from time to time. Fourthly, the network dimension is functional to the achievement of given objectives and fifth, it is sectoral, in that it deals with specific issues or policy domains.

The term network has gained currency in Political Science to describe a new mode of governing characterised by horizontal relations among both public and non-public actors. This type of governing arrangement is defined as "network governance" and has been widely used in the literature to explain the emergence of more or less formalised organisations constituted by both public and private actors. Network governance is described by two elements: the first is "consociation", which distinguishes a "pluralist society" where different perspectives can be compounded through a comprehensive policy-making, and the second is the presence of "parallel interest" as the "constitutive logic" of network governance, by which individuals with different specific interests have to be led to an agreement (Kohler-Koch, 1998: 9-11). Each individual with shared interests can join together to achieve a common objective, regardless of the physical and administrative boundaries: what characterises network governance is "heterogeneity" and the organisation of such "parallel interest" "along functional rather than territorial lines" (Kohler-Koch, 1998: 10-11). Given the lack of a shared and "unifying ideology", the EU is a notable example of network governance, since a plurality of actors of different nature takes part in negotiations (Kohler-Koch, 1998: 13-14).

Although widely focused on the relations between the central state and non-state actors, the concept of network governance has been largely employed in EU studies to describe the involvement of various types of actors at different scales. In this context, TMNs are deemed a product of network governance, as will be discussed in the next section. For this reason, the concept of network and in particular policy network has been used to analyse TMNs. This approach, by focusing on the functions performed by the network and the relations among the actors, provides an analytical tool to explore the horizontal dimension of city-to-city cooperation. In the ensuing sections a detailed discussion of the network approach to transnational municipalism is provided.

3.2   The policy network approach and collective action

One stream of research that may provide a conceptual framework to interpret TMNs is the policy network scholarship, as some authors suggest (Vartiainen, 1997). Drawing on the analysis of the characteristics and functions of TMNs outlined in the previous section, some authors have adopted this approach to the analysis of cooperative networks in Europe[25] and inter-urban networks[26].

The policy network theory has complemented and, to some extent, displaced existing theories on public/private relationship. Much of the literature on interrelations between state actors and interest groups has been influenced by the "pluralism/neo-corporatism dichotomy" (Börzel, 1997: 2). Since these theories have been widely criticised as not sufficiently capable of adequately interpreting the interaction between public and private actors, the "network approach" has been developed, where "policy network is a meso-level concept of interest group intermediation" (Börzel, 1997: 2). For this reason, policy networks have attracted considerable academic interest and different analytical approaches have been proposed to examine these structures, such as the "implementation structure approach", "the advocacy coalition framework", "interorganisation approaches", and Lindblom's "theory of policy-making systems" (Carlsson, 2000: 503-504).

In European studies the policy network framework has been a response to the multi-level governance approach, whose focus, according to some authors, has tilted towards the interaction among different governmental tiers, overlooking the nature of the variety of subjects in the EU decision-making (Börzel, 1997). Moreover, policy network theory has gained credit not only to explore public/private interaction, but also to analyse, along with urban political theories such as regime theory and regulation theory, the establishment of cooperative networks at different levels of government (Church and Reid, 1996).

Despite the fact that the policy network theory has been established in Political Science some decades ago, there is no consensus about what characterises a policy network and a wealth of definitions and typologies have been elaborated. Essentially, policy networks distinguish themselves from other organisational forms by two main features: the nature of the actors involved and the internal organisational arrangements. On the first point, a policy network involves both public and private actors.

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[25] Church and Reid (1996) mention Dang-Nguyen *et al.* (1994) and Marin and Mayntz (1991) as examples of studies on European networks relying on policy network theory.
[26] Kern and Bulkeley (2009) observe that the following studies rely on the concept of policy network to examine inter-urban networks: Bennington and Harvey (1998), Leitner and Sheppard (2002), Rhodes (1997) and Ward and Williams (1997).

For what concerns the internal organisation, a policy network may assume different structures, spanning from more coordinated and permanent networks to unstructured groups (Bulkeley and Betsill, 2003). Although the structural organisation of policy networks varies considerably, Rhodes identifies a set of factors that to various degrees define a network: 1) the "stability" of the members, which may be fixed or flexible; 2) the network's "insularity", that is the level of openness to external agents, and 3) the degree of "resource dependencies" (i.e. financial support, competencies and influence) among members (Peterson, 2003: 4). According to the combination of these factors, Rhodes distinguishes the following types of networks (Greenaway *et al.*, 1992):

- "policy communities", focused on a specific policy sector, are "vertically integrated, centred on a government department, and insulated from each other";
- "territorial communities", which focus on territorially based issues;
- "issue networks", where the actors are scattered among different departments and institutions
- "professionalised networks", where the members, who share similar professional competencies, seek to address specific issues;
- "producer groups", which have economic goals, and
- "intergovernmental networks", which are more loosely structured, focus on areas of concerns for local governments (Greenaway *et al.*, 1992: 61).

Despite the existence of a variety of policy networks, these are characterised by core functions and objectives. In this respect, policy networks can be described as:

> "[…] a set of relatively stable relationships which are of non-hierarchical and interdependent nature linking a variety of actors, who share common interests with regard to a policy and who exchange resources to pursue these shared interests acknowledging that co-operation is the best way to achieve common goals" (Börzel, 1997: 1).

According to Carlsson (2000), policy networks are "organised entities", i.e. "collectively acting units", endowed of particular "institutional arrangements" and whose purpose is to deal with:

> "the distributing of tasks among different actors and the creation of an intelligent conformity, or coordination, to guide the activities performed. […] the types of 'multiactor' joint actions that are achieved through policy networks ought to be regarded as instances of collective action" (Carlsson, 2000: 508).

In brief, within networks, the participants consensually establish norms in order to achieve a shared objective and avoid possible uncooperative behaviours by exchanging knowledge and developing relationships (Börzel, 1997).

The presence of self-interested individuals within a network introduces a second important characteristic of policy networks, i.e. the bargaining capacity in order to pursue common interests (Börzel, 1997; Carlsson, 2000; Peterson, 2003). As opposed to hierarchy and market, policy networks may be seen as organisations to solve coordination problems: if markets cause "negative externalities" and hierarchies engender problems of inequalities, in horizontal systems the decision-making process is dominated by the logic of bargaining, which, however, may "be blocked by dissent, preventing the consensus necessary for the realisation of common gains", and therefore likely to engender "suboptimal outcomes" (Börzel, 1997: 5).

Within a "bargaining system", an agreement among members of a policy network is hindered by the "bargaining dilemma" and the "structural dilemma", where the first indicates collective action problems and the latter indicates the clash between the interests of the members of an organisation and the interests of the same organisation (Börzel, 1997: 5). These issues can be solved within networks: on the one hand, they permit to mediate different goals of the individuals by putting in place "voluntary bargaining", driven by the willingness to achieve common objectives or "problem-solving"; on the other, they enable members to share information and lobby (Börzel, 1997: 5).

As previously discussed, network members engage in bargaining activities whose aim is to reach a consensus on a policy issue. This means that, within a network, the actors involved pursue common interests which can, to various degrees, be different from individual actors' interests. From this perspective, it can be argued that networks may limit each member's autonomy. If so, it is legitimate to ask why actors join a group where their decision-making capacity is limited. As the policy network account explains, the main reason for actors to join is to undertake collective action to achieve specific policy objectives. Notably:

> "the collective action problem […] arises when rational people desire collective consumption goods from which they cannot economically be excluded, and when each individual's contribution to the production of these yields a directly consequential benefit that is less than the cost involved. Rational individuals will then have strong incentives to enjoy the benefits of the good without paying for it, and in this sense to take 'free rides' on it" (Laver, 1997: 36).

By undertaking collective action, not only do members seek to pursue their own interests, but they also try to avoid a situation where their efforts in achieving a policy objective could be frustrated by uncooperative behaviour.

Without providing a detailed review of the vast literature on the collective action problems[27], which goes beyond the scope of this thesis, two key aspects highlighted in this scholarship deserve further attention. Firstly, the limited knowledge about the participants' reward: since the participants do not know the strategies of the counterparts, they will be likely to put in place "cooperative conditional strategies[28]" if the participants share some common views and assign a similar value to the outcome of an action (Laver, 1997: 55-56). To some extent, this assumption recalls the "homophily principle" mentioned previously with regard to network formation, whereby individuals sharing similarities are more likely to develop linkages. The aspect of the similarity appears to be a key driver of cooperation – undertaken in a more or less structured way. Although in a slightly simplistic manner, it can be argued that the establishment of a group is primarily driven by the willingness of a number of actors to supply a "collective good". The latter can be the solution of an issue perceived by all the members as problematic, for instance urban environmental degradation. The group members share similar characteristics and/or, if not similar beliefs, at least a common understanding of the good to be provided. With regard to inter-urban cooperation for sustainable development, this means that all the members, who are all representatives of local

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[27] Some notable examples on which this section has widely relied are: Lever (1997), Olson (1965) and Taylor (1987).

[28] "Conditional cooperation" occurs when an individual's decision to cooperate depends on the cooperation of another individual (Laver, 1997: 50).

governments[29], perceive environmental degradation as a problem affecting cities. Secondly, the prospect of gaining benefits underpins the decision to cooperate. According to Olson's work on collective action, participation in organisations is conditioned by the presence or absence of "selective incentives", which may be "positive", i.e. a benefit for the members, or "negative", when coercive mechanisms are in place to sanction non-compliant members[30] (Olson, 1965: 51). Furthermore, the incentives that members obtain from participating in the group may be "economic" or "social", the latter indicating gains in reputation (Olson, 1965: 60-61). Drawing on this assumption, one would expect that local authorities are induced to engage in a network by the prospect of gaining such benefits.

The commitment of local authorities to environmental sustainability can be used as an illustrative example of a collective action problem. In this policy sector, the object of the bargaining process is the protection of environmental goods[31], whose management trigger uncooperative behaviours (such as free-riding) that hinder the implementation of effective policies to tackle environmental degradation. It can be imagined that a local government passes a law that sets specific targets to ensure clean air and introduces a system of fines and/or sanctions to punish over-polluting enterprises. This action would engender two consequences. On the one hand, since air is a non-excludable, non-rival and non-optional good[32], neighbouring cities will also enjoy better air quality, probably without introducing any strict environmental rules – unlike those of the first city. If this latter situation occurs, then the second consequence is that some firms may be discouraged to invest in the environmentally virtuous locality and may be induced to displace their production to another city where environmental standards are more lenient. The latter city will therefore gain in competitiveness. This case represents a form of "environmental dumping": if goods are exchanged between polities with different levels of environmental protection, the polity with more permissive environmental regulations will become more competitive, since the final prices of the goods do not incorporate the negative ecological externalities of production (Markandya et al., 2002: 82). This example shows how the peculiar nature of environmental goods may produce a wide range of uncooperative behaviours rendering the governing of natural resources a challenging activity, as aptly theorised by Hardin's (1968) "tragedy of the commons", which illustrates the devastating effects of self-interest over natural resources[33]. In this respect, empirical research has shown that over-exploitation of natural resources can be contained when users can interact directly, allowing to build "trust and reciprocity" (Basurto and Ostrom, 2008: 3).

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[29] Here it is not taken into account the mixed membership in hybrid networks, where both local government officials and experts working in the private sector participate. Nevertheless, even in this type of organisations, the participants share a common interest in a specific policy domain.

[30] In this sense, networks are considered as "'latent' groups" or, whenever "selective incentives" are present, as "'mobilised' latent groups" (see Olson, 1965: 50-51).

[31] Environmental goods cannot be classified as a unique category of goods; they may be in some case common pool resources, private goods, public goods, or collective goods according to their degree of excludability and rivalry (for definition of environmental goods see *inter alia* Wijen *et al.*, 2012). In turn, environmental services may still assume different characteristics from the environmental goods that produce them.

[32] See Cornes and Sandler (1996), Laver (1997) and Taylor (1987) for a definition of public goods.

[33] The tragedy of the common is shown by Hardin (1968) through the example of the overgrazing problem generated by a herdsman pursuing his interest by increasing the number of animals on a common land. If many herdsmen behave in this way, then the result is an uncontrolled exploitation of the land, which would ultimately lead to its depletion (Hardin, 1968).

Drawing on the previous discussion, it can be argued that, by joining together, municipalities seek to pursue their own interests while avoiding that their efforts in achieving a given policy objective may be precluded by uncooperative behaviours. As such, political institutions, whether national or local, opt to create or join a network in order to avoid that a third party may enjoy positive externalities, for instance derived by a pro-environmental action. In this sense, a network is a political arena where to different extent members choose to commit themselves to a common cause, which is considered as a political priority. In the case taken into account in this thesis (i.e. SEUNs), the common cause is the commitment to pursue urban sustainable development. Member-cities collectively adopting urban sustainability as the guiding principle to regenerate their economies, reduce the level of external competition, and share the benefits of EU funding. It can be argued that the lack of binding rules and sanctions within the majority of networks may still incentivise members to free-ride. Nonetheless, actors will be more likely to join if the benefits of cooperating will be greater than the benefits of defecting. Therefore, city representatives compare the costs and the benefits of joining and, if the benefits are expected to be greater than the costs, they decide to engage in networks.

At this point, it should be noted that membership and participation indicate two different conditions. As noted by Payre and Saunier (2008), a local government may pay the fees and then acquires the status of member, but it may decide not to become involved in many initiatives of the networks or not to take any leading role. In this case membership is merely nominal, since there is no active participation. By way of contrast, another local government may decide to participate in and contribute to several initiatives of a network. In this second case, membership is the precondition for participation. In light of such divergence, local governments may identify different costs and benefits associated with membership and participation and evaluate them differently as illustrated in Table 3. This cost/benefit analysis is affected by endogenous (i.e. attitude of policy-makers and officers towards network membership and participation) and exogenous factors (i.e. economic context) and thus may vary from one city to another. For example, if a local government evaluates the costs of membership and participation being too high (and higher than the potential benefits), then it will decide not to join. If the representatives of a local authority consider positively the prospect of joining a network, but then evaluate the benefits of participation greater that the costs, then it will be more likely to become an inactive member. By way of contrast, when both the benefits of membership and participation are considered higher than the costs, then the city will have strong incentives to join and become an active member.

Table 3: Types and conditions of network membership

Type of membership	Conditions of membership
Not a member	$b_m < c_m$ and $b_p < c_p$
Inactive member	$b_m > c_m$ and $b_p < c_p$
Active member	$b_m > c_m$ and $b_p > c_p$

b_m benefits of membership
c_m costs of membership
b_p benefits of participation
c_p costs of participation

As discussed above, there is a sizeable body of work suggesting that the creation of groups devoted to pursue a common interest or to undertake a common action is driven by the willingness to contain defective behaviours and to pursue specific interests. However, the type of goals as well as the level of "formal coordination" within the group varies from one group to another, as exemplified by Carlsson's (2000: 509) matrix displayed in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Forms of collective actions

		Interests	
		Divergent	Common
Formal coordination	Yes	A	B
	No	C	D

Source: Carlsson (2000: 509).

According to the author, the four quadrants represent four different forms of collective action. In particular, the situation B identifies the "ideal-typical form of collective action", where the actors organise themselves formally to pursue the same objective[34] (Carlsson, 2000: 509). By way of contrast, the quadrant C indicates a situation where the action of individuals with different goals focuses onto a specific issue[35] (Carlsson, 2000). The quadrant D presents a situation where individuals are not formally coordinated, albeit sharing the same goal, as in the case of "issue networks", while quadrant A refers to organised structures where members may pursue various and different goals (2000: 509-510). This latter type of collective action describes policy networks, where actors' "interests might be compatible or complementary but not necessarily common" (2000: 510).

In order to bridge the concept of policy networks with collective action theory, Carlsson (2000) developed a "policy network theory of collective action", informed by the founding principles of the "institutional analysis and development framework" (IAD), especially the "methodological individualism". The "institutional analysis and development framework" assumes that the members of a policy network "are exposed to a set of incentives that induce them to act in a particular way, but […] their actions are fostered by physical circumstances as well as institutional attributes, rules, and norms" (Carlsson, 2000: 513). Furthermore, the IAD framework focuses on "a specific action arena, e.g. irrigation systems, policing, or forestry", which can "be understood by reference to a focal 'problem' […] and not primarily by reference to political decisions or programs" (Carlsson, 2000: 511). Hence, this framework is "problem-oriented", insofar as the analysis is concerned with the ways in which an issue is addressed by specific agents participating in a policy network (Carlsson, 2000: 511).

The IAD framework is complemented by the main concepts of Smelser's theory of collective behaviour, stating that cooperative action is prompt by the absence of effective and structured solutions to address an

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[34] The author mentions the trade unions as an example of this type of collective action.
[35] This is the case of "implementation structures" (Carlsson, 2000: 510).

issue (Carlsson, 2000). The "policy network theory of collective action" assumes that collective action is primarily determined by "six possible components" (Carlsson, 2000: 513-514). According to Carlsson (2000), these are: 1) "contextual factors", that is socio-demographic characteristics, values etc. that define the cultural context where policies are shaped; 2) by the willingness of the individuals to address an issue; 3) by the "mutual understanding" of the solutions to be adopted[36]; 4) by an event that prompts the creation of a policy network[37]; 5) by the presence of mobilised individuals; 6) by the role that "social control" plays on the formation and scope of policy networks (Carlsson, 2000: 513-516).

This set of variables is thus deemed crucial to understand the characteristics of networks and the mechanisms underlying members' behaviours. In particular, it has to be noted that the author emphasises the embeddedness of policy networks within the social, economic, and political context. It derives that, in order to fully understand how a network works, two main categories of variables have to be taken into consideration: endogenous and exogenous. While the first group includes those variables related to the internal dynamics of the networks (system of organisation, level of coordination, distribution of the competencies etc.), exogenous variables encompass the external factors that affect the policy networks, that is political, economic, and social context, as well as values and opinions.

3.3   A critique of the policy network approach

In the previous sections an outline of the concept of policy network and a discussion of the policy network approach, especially in its collective action variant, were provided. In particular, the review of this approach emphasised two aspects. On the one hand, the policy network framework enables to examine the role played by different types of actors in policy-making and provides typologies to categorise the diverse organisational forms in which policy networks can be structured. On the other, the focus on the collective action aspect of policy networks stresses the importance of interests and incentives as drivers of groups' behaviour.

Despite its merits, the policy network approach has not been widely employed in studies on TMNs. The reasons for the rejection of the policy network approach to the analysis of TMNs lie in a series of criticisms that have been explicitly expressed in some of the work on TMNs and that can be summarised as follows. A first limitation pointed out by some authors is that this approach has drawn considerable attention to the national level, which is not adequate to explore phenomena stretching across various levels, such as ecological problems (Bulkeley *et al*., 2003). Furthermore, it has been observed that, while policy networks scholarship stresses the capability of policy networks to leverage the nation-state, the role of TMNs goes beyond the function of pressure group (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009). In this respect, the inadequacy of the policy network approach to analyse TMNs also descends from its original formulation: this approach was developed by Rhodes to explain the policy process in the United Kingdom and therefore it was not thought to be a cross-national analytical framework (Bennington and Harvey, 1994). A second criticism to this framework relates the types of actors involved in TMNs: while policy networks are characterised by internal heterogeneity, since they encompass different types of members, TMNs are mainly constituted by representative of city governments (Bulkeley *et al*., 2003; Happaerts *et al*., 2011;

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[36] Carlsson (2000: 515) defines this factor as "growth and spread of a generalized belief".
[37] This category includes "precipitation factors" (Carlsson, 2000: 515).

Kern and Bulkeley, 2009). Thirdly, this approach is deemed unsuitable to analyse TMNs due to the lack of analysis of the process of network creation and their contribution to transformation in policy patterns (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003). Fourthly, whereas "resource interdependencies" are considered as the constitutive element of policy networks, in TMNs inter-linkages hinge on "cognitive than bargaining processes" (Kern and Bulkeley, 2009: 313). Moreover, it is argued that this framework overlooks the social and economic backdrop against which policy networks' action is undertaken (MacLeod and Goodwin, 1999). A further critique relates to the excessive focus of the policy network approach on "the process of interest intermediation" at the expenses of "the broader framework of power and ideology" that underpins the latter (Bennington and Harvey, 1994: 955). Finally, it is claimed that this framework emphasises the horizontality of the decision-making and policy-making that characterises networks, but issues around possible internal differences among members are ignored (Bennington and Harvey, 1994). In this respect, Bennington and Harvey (1994: 956) observe that the linkages among nation-states are regulated by "relationships of domination/subordination", reflecting the state of the economy in each country.

As a result of the limitations discussed above, a policy network approach does not suit the purpose of this thesis, which seeks to shed light on the political and economic factors as well as the reasons that underpin the participation of local governments – intended as individual members - in SEUNs. A policy network approach does not address the research questions of this thesis, insofar as it entails a research focus on the network as the unit of analysis, which implies an exploration of the internal dynamics of the networks and/or the relations between TMNs and other institutions. Nevertheless, this framework allows us to gain an understanding of how cities act collectively. In particular, in its variant focusing on collective action theory, the policy network approach provides a tool to analyse issues of collective action that characterise TMNs. From this perspective, it may complement an urban-centred analysis insofar as it enables us to identify the incentives that networks offer to the participants. In a similar vein, Bulkeley and Betsill (2003) argue that, in the case of the Climate Change Protection (CCP) programme, the characteristics of transnational networks can be framed within policy network as well as transnational network scholarship, which contribute to shed light on the modes in which members engage in a transnational initiative and information and knowledge exchange and dissemination are fostered. However, the authors conclude that this approach is not directly useful to analyse the CCP initiative as the latter cannot be considered as a policy network, in that it is included in other policy networks dealing with environmental issues and stretching across various scales (Bulkeley and Betsill, 2003).

Although policy network theory has been marginalised and criticised in the literature on TMNs, some aspects of this approach can be applied to the analysis of TMNs in order to shed light on the incentives that prompt cities to cooperate in supra-national organisations. The advantages of the policy network framework to analyse TMNs are laid out in the next section.

3.4   Policy network approach: a collegial perspective to transnational municipalism

In the previous sections the literature on policy networks has been reviewed as one possible approach to the analysis of transnational municipalism in Europe. Drawing on this stream of research, it can be argued that local authorities are incentivised to participate in TMNs for two reasons: on the one hand to obtain the "collective good" provided by TMNs to their members, that is the solution to socio-ecological issues

affecting cities; on the other, for the prospect of gaining the formative, political and economic benefits that networks offer – i.e. the "positive selective incentives".

Therefore, despite the drawbacks previously identified, the literature on policy networks and in particular the "policy network theory of collective action" can be fruitfully employed to examine the engagement of cities in SEUNs. While not adopting the network perspective that characterises the policy network approach – by which the unit of the analysis is the network, this framework allows to shed light on the incentives for cities to participate in SEUNs. Therefore, it can be argued that local governments engage in SEUNs because of the incentives they provide, which are political, economic and formative, as reported in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Incentives provided by participation in TMNs

Type of incentive	Time-span		
	Short-term	Mid-term	Long-term
Formative	Information and knowledge sharing	Policy learning	Policy innovation/change
	Capacity-building		
Political	Coalition-building	Lobbying	Collective action
Economic	EU project partnerships	EU funding	Urban investments

It should be noted that these incentives can be gained by cities at different time spans and at different level of engagement: for example, while each member can easily exchange information with other peers during network meetings, policy learning occurs after repeated and consolidated contacts among network members and as a result of the participation in EU programmes and projects.

As argued previously, policy networks usually define a type of organisation composed by both private and public actors across different levels of governments. Nevertheless, the structural and bargaining dilemmas discussed in relation to policy networks characterise the networks' internal coordination regardless of the public nature of TMNs. In effect, coordination problems emerge in every organisation. Yet, the exclusive or predominant presence of public actors in TMNs may affect the nature of the interests pursue by the members, which is mainly political and economic, as well as the expected incentives of membership, supposedly aimed of improving members' problem-solving skills and policy outputs. In other words, due to the public nature of TMNs, the policy network approach cannot be employed to uncover the internal organisational and relational dynamics of the network. Nonetheless, this framework provides a useful approach to the analysis of TMNs, insofar as the focus of the "policy network theory of collective action" offers an in-depth analytical lens to explore the incentives deriving from participation of member-cities into network activities.

A second advantage offered by the policy network approach is the collegial perspective over cities' participation in networks. Accordingly, policy networks, as "collectively acting units" enable members to solve problems of coordination, such as free riding and prisoner's dilemma, which may easily occur in organisations. From this perspective, urban networks serve as a means to overcome these "coordination problems" by putting in place bargaining mechanisms among the members. Given the difficulties to reach consensus on a policy issue, the outcomes of the negotiations are likely to be suboptimal. In other words, the policy outcomes achieved by city networks are not the best policy options in absolute terms, but are

the most viable possibilities chosen in presence of internal (i.e. related to the type and organisation of members) and external constraints (for example, the relationship with EU institutions).

A corollary to this argument is that TMNs can function as a means to fix different levels of environmental and economic development among cities. The environmental and economic differences among European cities may trigger a competition that may be detrimental to cities with a better quality of life (both from an environmental and social viewpoint). By sharing knowledge and experience within a network, local authorities seek to level disparities among them: the achievement of similar levels of development means curbing the competition for external investments. Therefore, TMNs can be conceived as a solution to contain economic rivalry among cities through the development of cooperative relations. Cooperation among cities is aimed at obtaining what is understood by all the members as the collective good, which can be more easily secured through joint action.

This latter aspect suggests a tension between the argument of de-politicisation of policy-making, evident in the emphasis on policy transfer and policy innovation, and the role that political ideologies and value systems play in the networks' bargaining processes. The first argument assumes that policy-making at all levels of government has become more technical, professionalised and a-political. As a result, policies can be transferred from one place to another, since the context seems not to affect policy design. *A contrario*, the second argument emphasises how policy-making and problem-solving within networks are shaped by the dominant ideas and beliefs of participants. These may be either negotiated by all the members participating in the bargaining process in equal measure or promoted unilaterally by some members and accepted by others. This latter situation describes the soft imposition of a few wealthy and politically influential cities over other more disadvantaged peers. The policy network approach does not clarify this situation, as it overlooks the importance that the institutional, economic and political context plays in influencing networks' policy-making. To some extent, this limitation has been addressed by the approach proposed by Carlsson (2000), who seeks to substantiate the theoretical foundations of the "policy network approach" by including it in the "Institutional Analysis and Development Framework" (IAD). However, this framework is not suitable for analysing the topic under study for two reasons. Firstly, the IAD framework focuses on "action arenas" dedicated to address specific policy issues, while SEUNs do not only perform problem-solving functions, as discussed in chapter 2. Secondly, the purpose of this framework, which is to evaluate the outcomes of policy networks, does not suit the objective of this thesis, which is to understand the factors and motivations to explain cities' participation in SEUNs.

Following this line of reasoning, it can be argued that the network approach, while providing useful insights into the motivations for cities to join, derived by the collective and selective incentives of network membership, does not explain why these incentives are perceived as such by the individual participants. In order to understand why local governments value the benefits provided by network membership it is necessary to analyse the individual motivations for cities to engage at supra-national level. To do so, the various urban-level drivers should be included in the analysis of cities' participation in SEUNs. In this sense, the meso-level alone does not thoroughly explain the motivations for cities to engage in SEUNs.

In light of the limitations of the policy network approach, some authors have applied multi-scale frameworks to analyse cities' supra-national activity, which takes into account both the supra- and sub-national levels. These approaches are discussed in the following sections.

3.5   Multi-scale approaches to transnational municipalism

The engagement of European cities in TMNs has been widely interpreted in the dedicated literature in light of supra-national phenomena, namely globalisation, and within the European context, Europeanisation. Such emphasis on the supra-national level reflects a general trend in Political Science that frames the international role of cities as the result of the increased interconnection among different levels of government and non-state actors. From this perspective, much of this literature conceives the role of cities on the international stage as consequential to supra-national processes, which have produced deep political and economic effects on local authorities.

In particular, a stream of research in Urban Studies, European Studies and International Relations that has burgeoned relatively recently has focused on the international role of cities. From a theoretical perspective, this scholarship has examined the renewed prominence of cities at international level by applying a multi-level or multi-scale approach. It should be noted that within this literature the terms "level" and "scale" are not used as synonyms. Drawing on various authors, Gibson *et al.* (2000: 218) define scale as "the spatial, temporal, quantitative, or analytical dimensions used to measure and study any phenomenon", and levels as "the units of analysis that are located at different positions on a scale", adding that "[m]any conceptual scales contain levels that are ordered hierarchically, but not all levels are linked to one another in a hierarchical system." Since the concept of scale incorporates the notion of level, the use of the term "multi-scale" denotes here those accounts analysing transnational municipalism - and the international engagement of local authorities more widely - as a phenomenon impacting on different geographical and administrative tiers. Furthermore, in this thesis "multi-scale" is used to avoid confusion with the term "multi-level", which indicates a specific approach.

As will be discussed in detail in the ensuing sections, multi-scale approaches to transnational municipalism assume that some issues (such as climate change) stretch across multiple levels of government and involve actors of different nature. Accordingly, it is deemed important to undertake an analysis encompassing all the levels and actors involved in order to fully understand sub-national mobilisation. In this respect, three multi-scale approaches to the internationalisation of local governments can be distinguished: 1) *global approaches*, and in particular the global/world city and global governance scholarships; 2) the *Europeanization approach* and 3) the *multi-level governance approach*. In the following sections these three multi-scale approaches are discussed.

3.6   Transnational municipalism and the global dimension

As anticipated in the previous section, one of the multi-scale approaches examined in this chapter contextualises transnational municipalism within the literature on global/world cities and global governance. In order to avoid confusion, it should be noted that terms "global" and "transnational" are

different. Therefore, before discussing these approaches, it is appropriate to provide a definition for both terms, which will help to lay the theoretical foundations for this thesis.

3.6.1 Transnational and global: a conceptual distinction

The terms transnational and global have different meanings. This difference is graphically illustrated in Figure 5 and Figure 6. In this respect, Hannerz (1996: 6) observes that, whereas both terms refer to the overcoming of the national boundaries, the label "transnational" better describes "phenomena which can be of quite variable scale and distribution, even when they do share characteristic of not being contained within a state". The main difference between global and transnational rests with the presence (or absence) of identifiable nation-states. More precisely, while "global processes are largely decentred from specific national territories", "transnational processes" are based within national boundaries and overcome them (American Anthropological Association, 1994 in Kearney, 1995: 548). A different reading of the two terms is provided by other authors; for example, Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson (2006: 4) claim that "the label 'transnational' suggests entanglement and blurred boundaries to a degree that the term 'global' could not". Nonetheless, some authors propose a reading of the *global* that is very close to transnational. Bulkeley and Betsill (2003[38]) distinguish between international and transnational: while the first term indicates processes where the states are the pivotal decision-making actors, transnational indicates processes connecting different national realities, but it does not imply such a state-centrist perspective.

The terms global and transnational do display distinctive features. Firstly, global refers to processes that are not generated within defined boundaries, while transnational identifies processes that are located in specific places and may feed back to the local. Secondly, the global conveys a sense of absence of boundaries, which indicates processes or phenomena encompassing various locations. By way of contrast, in the transnational dimension national and local identities adapt and in some cases resist the homogenising force of globalisation. Finally, while the term global can be described as a flow (or, to borrow Castell's phrase, the "spatial flows" generated by the financial networks, production networks and media networks), transnational is about relationships. While in global flows boundaries, actors and interests are blurred and geographically dispersed, in transnational processes these elements can be identified and located. Therefore, transnational processes entail direct interconnection between the local and supra-national level, but they are not all-encompassing and diffuse. Transnational processes affect the national and sub-national identities, but these do not dissolve; rather, they can even be strengthened by liaising with cross-border counterparts.

These distinctions are also evident when the two terms are used to describe governance. On the one hand, global governance indicates the involvement of a variety of governmental and non-governmental entities, although it is generally employed to refer to the role of international organisations to tackle issues of world relevance (Wilkinson, 2007). On the other, in transnational governance, "the governance activity is embedded in particular geopolitical structures and hence enveloped in multiple and interacting institutional web" (Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson, 2006: 4). More precisely, transnational governance

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[38] Note 1.

indicates the "the coordination of policy decision-making or enforcement in a given issue area across national borders" in which entities different from nation-states have a primary role (Fogarty, 2007: 983).

The meaning of the term transnational, which refers to processes where the levels can be distinguished, has implications on the choice of the analytical approach for examining TMNs. In this respect, the analysis of the role of cities in TMNs can be conducted with a limited consideration of the supra-national level – at least from a methodological viewpoint. In other words, an analysis of transnational networks, in which the actors and the levels of governance can be clearly identified, can focus on one specific level, for example the urban level.

Figure 5: The concept of "transnational"
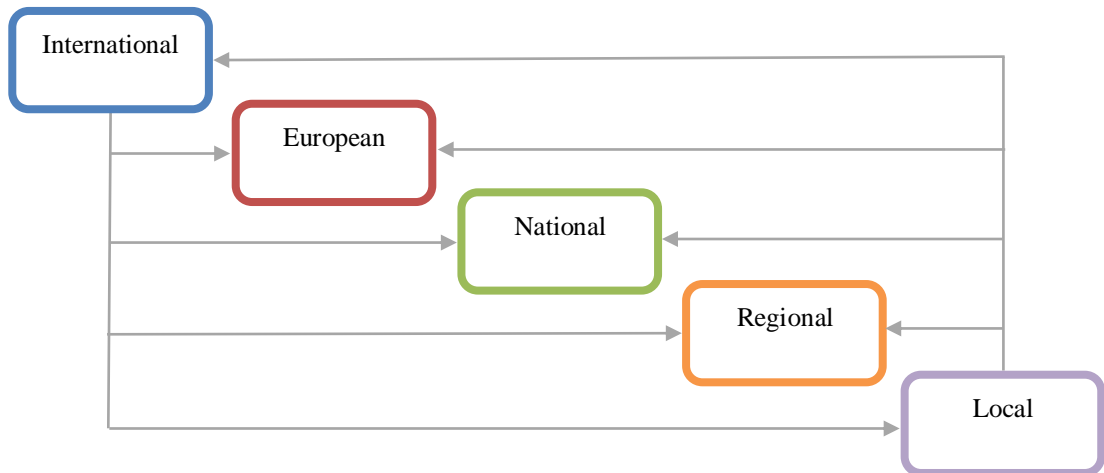
Figure 6: The concept of "global"
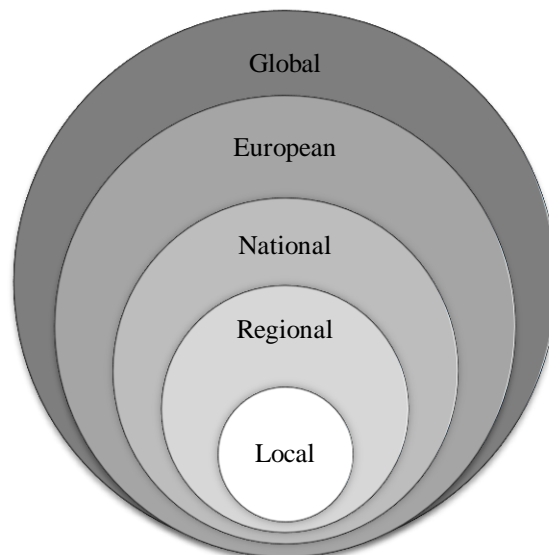
3.6.2 Transnational municipalism and global cities

The first global approach is the world/global city framework (see for instance Lee, 2013). Although scarcely used in the realm of TMNs, for sake of completion the global city and world city approaches deserve a brief discussion. Drawing on the world/global city scholarships, some contributions in the field of TMNs have strived to demonstrate the influence exerted by some global cities in the realm of climate change and environmental policy. On this point it has been argued that the political role that global cities have gained in international environmental politics is witnessed by the prominence of international associations of cities, such as the C40 Climate Leadership Group[39], which bring together global and capital cities (Bulkeley and Betsill, 2013). This argument is also central to some empirical research, which has shown that global cities, thanks to their connection in global economic flows, are more likely to engage in transnational initiatives for sustainable development (see Lee, 2013).

A rich body of research especially in Geography, Economics and Urban Studies has revolved around the concept of world or global cities and their inter-connections in global networks. The term "world city" has a long history, first appeared in the works of Geddes (1915)[40] and, lately, in Hall (1966)[41], then rediscovered and further examined by scholars such as Castells, Friedmann and Sassen (Brenner, 1998; Bell and Jayne, 2009). In particular, Friedmann's (1986) *world city hypothesis* sets out a research agenda primarily focused on the economic linkages among cities. Friedmann's hypothesis emphasises the centrality of some cities in the global economy, which function as "basing points" or nodes of "capital accumulation" (pp. 71, 72) (see Figure 7), and it "concerns the contradictory relations between production in the era of global management and the political determination of territorial interests" (Friedmann, 1986: 69). In light of their role as centres of capital accumulation within the global market, cities are conceptualised in the world city research and theory as "places and sites", rather than actors (Friedmann, 1995: 22). From this perspective, within a global dependent economy, local and regional governments are less and less capable of imposing their power over citizens: as Friedmann (1995: 25) claims, "[t]he more the economy becomes interdependent on the global scale, the less can regional and local governments, as they exist today, act upon the basic mechanisms that condition the daily life of their citizens." This standpoint appears to assume that cities can only to adapt to the globalising forces, insofar as urban political elites do not have much room for manoeuvre in a global world.

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[39] http://www.c40.org/
[40] Geddes, P. (1915) *Cities in evolution*. Williams and Norgate, London.
[41] Hall, P. (1966) *The world cities*. McGraw Hill, New York.

Figure 7: World cities
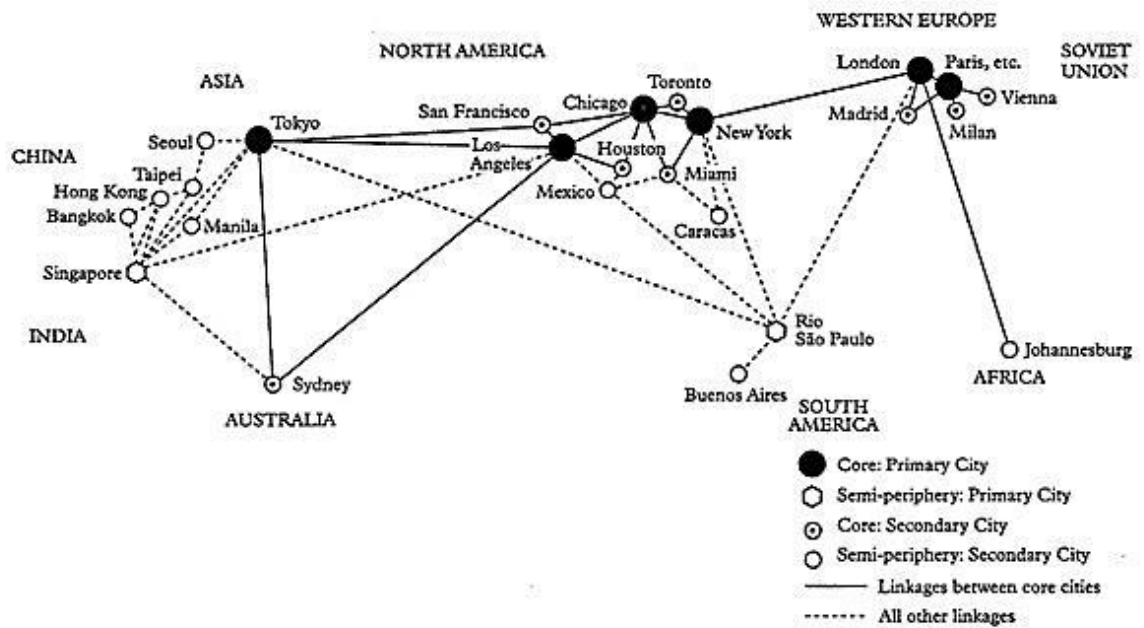
Source: Friedmann (1986: 74 in Acuto, 2011: 2959).

Similar to Friedman's world cities hypothesis is the concept of global city developed by Sassen. According to Sassen (1996), "global cities are new sites of 'extraterritoriality' paradoxically situated 'beyond' the state's territoriality while simultaneously being enclosed within its borders" (Brenner, 1998: 12) and are the places where globalisation manifests itself (Sassen, 2000). More precisely, these are the international financial and economic poles, such as "New York, London, Tokyo, Paris, Frankfurt, Zurich, Amsterdam, Los Angeles, Sydney, Hong Kong, […] Bangkok, Taipei, Sao Paulo, and Mexico City, which are linked within the "new geographies of centrality" (Sassen 2000: 82). In line with Friedmann (1986), Sassen (2002: 218) conceives cities as linked to each other in "de-territorialised cross-border networks" and therefore, given the growing number and importance of such networks, "much of what we experience and represent at the local level turns out to be a micro-environment with global span". Sassen (2002) goes further and claims that the new range of experiences and opportunities that a more interconnected world has offered to individuals go beyond the national boundaries, as showed by the growing number of transnational social activism. In this sense, such description of the urban dimension seems to suggest that, as a result of the tight inter-connection of the global and local scales, the latter appears to be a small-scale reproduction of the global dimension.

A basic difference between world and global cities lies in the fact that, while the first concept orders cities in a hierarchy, the second does not (Castells, 2002). In effect, various urban rankings have been elaborated to systematize larger and more important cities across the world in a hierarchical order, such as the examples reported in Table 5. Similarly, Derudder (2006: 2031-2033) claims that the two terms have a different meaning: while world city indicates "polycentric urban regions", global cities are not dependent on its surrounding region and are linked to other non-contiguous urban units. Conversely, despite such conceptual nuance, it is argued that the two terms can be used as synonyms (see for example

Friedmann, 1995). However, regardless the etymological debates, the theoretical and empirical endeavours of both theses have disentangled the pivotal economic role that primary urban centres (in particular capital cities and second cities with a global profile) are playing. The work around the world cities has been concerned with the analysis of "place-specific social relations, localisation and territorial concentration", seen as the *conditio sine qua non* for the global market, where the urban dimension is conceived as a "localised node within globally organised flows", while the global level is constituted by "networks of superimposed localities and cities" (Brenner, 2000: 366). From this perspective, world/global cities are global financial and economic centres, cosmopolitan hubs attracting tourists and workers worldwide.

Table 5: Examples of world cities taxonomies

Taxonomy				Cities (Europe)
Authors	Criterion	Levels		
GaWC	Levels of integration of cities in the world city network	α ++		London
		α +		Paris
		α		Amsterdam, Brussels, Frankfurt, Madrid, Milan
		α -		Barcelona, Dublin, Munich, Prague, Stockholm, Vienna, Warsaw
		β+		Athens, Berlin, Budapest, Copenhagen, Düsseldorf, Lisbon, Luxembourg, Rome, Hamburg,
		β		Helsinki, Manchester, Stuttgart
		β -		Antwerp, Birmingham, Bratislava, Edinburgh, Lyon, Riga, Rotterdam, Sofia
		γ +		Bristol, Cologne, Zagreb
		γ		Belfast, Glasgow, Leeds, Ljubljana, Marseille, Tallin, Valencia, Vilnius
		γ -		Gothenburg, Krakow, Leipzig, Malmö, Nantes, Porto, Seville, Turin, Utrecht,
		High sufficiency		Bilbao, Dresden, Lille, Newcastle, Nürnberg, Southampton, Strasbourg, The Hague, Wroclaw
		Sufficiency		Aarhus, Aberdeen, Bologna, Bordeaux, Bremen, Cardiff, Cordoba, Florence, Genoa, Graz, Hannover, Linz, Liverpool, Montpellier, Nice, Nottingham, Toulouse
Friedman (1986)	Presence of major financial centres and corporation, key manufacturing cities, transport centres, population size	Core countries[42]	Primary	London, Paris, Rotterdam, Frankfurt, Zurich
			Secondary	Brussels, Milan, Vienna, Madrid
		Peripheral countries	Primary	Cities in non-Western countries with high-medium levels of incomes and considerable degree of industrialisation and a market exchange based economy
			Secondary	

Source: GaWC (2012)[43]; Friedman (1986: 72).

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[42] The cities are listed by decreasing population size as reported in Friedman (1986).

Since the seminal works of Friedmann and Sassen, any discourse around cities has more or less explicitly assumed the pervasiveness of the global dimension. From this perspective, the increasing international engagement of cities has been facilitated by the international context, which has become more globalised, and where the "time-space compression" (Harvey, 1989b: 240) has made possible closer and faster connections than ever before. Indeed, the term globalisation encapsulates the idea of a new world unbounded, characterised by "the absence of a centre", as Bauman (1998: 38) puts it. The diminishing primacy of nation-states within the global economic networks has bolstered the importance of new local entities, such as local and regional authorities, transnational regions, and global actors (Sassen, 2002). In particular, cities have gained a prominent position, especially as centres of economic growth.

However, in light of the discussion outlined previously, it can be argued that the world/global city framework provides a partial analysis of the effects of globalisation on local authorities, as it does not describe the trajectory of development of secondary and third cities that are not global centres - i.e. the non-alpha cities. While global cities generally thrive thanks to their favourable position in the global financial and economic market, secondary and third cities have suffered the most the aftermaths of de-industrialisation and have strived to acquire international visibility and obtain economic benefits. Furthermore, this approach tends to emphasise the global economic and financial dynamics, while overlooking the urban political context in which world/global cities are embedded. In this sense, this approach does not appear to be suitable to analyse the involvement in TMNs of those cities that have a secondary or marginal position in the global economic networks.

Additionally, the global/world city research tends to generalize the features and processes characterising capital cities. The latter have common and homogeneous features that define them as world cities. But still, their internal social and political mechanisms make them distinctive. While global cities strive to be recognised as poles of attraction for an international financial, economic and cultural elite, their identity is also composed by those sections of the urban population that does not participate to the global economic and political processes. The interaction between the citizens and the local political elite defines the peculiarity of each city.

A further flaw of the global city approach is the overgeneralisation of the similarities among cases. On this point, criticisms have been raised with regard to the application of globalisation theory to explain changes occurred in European cities, which are different from other western counterparts – especially American cities (Le Galès and Harding, 1998). Urban scholars have adapted existing theories to analyse the specificities of European cities. In this respect, a European reading of the world/global city has produced the concept of the "porous Europe", developed by Taylor and Derudder (2004). For the authors (2004: 528), the relationships among European cities have to be contextualised within the existence of a "world city network". In particular, "global route arenas", created by larger localities connecting areas across the world, have contributed to the establishment of the porous Europe (Taylor and Derudder, 2004: 532). Taylor and Derudder (2004: 536) argue that:

> "Leading European world cities are specifically distinguished through their forming
> global urban arenas. In other words, being prominent contributors to global urban

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[43] Globalization and World Cities (GaWC) Research Network; see http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/

arenas is an important feature of being a leading European city. Thus, contrary to the 'un-European' label, London and other leading cities define what it is to be a European world city in the world city network: European cities are highly cosmopolitan in their intercity relations. European world cities define a porous Europe."

From this perspective, the specificities of European cities, where the effects of globalisation are intertwined to Europeanisation have been widely explored in the European and urban studies literature. For this, the particular role of local authorities within the European context deserves further attention, as shown in the proceeding of this chapter.

3.6.3   Transnational municipal networks and global governance

The second global approach is constituted by the global governance framework. Here, TMNs are contextualised within global governance discourses, especially in the field of environmental politics (see for instance Betsill and Bulkeley, 2004; Toly, 2008). The core argument of this approach is that globalisation and internationalisation processes, which have facilitated the development of closer global connections, have enabled the participation of a broad range of actors in the governance of environmental problems (Betsill and Bulkeley, 2004).

The use of the term governance signals the emergence of new modes of governing characterised by the presence of new actors in the process of decision-making and the use of "soft" instruments in place of authoritative regulations. The concept of governance identifies "all patterns of rule, including the kind of hierarchic state that is often thought to have existed before the public-sector reforms of the 1980s and 1990s" (Bevir, 2006: 364-365). More specifically, governance is characterised by the increasing reliance on networks, characterised by informal ties and loose *modus operandi* between various types of actors: public, civil society organisations, interest groups, experts and private business representatives that are involved in the decision-making process.

In this respect, it is observed that the involvement of cities in global governance has drawn increasing academic interest over the last three decades or so (Toly *et al*., 2012). In particular, the concept of global governance has gained currency in the field of environmental politics, due to the multi-scale nature of environmental issues. Global environmental governance can be conceived broadly in two ways: on the one hand, it may imply "the creation of global institutions through which to manage global commons"; on the other, it describes "the emergence of transnational networks and new forms of civil society" (Bulkeley, 2005: 877). This second reading of global environmental governance represents a type of "transnational governance", which "occurs when networks operating in the transnational sphere authoritatively steer constituents towards public goals" (Andonova *et al*., 2009: 53-56).

Therefore, the concept of global (environmental) governance, as suggested by several authors, questions the unitary nature of the national level and recognises the processes of "hollowing-out of the state", economic globalisation, nationalist and separatist movements (Bulkely and Betsill, 2003: 17). From this perspective, global environmental governance is considered as "multi-actor and multi-level", in that it is constituted by networks of sub-national authorities, governmental and non-governmental organisations and businesses and may "take place with and without the state" (Andonova *et al*., 2009: 52-56).

The use of the global governance framework to analyse TMNs in the environmental domain stems from the recognition that environmental problems have both global causes and global effects. Hence, adequate solutions should be developed by a plurality of actors, spanning across different administrative levels, cutting across different countries and including both government and non-governmental entities. In this respect, it is argued that "the governance of climate change occurs at multiple levels, from the global to the local" (Bulkely and Betsill, 2003: 32). Therefore, discourses on global governance (especially in climate politics) emphasise the participation of several actors and its multi-level character; these are the constant elements of the multi-scale approaches to TMNs, as will be discussed in the next sections.

The global (environmental) governance approach will not be used to examine the engagement of European cities in SEUNs for a series of reasons. Firstly, the analysis here does not focus on the practices and instruments used to manage environmental goods. Secondly, as discussed in the introduction, environmental policy does not require specific concepts to be analysed. Moreover, the concept of "global" is not appropriate to analyse a transnational phenomenon, as explained in section 3.6.1. Finally, the global approaches are not suitable to analyse the engagement of European cities in SEUNs insofar as they are affected by the conceptual issues discussed in the next section.

3.7 The urban dimension in a global world: critical aspects of the global approaches

In light of the discussion laid out in the previous sections, it seems that cities are inevitably subjugated to the globalising forces and so tightly entangled in the global networks, that urban dynamics cannot be analysed separately from the supra-national dimension. In other words, it appears that globalisation has dramatically transformed local politics to a mere reflection of global processes. An alternative interpretation maintains that the global and the local scales constructively influence each other. The popularity of this argument has even led to the coining of the neologism "glocalisation" (see Robertson, 1995; Swyngedouw, 1992), which defines "the simultaneity of both universalizing and particularizing tendencies in contemporary social, political, and economic systems" (Blatter, 2007: 357). Therefore, the supra-national level seems to be conceived as a *deus ex machina* regulating and influencing the political, economic and legal decisions of the lower levels. In this vein, the entanglement and mutual influence of the global and the local dimensions have made it difficult to draw a line between the two levels. Hence, it seems to be nearly impossible studying the city without taking into account the global context, as if the local cannot be considered as a separate and autonomous level.

This view has been questioned by some authors[44], who have interpreted the institutional changes taking place in cities in light of the devolution of competencies from the central level to the sub- and supra-national levels (Brenner, 2000). In this sense, it has been argued that "globalisation must be understood as a re-scaling of global social space, not as a subjection of localities to the de-territorializing, placeless dynamics of the 'space of flows'" (Brenner, 1998: 27). In this respect, some research contributions on TMNs rooted in urban literature have interpreted these organisations in light of the process of state reconfiguration (see Bulkeley, 2005) and have examined the spatial implications of TMNs. Here, the

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[44] Such as Jessop (1997) and MacLeod (1999) (Brenner, 2000).

focus is on the rise of "new the geographies of governance", defined as "new medievalism", "glocalisation" or "hollowing out of the state" (Bulkeley, 2005: 882-883).

Although the internationalisation and globalisation of local governments have produced economic changes that affected local governments, especially with regard to employment and economic wealth of a city, some activities are place-bound, and to some extent this explains the relevance of the local level (Goldsmith, 1993). This holds true not only for economic activities, but also with regard to political dynamics and social relations. The distinctive urban identity that characterises each place is defined by the sense of belonging and attachment to a community – what Bell and De-Shalit (2013) define as "civicism", i.e. the feeling that a city is unique and not absorbed by the homogenising tendency of globalisation – which find its expression in urban movements, neighbourhood and community associations, but also in citizens' everyday life, on which the global/international dimension has relatively limited influence. Even world capital cities preserve some urban niches untouched by globalisation. In this respect, with reference to global cities, Castells (2002) argues that:

> "There are many different dimensions of globalisation, of urban activities, which are connected functionally. All cities, to very different degrees, are to some extent under the stress of the connection of each key centre, of each key activity in this global network, while at the same time most of the city is engaged in a very local life" (Castells, 2002: 554).

Therefore, despite a general trend towards "convergence", cities are not completely subjugated by globalisation, whose influence is "mediated" by their past, their morphology, their buildings, the characteristics of their citizens and the profile they have built in the international economy (Marcuse and Kempen, 2002: 4). On this point, Savitch and Kantor (2002: 16) observe that:

> "Globalisation has not made all urban places alike. Where you live and work matters more than ever in accessing jobs, income, public amenities, schools, and green space. These things are contingent upon 'place'. Location does make a huge difference."

The persistence of an autonomous and multifaceted urban identity has resisted to the homogenising forces of globalisation, in opposition to what some authors hypothesised (see Ritzer's, 1996 "McDonaldization" thesis). "Standardisation" is in fact a significant component of globalisation, as shown by the increasing production of "common standards of measurement, universal criteria, interchangeable parts, and identical symbols" (Savitch and Kantor, 2002: 13). Nevertheless, although it is undeniable that globalising forces play out in localities, their impact and influence vary significantly from one city to another, sometimes being accepted and sometimes being opposed by the local level (Beauregard, 1995).

The contrasting views on the "global-local interplay" (Dunford and Kaukalas, 1992) are well exemplified by the description of the city of London provided by two authors. The conception of London as a global city underpins Toulouse's statement by which "the City is now a global stage located in Britain rather than a British stage in the global arena" (Toulouse, 1991[45] in Brenner, 1998: 23). Against this view, Castells (2002: 554) argues that:

> "London is not a global city, if you understand global city to mean that the whole or the majority of London is integrated in a global network. No, London is very local and very

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[45] Toulouse, C. (1991). "Thatcherism, class politics and urban development in London", *Critical Sociology* 81(1), pp. 55-76.

parochial. If you go around Hampstead, you seem to be in an upper-class village of the gentry. And the same thing applies to every city."

This excerpt exemplifies the conceptualisation of the global city as an entity composed of many different facets, each of which constructs different functional networks – for instance the "city" in London together with other international financial centres creates global financial networks (Castells, 2002). Hence, the manifold urban identities do not fade but coexist in the global networks. As Lefebvre (1991: 86, italics in the original) puts it, "*the worldwide does not abolish the local*". Rather, "the local […] does not disappear, for it is never absorbed by the regional or even worldwide level" (Lefebvre, 1991: 88). Actually, even in global cities whose identity is strongly shaped by their role in the global market, a local life still persists. In this sense, cities cannot be described as internally homogeneous entities, since they are "very plural places" (Massey, 1999: 116). In other words, the outward international profile of cities overlaps, but does not eliminate the inward urban identity.

Following this line of reasoning, it can be argued that urban politics is not always and exclusively structured around international issues; or such international issues are reinterpreted in light of a specific urban and local understanding, which varies from one place to another. Alternatively, it can be argued that urban politics is influenced by international/global/European dynamics; but not necessarily these occupy a prominent place on the urban political agenda. Urban politics is still very much concerned with day-to-day administration (such as the use of the budget, urban planning decisions, infrastructural projects, the maintenance of public premises, supply of environmental and social services). These are the topics on which opposed political factions compete for votes. For this, local politicians may turn to the international scale to persuade global companies and industries to invest in their localities. To do so, the development of an international profile, for example through the participation in international/European urban organisations or by hosting international events (such as the Olympics and cultural exhibitions), increases the visibility of the city, which is instrumental to attract investment. In this sense, the global and/or European dimension becomes functional to satisfy citizens' (and voters') demands. Especially for second cities (i.e. non-capital metropolitan cities), the rhetoric of the international or European city is a branding strategy to attract investment and capital, which in turn will be used to ameliorate public building, subsidise welfare services and improve local infrastructures. In periods of difficult economic conditions, when public expenditure is being dramatically cut, the quest for external capital is crucial for local administrations. But the development of an international profile does not imply the annihilation of the urban identity; these are two separate facets that define the whole city. In fact, the world city image, which is primarily developed by political and financial elites, has a political but not a social or cultural meaning that may affect urban social practices. It may possibly affect the urban identity if the international façade is socially and culturally structured and reinterpreted outside the political and economic elites.

As a counter-argument, it may be assumed that even local issues have an international dimension. Surely, there may be local problems caused by international events or phenomena, for example an increase of local unemployment caused by the relocation of an international firm. Nonetheless, this latter example shows that international causes can have a local (or regional) impact. But besides problems generated by the international context, the core of local political activities is inward looking and bound to a specific community. In their article discussing the rise of European cities as "political and social players", Le

Galès and Harding (1998: 122, 130) claim that, in light of the economic policies developed by local governments, "there is a role for local politics. And not all of the changes in local politics can be read off from changes in the global economy or the form and functions of nation-states." This does not mean that the city is a micro-cosmos isolated from the international context; by way of contrast, cities are entangled in the global flows. However, there are policies and issues that are not (or only marginally) influenced by the global context. In this sense, the interaction between the citizens and the local political elite defines the peculiarity of each city.

Obviously, it is indisputable that globalisation – intended as the considerable expansion of the volume trade and the movement of people across the world which occurred from the 1980s – has yielded some profound changes. In particular, globalisation has altered the power relations: on the one hand, the linkages between levels of government have become less tight, with sub-national authorities gaining more room to manoeuvre; on the other, economic actors have acquired more influence over political decisions. Although there is no agreement as to whether globalisation has actually "delinked" cities from central states, Le Galès and Harding (1998: 128) note that, thanks to globalisation, cities are less economically dependent from the central states, hence gaining "a new legitimacy". This wider self-reliance engendered by globalisation has enabled the establishment of cooperative relations among cities across different countries. On this point, Ewen (2008: 103) argues that:

> "the scope and presence of municipal networks accelerated and intensified during the late twentieth century through improvements in communication technologies and the increased availability of global travel, but municipalities have been active in transnational networks for more than a century. Transnational municipalism is a constant and recurring feature of municipalism rather than the product of globalisation."

In other words, globalisation can be seen as an enabling factor of transnational municipalism, but it does not explain the reasons underpinning cities' involvement in transnational urban networks, which, for the reasons outlined in the next chapter, lie in the urban context.

3.8   Transnational municipalism in the European Union

In Europe, in addition to globalisation, the process of European integration has affected – although to different degrees - the domestic and local institutions of member-states. In this respect, the significant role that the EU institutions have played in encouraging the participation of cities at supra-national activities has been widely acknowledged. For this, many scholars have interpreted changes at national and local levels in light of the process of Europeanisation. Likewise, the overwhelming majority of the contributions on TMNs rely on Europeanisation or MLG frameworks to interpret the establishment, diffusion and functioning of European inter-urban networks (Betsill and Bulkeley, 2003; Bulkeley *et al*., 2003; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2005; Betsill and Bulkeley, 2006; Kübler and Piliutyte, 2007; Heinelt and Niederhafner, 2008; Kern, 2009; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009). Within the literature on TMNs two trends can be distinguished. On the one hand, some authors have interpreted the emergence and diffusion of TMNs in Europe using the concept of Europeanisation. On the other, TMNs have been conceived as a result of the multi-level structure of the EU. In the next sections these two streams of research will be examined.

3.8.1   The process of Europeanisation and transnational municipalism

In addition to globalisation, Europeanisation appears to have become a common explanation for most European political and economic phenomena occurring at national and sub-national levels. For instance, Kern (2009) argues that to examine the process of the Europeanisation of cities it is necessary to unfold the development of the relations between the EU and regional and local levels, and their influence on the relations between the EU and member-states and between member-states and local authorities.

The concept of Europeanisation has been widely discussed in European studies (see *inter alia* Börzel, 1999; Radaelli, 2000). Amid the plethora of definitions, Radaelli (2000: 4) states that Europeanisation indicates

> "Processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies."

This definition highlights that Europeanisation does not equate with European integration: while European integration is "ontological", i.e. it deals with the transfer and sharing of power, Europeanisation is "post-ontological", in that it refers to the impacts of the EU (Radaelli, 2000: 6). Furthermore, Europeanisation is different from the concept of "convergence" in that the latter is an outcome of Europeanisation, which in turn may also exacerbate the disparities among EU Members (Radaelli, 2000: 6). Finally, it should be made a distinction between Europeanisation and "harmonization": while the latter creates "a level playing field", Europeanisation may fuel competitive relations among members (Radaelli, 2000: 6).

Moreover, it has been observed that Europeanisation does not equally affect domestic institutions of member-states. In this sense, according to Radaelli (2000), Europeanisation may assume the following forms:

1) "inertia", which indicates a situation in which there are no transformations;
2) "absorption", indicating the "adaption […] to non-fundamental changes, but maintaining their 'core'";
3) "transformation", occurring when political attitudes are deeply altered, and
4) "retrenchment", which manifests itself in those cases when "national policy becomes 'less European'" (Radaelli, 2000: 14-15).

Following this line of reasoning, Europeanisation may homogenise domestic institutions, levelling the differences and increasing the degree of resemblance among member-states' policy and procedures. This process is referred as "isomorphism", by which EU Members tend to resemble each other (Radelli, 2000: 17). However, According to Radelli (2000), isomorphism may be induced in three ways: through "coercion", when member-states are forced to conform to European models; through "mimetism", when a group of member-states decide to comply to European policy to emulate other members; or, through "cognitive convergence", as in those cases when the EU indirectly influences national policy areas despite

the lack of binding EU rules in place, for example through processes of policy diffusion and learning (Radelli, 2000: 17-19).

Isomorphism and convergence do not describe only the national reaction to European integration. Also sub-national levels of authorities are affected by European laws and policies. In this respect, it has been observed how the processes of Europeanisation have affected European cities through forms of "coercive isomorphism", when cities have reacted "to the constraints and policies of the European Union", through "mimetic isomorphism" and although in limited proportions, through "normative isomorphism", which entails the intervention of experts (Le Galès, 2002: 98).

As discussed previously, Europeanisation does not necessarily imply the transformation of national and local institutions (Radaelli, 2000). Domestic institutions may actually resist European attempts to integrate member-states and "retrench" behind national – or even regional - boundaries. On this point, it has been suggested that Europeanisation is not merely a top-down one-way process; rather, EU institutions may be influenced by the participation in the decision-making of non-state and non-public authors. This argument underpins Marshall's (2005: 672) "urban Europeanisation" framework, which distinguishes two different types of Europeanisation:

- "download" Europeanisation, occurring when the influence exerted by the EU produces the transformation of the structures and institutions of local governments, and
- "upload" Europeanisation, which reflects the "transfer of innovative urban practices" to the EU level; in this case, local authorities influence the EU.

In addition to download and upload Europeanisation, Marshall (2005: 673) identifies a third type of Europeanisation, defined as "crossload", which entails the exchange of experience and knowledge with other European local authorities, such as through inter-urban networks. Through the application of his three-pronged typology of Europeanisation, Marshall (2005: 681-682 italics in original) reports that, although Europeanisation had significantly affected the urban "modes of working" of the European cities under scrutiny[46], this influence was "*confined to European working*" and only "a limited amount of 'spill-over' into urban regeneration programmes" was found, still bound by the central state. In other words, Europeanisation has not completely changed the mechanisms and political orientation of local governments. In this sense, it appears that Europeanisation has not engendered the transformation but the absorption of urban policy-making and political practice.

A further attempt to classify the impact of Europeanisation on local authorities is developed by Kern (2009: 1-2, 15), who distinguishes three dimensions of Europeanisation of cities:

1. "hierarchical", which refers to the influence of EU regulations on sub-national authorities;
2. "cooperative", which describes direct linkages between cities and EU institutions;
3. "horizontal", i.e. collaborative relations among sub-national governments, witnessed by the establishment of transnational networking. This may take the forms of: a) town twinning; b) transnational municipal networks, and c) short-term projects subsidised by the EU.

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[46] Marshall (2005) applies the concepts of download and upload Europeanisation to two case studies, namely Birmingham and Glasgow.

The first type of Europeanisation - which is "top-down" - emphasises the impact of EU laws on municipalities (Kern, 2009: 1). In this respect, the *acquis communutaire,* through the incorporation of specific directives and principles, has fostered the involvement of cities in the process of European integration as an attempt to address the long-standing and unresolved issue of the democratic deficit. In particular, the subsidiarity principle[47], set out in the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, strengthened the participation of sub-national governments in the process of European integration (Ewen, 2008; Goldsmith, 1993). The subsidiarity principle has supported national reforms to increase competencies at local level: accordingly, policy issues should be addressed, whenever possible, by lower levels of authority; only if these issues have a national relevance or cannot be tackled efficiently by sub-national authorities, they have to be addressed by the central government.

The urban dimension has been mainstreamed in the EU policy-making through programmes and initiatives funded by the European Regional Development Fund that have an urban dimension and incentivise the establishment of networks as a means to collectively tackle social, economic and environmental problems. In this respect, it has been observed that, in addition to specific funds for regions and cities, the EU has supported the role of cities through a series of documents expressing the willingness of the Union to implement "a coherent urban policy" (Schultze, 2003: 129)[48]. A recent attempt to consolidate the role of cities in the EU policy-making is the *Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020*, which has promoted the intervention of cities to achieve "territorial cohesion" in Europe (TAEU, 2011: 4).

The wealth of EU documents, programmes, initiatives and funds is aimed at strengthening the role of cities in the social and economic integration process, since they "seem to be potential local bases for the implementation of European programmes, for the mobilization of citizens on behalf of the European integration project, and for the participation of coalitions that aim to advance this project" (Le Galès, 2002: 76). In this respect, the willingness of the EC/EU institutions to involve local authorities in EC/EU policy-making has been instrumental to achieve specific objectives: on the one hand, the liaisons with European local government has enabled the EC/EU institutions to enhance internal cohesion; on the other, it has made easier to understand the perspective of local governments to improve EC/EU policy-making process (Goldsmith, 1993).

While in a hierarchical approach to Europeanisation local authorities are deemed passive "policy-takers" affected by laws and policies emanated from the EU, a cooperative perspective to Europeanisation consider cities as active "policy-makers" (Kern, 2009: 12). In more detail, cooperative Europeanisation shows the capability of local governments to overcome nation-states and liaise directly with the EU, engaging in lobbying, developing international relations and putting in place "paradiplomatic" activities (Kern, 2009: 12-13). According to the Europeanisation approach, in particular in its cooperative version, it is argued that the process of European economic and political integration - coupled with globalisation -

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[47] Now established by the Article 5 of the *Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union* (2010/C 83/01).
[48] Schulze (2003) includes among these documents the Communications "Towards an Urban Agenda in the European Union" in 1997 and "Sustainable Urban Development in the European Union – A Framework for Action" in 1998.

has facilitates the establishment of cooperative relations among European local authorities, giving them the opportunity to "by-pass" the central governments (Goldsmith, 1993: 683). In some cases, cities seek to exploit their relationship with the EU institutions (especially the Commission) to overcome national governments and to expand their sphere of competencies at local level (Marshall, 2005). In this sense, European inter-urban networks would enable cities to widen their decision-making autonomy.

Finally, the third type of Europeanisation refers to the establishment of horizontal relations between cities without the intervention of EU institutions with the aim to exchange knowledge and best practices (Kern, 2009). It should be noted that there are different patterns of sub-national mobilisation, with some local authorities assuming a "pro-active" role, while others tend to be "reactive" (Goldsmith, 1993: 693). Such different propensity to mobilise at EU level has been associated with variations in national administrative structures, the role of local political actors, the existence of international interlinkages, but primarily city size (Kern, 2009). These factors appear to explain the differences in the attitude towards EU engagement not only among cities across members, but also among cities located in the same nation-state (Kern, 2009). In this respect, it has been noted that "a cluster of truly Europeanized cities is slowly emerging" (Kern, 2009: 18). These Europeanised local authorities, variously defined as "pace-making" (Goldsmith, 1993: 693), "entrepreneurial" (Balme and Le Galès, 1992 in Goldsmith, 1993: 694) or "pioneer" cities (Kern, 2009: 18), are pro-actively engaged in European initiatives, programmes and inter-urban networks, in which they shape "an identity as European cities", and exert a strong political influence on the EU institutions (Kern, 2009: 13, 18). However, it seems that small localities are also becoming increasingly involved at EU level, as signalled by the recent establishment of European municipal networks specifically dedicated to small localities and communities, such as the networks Eurotowns and CoSE (Communities of Sustainable Europe). The rise of these networks represents an attempt of smaller and less influential municipalities, which occupy the lower end of the world urban hierarchy, to grasp the opportunities provided by the EU, following the path set by the bigger "Europeanised" cities. In this sense, the group of "pioneer" cities "may become models for their national, less Europeanized, peers" (Kern, 2009: 18-19).

Drawing on the previous discussion, the role that Europeanisation has played in fostering the supra-national engagement of European local governments is evident. As some authors highlight, European cities, thanks to the importance given to them by the EU, have changed their role in the political arena from "policy-takers" to "policy-makers" (Kern, 2009: 12; Schultze, 2003).

The process of European integration has favoured the intensification of relations among cities; nevertheless, the Europeanisation approach fails to provide an account of the causal factors that paved the way to build European urban networks. It is arguable how much the process of Europeanisation has changed its members, included cities. The influence that political, economic and social factors wield on the outcomes of Europeanisation is simply acknowledged, but these are not examined in-depth. Although the influence exerted by these factors on transnational inter-urban cooperation cannot be denied, the scope of such influence varies. Furthermore, as Radaelli (2000: 24) suggests, "Europeanization processes are filtered and refracted by systems of policy beliefs". European integration as well as globalisation may be seen as enabling factors: these have favoured the establishment of such networks, providing a space to exchange knowledge and practices. Nonetheless, the constitution of networks also mirrors national

processes of government restructuring, decentralisation and fragmentation of competencies. These processes have provided local authorities with more leeway for policy-making. However, Europeanisation does not fully explain the motivations for cities to join TMNs. Together with globalisation Europeanisation can be considered as a process that has eased cities' involvement at EU level. Nonetheless, this approach does not shed light on the urban-level factors that may explain cities' network engagement. As discussed before, despite some attempts to provide a multi-faceted perspective, Europeanisation approach is primarily top-down, leaving little room for urban-level explanations.

3.8.2   The Multi-level Governance approach

The third multi-scale approach is the multi-level governance framework. Most of the literature on TMNs interprets these organisations as the by-product of the multi-tier governing system of the EU, for example, the very well-known *multi-level governance* (MLG) (see for instance Betsill and Bulkeley, 2003; Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2005; Betsill and Bulkeley, 2006; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Niederhafner, 2013). The concept of MLG has gained significant currency not only in European studies, where it was originated, but also in sub-field of Political Science, such as Local Government Studies.

The term MLG describes the peculiar governing arrangement that characterises the EU architecture. More precisely, it indicates a "system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers – supra-national, national, regional and local" (Marks, 1993: 392). Building on this definition, Schmitter (2004) describes MLG as:

> "an arrangement for making binding decisions that engage a multiplicity of politically independent but otherwise interdependent actors – private and public – at different levels of territorial aggregation in more or less continuous negotiation/deliberation/implementation, and that does not assign exclusively policy competence or assert a stable hierarchy of political authority to any of this level" (Schmitter, 2004: 49).

From this perspective, the establishment of inter-urban networks is deemed to be favoured by the new mode of governing developed within the EU. In particular, the greater interconnection between levels of government and the transfer of competencies from central states to the EU and local levels have provided cities with more opportunities to act independently from the nation-states.

Mainstream theories of European integration, notably neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism, have widely debated whether and to what extent the role of member-states has been transformed by the process of European integration. These theories, which are state-centric, have been questioned by works focusing on the distributions of powers from the central state to the supra- and sub-national levels and on the involvement of non-public actors. This transfer of competencies and powers that characterises multi-tier systems of governance occurs in three directions: 1) "upwards" to international actors and organisations; 2) "downwards" to regional and local authorities, and 3) "outwards" to civil society and non-state actors (Pierre and Peters, 2000 in Jordan et al., 2005: 480).

The scholarly interest for the "diffusion of authority" has produced a wealth of concepts to define the dispersal of powers and influence: "polycentric governance", "multi-centred governance", "governance by networks", "*consortio*" and "*condominio*" are just some of the terms that can be found in the literature

(Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 234-235)[49]. Among these, MLG has become widely adopted in European studies to describe the peculiar system of governing of the EU.

The MLG approach enters in the debate on reducing and dismantling the central state through the distribution of powers and competencies to supra- and sub-national authorities. However, by postulating the "transformation of the nation-state" while rejecting its "withering away" or its "obstinate resilience", the MLG framework constitutes a way out from the two theoretical strongholds of European studies – i.e. neo-functionalism and intergovernmentalism (Börzel, 1997: 8-9). In so doing, the MLG approach can be conceptualised as "the combined result of decentralisation, the 'hollowing out' of the state, a shift from an interventionist to an 'enabling state', budgetary cutbacks and a growing degree of institutional self-assertion and professionalism at the sub-national level" (Peters and Pierre, 2001: 134).

Therefore, central to MLG is the recognition of new modalities of decision-making that have given clout the new non-state actors, such as local governments, interest groups and non-governmental organisations. MLG approach hinges on the idea that sub-national authorities have acquired more room for manoeuvre to engage at international level, despite being "embedded in regional and national webs of rules, resources and patterns of coordination", as witnessed by the creation of transnational organisations of local entities (Pierre and Peters, 2004: 79). Since in a multi-level system the relations among the agents involved in the decision-making and policy-making process are not vertically structured, MLG can be described as a form of "stratarchy", i.e. "an organizational model where each level of the organization operates to a large extent independently of other organizational levels" (Pierre and Peters, 2004: 79).

Due to its particular features (i.e. multi-actor, polycentric and multi-scale), the MLG approach is considered suitable by some authors to interpret TMNs. Firstly, a MLG framework would enable to abandon state-centric interpretations of TMNs, in which non-state agents have a prominent role (Bulkeley and Betsill, 2004). Secondly, the use of MLG in the literature on TMNs as a framework places emphasis onto the "polycentric arrangement of overlapping and interconnected spheres of authority", which provides an alternative interpretation to the vertical top-down accounts (such as regime theory and transnational networks) - especially to examine global environmental governance (Betsill and Bulkeley, 2006: 154). Finally, the MLG approach is deemed to be so apt to analyse TMNs that some authors have firmly stated that "it is only by taking a multilevel perspective that we can fully capture the social, political, and economic processes that shape global governance" (Betsill and Bulkeley, 2006: 141).

From any account of MLG it emerges that is not a unitary concept. The modalities in which each level operates and the way they are connected define two models of multi-tier systems with different features, as reported in Table 6 below: type I, labelled as "general-purpose jurisdictions", and type II, defined as "task-specific jurisdictions" (Hooghe and Marks, 2003: 236). These two types of MLG have also been adopted to classify TMNs. For example, Betsill and Bulkeley (2006: 151) in their study on the CCP programme argue that this latter network, although interposing between actors across multiple scales (hence a type I MLG), can be configured as a type II, insofar as it engenders "a new sphere of authority

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[49] For an exhaustive list of the terms coined to define diffusion of authority across different levels see Hooghe and Marks (2003).

through which the governance of climate change is taking place and which is not bound to a particular scale".

Table 6: Types of multi-level governance

Type I MLG	Type II MLG
general-purpose jurisdictions: decision-making competencies are fractioned across jurisdictions, but grouped in a few "packages"	*task-specific jurisdictions*: several and autonomous jurisdictions are responsible for specific duties; this entails a system where different "public service industries" assist citizens
non-intersecting membership: type I MLG has "durable boundaries" that do not cut across levels	*intersecting membership*: these jurisdictions can be described as "functional, overlapping, and competing" and "polycentric"
limited number of jurisdictional levels: in this type of MLG there is a limited number of jurisdictions (from local to central)	*many jurisdictional levels*: type II MLG is characterised by the presence of several levels of authority. For this, it is also defined as "multi- or poly-centred governance"
system-wide, durable architecture: type I jurisdictions are structured in an elected legislative, an executive, and a judiciary systems	*flexible design*: type II governance is flexible in order to address the variations in citizens' demands

Source: Hooghe and Marks (2003: 236-239).

Drawing on this typology, TMNs can be conceptualised in two ways. On the one hand, if considered as a form of type I MLG, TMNs represent a channel of participation and involvement in EU affairs of local authorities, although within a hierarchical distribution of powers across scales (Bulkeley *et al*., 2003). If conceived as a type II MLG, TMNs enable local authorities to engage in a variety of policy sectors that cut across different scales, creating "a new political space or sphere of authority" (Bulkeley *et al*., 2003: 239-240).

Since most of the literature cited in this section adopts a MLG perspective to analyse the role of TMNs in environmental governance (see Betsill and Bulkeley, 2006; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2004; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2005; Bulkeley *et al*., 2003; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009), it seems appropriate to lay out a brief discussion of the application of multi-level environmental in environmental policy.

3.8.2.1 Multi-level governance and environmental policy

From a disciplinary perspective, the concept of multi-level governance was employed initially in the domain of cohesion policies and subsequently in other EU policy areas, including environmental policy (Piattoni, 2009). Multi-tier systems are deemed suitable to respond to the peculiar nature of environmental problems. The rationale is that, since environmental issues such as climate change affect every administrative level, from the local to the global scale, the political response should be targeted at each level. Different actors concur to the governing of the environment: international organisations (such as the EU and UN) through the definition of agreements and the establishment of regulatory mechanisms; the nation-state, through the implementation of norms; the market, through fines, use of labels and self-defined standards; the civil society, through direct action to stop and control activities against the environment, and local authorities, through forms of community activism (Newell, 2007). In the case of climate change, Sovacool and Brown (2009) argue that, whereas it engenders a global impact, the

responsibility should be found even at individual level; thus, to tackle climate change in an adequate way it is paramount to target both scales (Sovacool and Brown, 2009).

Despite a sizeable amount of scholarly research claiming that multi-tier governance systems effectively define and implement environmental policy, some sceptical views have been aired. In particular, although MLG may be suitable to deal with complex multi-scale problems, thanks to its emphasis on cross-level interactions, there are some issues associated with it. In this respect, it has been observed that there are problems engendered by the coordination of a plurality of agents at various levels, which may bring about "transaction costs" and may affect the efficiency of decision-making over crucial issues and additionally, there are risks related to the distribution of competencies, in particular a potential "lack of transparency and democratic legitimacy" (Termeer *et al.*, 2010: 33-34). In this sense, some authors note that the partition of competencies and the presence of a plethora of actors that characterise MLG may be detrimental rather than beneficial to address effectively environmental issues (Termeer *et al.*, 2010).

For this reason, in the literature there is agreement neither on what level should lead policies and actions to tackle environmental problems, nor on how the competencies should be distributed between levels. In this respect, Sovacool and Brown (2009: 320, 322) identify two distinct perspectives over what levels of jurisdiction are more appropriate to tackle climate change: on the one hand, the upholders of the "local/state scale" consider it as the most appropriate level on which to tackle environmental problems, in that it ensures "innovation and diversity, flexibility and accountability"; on the other, the advocates of the "national/international scale" see the latter as being the most effective level, since "it best promotes uniformity and consistency along with economies of scale, and avoids spillover effects" (Table 7).

Table 7: Approaches to climate action

Approaches		Benefits
Local/state approach	*Diversity*	Experimental policy-making Enhancement of competition between jurisdictions Bottom-up influence over definition of national priorities
	Flexibility	Better knowledge of a specific problem More effective policy response ("administrative efficiency")
	Accountability	"Self-selection": citizens' location decisions depend on the extent to which policies implemented at local level match their priorities
		Greater involvement of citizens in decision-making
National/global approach	*Uniformity/consistency*	International requirements
	Economies of scale	Pooling of information
	Spill-over effects	Containment of free-riding Market distortions

Source: Adaptation of Sovacool and Brown (2009: 326).

As reported in Table 7 above, dealing with environmental problems at domestic level (both national and sub-national level) provides advantages in terms of better knowledge of the territory, which helps addressing the information deficit of the international and centralized levels (Sovacool and Brown, 2009). Furthermore, it helps to improve environmental policy-making and generate "laboratories of democracy", where new policies are designed and tested (Sovacool and Brown, 2009: 320). In particular, the

proponents of this approach claim that a decentralised administrative structure would allow to take into account local specificities and to develop adequate measures – hence avoiding "one-size-fit-all" solutions - and to encourage the direct engagement of citizens in local policy-making (Sovacool and Brown, 2009: 320-321).

In this respect, it should be noted that the emphasis on local governments as the appropriate level to tackle environmental problems can be traced back in a variety of international initiatives, such as the 1992 Earth Summit, which produced the Agenda 21 - encouraging the engagement of local authorities in environmental protection - or the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements in 1996 (HABITAT II) (Gibbs, 1997). In particular, the Agenda 21, launched at the World Conference on Environment and Development in Brazil in 1992, prescribed (in Chapter 28) that, to tackle environmental issues, local authorities: 1) should have engaged with the various segments of local community in activities of "consultation and consensus-building"; 2) should have cooperate with international organisations and 3) should have shared knowledge and expertise. Within the European context, the EU has underlined the importance that cities may have in achieving sustainable development, since the 1990 *Green Paper on the Urban Environment* (Gibbs, 1997). Moreover, specific programmes and funding schemes have been set up by EU institutions[50] to promote the intervention of local authorities in environmental issues.

By way of contrast, Sovacool and Brown (2009) point out that the upholders of the national/global approach invoke as its advantages the possibility to pool information and devise common criteria, therefore strengthening the efficiency of the system of regulation. Additionally, proponents of this approach point out the free-riding problems associated with decentralisation, where the more environmentally virtuous actors may be seen their accomplishments frustrated: actors disrespectful of pro-environmental legislation can decide to move to localities with a more lenient environmental legislation, engendering a "leakage" (Sovacool and Brown 2009: 323).

In light of the pros and cons of both approaches, it is argued that multi-scale solutions to address climate change would be optimal; but in practice, it would be challenging to manage various levels simultaneously (Sovacool and Brown, 2009).

The problems related to the application of MLG to environmental policy – in particular the issues around the distribution of competencies and the coordination among actors - open discussions about how multi-tiered systems can be understood and empirically analysed. Despite becoming a dominant approach in European studies along with intergovernmentalism and neo-functionalism, the MLG framework presents some conceptual and methodological flaws that make questionable its validity to analyse the phenomenon of transnational municipalism in Europe. In the next section, the issues with MLG are presented and discussed.

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[50] Examples of specific projects aimed at undertaking municipal sustainability initiatives are: the Joint European Support for Sustainable Investment in City Areas (JESSICA), the Smart Cities and Communities Information Systems and URBACT.

3.8.2.2 A critique of the multi-level governance approach

As discussed in the previous section, the concept of MLG has gained wide currency in the field of TMNs, and European studies more broadly. The main merit of the MLG is the emphasis placed on the importance of non-state and non-public actors in decision-making as well as its comprehensive perspective on the diffusion of power and the integration and mutual influence between levels. Despite its wide success, the MLG approach presents a series of limitations, as also pointed out by some authors (see for instance Jordan, 2001; Stubbs, 2005).

A first flaw of MLG approach is the lack of an historical perspective, as it overlooks the past existence of local governments and nation-states and underestimates their autonomous historical trajectory in the Europeanisation process. Cities and states developed at different times, and in many cases cities developed well before the creation of nation-states, especially in those countries unified in a relatively recent period (e.g. Italy, Germany and Belgium). As theorised by Marshall's (2005) upload/download typology of Europeanisation, it can be argued that the relationship among levels is a two-way flow: such as supra-national actors influenced lower-level authorities, so local authorities affected supra-national organisations and institutions. This implies that, although the EU has impacted considerably on Member-States, it did not change radically either the administrative or the political system. The EU system was built upon nation-states with established and different administrative systems and internal levels of segmentation of power (i.e. regions, provinces, municipalities and so on). Therefore, systems with different levels of authorities were already in place, on which EC/EU institutions overlapped. Likewise, it is true that the multi-tiered structure of the EU has provided local authorities with "access points" to the supra-national level, through which they can obtain considerable political and economic advantages, as discussed in the previous sections. Nevertheless, cities have always sought to establish international linkages with the purpose of gaining economic advantages and political influence. In this respect, Braudel (1984) documents how the gradual establishment of the economic relationships among European cities, such as the Hansa or the Italian Maritime Republics, laid the foundation of the international economic system. From an historical viewpoint, the growing autonomy that cities have acquired in the last decades is not exceptional; by way of contrast, it can be argued that the process of nation-state building during the 18th and 19th represents a rupture with a long-lasting locally-based political order. In effect, the stability of the nation-state began to shake since the 1970s, when economic, political and institutional factors - including the welfare state retrenchment undertaken in a neoliberal shift throughout Western society, the reform of public administration of the late 1980s-1990s that outsourced once public functions to private enterprises and devolved many competencies to sub-national authorities, the principle of subsidiarity promoted by the then European Economic Community (EEC) as a way to foster democratisation process – caused a shift of responsibilities from the central states to local governments. The very same literature on TMNs acknowledges the historical roots of the modern transnational municipalism in the medieval inter-urban leagues (see Kern and Bulkeley, 2009) and the town twinning practice developed in the second decade of 1900s (see Kern, 2009). Similarly, there are several examples of "city meddling" in international issues, such as the anti-war and anti-nuclear protests, whereby local political elites took a stand on matters of international relevance (Alger, 1990: 510-511). However, in multi-level accounts of TMNs it is assumed that the development of the European architecture has changed the practice of contemporary transnational municipalism in Europe.

Flowing from this latter point, a second issue with the MLG approach is that it does not take into account the historical development of the relations between public and non-public actors in Europe. In this sense, the involvement of non-public actors, which is deemed to be fostered by the establishment of the EU, was not brought about by the creation of a multi-level Europe. In many European nation-states, such as Austria and Scandinavian countries, there is a long and consolidated tradition of negotiations among trade unions, businessmen, government representatives (at national and sub-national levels) characterising the corporatist model. For example, Middlemas (1979 in Hill, 2009: 54-55), in his analysis of the British corporatism, claims that, during the first decades of the 20th century, unions and organisations representing employers were "incorporated" - i.e. actively involved - in the policy-making process, in order to create a consensual climate.

Thirdly, it appears that the MLG literature does not engage in an assessment of the effectiveness of a multi-tiered structure to address specific policy problems. For this reason, MLG theorists seem to be overly enthusiastic about the capability of multi-tier systems to deliver effective policy solutions and ensure adequate political participation In this respect, it has been observed that the MLG literature is characterised by "premature normativism", as it assumes implicitly the effective functioning of multi-level governance arrangements rather than shedding light on the mechanisms underpinning MLG (Stubbs, 2005: 69). As Ward (2009: 478) observes, MLG has been popularised in most of urban comparative research "treating each of the levels – nation, region and city – as ontological and epistemological givens".

Fourthly, the much praised originality of this approach, primarily resting on the interconnections between levels and actors, has been questioned by some authors. For instance, it has been noted that MLG combines previous theoretical propositions, such as the "concordance system" developed by Puchala and some neo-functionalist theses (Jordan, 2001: 201). Much of the Marxist Political Geography scholarship has been concerned with the global-local relationship, highlighting the change of power configuration across scales produced by capitalism (see *inter alia* Harvey, Cox and Brenner). However, the strong critical element that characterises this literature is absent in the MLG approach. Additionally, most of the multi-level governance literature ignores the implication of globalisation and neo-liberalism (Stubbs 2005). It has been pointed out that the focus of MLG on the diffusion of authorities among different levels and actors may be seen as a sort of "rehashed neo-pluralism" (Stubbs, 2005: 71).

In addition to these conceptual criticisms, the MLG approach is flawed by a series of analytical issues. Albeit providing a clear description of the EU governing system, MLG does not offer an adequate framework to explain either the political processes that have led to the engagement of a variety of actors in the EU decision-making, or what the relationships between actors at different levels are. In this sense, it can be argued the MLG approach is descriptive, in that it offers a narrative of the existing displacement of power; but it is not explanatory, as it does not provide an account of the drivers of this phenomenon. Likewise, it has been argued that, despite its "'thick' though compelling description" of the transformations of the EU governing structure, MLG framework does not provide an explanation for the mechanisms of the European integration (Jordan, 2001: 201).

Moreover, if used as an explanatory framework, MLG is tautological: on the one hand, according to its definition, the governing system of the EU is multi-level precisely because of the presence of a multitude

of actors at different levels; on the other, as mentioned in the previous section, sub-national mobilisation appears to be incentivised by the multi-level structure of the EU. In the first case, the involvement of local authorities at EU level is a pre-condition of MLG; while in the second case, MLG is a driver of sub-national mobilisation. Simply put, it is not clear whether the interaction of sub-national actors at EU level contributes to shape the institutional and policy-making structure of the EU or the multi-tier nature of the EU architecture explains the supra-national engagement of local authorities.

Furthermore, as an analytical framework, the validity and applicability of MLG to the specific cases is questionable. The MLG approach is affected by a problem of "abstract modelling": MLG is mainly a theoretical model with limited empirical applicability to comparison of different units and this methodological limitation is the result of the inductive nature of the concept (Stubbs, 2005: 70-71). More precisely, it has been observed that MLG typologies (such as Type I and Type II MLG) are tailored to the Western European institutional context and therefore they cannot be adapted to other realities (Stubbs, 2005). By way of contrast, some authors have claimed that Hooghe and Marks' two-pronged typology of MLG, despite its European origins, can be easily adapted to other governance arrangements with a federal structure (as the US and Australia) or where transnational organisations exist (Betsill and Bulkeley, 2006). Nonetheless, the transfer of this approach from one context to another requires a certain degree of adaptation; such process would require the inclusion of the different political and institutional elements of the new reality and possibly the elimination of those components characterising the original context. From this perspective, it is arguable that the MLG approach is so flexible and adaptable to analyse all the institutional multi-tiered structures. Therefore, it can be claimed that, thanks to its looseness, MLG as a concept can be exported, while the typologies cannot (Stubbs, 2005).

Another critical aspect of the MLG approach is the difficulty of shedding light onto the role and competencies of which each level should be entitled to deliver effective policy responses, and how the different actors should cooperate. In order to understand what each level of government should do to deliver effective policies, it is necessary to understand the role that each level plays in a given policy domain. However, disentangling the actions and the contribution of public and non-public, supra-national, national and sub-national actors poses methodological and empirical research challenges. Firstly, it is difficult to analyse the different types and modes of interaction among the levels as well as to appraise the results of this interaction. A second challenge is how to isolate and evaluate the contribution of each agent to address a policy issues (such as environmental problems) and how this differs from that of the other actors. For example, one may ask how local authorities tackle climate change. Then, the issue is how to isolate the impact of local authorities' action from the concurring action of the national and European levels, which are entitled of binding legislative powers. In this respect, Bulkeley and Betsill (2005), in their analysis of sustainable cities, argue that focusing on the local dimension of sustainable cities will not enable to depict a more articulated landscape; by way of contrast, the MLG framework can provide a multi-faceted perspective. Similarly, Betsill and Bulkeley (2006: 142) criticise the international relations scholarship on regime theory and transnational networks because it makes a conceptual distinction

> "between 'global' processes and actors and those that are 'local' in origin and scope on the one hand, and between state and nonstate actors on the other, […] obscure how global environmental governance takes place through processes and institutions operating at and between a variety of scales, involving a range of actors with different levels of authority."

However, while providing an insight on the opportunities that the new modes of governance have opened up to local authorities, the MLG approach does not examine the economic, political and social dynamics that play out at each level, which are pivotal to gain an understanding of why cities are getting increasingly important in the political landscape.

A third limitation of MLG is its descriptive comprehensiveness. Although from a conceptual viewpoint the all-embracing nature of this approach can be seen as a strong point, it can be at the same time a methodological weakness. The non-hierarchical and polycentric features that characterise the MLG do not permit to give preference to one level over another. The absence of a specific analytical focus may thus result in a lack of critical explanations of the potential tensions among actors at different levels.

Additionally, a multi-level perspective would limit the choice of research methods. For example, there would be problems with the application of a comparative research design, since the selection of the cases would constitute a significant challenge. Indeed, it is neither straightforward to select the most appropriate cases at each level nor to establish criteria to operate such choice. In the case of research on TMNs, by adopting the MLG framework it is assumed that European transnational municipalism involves more than one level of government, namely the local and the European levels. From a methodological standpoint, then the units of analysis should be located on each level, leading to draw a sample of member-cities and a sample of networks. However, when it comes to data collection, both samples would comprise cities, in as much as member-cities constitute the networks and in many cases they hold representative positions (such as chairs). Hence, the sample would be cross-national rather than multi-level (the level would still be local). However, even assuming that a pool of cases including participants at each level of government could be drawn, it is debatable whether a diverse sample would enable to explore the causal mechanisms of transnational municipalism. Actually, it can be contended that this method would privilege breadth over depth of the explanations, providing a more descriptive rather than explanatory account, as discussed above.

Finally, a particularly challenging aspect is to distinguish and assess the existence, the strength and the direction of the influence exerted by one level over another. While it is widely argued that the supra-national level has influenced the local level, this argument has more a theoretical than an empirical validity. In fact, the magnitude (i.e. how much) and the direction (i.e. which level has impacted on another level) of such influence cannot be measured, unless the EU-local relation is explored over a very long time span.

In the specific case of the use of MLG to the analysis of TMNs, the main critique refers to the implicit incoherence between the key arguments and their empirical application. While most of the literature on TMNs emphasises the importance of couching such phenomenon in a multi-level and non-hierarchal theoretical framework (see *inter alia* Betsill and Bulkeley, 2004; Bulkeley and Betsill, 2006), it does not succeed in developing it fully. As a result, a multi-level approach to TMNs – whereby no analytical prominence is given to a particular scale - may result in the production of an exhaustive anthology of descriptions of this phenomenon primarily through the use of case-studies where individual cities are the units of observation (see as an example Bulkeley and Betsill, 2003). This incongruence between the conceptual base of multi-level accounts of TMNs and the practice can be – at least partially – explained by the methodological challenges of the multi-level analysis outlined in the previous paragraphs.

The discussion of the theoretical and methodological issues with the MLG approach suggests that this framework does not constitute a consistent theory; rather, it can be considered as a characterisation of the status quo in the European administrative context. Alternatively, MLG may be better described as an ideal type of governing arrangements. In this respect, Jordan (2001: 205) concludes that the MLG framework can be employed as "a useful descriptive picture of the EU" despite falling short of constituting "a comprehensive theory of integration". In light of such limitations, the MLG approach does not provide a suitable analytical approach to frame this research. As already discussed, this research seeks to isolate the motivations and the drivers in place at local levels, while taking into account the EU context. For this reason, an alternative approach is proposed to examine the reasons and drivers for cities to participate in SEUNs (see chapter 4).

3.9   Concluding remarks

As discussed in the previous sections, the multi-scale accounts of TMNs provide an exhaustive description of the nature, functions and role of these organisations. Nonetheless, these approaches present both theoretical and methodological shortcomings. These have been analysed in greater detail for the MLG approach, since this has been used more widely in works on TMNs than the other two frameworks. Despite the differences between the three multi-scale approaches, they share two common drawbacks. On the one hand, this category of analytical approaches overlooks the urban dimension of transnational municipalism, drawing greater attention onto the supra-national level. Therefore, multi-scale approaches do not explain transnational municipalism in the EU in sufficient depth. On the other, in multi-scale accounts, a conceptualisation of supra-national processes (namely globalisation and Europeanisation) as causal - rather than enabling - factors of transnational municipalism seems to prevail. This interpretation falls short of providing a clear understanding of the extent to which the supra-national dimension constitutes the driver or the context of transnational municipalism. In other words, it is not clear whether globalisation and Europeanisation are the causes underpinning sub-national mobilisation or if these supra-national processes provide opportunities or constitute constraints for cities to engage at supra-national level. For these reasons, the core argument of this research stems from the assumption that the engagement of cities in SEUNs is influenced to a greater extent by changes occurred at local level than processes in place at supra-local levels. However, in the literature on European city networks the analysis of the urban factors that underpin local governments' engagement in intra-urban organisations is scant.

In light of the criticisms outlined in the previous sections, this thesis does not adopt a multi-scale approach as theoretical framework. Rather than striving to provide a multi-level account of the engagement of cities in European TMNs, the analytical focus of this research is upon one single level, i.e. the urban level. Here, the term "urban" indicates the political, economic, cultural and social system that defines and distinguishes the city from other urban settlements[51]. As will be discussed at length in the next chapter, the underlying assumption is that transnational municipalism is part of a wider regeneration strategy led by local political elites. To do so, local governments seek to exploit the opportunities offered by the international and European context to satisfy local demands and address local problems. European city networking enables local authorities to broaden their decisional autonomy over urban-related issues

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[51] For an exhaustive definition of the term city see chapter 3, section 4.2.

by interacting with European institutions without the intermediation of the national level. In this respect, local authorities have acquired in the last decades more autonomy and political influence. This increasing independence (or reduced dependence) from upper-level authorities finds its roots in urban-level processes occurred in the last three decades, which will be described in the following chapter.

4. AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE TO TRANSNATIONAL MUNICIPALISM: THE URBAN APPROACH

4.1 Towards an urban approach to the analysis of local governments' involvement at EU level

In the previous chapter the horizontal and multi-scale approaches to transnational municipalism were discussed. While the purpose of the literature review was to gain an understanding of *how* to examine the phenomenon under study, the second step entails the development of an adequate analytical framework that helps to identify *what* has to be taken into account; that is the factors determining the presence and the degree of involvement of local authorities on the European stage. As previously discussed, many contributions in the literature argue for a comprehensive analytical approach to TMNs in order to unravel the relations among the local, national and global. However, the empirical results do not seem to support the theoretical premises. In many cases, these works stem from sound theoretical foundations, but the research efforts fall short of providing robust results. This is due to the theoretical and operational challenges discussed in the previous chapter that hinder the fulfilment of the ambitious research goal of analysing the relationships between various levels of governments. In light of these flaws, multi-scale perspectives to transnational municipalism have been rejected.

By way of contrast, the horizontal approach in its collective action variant can provide a useful analytical insight to explore the phenomenon under study. This approach, as suggested by Carlsson (2000), can improve its theoretical validity if combined with other approaches. Following this line of reasoning, an urban-level analysis is proposed here to complement and to some extent redefine the horizontal approach. The latter enables us to undertake an analysis of the "collective" and "selective" incentives that the members obtain, shedding light on the reasons for engaging in a network. Nevertheless, this horizontal perspective does not explain why local governments are actually interested in the incentives that city networks provide. In order to address this question, it is necessary to shift the focus of the analysis from the network to the members, i.e. to local governments. This approach, which can be defined for convenience as *urban*, argues that the city rather than the network is the unit of inquiry; hence, the analysis is concerned with the members of the network. It should be specified that the analysis is not meant to focus on the characteristics of the individual members participating in a network (i.e. the local officials), but on the characteristics of the city s/he represents. In other words, this approach provides an analysis centred on the urban context – described by economic, institutional and political variables[52] - against which local governments' decision to engage in SEUNs is taken. The focus on the urban dimension does not neglect the national and EU context in which cities are embedded. Here, more importance is given to the urban-level dynamics than to national and supra-national phenomena to explain the decisions of local governments. By adopting an urban perspective, it is possible to overcome the limitations of the other approaches and effectively address the research objectives of this thesis.

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[52] As discussed previously, the social component is omitted, since only local governments are engaged in the TMNs taken into account in this study.

The adoption of this approach has both theoretical and methodological implications. From a theoretical viewpoint, the analysis of cities relies on urban studies scholarship, which has extensively explored the phenomena and transformations occurring in and affecting localities. From a methodological perspective, an urban approach enables us to combine different research methods, as discussed in the following chapter.

Before outlining the theoretical foundations of the urban approach, it is necessary to provide a definition of what the term city indicates. In the following sections then a discussion of the economic, institutional and political factors that constitute the urban approach is provided.

4.2   A definition of city

There are two types of definition to describe the term city: a statistical definition and a socio-political definition. With regard to the first type, urban size and the population density constitute the criteria to distinguish cities from other human settlements. As an example, the Urban Audit[53], which is the most comprehensive database on cities compiled by Eurostat, includes conurbations with a population comprised within 50,000 to 10 million inhabitants (Feldmann, 2008) (see Figure 8). From this standpoint, cities correspond to large settlements with a high concentration of population.

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[53] The cities included in the Urban Audit are selected through a four-step process: 1) those '"grid cells" with 1,500 inhabitants per km² or more are included; 2) the surrounding cells with more than 50,000 inhabitants per km² are included; 3) those localities where the 50% of the population is located in the centre are included in the urban area, and 4) a city is defined if a connection to the political level exists, if half of the inhabitants is located in a centre of a city and if the two third of the inhabitants is located in a city (Eurostat, 2013: 218).

Figure 8: Total resident population in the Urban Audit core cities

Inhabitants

○	< 100,000
○	100,000 - < 250,000
●	250,000 - < 500,000
●	500,000 - <1,000,000
●	1,000,000 - <3,000,000
●	> 3,000,000
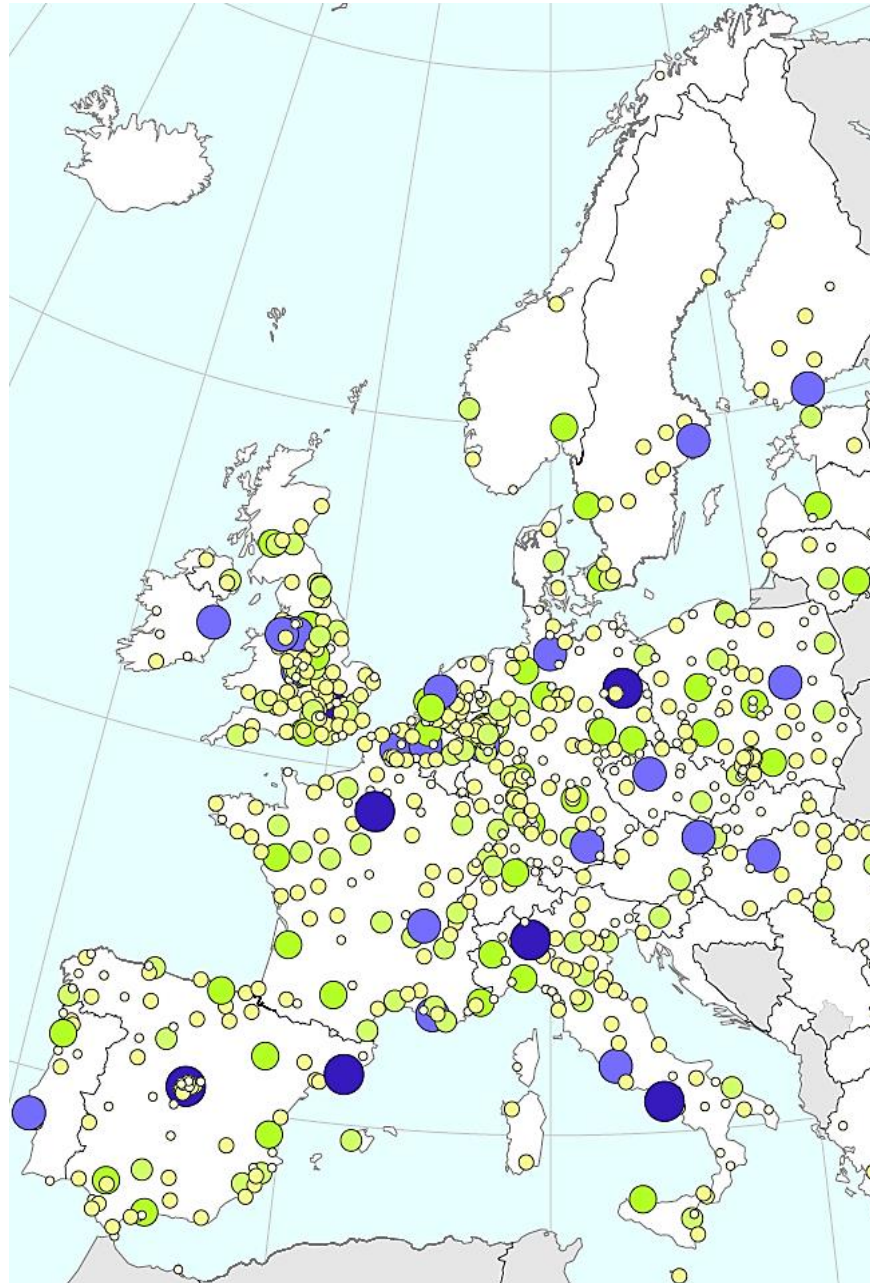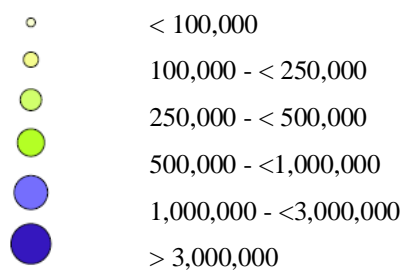
Source: Eurostat, Statistical Atlas (as of 1 January 2012).

Despite the statistical definition of cities, which can be used to classify localities according to their size, a more analytical conceptualisation of city should identify the specific social, political, economic and

cultural elements that characterise the urban context. This latter type of definition, which can be labelled as socio-political, draws on the urban political and sociological scholarship, which originated at the beginning of the 20th century. In particular, one of the key studies on the city was elaborated by Weber (1925) in his book *The City*. Through the analysis of the evolution of cities from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, Weber highlights the importance of the economic and politico-administrative dimensions in the definition of a city. More precisely, the economic component of a city refers to the presence of established economic activities, while the politico-administrative dimension inheres to the "urban economic policy", whose aim was

> "to stabilise the conditions of the local urban economy by means of economic regulations in the interest of permanently and cheaply feeding the masses and standardising the economic opportunities of tradesmen and merchants" (Weber, 1958: 65-73).

Other authors have highlighted how the economic and political spheres are not the only components of the urban dimension: a city is also defined by a peculiar culture. In this respect, Wirth (1938: 2) observes that:

> "the city is not only in ever larger degrees the dwelling-place and the workshop of modern man, but it is the initiating and controlling centre of economic, political, and cultural life that has drawn the most remote parts of the world into its orbit and woven diverse areas, peoples, and activities into a cosmos."

This entanglement of diverse and composite social, economic, cultural and political spheres is the distinctive feature of the city. In other words, the urban defines a "multiplex entity", that is "a concentrated complex and a process of diverse relational webs" (Amin and Graham, 1997: 418).

Furthermore, it has been pointed out that cities are characterised by distinctive types of social and economic relations and a specific institutional structure. In particular, Castells (1977: 12) defines a city as:

> "a geographic locus in which is established the politico-administrative superstructure of a society that has reached that point of technical and social development (natural and cultural) at which there is a differentiation of the product in the simple and the extended reproduction of labour power, culminating in a system of distribution and exchange".

This system includes four elements: 1) a class system; 2) a political system instrumental to maintain the societal mechanisms and "the domination of one class over another"; 3) "an institutional system of investment", mainly in the cultural and technological sectors, and 4) "a system of external exchange" of commodities (Castells, 1977: 12).

Setting aside the Marxist analysis of the urban question – which goes beyond the purpose of this thesis - what is important in Castells' definition is the co-existence within the city of complex and entangled political, economic and social structures, which distinguish the city from other localities. In this respect, it should be specified that throughout this work, the term city is used to indicate urban governments. In other words, "city" here indicates the city-government, that is the local political elite. Although the existence of other non-public actors (such as pressure groups and businesses) that define urban politics is not neglected, these are not taken into account in this thesis, which is concerned primarily with urban political elites.

These definitions describe the urban dimension as a complex politico-administrative, economic, social and cultural structure. In turn, this conceptualisation of the city makes the use of the term urban more preferable than local for a series of reasons. Firstly, while local identifies any level of government below the national (hence including the regional level), urban refers to the sphere of the city. In more detail, urban qualifies a specific category of territorial agglomerations, defined by size, population density, and especially by an economic, political and social system whose influence goes beyond the urban boundaries. Secondly, the two terms have different theoretical foundations. Local is a generic term to indicate the study of policy and political processes occurring at sub-national level with no specific conceptual orientations. In this sense, the term local is preferable to urban to indicate city governments. Therefore, the phrases "local government" and "local authorities" seem to be a better option than "urban governments". By way of contrast, the term urban recalls an established thread of political and sociological theory characterised by a critical stance towards contemporary economic system and the policies and political discourse associated to it. Nonetheless, the preference for the word urban over local does not indicate an implicit negative meaning attributed to the latter, as occurs in some European political cultures (such as in France or Italy), where local recalls an out-of-time and particular struggle against the central state (Saunier, 2002).

Having defined the meaning of city, in the next section the theoretical foundations of the urban approach are outlined.

4.3 The urban-level drivers of SEUN membership

The definition of the tem city developed by the sociological work of Weber, Wirth and Castells suggests that a thorough analysis of cities should take into account the different "systems" – as Castells (1977) defines them – and, if the case, the transformations that have led to the *status quo*. Drawing on the findings of some contributions in the field of TMNs and more broadly in urban political scholarship, it emerges that it is necessary to include in the analysis three types of factors to understand the phenomenon of transnational municipalism for sustainability in Europe (Figure 9). Firstly, the patterns of urban economic development emerging from the transition to post-industrialism; secondly, the institutional arrangements derived from decentralization processes, which have widened the degree of autonomy of local governments; finally, the political discourses used by political elites to legitimize their political economic choices.

Figure 9: The drivers of transnational municipalism for sustainability in Europe
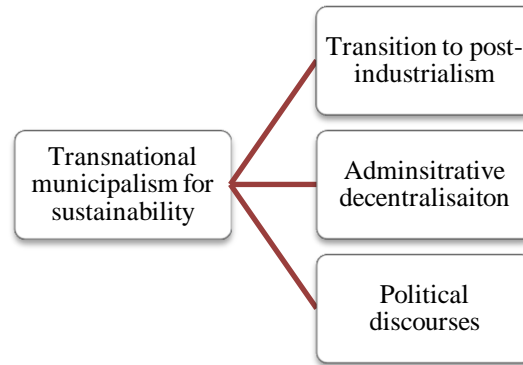
4.3.1 Urban economic development

In order to understand the phenomenon of transnational municipalism the economic conditions characterising European cities should be examined. These economic factors include both the transformations of local economies and the strategies put in place by local governments to address them. In this respect, some authors have interpreted transnational municipalism in the context of urban regeneration strategies undertaken by local governments (Ewen, 2008) or as a response to the economic competition among cities (Clarke, 2009; Leitner and Sheppard, 1999). Therefore, transnational municipalism is rooted in the patterns of urban economic development, which entails the shift from an industrial to a post-industrial economy and the politics of economic competitiveness.

4.3.1.1 The transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy in cities

In some accounts of transnational municipalism, the economic context in which local governments develop internationalisation policy is examined. For example, in her historical analysis of Birmingham's European engagement, Ewen (2008: 102) argues that the policies implemented by de-industrialised centres in the Eighties were aimed at developing "neatly packaged images that differentiated them from their decaying industrial heritage, while emphasizing their credentials as cities of European and international prestige." In this sense, the involvement of local authorities in European and international activities has to be framed within the transition from an industrial to a post-industrial economy, which has been one of the pivotal transformations that affected European cities in the last three decades.

Before illustrating the main economic changes that occurred in Europe - and more widely in Western societies – it is useful to provide an outline of the term "post-industrial". In his book "*The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*", Bell (2008: xv-xvii) identifies a set of dimensions of change that characterise the post-industrial society:

1. a shift from manufacturing to the tertiary sector;
2. a change in the employment structure, with a sharp increase of highly skilled professions and the parallel decline of manual jobs;

3. the role of education as the enabling factor of "social mobility";

4. the emerging relevance of the "human capital" (and the related idea of "social capital") in theories of growth;

5. the crucial role of "intellectual technologies", based on mathematic modelling rather than on mechanical automation;

6. information and communication technologies as the dominant infrastructures of the post-industrial society, replacing the central importance that transport had in the industrial system, and

7. the "labour theory of value" underpinning industrialisation was replaced by the "knowledge theory of value" as the founding principle of the post-industrial society, where "innovation" plays a pivotal role.

Therefore, the main difference between the industrial and the post-industrial society is that, while the first hinged on the "coordination of machines and men for the production of goods", the latter "is organised around knowledge, for the purpose of social control and the directing of innovation and change" (Bell, 2008: 20). In brief, the post-industrial economy is characterised by the predominance of an advanced service sector. Additionally, the development of the service economy has also engendered the creation of a fourth economic sector, defined by Gottman (1983)[54] as the "quaternary sector", which includes those services, such as producer services[55], that can be easily transferred from one place to another (Logan and Swanstrom, 1990: 8).

The shift from an industrial to a post-industrial economy has therefore entailed challenging restructuring processes, such as the absorption of the industrial workforce, the redevelopment of former industrial buildings and the requalification of industrial sites. Despite some attempts to involve sub-national authorities, such as the creation of the Regional Development Agencies in England in 1998[56], the solutions to these problems were left mostly to cities. In fact, in the attempt to move over the de-industrialization affecting cities with manufacturing activities, Western European cities were faced with the challenge of reinventing their economies by investing in the new promising economic service sectors. However, to recover the urban economy cities needed considerable availability of capital. In this respect, the position of cities in the global economic and financial flows was an important factor to determine the success of their economic restructuring. On the one hand, capital cities (such as London or Paris) recovered more easily from de-industrialization thanks to their favourable position in the global market and their multi-sector economy, on the other de-industrialization in second cities had different outcomes: while some have been more successful, others encountered more difficulties in restructuring their economies (Savitch and Kantor, 2002). In other words, while "world cities" catalysed advanced international economic and financial services, cities with a less global profile sought to develop a new range of activities (Logan and Swanstrom, 1990). While those cities that successfully recovered from de-industrialisation acquired the rank of post-industrial, indicating "a dominant layer of activity, superimposed upon a diminished base of manufacture, shipping, and skilled trades", the cities that were

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[54] Gottman, J. (1983). *The Coming of the Transactional City*. College Park: University of Maryland, Institute for Urban Studies.

[55] Producer services include: business, financial, insurance real and estate services (OECD, 2000).

[56] The RDAs were then suppressed in 2012 (see: http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/webarchive/regional-development-agencies.htm).

not able to thrive declined, albeit several local authorities were able to develop some post-industrial economic enterprises such as tourism, cultural and leisure attractions (Savitch and Kantor, 2002: 8). The shift from industrial to post-industrial economy also led to the creation of new types of urban conglomerations, such as "new-age boom towns" or "sunbelt cities", where the information and communication technologies constitute the dominant economic sectors (Savitch and Kantor, 2002: 7). Although these new cities are more widespread in the North-American urban system, a few examples of "boomtowns" can be also found in Western Europe, such as Croydon (London), Oxford, Grenoble, Montpellier, Munich, and emerging localities in the North-Eastern Italian regions (Savitch and Kantor, 2002: 7).

From the Sixties and in particular during the following decade, European local governments began to intervene in urban economic growth with the implementation of policies aimed primarily at addressing the problems caused by de-industrialisation, and concerted their intervention with business and financial private actors (Le Galès and Harding, 1998). The aim of such local growth policy was threefold: the improvement of the labour market, providing the support to firms and creation of a suitable business environment, and the development of strategies to win over companies and wealthy classes (Le Galès and Harding, 1998).

In this respect, it has been noted that the "mobilisation" of local policy-makers to achieve economic development was greater in regional capital cities than in national capitals, since non-capital cities sought to acquire more autonomy from the national government (Le Galès and Harding, 1998: 131). The engagement of European cities in urban economic policy varied significantly also across countries: while local governments in Germany, France, Great Britain – led by a "younger, more educated and less working class […] new urban left" - Netherlands, and Spain were highly mobilised, in Ireland, Italy (except for Bergamo, the cities in Emilia-Romagna and those around Venice), Portugal and Northern European countries the level of involvement was low (Le Galès and Harding, 1998: 131).

The emphasis placed by some local governments on urban economic growth signalled what Harvey (1989) describes as a move from the "managerial approach" of the 1960s to "entrepreneurial forms of action" characterising the following two decades, which has to be partly attributed to the dismantling of the industrial system and the deriving loss of jobs, the implementation of restrictive fiscal policies and a widespread political emphasis on free market economics. For Harvey (1989: 7) such urban entrepreneurialism was generally constituted by three elements: 1) the key role of "public-private partnership" aimed at stimulating economic growth; 2) local authorities taking the risks associated with speculation; 3) more attention to reshape the city profile by investing in offices, cultural and leisure centres etc. (i.e. the "political economy of place") than to address the problems of a given area (what it is defined as the "political economy of territory").

This latter point sheds light on a strategy implemented by European local governments to attract capital, that is the development a new urban image. The challenge of restructuring urban economies, especially in a period when local budgets were significantly curtailed by central governments, prompted cities to search for alternative source of funding. As mentioned before, this put cities in a stiff competition to attract external investments, in which firms and businesses have a favourable position, in that they can move capital from one place to another, enjoying various levels of "location substitutability" (Cox, 1995:

214, 217). As a result, firms can use such locational freedom to increase their weight in negotiations with local governments. In order to attract companies, nation-states and sub-national authorities alike may offer "incentive packages" to firms, such as reductions in taxation or building transport facilities (Blair and Premus, 1993). Therefore, in order to win the competition for attracting external capital, cities have sought to offer the best conditions for companies. A similar argument is put forward by Harvey (1989: 11), who claims that in a context characterised by the intensification of the inter-urban competition engendered by easier and less expensive movement of goods, services and people, the governance of cities was aimed at creating a "good business climate" and offering inducements to attract investments. However, local economic strategies based on incentives to businesses, especially when implemented in the same urban area, may engender a "zero-sum game": for instance, local governments, rather than stimulating employment, may increase fiscal pressure in one area of the city, which in turn means that the improvements in one area may be paralleled by economic worsening in another (Blair and Premus, 1993). In this respect, as the "bargaining theory" developed by Kantor and Savitch (2005) hypothesises, city governments put in place different strategies to attract capital according to "bargaining advantages" - such as their geographical position, or the existence of funding mechanisms from national or international authorities – and the negotiation ability of local policy-makers.

4.3.1.2 The politics of competitiveness

A second economic driver that helps to explain the international engagement of cities is the importance given by national governments and the EU on urban competitiveness. The competition among cities to attract inward investments has oriented urban economic policy towards the objective of increasing competitiveness. In this respect, it has been observed that, due to the emphasis placed upon competitiveness in urban economic policies in the 1980s, in the following decade local authorities tried to develop "cooperative strategies", including city networks (Clarke, 2009: 502). In the same vein, Leitner and Sheppard (2002: 500) suggest that the participation in city networks can "empower" local authorities, insofar as the cooperative nature of the networks makes cities less vulnerable in the race for investments.

Urban economic competitiveness can be defined according to six parameters[57]: 1) the creation of "high-skill, high income jobs"; 2) the development of a green goods and services industry; 3) the creation of "goods and services with desirable characteristics", for instance "high income elasticity of demand"[58]; 4) the expansion of the economy should be at a sustainable rate; 5) local authorities should try and develop specific economic sectors to "gain control over its future by choosing alternative futures"; 6) a local authority should strengthen its presence on the "urban hierarchy" (Kresl, 1995: 51). In order to achieve competitiveness as defined by the indicators outlined above, local governments have to take into account in urban policy-making the "economic" and "strategic" "determinants of competitiveness"[59] (Kresl, 1995: 51), which are reported in Table 8 below. While the economic determinants pertain to the structure of the

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[57] Kresl (1995: 50-51) defines these parameters as "indicators of competitiveness".

[58] For example, luxury goods have a higher income elasticity of demand (Mankiw, 2009).

[59] Kresl (1995: 51) describe "urban competitiveness" as a function of the "economic determinants" and "strategic determinants", where the first equal to "factors of production+ infrastructure+ location+ economic structure+ urban amenities", while the second category equals to "effective governance+ urban strategy+ public-private sector cooperation+ institutional flexibility".

local economy and the type of economic actors operating, the strategic determinants mainly refer to the role that local and also national governments play in the local economy.

The aim of much of urban economic policy has thus been to gain considerable competitiveness, not only over cities in the same regional and national area, but also over potential rivals outside the national boundaries. The race among cities to enhance their economic prosperity has forced local authorities to search for "a niche for their communities in the new economic order" that the move towards a post-industrial economy imposed (Savitch and Kantor, 2002: 8). Therefore, local governments have implemented place promotion and city branding strategies in an attempt to show that their cities match the characteristics required by entrepreneurs. As location theory suggests, in addition to transportation, costs of materials and labour, other factors that weigh in the decision of businesses to settle are: the workforce skillset, the types of taxes to firms and enterprises, the socio-economic and financial context, as well as the political conditions (Blair and Premus, 1993). Among these drivers of firm locational decision, the last two deserve more attention. With regard to the socio-economic situation, a sizeable body of research showed that levels of well-being in a given area positively impact on economic growth in two ways: on the one hand, in an economic context where the capital is more "footloose", the presence of "amenities" may influence the decision of businesses as to where locate; on the other, employees may be keen on exchanging higher salaries for the presence of more facilities (Blair and Premus, 1993: 13). Indeed, one driver of urban competitiveness is the presence of urban amenities, which include the quality of the urban environment (see Table 8 below). The provision of a liveable urban environment may induce businesses to locate their activity in a given city, helping the regeneration of the economy. Therefore, another facet of the post-industrial city is the image of the green and sustainable city, as will be discussed in the ensuing sections. For these reasons, the theme of the quality of life has become central to urban regeneration policies. The efforts of local policy-makers to undertake regeneration have been directed to transform their city in "an innovative, exciting, creative, and safe place to live or to visit, to play and consume in" (Harvey, 1989: 9).

Table 8: The "determinants" of urban competitiveness

Type of determinant	Determinants of competitiveness	
Economic	*Factors of production*	Investment in advanced technology
		Highly skilled and educated workforce
		Development of financial and professional services
	Infrastructure	Advanced transport and communication networks
	Location	Research and innovation facilities
		Support to small enterprises
	Economic structure	Support to small- and mid-size firms
		Support to foreign firms
		Presence of business and financial services
	Urban amenities	Presence of cultural, leisure, environmental and educational facilities
		Development of arts industries
		Improvement of housing provision
Strategic	*Effective governance*	Coordinated and collaborative decision-making among local authorities of the same area
	Urban strategy	Public-private partnership
		Influence of the national government and international and international economy
		Implementation of policies to support firms' development
	Public-private sector cooperation	Collaborative relationship between local governments and firms
		Trade-off between taxes and services (no taxes, no services or high taxes, more services)
	Institutional flexibility	Absence of change-resistance local institutions and politically-oriented policy-making

Source: Adaptation of Kresl (1995: 51-66).

With regard to the urban political climate, it has already been noted that local policy-makers have tried to implement strategies to attract inward investments. In particular, the endeavours of local governments to boost their national and international competitiveness have led them to shape the urban image to provide a business-friendly environment. As Savitch and Kantor (2002: 36-37) observe, city governments have been able to plan their investments, and decide to market themselves as "tourist cities, research or technical centres, or as retirement communities". Following the perspective proposed by the radical political economy approach, it can be argued that inter-urban competition has fuelled a wave of "imitation/distinction" among localities, which has become evident in the organisation of events, investments in symbolic buildings and in infrastructures (Le Galès, 1999: 296). Through "urban boosterism" strategies (such as the redefinition of the urban image, marketing and place promotion), former industrial cities have tried to redefine their profile by engaging in initiatives with an outreach beyond their boundaries (Hall, 1993: 891). Whilst in the previous decades the archetype of the "modern city" was the industrial city, with the post-industrial turn this was now replaced by the sustainable, international and innovative city. The willingness to conform to this image has pushed cities to devise innovative development plans. Indeed, discourses on regeneration and competitiveness have emphasised the importance of innovation as a key element of the "modern city" image. As a result, the post-industrial city is conceived as being an innovation pole, characterised by cutting-edge research facilities, internationally renowned universities as well as advanced industries (such as ITC technologies).

In this sense, the objective of economic growth acts as a spur to innovate urban policy. It has been observed that the efforts of local politicians have been oriented to clean the image of industrial city, which is "associated with the old, the polluted, the out of date" (Short, 1999: 45). Therefore, the creation of a new profile for former industrial cities has entailed the restoration and reconversion of the industrial heritage and the rethinking of the urban identity, previously shaped around the importance of work, and a "collective sense of meaning and significance tied to the city's industrial and manufacturing base" (Short, 1999: 45-46). In this respect, two telling examples of urban regeneration are the cities of Hamburg and Lille: while the first moved away from its past image as a port city and became "a nexus between Eastern and Western Europe", the latter developed a successful transport network assuming the role of "the crossroads of the European Union" (Savitch and Kantor, 2002: 37). Additionally, local governments, in order to boost the inflow of tourists, have sought to "market themselves" by developing marketing and communication strategies, and to improve the physical appearance of the industrial legacy (Hall, 1993: 891).

In addition to international private investments, EU funding has been a further source of capital to support local governments to complete their post-industrial transition. As discussed before, local authorities had to face the issues of de-industrialisation, such as unemployment, the dismantling of industrial sites and pollution. In order to address such difficulties, European local governments found themselves in need of considerable capital, but also of a new vision to inform the process of urban regeneration. For this reason, many European cities looked at the EU to find support. The financial resources made available to local authorities through European funds and programmes attracted local governments in search of additional economic aids. Urban internationalisation has been fostered by specific EU programmes dedicated to sustain urban development, such as URBAN, URBACT and so on. In a period of tight local budgets, local authorities have seen European engagement as a way to obtain additional financial resources. Obviously, the EU financial aid serves as a means to develop policies inspired by common values and ideas recognised by the Treaties. In particular, as will be discussed more in detail in the remainder of this chapter, one of the priority themes of the EU Commission Regional Policy is urban sustainable development.

The process of de-industrialisation prompted cities to look at the European level to achieve the objective of urban regeneration. The latter comprises three intertwined processes: urban economic restructuring, physical requalification and social renewal. In order to successfully regenerate a city three elements are relevant: a vision for the future of the city, a political and economic strategy to achieve it and – perhaps more importantly - considerable financial resources. Transnational urban networking has helped cities to implement these objectives in two main ways. Firstly, the engagement at EU level has enabled local governments to gain easier access to EU funding to subsidise urban regeneration projects. Secondly, the participation in inter-urban organisations has supported the development of a new urban image, which is instrumental in attracting inward capital (in the form of investments and income). In particular, inter-urban networking has facilitated the circulation and sharing of specific ideas and practices about issues related to urban regeneration that have consolidated a shared urban imaginary. This argument is supported by some authors. For instance, Ewen (2008) observes that many secondary cities in the UK, in particular those in areas affected by low growth such as the West Midlands, turned to the EU attracted by available

EU funds to subsidise local regeneration. Similarly, it is argued that some cities in the UK have employed EU funding to renovate the urban territory and the city profile and used is "as the magnet to attract additional inward investment from private sector developers" (Bennington and Harvey, 1994: 948). For example, the former industrial cities of Birmingham and Glasgow have utilised EU funds to develop a new profile as "cultural capitals of Europe" (Bennington and Harvey, 1994: 948). In this sense, it can be argued that the involvement of European cities in transnational networks (and especially in those for sustainable development) is a way of promoting the image of the "city of the future" – which is green, clean and technologically advanced - and widening the economic and political influence at the supra-national scale. Hence, city networking can be seen as a component of a wider strategy for urban economic development. As previously mentioned, place promotion and "urban boosterism" contribute to attracting investment. To do so, joining a network becomes important to the extent to which it helps to promote the locality at the supra-national scale. Indeed, the set-up of European offices constituted for some British cities[60] one means to develop "a modern, vibrant European identity" while circumventing the national level (Ewen, 2008: 108).

The participation in European inter-urban networks provides local governments with considerable benefits, such as facilitating the access to EU funding, which can be employed to support the regeneration of a territory, and the opportunity to exchange knowledge and information, which in turn helps cities to develop an international profile. In this sense, it can be argued that local authorities' European engagement is motivated by primarily pragmatic and utilitarian reasons, insofar as it may help cities to achieve specific economic objectives.

4.3.2   The institutional context: decentralisation and devolution of powers

The second factor that may explain the inclination of cities towards European cooperation is the institutional context. Some authors have pointed out the effects of the participation in European city networks on the relationship between local authorities and the central state (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003; Bulkeley, 2005; Payre and Saunier, 2008). In order to understand this point it is necessary to examine the institutional restructuring process, characterised by the decentralisation of administrative powers occurred, although with some differences, in many European countries. The term decentralisation indicates the transfer (or devolution) of powers and competencies from the central state to sub-national levels of government. Simply put, decentralisation widens the autonomy of local governments by increasing the range of regulative and policy instruments to their disposal. The concept of autonomy hence indicates the capacity of local governments to act over their territory almost without interference of upper levels of authorities[61]. More precisely, it is possible to distinguish two types of autonomy: administrative autonomy, meaning the scope and number of policy functions to which a city is entitled (Figure 10) and political autonomy, which indicates the possibility to directly elect political representatives.

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[60] Ewen (2008) cites Birmingham as an example.
[61] This is the basic tenet of the subsidiarity principle by which the central government should intervene when lower administrative levels cannot ensure an effective action.

Figure 10: Policy functions of local governments by sector

Social policy	Education Equal opportunities Housing Health Social care	Environmental policy	Agriculture Energy Planning Transport Water management Waste management
Economic policy	Budget management Employment Fiscal policy	Cultural policy	Leisure Sports
Other	Public order		
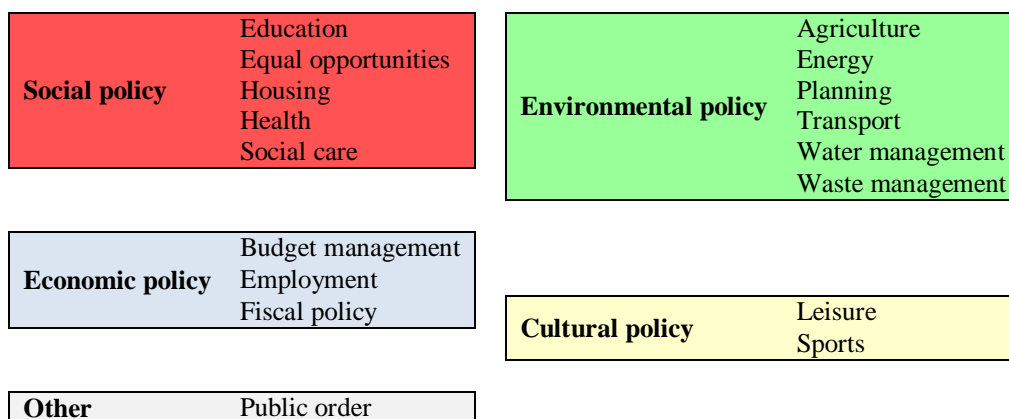
Further, more than an absolute concept (autonomous or not autonomous), autonomy can be understood as a relative concept, defined by a continuum where the two extremes are "high autonomy" and "low autonomy". As a consequence, autonomy is also a hierarchical concept, whereby case studies can be positioned on the continuum for each of the types of autonomy (Figure 11).

Figure 11: The concept of autonomy
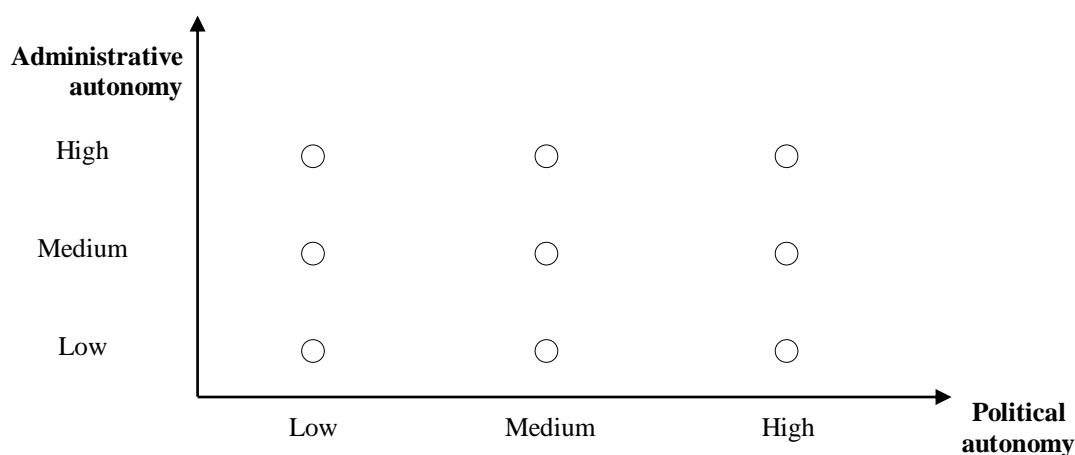
Local autonomy has been defined as "the ability of local governments to have an independent impact on the well-being of their citizens", the latter indicating both financial and non-financial resources available to individuals to fulfil their aspirations (Wolman and Goldsmith, 1990: 3). A more accurate definition has been proposed by Clark (1984: 198), for which local autonomy is characterised by two types of power: "initiation and immunity". While "initiation" represents "the power to act, whatever the circumstances, provided that prior rights to do so exist", "immunity allows local governments to act however they wish within the limits imposed by their initiative powers" (Clark, 1984: 197-198). The levels of autonomy depend upon the number and scope of competencies and policy instruments of which local governments are entitled as well as the possibility to elect local political representatives. The levels of autonomy vary significantly from one country to another and there may also be variations within the same country.

The brief discussion on local autonomy set out above helps to understand how the process of decentralisation, which was aimed to increase the competencies of local governments, have varied across European countries, where various administrative systems were in place. In this sense, the competencies

transferred from the centre to sub-national authorities occurred within the specific national constitutional arrangements, which define the number of sub-national administrative tiers and the regulation of the centre-local relations. Despite claims that Europeanisation processes are homogenising EU member-states (as seen in chapter 3), the distributions of powers and competencies is still an area where the central state is sovereign to legislate.

Administrative systems in Europe can be classified in two ways. A first possibility is to group countries according to the number of administrative divisions, i.e. communes, districts, counties, provinces and regions (Table 9). A second option is to draw a functional distinction, by comparing the number of functions and the policy areas for which local authorities are competent, as displayed in Figure 10 above. This latter type of categorisation is more precise, but unfortunately little comparative data on local governments' policy competencies are available[62].

Table 9: Classification of European countries by number of administrative tiers

Administrative types	Number of administrative tiers	Countries
two governmental tier countries	one sub-national level	Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Slovenia
three governmental tier countries	one central and two sub-national levels	Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden
four governmental tier countries	one central and three sub-national levels	Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, United Kingdom

Source: Hoorens (2008: 37-38 in EC, 2010: 114-115).

From an historical perspective, over the last three decades the autonomy of local governments has been expanded as a result of two main processes: the delegation of powers from upper- to lower-levels of government, and cities' request for a more incisive political role. Firstly, the top-down process of delegation of competencies was made possible by both public administration reforms implemented by central states and the EU intervention to incentivise the participation of local authorities. The devolution of the competencies from the central state to sub-national level of has widened the political capacities of local authorities, which in turn has contributed to the strengthening of supra-national involvement of municipalities.

The decentralisation of powers can be traced back to the Seventies. In this period the public service reform, which led to an increasing division of powers, took various forms across Western European states (Borraz and John, 2004). Some governments widened the competencies and the administrative levels (e.g. in France), while others enacted new laws for service supply, such as the UK (Borraz and John, 2004). Furthermore, many efforts of central governments were concerned with the improvement of the standards of services, either relying on the practices of the New Public Management (in the UK and Sweden), or granting more organisational autonomy to local governments (in Finland and Norway) (Borraz and John, 2004). Yet, some countries, such as Sweden and Italy, implemented reforms to broaden the democratic

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[62] For an in-depth discussion on the comparison of local authorities' functions in Europe see chapter 6, section 6.2.2.

process at local level by introducing mechanisms to enhance citizens' participation (Borraz and John, 2004).

The devolution of power to sub-national authorities was reinforced by pressing economic, political and social issues, such as mounting public expenditure, crisis of the welfare state, increasing distrust of the national political class, legitimacy crisis of central power, and pressing requests for greater public involvement in decision-making (Borraz and John, 2004). In this latter point, it has been noted that state reorganisation was also the outcome of "bottom-up pressures" of social agents, less trustful towards the central state (Jobert, 1999 in Le Galès, 2002: 91). In particular, the decentralisation process was undertaken to respond to the changing relationship between voters and political class: in several European countries, where election turnouts were shrinking, engendering growing concerns over a "legitimacy crisis", the administrative changes at local level have been pointed as the solution to address requests for a more responsible political class and for more participation of citizens in political decisions (Borraz and John, 2004: 108, 114-115). In this respect, the increasing political disaffection of voters has concerned local governments to a lesser extent. A study conducted by Denters (2002) of four European countries (Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom) shows that the degrees of "people's trust in the responsiveness and the competence[63] […] of their political agents" change from one level of government to another and this result was more pronounced in small cities than in large ones (Denters, 2002: 802). More precisely, it is reported that the levels of trust[64] – intended as "responsiveness[65]" and "competence[66]" – are higher for local policy-makers than for the national counterparts (Denters, 2002: 808). In a similar vein, Fisher et al. (2010), in a study exploring how various types of trust[67] function in relation to political parties and policy-makers, found that the sharing of values and beliefs between voters and institutions – i.e. "moral trust" - is more relevant to policy-makers than to parties (2010: 178).

While broadening the competencies of local governments, decentralization was paralleled by substantial cuts to local budgets. Therefore, cities found themselves in need of additional funding to face mounting social and economic problems. For this, many local politicians have tried "to be local boosters, to lead development coalitions and to break free from the constraints of party hierarchies" (Borraz and John, 2004: 113-114). Furthermore, local political leaders, less bounded by party politics, have gained more room for manoeuvre to implement "popular policies" and to make concessions to entrepreneurs and investors (Borraz and John, 2004: 113-114). As discussed in the previous section, these political attitudes represented the shift from a managerial to an entrepreneurial style of government, which emphasizes local growth (Harvey, 1989).

Furthermore, as Lever (1997: 228) notes, in the 1980s and 1990s, urban and regional governments were trying to "delink" themselves from the national economic system. The author points out four main factors that led to such disconnection between centre and periphery. Firstly, a widespread belief (stemming from

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[63] "Competence" here is defined by Denters (2002: 802) as "care with taxpayers' money".
[64] The third dimension of trust is integrity, whereby "the elected officials should not focus on personal interests" (Denters, 2002: 795).
[65] Responsiveness indicates that "the elected officials should be responsive to the represented" (Denters, 2002: 795).
[66] Competence refers to the capacity of the elected agent to act on behalf of the voters (Denters, 2002).
[67] These are: "strategic trust", "deliberative trust" and "moral trust" (Fisher et al., 2010).

the combination of "social or cultural" regionalism with "economic regionalism") that local governments could be more successful than national governments in managing local economy. Secondly, the resurgence of the idea of "the Europe of the regions", sustained by the principle of subsidiarity, placed emphasis on the role of metropolitan areas in building up the EU. Thirdly, Lever adds the confidence of local administrators to be able to economically "outperform" the central government, which in turn would ensure them to be re-elected. Finally, through strategies of "urban marketing" local governments can build an urban image different from the "national identity"[68]. As discussed previously, many cities seek to develop an international or a European profile, in order to establish their position in the global networks.

The lack of intervention of the central government to address the problems faced by local authorities and the belief that cities were economically and politically more advanced than the central state soured the national-local relations and prompted cities to strengthen their linkages outside the national boundaries. For example, Payre and Saunier (2008: 83) in their analysis of the involvement of Lyon in UIV[69] and Eurocities observe that "Lyon's municipal leaders tried to escape a centre-periphery relationship" in a context marked by the transfer of competencies from the central level to sub-national governments and European institutions. Similarly, it has been noted that municipalities conceive "networks as an opportunity to subvert centralisation" process and to better represent the interests of localities (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003: 237). In particular, Bulkeley (2005: 893) found that for the case of the Cities for Climate Protection programme, the network enables local governments to "bypass" central governments and even take decisions different from the latter, although nation-states were involved in the programme, for instance through the provision of funding. In this respect, it has been argued that in those countries where local politicians are endowed of a high "political status", these have the room for manoeuvre to set out international strategies that may be in contrast with the national level (Kübler and Piliutyte, 2007: 362). Furthermore, Bulkeley (2005: 893) observes that the effectiveness of initiatives promoted within networks is influenced by

> "the powers of municipalities, which are in turn reflective of the politics of local governance, central-local government relations, and the extent to which local governments, or other actors, are able to 'outflank' the nation-state in pursuit of their political aims and ambitions, through, for example, direct relations with supranational institutions, such as the European Commission".

As discussed before, the establishment of cooperative relations among European cities was favoured by several institutional factors, primarily the increased autonomy given to local governments by devolution processes at national level, and the EU emphasis on the role of cities to foster a more democratic involvement of citizens. Transnational city networking may be seen as a means for local authorities to assert their autonomous governing capacity. It should be specified that the quest for more autonomy is primarily possible for those municipalities already entitled of substantial competencies, which enable them to exert a significant degree of influence over the EU institutions and the member-states. Therefore, TMNs may be conceived as symbolic spaces of autonomy, where members can take decisions independently from the central state and pursue their territorial interests. In this sense, transnational urban

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[68] Lever (1997: 230-232) indicates Barcelona, Frankfurt and Milan as "delinked" European cities that fared better than the average national economic performance.
[69] The *Union Internationale des Villes* was founded in 1913 (Payre and Saunier, 2008).

networking can be thought as an outcome of centrifugal movements, since local authorities have sought to increase the political distance from central level by implementing place specific policies. Ultimately, transnational municipalism can be conceived as a strategy put in place by local governments to acquire more autonomy by directly interconnecting the urban and the supra-national levels – a process that may be defined as "jumping of scale" (Smith, 1992; Cox, 1998; Herbert and Niederhafner, 2008) – and as a result of such direct link, to reinforce their position in negotiations with the central state.

4.3.3   The political factors

In addition to the economic and institutional factors outlined above, political factors determine local authorities' engagement in SEUNs. In particular, two types of political drivers influence cities' European commitments: firstly, the position of the different political parties with regard to EU policies and politics, which affects their understanding of European urban networks, and secondly, the incorporation of environmentalism (through the concepts of sustainable development and green economy) in many parties' agendas. Clearly, these issues have a national rather than local dimension, insofar as these are mainly shaped by national politics. Nonetheless, the positions of parties on EU politics and environmentalism do affect local politics, since the core ideas and ideologies spread from national party committees to local branches.

4.3.3.1 Parties' ideology and attitude towards European engagement

Ideology and party politics

The relationship between politics and cooperative networks in Europe has not been explored in depth. An exception is a study conducted by Leitner and Sheppard (2002). The authors highlight how political parties may elaborate different interpretations of inter-urban cooperation, identifying a progressive conceptualisation of networks, which are depicted "as an alternative to market", and a neo-liberal interpretation, which sees these structures as a means to expand free market ideas (Leitner and Sheppard, 2002: 496).

As said previously, one factor that may affect the propensity of local governments to participate in EU inter-urban organisations is the party's attitude towards the EU. In this respect, two aspects have to be taken into account: firstly, the ideological positions on the EU and its policy and secondly, the previous experience of the local governments in European TMNs.

With regard to the first aspect, the political leaning of the council may influence the decision to participate in European city networks. In particular, the position of each party on EU affairs may impact on the scope of the European engagement of the local government. Since its foundation, the European Community has brought into European parties' agenda new issues: the type and number of powers transferred to the Community, the decision-making mechanisms, the political orientation of European policy-making, the enlargement rounds etc. have challenged mainstream parties' positions. In this sense, the "European question" has redefined the ideologies of traditional parties and shaped the profile of newly formed political organisations.

Some authors maintain that political parties at the both left and right extremes of the political spectrum are generally more euro-sceptic, while parties at the centre of the spectrum (including social-democratic, liberal and Christian-democratic parties) are deemed to be more pro-European (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002). The parties' positon on European integration finds its roots in various explanations. On the one hand, because "mainstream" parties (i.e. those at the centre of political spectrum) are well integrated in the "structure of contestation", they exploit European integration to their advantage, while those parties that are not included in the system tend to be strongly adverse to the status quo (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002: 968). On the other, since the EU is considered a neo-liberal structure set up by centre-right, centre, and to a lesser degree, centre-left parties, those parties that are positioned on the extremes are in opposition to EU policies (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002). In particular, it has been observed that the left-right dichotomy characterises parties' views on those policies that involved issues of redistribution and regulation of capitalism (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002). In this respect, the radical left is considered to be strongly opposed to the EU, since it is in sharp contrast to its founding principles, namely anti-capitalism and state intervention in the market and in social service provision (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002). However, left-wing parties (or at least not all of them) do not reject the very existence of the EU as a supra-national governmental structure - as in the case of extreme right-wing parties - insofar as internationalism is a core principle of left-wing ideology. Rather, radical left parties are against the agenda and the policies of the EU, which is considered as a stronghold of neo-liberalism. Therefore, the left-wing critical stand towards the EU, which can be considered a moderate form of Euroscepticism (or Eurorealism), is not directed against the idea of Europeanism, but against the principles and as a consequence, the policies implemented by the EU, which emphasise free market and economic growth.

Although displaying a pro-European attitude, for centre-left parties EU integration is an ambiguous issue: while some of the EU economic policies may compromise national social-democratic welfare systems, European integration may widen the protection of the labour market and social welfare at European scale (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002). For example, it has been argued that the European social model proposed by the Lisbon Agenda has a social-democratic bent (Annesley, 2007). By way of contrast, centre-right parties are generally in favour of European integration, although they are against any attempts to intervene in the market (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002).

In a similar vein, Marks *et al.* (2002: 586) found that the "cleavage theory" - by which the differences among social groups and the ideologies that describe them affect the orientation of parties - explains parties' positioning with regard to European integration (see Table 10). The authors found that, while the positon of a party on the left-right axis affects its perspective on EU integration, the median voter and especially party affiliation produce a higher impact on party's position on European integration (Marks *et al.*, 2002).

Table 10: Party families and positions on European integration

Party family	Position on European economic integration	Position on political integration	Overall position
Extreme left	Strongly opposed	Moderately opposed	Strongly opposed
Green	Moderately opposed	Mixed	Moderately opposed
Social democratic	Moderately in favour	Strongly in favour	Moderately to strongly in favour
Liberal	Strongly in favour	Strongly in favour	Strongly in favour
Christian democratic	Strongly in favour	Strongly in favour	Strongly in favour
Conservative	Strongly in favour	Strongly opposed	Moderately in favour
Extreme right	Moderately opposed	Strongly opposed	Strongly opposed

Source: Adaptation of Marks *et al.* (2002: 587).

In addition to the traditional left/right dichotomy, Hooghe *et al.* (2002: 976) highlight the salience of "post-materialist values" in the definition of a "new politics" in the European dimension, represented by political issues such as environmental protection, immigration etc.. According to their position on these themes, parties can be grouped in two categories: "green/alternative/libertarian" (GAL) and "traditional/authoritarian/nationalism" (TAN) (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002: 976). In this respect, the authors observe that radical right and right populist parties – i.e. those positioned on the extreme of the traditional/authoritarian/nationalism positions – are deeply anti-Europeanist, insofar as the EU undermines national sovereignty, which is one of their core tenets (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002). Furthermore, those conservative parties "with a traditional/authoritarian/nationalism inclination" have a Euro-sceptic position[70]. (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002: 981). By way of contrast, green parties, especially those with reformist tendencies, which are located on the green/alternative/libertarian position, have developed since the 1990s more pro-European views (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002).

From the studies discussed above it emerges that the position on EU integration varies across parties and according to specific policies. However, in addition to the pro-/anti-Europe dichotomy, it is possible to distinguish different nuances of pro-Europeanism. In effect, pro-Europeanism is interpreted differently across the political spectrum, insofar as it is embedded in the constitutive values and views of parties. In this sense, for centre-left parties the support for the EU is rooted in their core values such as internationalism and is located in their associational tradition. Therefore, centre-left parties, which can be considered as "associational" pro-European, may privilege those practices and policies that emphasise these aspects. By way of contrast, centre-right parties foster pro-European positions with regard to those economic policies that incentivise economic growth without state intervention, while are less enthusiastic about those practices and policies that favour social policies and integration. Additionally, for centre-right parties and to some extent centrist parties, pro-Europeanism is embedded in their state-centric and top-down position. Hence, they tend to have a more institutional view of the EU, privileging the participation

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[70] The authors include in this category the British Conservative Party, the Portuguese Popular Party, the Irish Fianna Fail, the French Gaullists, and Forza Italia in Italy (Hooghe *et al.*, 2002).

of nation-states in EU institutions[71] over other decision-making channels. Therefore, centre-right and centrist parties can be considered as "institutional" pro-European.

Drawing on the discussion laid out above, the position of EU parties can be visualised in a Cartesian plane where the horizontal axis describes the left/right dimension and the vertical axis represent the GAL/TAN dimension. Figure 12 displays a simplified chart of the positions of EU parties[72].

Figure 12: position of EU parties on GAL/TAN and left/right
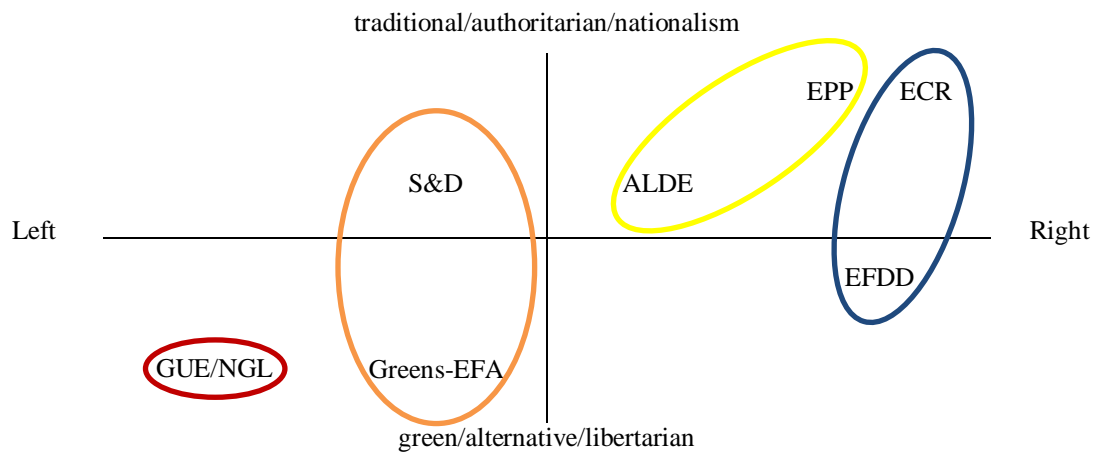
Party position

▬ (orange)	Associational pro-EU
▬ (yellow)	Institutional pro-EU
▬ (red)	Euro-realist (bottom-up pro-European): against current political orientation of EU, not against the EU *per se*
▬ (blue)	Euro-sceptic: upholders of national sovereignty and critical of the EU architecture

Acronyms

ALDE	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists Group
EFDD	Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy
EPP	European People's Party
Greens-EFA	Greens/European Free Alliance
GUE/NGL	Confederal European United Left - Nordic Green Left
S&D	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament

Parties' positions on European integration are a matter of national politics, in that nation-states are the main actors and decision-makers in EU politics. Although the political influence of local authorities is growing, they can neither intervene on several issues, nor do they have decision-making power. Local governments' role is limited to influencing the policy domains in which they have the constitutional competencies to act, such as urban development planning. Therefore, local party branches align to

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[71] The Article 13 of the Treaty of the EU indicates as the EU institutions the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, the Court of Justice of the European Union, the European Central Bank and the Court of Auditors (http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/glossary/eu_institutions_en.htm).
[72] The chart in Figure 12 has been drawn for illustrative purposes. The axes are built on a two-point scale and indicate the high/low proximity to the left/right and GAL/TAN dimensions.

national committees' stance. In this sense, the degree of support or opposition of national parties to the process of European integration is reflected in urban politics.

The general position of a party towards European integration affects the propensity of local governments to engage at EU level and as a consequence, the scope of the commitment and type of activities in which a city is involved. Hence, it may be hypothesised that those local councils that have been led by centre-left parties will be more likely to be highly engaged at EU level, the latter seen as an expression of participatory and internationalist positions. With regard to radical left parties, it may be argued that they are willing to participate in those European activities that foster a more bottom-up and democratic involvement of the actors. In this sense, left-wing parties may have a positive attitude towards TMNs, insofar as these organisations enable the participation of local actors in the EU decision-making. Centre-right parties affiliated to the EPP as well as centrist parties have a more institutional view of European engagement and thus may be more likely to participate in mainstream European activities, i.e. within the conventional European institutional schemes, than in organisations outside the institutional framework. By way of contrast, conservative parties and extreme right parties have more Euro-sceptic positions, seeing the EU in opposition to the supremacy of the nation-state. Hence, conservative and extreme right parties can be seen as less inclined to be engaged in European organisations.

Although different parties support various and contrasting views on the European question, this does not mean that at each election, the winning party or coalition will break the previous commitments taken at EU level. Particularly at local level, politics is bound to factors other than party ideology, such as political agency and a long-lasting general party leaning evident in local electoral performance. These aspects are discussed in the next sub-section.

Previous experience and attitude towards EU engagement

Although ideology guides the positioning of a party on a given issue, this is mediated by individual politicians, whose personal aspirations and interests concur to orient policy-making. In this sense, local governments' participation in networks is also affected by the individual aims and beliefs of the elected and non-elected officials involved in the networks. In this respect, Payre and Saunier (2008) argue that the personal and collective interests of the local representatives determine the extent to which municipalities are involved in the activities of the networks. Hence, politicians, even within the same party, may have their personal and different views on undertaking commitments at EU level. Clearly, those individuals who foresee positive collective (i.e. for their party or for the city) and/or individual (such as personal political recognition) from SEUN membership will support a pro-active engagement of the city. As discussed previously, the possibility for local governments to develop international relations without or with limited interference of the central state – which has been termed "paradiplomacy" – increases the political influence not only of local governments intended as collective agents, but also of local policy-makers directly involved in the activities of a network. In particular, through the participation in networks, local officials gain the opportunity to lobby at the EU institutions and have a chance to influence EU legislation at their advantage, thus gaining political influence at EU level. In this respect, some authors observe how the development of a European profile for local governments may boost local politicians' personalities (Bennington and Harvey, 1994; Borraz and John, 2004; Payre and Saunier,

2008). For example, Payre and Saunier (2008: 81) argue that different mayors of Lyon have exploited their role in Eurocities as "a stepping-stone for their political careers". This is true in those European countries where local politics, especially in capital and second cities, has become a fundamental step to access the national political stage. Such political context helps to explain the endeavours of local politicians to widen their international visibility and political consensus – for which European inter-urban networking represents a means.

Although individual politicians and/or local officials may assume a leading role in determining the role of the city at EU level, the final decision as to whether and how much to engage in a given network may be the result of negotiations among different personalities within the council. Each of the individuals may have diverging attitudes, values, opinions and interests, which may prevail, succumb or adjust in the bargaining process that defines the type and scope of the local council's European engagement. Therefore, it can be argued that the individuals involved in the decision as whether to join a network have a "bounded rationality". In this respect, Greenaway *et al*. (1992: 22), drawing on Simon (1957)[73], observe that:

> "decision-makers in the real world are bounded by various constraints. Their own conscious habits and reflexes, the values they hold apart the organisation in which they work, and the extent of their knowledge or information are among the most important of these".

Therefore, policy-makers do not make a choice in a purely rational way, since they will not select the strategy that maximise their utility if it goes against the shared values and beliefs of the society they govern: in this context, "policy-making becomes the art of compromise between unknown outcomes and separately valued goals" (Greenaway *et al*., 1992: 23).

In this sense, the previous experience in a given network also influences the decision as to whether renew the membership. Therefore, changes in membership in SEUNs may not necessarily be affected by changes of the political make-up of the local council. To illustrate this argument it may be assumed that at a given time (which can be called t_0) a council is led by a pro-EU party (or coalition) (see Figure 13). Hence, it may be hypothesised that the new council will be keen on widening its portfolio of European activities and that, as a result, decides to join a European city network – called for example Y. If during the mandate, the politicians and local officials in charge of the network-related activities can identify benefits of membership in Y that are valued far greater than the costs of the involvement, then - all other things being equal - the local government will be more likely to stay in the network Y, regardless of which party or coalition will gain the majority of seats in the council in the following mandate. Therefore, if participation in the network is generally perceived as being beneficial, even the election of a Euro-sceptic party or coalition in the council (t_1) may not lead to a withdrawal from the network. At most, the new majority, more hostile to the engagement in EU activities, may reduce the scope of the involvement in Y, for instance by selecting the number of activities in which to participate or by withdrawing from other less profitable networks. By way of contrast, if the previous experience in the network Y is not considered as being beneficial, then the likelihood for the city to leave this network would be higher.

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[73] Simon, H., 1957. *Administrative Behaviour*. New York: Free Press.

However, the situation is complicated by the possibility of an exogenous shock. For instance, the decision about network membership may change if a sudden event, such as a severe economic crisis, strikes the city. In this case, the council would be in need of immediate financial resources to tackle the issue in question. This would imply a rationalisation of local spending by employing shares of the budget allocated to secondary (or allegedly superfluous) sectors to solve the unplanned event. In this context, the gravity of the conditions may induce the ruling party, even a pro-EU majority, to withdraw or at least drastically reduce the European commitments, which may not be considered as essential given the current circumstances. Here, social security and economic concerns prevail over political positions. Therefore, it can be argued that the condition at t_2 will be determined by the position on the European question of the party winning the next local elections, by the overall social, economic and environmental conditions of the city, by the previous experience within (or outside) the network Y and the advantages and disadvantages associated with the participation in this latter network.

It is clear that the hypothetical situation discussed above and displayed in Figure 13, simplifies the complexity of the political decision about network membership. Despite the fact that pro-European parties may determine a greater participation of local councils at EU level, while Eurosceptic parties may discourage such engagement, this does not imply that changes in the political composition automatically lead to a withdrawal or an immediate request to join a network. This is because party politics is one of the several drivers of SEUN membership; hence, a new majority in the local council may not imply a change in the attitude towards network membership. Furthermore, local councils are made up of different political groups that prompt negotiations over policy-making, therefore the party (or rather, the individual politicians) that successfully dominates the bargaining process may impose its vision. In brief, the weight that individual political personalities have in the political negotiations (both within their party and within the council), the assessment made by the political actors of the benefits and costs deriving from engagement in networks as well as the probability of unexpected events affect both the decision of a local authority to cooperate at EU level and the scope of such involvement.

Figure 13: Local politics and political attitudes towards the EU and SEUN membership
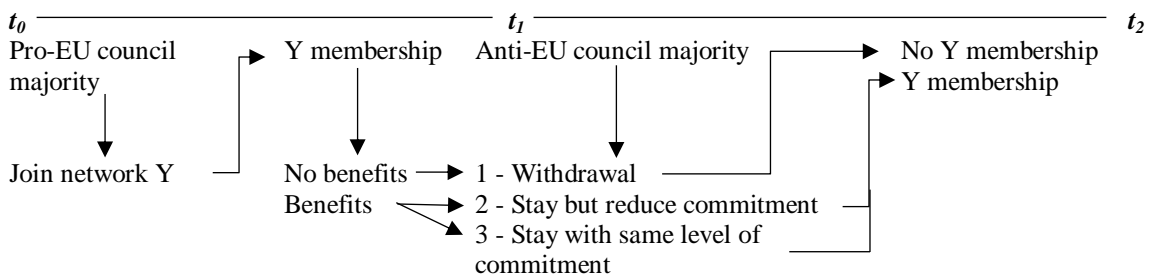
As discussed in this section, it can be theorised that the role of party politics, individual political personalities and the previous experience at EU level are the main political factors influencing cities' participation in TMNs. Furthermore, in the specific case of networks for sustainable development, it is important to examine a further element: the importance that environment has played in shaping political discourses.

4.3.3.2 Urban environmentalism

As discussed in the introduction, the number of European urban networks dedicated to sustainable development has multiplied. This raises questions as to whether, how much and why local policy-makers are interested in sustainable development. In their study on local governments' participation in the CCP programme, Bulkeley and Betsill (2003: 184-185) found that, in addition to financial resources and the entitlement of local authorities of relevant powers in the policy fields addressed by the programme (such as transportation and energy policy), the other drivers affecting the outcomes of the initiative were the role played by "committed individuals" in the local governments, the creation of "synergies" – rather than "conflicts" - between environmental, social and political objectives, and finally the "political will" to successfully address climate change problems.

In order to understand the interest of cities in urban networks for sustainability, the third factor to be included in the analysis relates to the upsurge of environment-related concepts onto the political agenda. In particular, the concepts of sustainable development and green economy have significantly influenced political discourses, not only at international and national level, but also at local level.

The concept of sustainable urban development

As a political theme the environment[74] became popularized due to the pressure exercised by green parties and environmental movements in the 1970s. The diffusion of environmental awareness has been explained by the shift towards post-materialist values in Western affluent societies (see Inglehart, 1971). According to Inglehart's thesis, once economic and social demands are satisfied, political and social attention moves towards new issues, which include equal opportunities and the right to a clean and healthy environment (Inglehart and Abramson, 1999), i.e. the "third generation rights"[75]. Although Inglehart's "scarcity hypothesis" maintains that the endorsement to post-materialist values shrinks in periods of economic downturn (Inglehart, 1985: 103), a long-term switch to post-materialism was found in Western and also in emerging Countries in the period 1970-1992, due to the "generational replacement[76]" and the assimilation of post-materialist values as principles of advanced democratic societies (Inglehart and Abramson, 1994).

However, after its establishment on the political agenda, environmentalism lost its radical component through incorporation and wide acceptance, marking the entry into "the era of post-ecologism" (Blühdorn and Welsh, 2007: 185). The adaptation of environmentalism to the logic of economic development has resulted in the definition of the notion of sustainable development. This concept has become very popular in the last 25 years and considered by Western policy-makers as *the* approach to solve environmental

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[74] The idea of environment developed in the second half of the twentieth century widening the concept of nature: while the latter was seen as the whole "material world of things", environment included all "non-human, natural surroundings within which human beings exist" (Giddens, 2009: 157-158).

[75] The jurist Karel Vasak in 1979 proposed the repartition of human rights into three generations: the first includes civil and political rights; the second defines social, economic and cultural rights, and the third comprises "solidarity rights", such as the right to peace, development, environment and communication (Hajjar Leib, 2011: 53-54).

[76] See on this point Inglehart's "socialisation hypothesis" (Inglehart, 1985: 103).

issues while ensuring economic growth and social fairness. Launched in 1987 by the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development "Our Common Future" – commonly known as Bruntland report - sustainable development identifies the interrelation of environmental, social and economic sustainability (see Figure 14). In the Report, sustainable development is defined as the "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987: 41).

Figure 14: Two main representations of sustainability

Venn diagram of sustainability   "Russian doll" model of sustainability
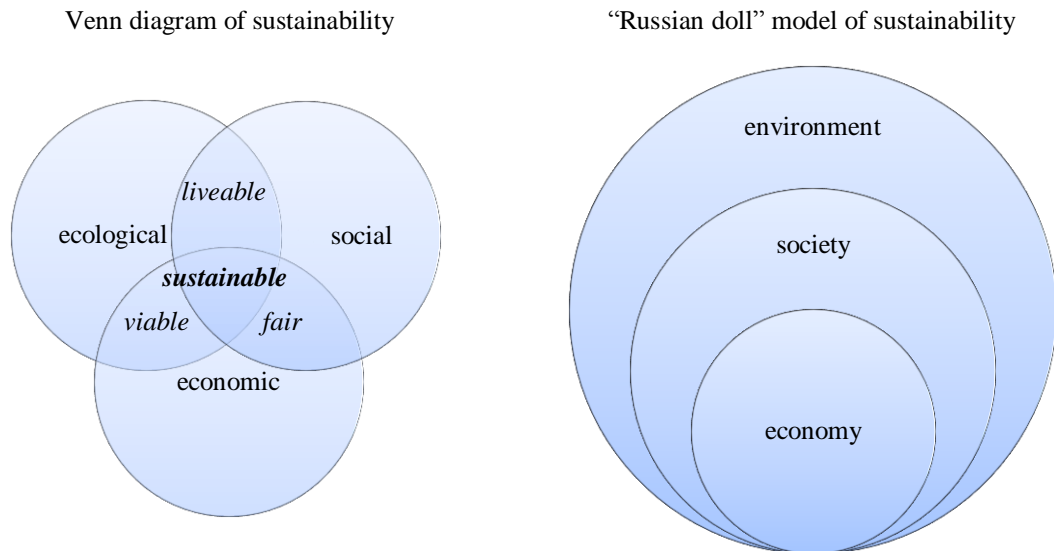
Source: O'Riordan (1998).

The success of the concept lies in its indefinite nature. Indeed, it is clear neither how to achieve sustainability nor what drawbacks it may cause (Campbell, 1996). Although there is a wide agreement among policy-makers, practitioners and scholars on the absolute necessity of achieving sustainable development, it seems that there is not a clear plan about how to strike the balance between environmental, economic and social sustainability. From a "pessimistic" viewpoint, sustainable development "is so malleable as to mean many things to many people without requiring commitment to any specific policies" (Campbell, 1996: 301). Thanks to its conceptual weakness and seemingly a-political nature, sustainable development has become the ultimate objective that policy-makers at all levels of government and of different political colours aim to achieve. Although motivated by social and environmental concerns, sustainable development disguises the old growth-centred economic strategy. In fact, it does not propose a paradigm-altering economic and behavioural model: it simply replaces the old fossil-fuel dependent economy with a green version of it relying on renewable energy and more pro-environmental attitudes. Even further, it is suggested that "sustainable development […] is an oxymoron": development cannot be sustainable, since it engendered the present socio-ecological issues (Latouche, 2003: 2). However, thanks to such contradictory nature, sustainable development works well in bypassing the question of the feasibility of continuous growth. Thanks to the combination of post-materialist values with the growth-centred capitalist vision, sustainable development seems to provide the answer to socio-

environmental issues, thus offering the conceptual framework to match economic aspirations with a widespread environmental awareness.

Furthermore, sustainable development avoids any discussions about political and policy approaches to environmental problems and related ethical issues. In particular, environmental protection clashes with individual freedom, which is a constitutive value of liberal democracies. Contemporary societies (in the Western world and to some extent in developing countries) are dominated by the logic of continuous economic growth and mass consumption. In order to curb environmental degradation, it would be necessary to limit consumerist behaviour. To do so, some sort of regulation of individual behaviour would be required. This means that personal freedom would have to be constrained, insofar as individuals should give up some of their freedom in order to safeguard public goods. Additionally, the challenge of balancing social, environmental and economic goals may develop tensions, described by Campbell (1996: 298-299) as the "three conflicts" that planners and policy-makers have to address (see Figure 15). The first issue with sustainable development is the "property conflict", which refers to coupling economic goals and social fairness and implies addressing the opposition between the diverging interests of social groups over property. Secondly, the "resource conflict" represents the tension between the use and conservation of natural resources (1996: 299). Finally, the "development conflict" stems from the challenge to find a balance between the organisation of a fairer society and the safeguard of the environment, since the latter may pose limits to economic development (1996: 299).

Figure 15: The triangle of conflicting goals for planners
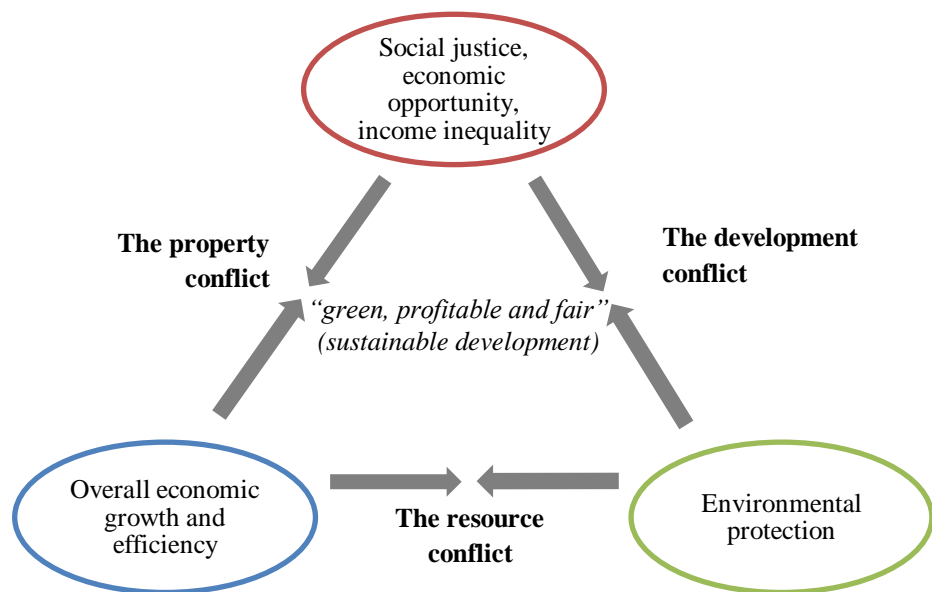
Source: Adaptation of Campbell (1996: 298).

Despite the incompatibility between the consumerist paradigm dominating the contemporary society and the founding principles of sustainable development, many policy-makers gloss over a potential reshuffle of the societal values and behaviours. By way of contrast, to operationalise the concept of sustainable development without altering contemporary lifestyles, the idea of a green economy has gained currency. The green economy emphasises the importance of an environment-friendly economy to deliver social and ecological sustainability. This point is discussed in the next sub-section.

Green economy

As highlighted by Campbell (1996), one thorny issue around sustainable development is how to limit the exploitation of natural resources. From this perspective, sustainable development posits questions as to whether and how much state intervention is required to provide environmental quality, ranging from *laissez-faire* positions, where the state has a minimum control over the market and private initiative is enforced, to strong state intervention, passing from a broad range of intermediate solutions (see on this point Carlie and Christie, 1992). Linked to the issue of governmental intervention, a second concern relates to the clash between economic growth and social and environmental justice. More recently, it is appears to be a widespread agreement, especially among policy-makers, on the importance of economic growth to deliver a sustainable society. The reliance on the economy to solve environmental problems may be defined as "trickle-down environmentalism": stemming from the concept of "trickle-down economics", which assumes that by expanding the economy it would possible to undertake a more equitable allocation of wealth, this type of environmentalism postulates that economic growth would ensure higher environmental standards, since there would be "more money with which to buy environmental protection" (Campbell, 1996: 300).

Such "trickle-down environmentalism" underpins the concept of green economy, hailed as the recipe to stimulate the labour market by creating new jobs and attract new investments. A green economy is defined as "one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities" (UNEP, 2010: 5). In other words:

> "a green economy is one whose growth in income and employment is driven by public and private investments that reduce carbon emissions and pollution, enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services."[77]

A green economy therefore could produce significant benefits, including the creation of new jobs, the reduction of CO_2 emissions and environmental damages, as well as the fulfilment of the core objectives of sustainable development (Fulai, 2010). However, the gain in employment engendered by a green economy will not be substantial in the long run. If we take for instance the renewables sector, it is true that renewable energy production will phase out the conventional sources, with the result of increasing employment in the short term. For example, Blanco and Rodrigues (2009) found that the development of a European wind energy industry contributed to create new jobs in a short time span (from 46.000 employees in 2003 to 104.350 in 2008), and suggested that it can also incorporate layoffs from other energy sectors, as occurred in the areas of Nakskov (Denmark) and Bremenhaven (Germany) characterised by a shrinking shipping sector. However, in the medium and long run the new "green jobs" will replace - rather that adding up to - "old jobs" in the traditional fossil energy production sector. This employment shift is documented by another research on wind energy sector in Denmark (CEPOS, 2010). Despite having created new job opportunities[78], it is foreseen that in the future the Danish wind power industry, which have been considerably subsidised, will not increase further the number jobs, but it will reallocate employment by subtracting employees from those sectors that do not receive any subsidy (CEPOS, 2010). Notwithstanding, the strong emphasis on the job creation potential of the green economy

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[77] See: http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/AboutGEI/WhatisGEI/tabid/29784/Default.aspx
[78] Approximately 28,400 employees worked in this sector in 2008 (CEPOS, 2010).

is politically instrumental to convey the neo-liberal imperative of unlimited economic growth, revisited according to the sustainable development paradigm.

In order to build a green economy, cities are considered as the key actors. Thanks to the economies of scale, cities offer some major advantages – what is defined as the "urban sustainability multiplier – such as minor costs for each inhabitant for waste collection and recycling, lower land use per person and reduced use of fossil fuel (Rees, 1999: 214).

However, more than their environmental potential, it is emphasised the economic benefits that derive from promoting urban sustainability. In this respect, it is argued that:

> "local governments can have considerable regulatory and financial power to encourage low-carbon and sustainable investment, while at the same time being suppliers of services, consumers of energy and other natural resources, purchasers of products and services, planners and instigators of change" (CEPS, 2010: 1).

Being "critical drivers of national growth", local authorities and communities would play a crucial role acting as "catalysts for green growth policy solutions": being ideal sites of innovation, cities can develop policy practices to influence national and international governments (OECD, 2012: 24). From this perspective, the green economy, combining the promise of economic growth with ecological concerns, can stimulate local growth: the environment is commodified into goods and services to be sold on the market and yielding return that can be used for the urban community.

The idea of green economy received widespread support in the EU, where various documents have emphasised the role of cities as drivers of sustainable growth. The strategic importance of cities in the environmental realm can be traced back to the 1990 Green Paper on the Urban Environment (Gibbs, 1997). More recently, in the Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020 (2011: 4, 6) the competent Ministers stressed the importance that cities, along with regions and member-states, have in delivering a "smart, inclusive and sustainable growth" and committed themselves to help cities becoming "motors of smart, sustainable and inclusive development and attractive places to live, work, visit and invest in". To do so, in the *Territorial Agenda* (2011: 6) an "integrated and multilevel approach in urban development and regeneration policies" are suggested. To achieve this objective, it is maintained that

> "[t]he cooperation and networking of cities could contribute to smart development of city regions at varying scales in the long run. Cities should, where appropriate look beyond their administrative borders and focus on functional regions, including their peri-urban neighbourhoods" (TA2020, 2011: 6).

To further help cities (and regions), the EU has also set up specific programmes and funding schemes to subsidise municipal initiatives and policies for sustainability[79]. From this perspective, by enabling cities to share their experience and knowledge as well as develop collaborative projects in the field of sustainability, inter-urban cooperation could be a key factor in enhancing a more sustainable economic development in the EU.

This type of environmentalism that emphasises economic growth as the source of environmental protection and social equity - the "sustainable growth" - has deeply influenced urban politics. According

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[79] See chapter 2, p.52, footnote 50.

to Brand (2007: 620), urban environmentalism, stemming from neoliberal urbanisation, is politically relevant for local policy-makers for three main reasons. Firstly, due to the substantial public spending cuts of the 1970s-1980s that curtailed local authorities' budgets, the environment was regarded as the means to rebuild social welfare at a low public cost. Secondly, the protection of local ecosystems, which are place-specific, could be used to recreate the sense of community and eliminate class division. Thirdly, by putting in place strategies to improve environmental quality, "[c]ity authorities could show that they still had an important role to play, and one which the market could not fulfil", using "urban environmental management" as a "legitimation strategy". Therefore, it appears that the political emphasis on the environment is politically opportunistic and functional to pursue neo-liberal objectives.

In this sense, for many urban governments the incorporation of "climate change governance and carbon control" in political discussion and policies responds to a need to find an "urban sustainability fix" capable of compounding the contrasts between economic, social and environmental questions (Jonas *et al.*, 2011: 2541). Obviously, it is undeniable that some local policy-makers are genuinely concerned about environmental problems – defined by some authors as "green inside activists" (see Hysing and Olsson, 2011). Nevertheless, what emerges in the policy documents mentioned above is that the primary focus of urban development strategies is economic growth. From this perspective, the concept of green growth is politically instrumental to justify economic growth by emphasising its contribution to environmental protection. The rhetoric of urban sustainability, based on the achievement of the green growth, conceals attempts to reinvigorate post-industrial urban economies and – indirectly - restore the democratic legitimacy of political elites (at all levels of government), whose commitment to sustainability could benefit them in electoral terms. The environmentalist turn of contemporary politics has hence offered an appealing green variation of the neo-liberal economic development model for post-industrial cities, which are still considered as "growth machines". The loss of an industrial base forced cities to invest in new economic sectors in the attempt to rebuild their cultural, social and economic identity. The promotion of the image of the "green city" to bring capital and professionals and expand the tourist sector, and the exhibition of a "city's sense of global responsibility" displayed by taking part in international urban environmental initiatives are the manifestations of the relationship between neo-liberalism and the environment (Brand, 2007: 618).

As previously argued, satisfactory levels of quality of life and the improvement of the environment are considered key factors to enhance the competitiveness of cities (Kresl, 1995). In order to undertake urban regeneration, local policy-makers have engaged in place marketing promotion aimed to develop and sell a brand-new image for the city, conveying the sense of being cutting-edge, forward-looking, innovative, smart and sustainable. A telling example of the strategic use of urban environmentalism to undertake place promotion and ultimately regeneration is described by Jamison (2008), who reports the experience of the city of Malmö. By hosting an international housing exposition in 2001, Malmö sought to regenerate some areas of city through the promotion of the idea of "sustainable urban development" and the development of a new image as the "post-industrial city of the future" (Jamison, 2008: 281). The case of the regeneration plan of the city of Malmö shows that a city branding strategy, which conveys the idea of sustainable urban development, and the implementation of international initiatives are functional to regenerate cities by promising economic growth while caring for the environment.

From this perspective, it can be argued that local authorities have incorporated urban sustainability in their political discourses as a "fix" to respond to the challenges of urban regeneration. Therefore, urban environmentalism provides a new conceptual framework to replace the "old" politics of industrialism and offers the opportunity to forge a new image for former industrial cities. As discussed previously, the development of a profile as a sustainable or green city, which stands for high levels of quality of life, is instrumental in attracting inward capital in form of investments and income from tourists and from a resident professional elite. Furthermore, in the European context, the commitment of local governments to sustainable development has been incentivised by the allocation of EU funding to projects and initiatives focusing on urban sustainability.

Drawing on the arguments discussed in this section, it appears that the preference of European cities for inter-urban networks for sustainability is primarily explained by the economic and political incentives deriving from participation in such networks. European city networks dedicated to sustainability become an arena where cities exchange ideas and practices about how to tackle urban socio-ecological problems that affect contemporary cities. Moreover, as discussed in chapter 2 (section 2.1.2), participation in networks makes it easier for cities to find partners with whom to bid for EU funding for projects and initiatives, which increasingly cover issues related to urban sustainability. Therefore, while in most of the literature on local authorities' engagement in transnational initiative for climate change and environmental issues is characterised by a normative conceptualisation of sustainable development, here the latter is conceived as a political discourse functional to conciliate environmentalism within mainstream economic views. From this standpoint, it can be hypothesised that cities' involvement in SEUNs is not mainly driven by environmental concerns but it is part of a wider strategy to undertake urban regeneration.

4.4   The analytical framework: an urban approach to transnational municipalism

In the previous sections the economic, institutional and political factors underpinning transnational municipalism for sustainable development in Europe have been discussed. The growing relevance of TMNs – and of SEUNs in particular - is situated within this context. The search for investment to develop urban economies, the decentralisation and devolution of competencies from the central to the local level, which have provided local authorities with more leeway for policy-making, and the political environment of the local government – constitute the backdrop of the participation of cities in European socio-ecological urban networks. For this reason, the core argument of this thesis stems from the recognition that the participation in city networks for sustainable development helps European cities to implement their regeneration agenda, by sharing experience and strategies aimed at reinventing their image and facilitating their access to EU funding.

In order to verify the validity of this argument an urban-centred approach is adopted. This hinges on two main assumptions. Firstly, in contrast with the conceptualisations of the city as a geographical site, that is a passive unit dominated by supra-national economic and political elites, the approach applied here conceives the city government as a political agent with an autonomous decision-making capacity. This entails that the choice to participate in transnational networks and the extent of their involvement is influenced by the interests and attitudes of the local political elite and by the collective and selective

benefits of SEUN membership expected by local policy-makers. From this perspective, local agents – being primarily elected officials but also local officers – exert an influence over decisions on network membership. As discussed previously, the decision to engage in a network may be the result of negotiations between individual agents with different views and interests on participation in SEUNs. This argument suggests that, to fully explore the phenomenon of transnational municipalism for sustainability it is necessary to take into account the incentives that cities obtain from their engagement in SEUNs.

Secondly, it is assumed that the choices of local governments are primarily embedded in the urban context, whereby the economic, political and institutional drivers underpin cities' participation in SEUNs. From this standpoint, the urban background is assumed to exert a far greater influence than the supra-national level. While international phenomena, such as Europeanisation and globalisation, have favoured the establishment of supra-national city networks, offering greater opportunities to create relationships and providing a space to exchange knowledge and practices, they cannot alone explain the reasons for cities to join. Hence, Europeanisation and globalisation processes can be considered as enabling factors to the actions of local governments. Although local governments are influenced by European and international events, local authorities still have a sphere of autonomy within closed and defined boundaries. As a result, the economic, institutional and political factors that have been discussed in this chapter will be used as variables to explore the participation of European local authorities in SEUNs.

This approach seeks to explore both the broad urban context in which political decisions are taken as well as the drivers intervening within the city hall, i.e. the political values and attitudes characterising different parties and individuals. To summarise, the factors that are hypothesised affecting local governments' decision to engage in network for sustainability are the following (and summarised in Table 11):

- *Economic factors*: European local authorities seek to complete the transformation from industrial to post-industrial cities; therefore, transnational municipalism is instrumental to undertake urban regeneration insofar as it constitutes a means to access EU funding and to indirectly attract inward investments;
- *Institutional factors*: the process of decentralisation of competencies has enabled local authorities to increase their presence at EU level; this may induce cities to further "delink" themselves from national governments. In this context, transnational municipalism contributes to expand local governments' autonomy, by providing cities with the opportunity to undertake decisions without the intervention of the central state;
- *Political factors*: party politics, political agency, past experience in SEUNs and political discourses influence local governments' participation in SEUNs in the following ways:
  - by determining the overall position of the council towards EU engagement. Local governments' engagement in SEUNs is influenced by the combination of pro-European positions (especially a "European culture"), political personalities interested in European issues or sustainable development and a rewarding experience in networks;
  - by incorporating sustainable development in local governments' political discourses. As a result of the mainstreaming of sustainable development in political discourses, the engagement in SEUNs provides cities with the opportunity to improve their

sustainability policy and enhance their green profile, which in turn may help them to achieve economic goals.

Table 11: Components of the urban approach to TMNs

Category	Factor	Component
Economic	Urban economic development model	Transition from industrial to post-industrial city
		Politics of competitiveness
Institutional	Level of autonomy	Decision-making capacity
		Political representation
Political	Party politics	Position on the EU
		Position on sustainable development
	Political agency	Individual interest in European commitment
		Individual interest in sustainable development
	Previous experience in networks	Path-dependence
		Institutional inertia
		Change of attitude towards SEUN membership

From a methodological perspective, this approach supposes a shift in the analytical focus from the network to the city as the unit of observation. While most of the literature has adopted a multi-scale perspective (and primarily the MLG framework) to examine TMNs, where all the levels are treated in a non-hierarchical way, this thesis adopts a different analytical perspective. The urban approach is more targeted, inasmuch as it enables to undertake an exhaustive analysis of one single level (i.e. the urban level). Figure 16 presents a graphic illustration of the urban approach.

The framework proposed here enables an exploration of the engagement of cities at EU level through the analysis of the urban-level factors and motivations for cities to participate in networks, while taking into account the international and European context. This analytical approach is thus structured around four dimensions:

1. the supra-national levels (*enabling factors*), characterised by the supra-national events and phenomena (European integration and global interconnections) that have enabled the internationalisation of local governments;

2. the national level (*constraining factor*): by constitutionally establishing the relationship between central and local governments, the nation-state limits the policy-making, financial and political autonomy of cities;

3. the meso-level (*incentive provider*), i.e. the network dimension, which interconnects the local with the European level, provides cities with benefits and incentives as a result of getting involved in networks;

4. the urban dimension (*causal drivers*): the economic, political and institutional factors playing out at urban level have prompted local governments to participate in SEUNs.

The urban approach developed in this thesis moves away from the mainstream approaches that characterise most of the contributions on the topic. Rather than considering the network functions (such as lobbying or networking) as structural components of the network dimension, these are considered as incentives for cities to engage. While not dismissing the explanatory value of the theories used to explore

TMNs – i.e. policy network theory, global approaches, Europeanisation and MLG - this thesis seeks to build on previous research in the field by providing an urban perspective of the phenomenon of transnational municipalism. However, within the TMNs literature, few examples of an urban focused approach can be found. For instance, Bulkeley and Betsill (2003) in their analysis of the Climate Change protection programme sketch out the institutional, political and economic background characterised by the central-local relations in order to analyse the involvement of some cities in the initiative. But rather than keeping the political and economic events as a backdrop to international engagement of local authorities, these should be included in the analysis as the drivers for the cities to join inter-urban cooperative networks.

Figure 16: The urban approach to Transnational Municipalism
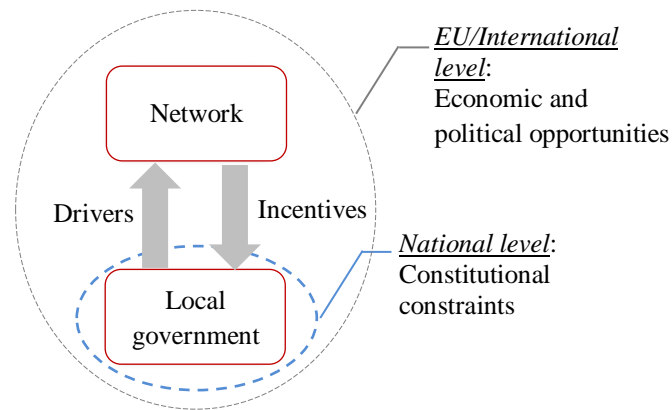
Despite the fact that some authors within the field of TMNs have criticised non multi-scale approaches, others have argued for a more exhaustive analysis of cities. An example can be found in Saunier and Ewen's book (2008), which provides an historical analysis of transnational municipalism. In the introduction Saunier (2008: 9) argues that the various contributions in the book, rather than conceiving "the role of cities as mere sites for the flows that have made and unmade the world", they "focus on the role of municipal urban governments as one embodiment of urban agency", while being careful not to conflate municipal urban governments with cities. Therefore, cities "are […] an appropriate target" for an historical analysis of the international engagement of local authorities (Saunier, 2008: 9). Drawing on this approach, Saunier and Ewen (2008: 177, 181) observe that historically TMNs have always been urban centred, in that cities acted at the same time (although not to the same extent) as "donors" and "recipient" through the dissemination of norms and practices.

While not directly related to the subject under study, a further example is constituted by Ward's (2009: 480) "relational comparative approach to the comparison of cities", which "recognizes both the territorial and the relational histories and geographies that are behind their production and (re)production". This approach focuses on cities as the unit of analysis, which are "theorised as open, embedded and relational" (Ward, 2009: 481). Thus the "city scale" is examined as "a dynamically evolving scale", characterised by different actors and actions (Ward, 2009: 482). For example, the author argues that

> "Terms such as 'international' financial system, 'national' economy or 'urban'
> governance that are liable to be used to describe aspects of cities should themselves be

questioned. In this it is important that the constructed (and repeatedly reconstructed) nature of such categories is exposed for critical reflection" (Ward, 2009: 482).

The work of Le Galès (2002)[80] should also be mentioned: this study, which provides an extensive analysis of the impact that the redefinitions of the nation-state, Europeanisation and globalisation have yielded on European cities as well as the political, social economic and institutional transformation within cities, adopts a "city-based approach" that assigns a significant role to the local agents.

It should be noted that the development of an urban approach as an alternative to more mainstream multi-scale frameworks is not aimed at questioning the validity of the empirical conclusions reached by previous research on transnational municipalism and internationalisation of local governments. The argument here is about recalibrating the European and global reflections over urban politics. This is to say that local governments still have decision-making autonomy over their destiny. Cities, amid globalising and Europeanisation forces, can still shape their identity and can choose with a certain degree of autonomy the instruments to do so. In this sense, the international/European context does play a role, by providing opportunities to scale up in the international arena and at the same time, engendering new problems for local governments. As Le Galès and Harding (1998:142) observe, "globalisation represents both a constraint and an opportunity for cities, it does not determine their strategies or policies." In other words, while supra-national phenomena have engendered problems for localities (firm displacement, unemployment, migration etc.), these also have provided cities with opportunities to face these problems: easier exchanges of goods and information, transports, easier access to new markets etc.. To sum up, supra-national phenomena have facilitate the presence of cities on the global stage; but these are enabling factors, rather than the motivations for cities to engage at international level. The core argument of this thesis is that the analysis of urban politics should be "relocalised", as cities have not dispersed their autonomy in the global or European dimension.

While it may be claimed that focusing only on the urban level is reductive, it can be also argued that taking into account all the levels of governments intervening in transnational municipalism without analysing in detail the political, economic and social structures of urban dimension - and their change – will not deliver a complete and exhaustive analysis of transnational municipalism in the European settings. In particular, this approach is suitable to explore the topic under study for a series of reasons. Firstly, the urban level seems to be the most appropriate scale of enquiry to address the research objective of this thesis, which is to unravel the factors and the motivations underpinning the decision of European cities to engage in SEUNs. As widely discussed in this chapter, SEUN membership is affected by urban-level economic, institutional and political drivers. Secondly, a focus on local governments delivers some methodological advantages. Especially for qualitative studies (for problems in quantitative analysis, see chapter 5), the accessibility to local policy-makers is greater than for members of national governments. In the same vein, Saunier (2008) highlights that the focus on the urban level can provide researchers with a wealth of primary data and information[81]. Thirdly, the urban-centred approach cuts across several disciplinary sub-fields of Political Science, while drawing on other fields of the Social Sciences (such as Political Geography or Urban Sociology). This interdisciplinarity helps to combine different theoretical

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[80] It should be noted that the establishment of transnational municipal networks is discussed by the author in the context of the Europeanisation of local governments (Le Galès, 2002).
[81] The author refers to the opportunity to access archival sources.

perspectives. Finally, the study of the economic, institutional and political phenomena occurring in cities is in tune with the current revival of localist theories in Political Science, such as the New Regionalism and New Localism. The recent resurgence of autonomy requests of sub-national governments (especially in Europe) has prompted a new wave of regionalism and localism. The latter has rekindled political theories conceiving cities as the mainstay of the future political order. In this sense, an urban-centred approach to transnational municipalism is situated in such recent theoretical developments and may contribute to shed light on their validity. However, it should be noted that the focus on cities is merely instrumental to address the questions of this study and does not presuppose any arguments considering cities as the most effective actors to deliver a sustainable and cohesive Europe. In other words, this approach neither expresses any judgment about cities, nor does it seek to evaluate their impact at EU level.

4.5   Concluding observations

In this chapter the urban approach has been outlined. In opposition to the multi-scale approaches adopted by much of the literature on the topic, this framework, which draws on the Urban Politics scholarship, focuses on the city-government as the unit of observation and takes into account three types of factors – economic, institutional and political – as drivers of cities' participation in SEUNs.

Therefore, the urban approach is a tool aimed at exploring and analysing the context in which participation in European inter-urban networks for sustainability is embedded, while taking into account the role that local policy-makers play in influencing SEUN membership. The theoretical arguments underpinning this analytical framework have shaped the hypotheses and assumptions to be tested empirically and have informed the choice of the research methods, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

PART 2

METHODS AND FINDINGS

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

In the first part of the thesis, the different and possible approaches to the analysis of the reasons for cities to join SEUNs have been examined. As discussed in chapter 3, this thesis adopts an urban approach, which entails an analysis of the economic, political and institutional factors in place at local level that affect cities' participation in SEUNs. Therefore, the urban approach has been devised to provide the theoretical framework within which to inscribe the overarching research questions of this thesis, which are the following:

1. What are the political, institutional and economic factors influencing local authorities' membership in socio-ecological urban networks?
2. What are the motivations for cities to participate in SEUNs?

In this chapter the methodology adopted to test the research hypotheses is presented. The discussion of the methodology is broken down into the following constitutive elements (Figure 17):

- the *methodological approach*, which indicates the overarching structure of the research process. More precisely, the methodological approach relates to the decision about how to answer the research questions;
- the *research design*, that is the organisation of the analysis;
- the *data collection techniques*, which are the means through which the data to verify the hypotheses are obtained; and finally
- the *analytical instruments*, i.e. the tools to analyse the evidence.

Figure 17: The research process
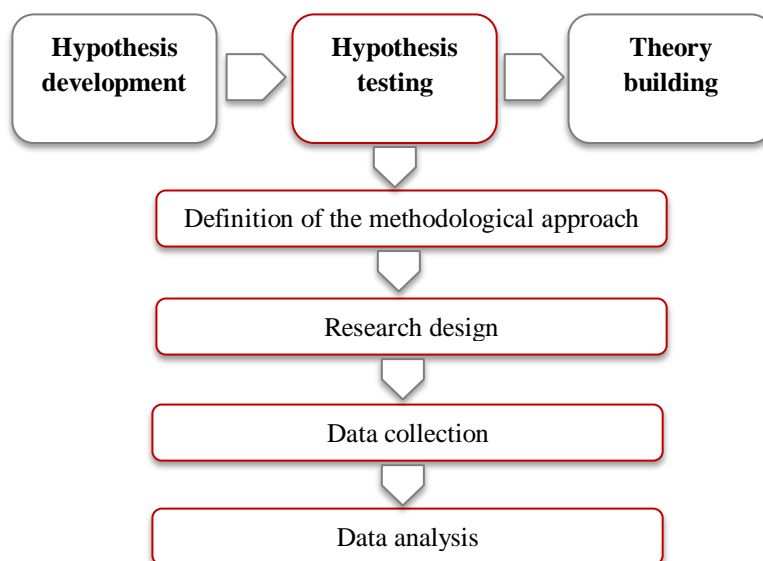
In the following sections the components of the methodology are discussed.

5.2   The methodological approach: the comparative method

The topic under study and the research questions of this thesis have oriented the choice of the method towards the comparative method. Transnational municipalism is by definition a plural phenomenon, engendered by the joint action of a certain number of cities across different countries. This latter point also hints that research on transnational municipalism should entail a cross-country comparison: being a phenomenon overcoming the national boundaries, transnational municipalism should be explored through the analysis of cities located in different countries. This is not say that no other method than the comparative analysis is possible; single case study analysis have been undertaken and have provided valuable results (see for instance, Ewen, 2008; Pyre and Saunier, 2008). However, the comparative method enables us to go beyond the production of monographic studies and permits to test the research hypotheses on a broad sample (in large-N quantitative studies) or by undertaking an intensive cross-case analysis of a small number of units carefully selected (in small-N qualitative studies).

It should be noted the term comparative method encompasses a variety of methods both quantitative and qualitative. These two methods present different characteristics. On the one hand, the comparative quantitative analysis is a large-scale analysis that can be carried out at either individual or aggregate level according to the purposes of the research. Quantitative methods also allow us to test hypotheses and build models applicable to a wider population. On the other, the comparative qualitative analysis[82] indicates an in-depth analysis undertaken on a sample of a few cases, whose purpose is to test the quantitative models and to unravel the causes and motivations of a given phenomenon.

Despite the comparative method indicates both quantitative and qualitative methods that entail a comparison among cases, in Social Sciences this identifies the intensive analysis of a few cases (Collier, 1993). The comparative method has been widely used in Political Science and its foundations are rooted in a sizeable body of methodological contributions (see *inter alia*, Rokkan and Merritt, 1966; Lasswell, 1968; Smelser, 1968; Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Sartori, 1970; Lijphart, 1971; Lijphart, 1975). An accurate definition of the comparative method is provided by Lijphart (1975: 164), who describes it as:

> "the method of testing hypothesised empirical relationships among variables on the basis of the same logic that guides the statistical method, but in which cases are selected in such a way as to maximise the variance of the independent variables and to minimize the variance of the control variables."

In this respect, a case is a unit that indicates a "spatially bound phenomenon" […] observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time" (Gerring, 2004: 342). The number and type of cases vary with the focus, objective and design of the study.

The comparative method is deemed to be particularly well suited to political analysis, where the explanatory depth is crucial to gain an understanding of political events and practices, especially when only few observable examples exist (Collier, 1993). The importance of the comparative method lies in that it can be used to unravel "empirical relationships among variables" (Lijphart, 1971: 683). As

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[82] This phrase is used to avoid confusion with "qualitative comparative analysis", which is a mixed method relying Boolean algebra and set theory (Ragin, 1987, 2000; Rihoux, 2003, 2006; Rihoux and Ragin, 2009).

Pickvance (2001: 11-12) argues, the comparative analysis is concerned with finding out similarities and differences in:

1) "the values of variables";
2) the type of relations linking the variables;
3) the "occurrence of events or patterns of events".

Similarly, Skocpol and Somers (1980 in Collier, 1993: 108) identify three interrelated objectives of the comparative method: the first is the analysis of "covariation among cases for the purpose of causal analysis"; the second goal is "the parallel demonstration of theory", whereby a pool of cases is examined to shed light on the causal mechanisms; the third goal (i.e. "the contrast of contexts") of the comparative analysis is concerned with shedding light on the difference between the cases.

In the same vein, Collier (1993: 108-111), drawing on previous contributions in comparative research[83], sets out a series justifications to employ the comparative method. Firstly, the comparative analysis enables to pursue what Verba (1967) defined as "disciplined configurative approach", relying on an accurate analysis of case studies to verify the hypotheses and generating new theories. Secondly, it allows to avoid problems of "conceptual stretching" (see Sartori, 1970): since a specific concept may not be suitable to analyse a wide sample of cases, the use of small pool of cases allows to apply more precise concepts. Thirdly, it enables "thick descriptions" (see Geertz, 1973) and other types of analytical accounts to unravel "the meaning of behaviour and institutions to the actors involved". Finally, through the systematic comparison of a small number of cases it is possible to identify and evaluate competing causal mechanisms.

The comparative method can be carried out following two strategies: the most similar systems design (MSSD) and the most different systems design (MDSD). The first strategy consists in comparing very similar cases that share similar characteristics, which only differ in respect of the dependent variable. However, this type of comparative technique is also conceived in broader terms, when the cases present similarities, but the selection process is not rigorously carried out by taking into account the control variables to select the units to compare (Anckar, 2008). By way of contrast, MDSD consists in comparing very different cases, all of which have in common the same dependent variable.

The MDSD and MSSD strategies are rooted respectively in the "indirect method of agreement" and the "indirect method of difference", which advance Mill's systems of comparisons[84] (Pennings *et al.*, 2006: 36-37). While the first method, by omitting the similarities among cases and widening the number of cases with diverging characteristics, improves the reliability of the findings, in the second approach the cases present both differences and similarities, thus providing a more articulate analysis (Pennings *et al.*, 2006).

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[83] These include: Geertz (1973); Ragin (1987); Sartori (1970); Skocpol and Somers (1980); Verba (1967)

[84] These are the "method of difference", which "focuses in particular on the variation of certain features amongst others that do not differ […]across comparable cases", and the "method of agreement", which "compares cases […] in order to detect those relationships between X → Y that are similar, notwithstanding the remaining differences on other features of the cases compared" (Pennings et al., 2006: 37)

In addition to the comparative strategies discussed above, Ebbinghaus (2005: 141) identifies three comparative strategies that can be adopted to select cases and variables:

1. the *most similar/different outcome* (MSDO), based on the "method of difference", by which variations of an independent variable accounts for variation of the dependent variable;

2. the *most dissimilar/same outcome* (MDSO), stemming from the "method of agreement", requires identifying "the same explanatory factors in diverse societies that explain the same outcome in all cases";

3. the *most similar/same outcome* (MSSO) strategy, which entails the selection of those cases that share same outcomes and the analysis of the similar characteristics.

Obviously, the choice of the comparative strategies should be made in accordance to the research hypotheses to be verified.

Despite the wealth of comparative studies in Political Science, harsh criticisms have been voiced about the scientific validity of the comparative method. In the following section the main drawbacks of this approach are identified and discussed.

5.2.1   Limitations of the comparative method

The comparative method has important methodological advantages, since it provides substantive explanations of a phenomenon. However, the comparative method, both in its quantitative and qualitative versions, has some weaknesses that might compromise the validity and generalisability of the results.

The most common criticism is the "many variables, small number of cases" problem (Lijphart, 1971: 685). This issue resembles what in statistics is defined as a "degree of freedom" problem, which implicitly assumes the need to include several variables in the analysis (Ebbinghaus, 2005). In fact, in large-N studies drawing on regression analysis it is possible to either include additional cases or reduce the number of the variables in the analysis to increase the degrees of freedom and therefore "lower and lower levels of explained variance are necessary to conclude with some confidence that the relationship being studied is unlikely to have been brought about by chance" (George and Bennett, 2004: 28). More precisely, the degree of freedom problem is related to "underdetermination", i.e. "the inability to discriminate between competing explanations on the basis of the evidence" (George and Bennett, 2004: 28). However, as the authors argue, even in single-case studies, the availability of different theoretical explanations of a phenomenon enables to exclude other causes (George and Bennett, 2004).

In order to overcome "many variables, small N problem", Lijphart (1971: 686-690) suggests four possible solutions:

1. broadening the sample by including more cases;

2. decreasing the number of variables by merging those that share similarities in a single variable (for example by applying principal component analysis);

3. using "comparable cases", that is "similar in a large number of important characteristics (variables) which one wants to treat as constants, but dissimilar as far as those variables are

concerned which one wants to relate to each other" (i.e. Mill's method of difference or of concomitant variations), or

4. limiting the comparison to "the 'key' variables", avoiding to include those parameters not directly relevant to the study and opting for "theoretical parsimony". In this respect, the practice of "scanning" can help to select the variables to be included in the analysis after careful consideration of a broad range of variables.

A further problem affecting the comparative research is the selection bias. The case selection process is a very important task that lays the foundation of a sound research design, since mistakes in the selection process may affect the results. Selection bias indicates "some form of selection process in either the design of the study or the real-world phenomena under investigation results in inferences that suffer from systematic error" (Collier and Mahoney, 1996: 59)[85]. In quantitative studies, issues of selection bias may be engendered by the "self-selection of individuals into the categories of an explanatory variable", which may lead to misinterpretation of the effects, or may emerge when "the values of an explanatory variable are affected by the values of the dependent variable at a prior point in time", making it difficult to assess the causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables[86] (Collier and Mahoney, 1996: 59-60).

Furthermore, a particular source of selection bias both in quantitative and qualitative studies may arise when "selecting on the dependent variable" (Collier and Mahoney, 1996: 60). This technique indicates any selection method that consists of choosing cases that assume "extreme" values, that is outside the normal distribution of the dependent variable, "once the effect of the explanatory variables included in the analysis is removed" (Collier and Mahoney, 1996: 60, 62)[87]. Furthermore, it should be noted that the selection bias may not only be produced by methodological mistakes in the way cases are chosen, but also by other "non-scientific" reasons - especially in qualitative studies. In this respect, factors such as financial motivations, time constraints and also methodological knowledge as well as familiarity with and proximity to cases influence the case selection process (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

It is suggested that a way to overcome this problem is to draw a non-random sample where the selection of cases from a larger number of units allows us to ensure a significant level of the variation of the dependent variable (Collier and Mahoney, 1996). In particular, by employing a purposive sampling, it is possible to select those cases that are best suited to the research design, therefore strengthening causal inference (Seawright and Gerring, 2008). By way of contrast, while selection bias in quantitative studies is addressed through random selection of the cases, it is argued that in small-N studies random sampling can cause severe issues (Collier and Mahoney, 1996: 57; Seawright and Gerring, 2008). In particular, it has been shown[88] that the use of random sampling in small-N comparative research[89] including five cases

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[85] The authors specify that while the term bias indicates "systematic error that is expected to occur in a given context of research", error defines "any difference between an estimated value and the "true" value of a variable or parameter, whether the difference follows a systematic pattern or not" (Collier and Mahoney, 1996: 59).

[86] This issue is defined as "endogeneity" (Collier and Mahoney, 1996: 60).

[87] This selection technique is defined "truncation" (Collier and Mahoney, 1996: 60).

[88] In their study, Seawright and Gerring (2008) run two Monte Carlo experiments, using a sample of cases and one dichotomous variable assuming the values 0 or 1.

[89] The authors refer to a sample of five or less cases (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

(or fewer) could lead the researcher to select a non-representative set of cases (Seawright and Gerring, 2008).

Another problem affecting comparative qualitative research - is the "no-variance problem": when "the outcome to be explained is either one value of what is understood as a dichotomous variable […] or an extreme value of a continuous variable", the lack of covariation hinders hypothesis verification (Collier and Mahoney, 1996: 72-73). The no-variance problem does not only refer to the lack of variation of the dependent variable, but also of the independent variable: in this case, the researcher may incur the mistake of "concluding that any characteristic that the cases share is a causal consequence of the explanatory variable" (Collier and Mahoney, 1996: 74). However, if the decision about no-variation of the explanatory variables is justified by the nature of the researched topic (for instance when a phenomenon is relatively understudied), studies that adopt a no-variance selection criterion may still provide useful insights (Collier and Mahoney, 1996).

Finally, the comparative approach may incur what Lijphart (1971: 686) defines as "the fallacy of attaching too much significance to negative findings", by which researchers may be tempted to discard a hypothesis based on the presence of "deviant cases", i.e. outliers. Nevertheless, only when several negative cases are identified, a given explanation may be rejected (Lijphart, 1971).

The robustness as well as the reliability of the qualitative comparative method has stirred controversial opinions. While harsh critics can be found within social science methodological literature, a consistent number of scholars highlighted the advantages of this method. For instance, Ebbinghaus (2005: 142) argues that "a small-N study can be useful when the cases are well selected to test a given theory, any disconfirming case can help to eliminate hypotheses". Of course, the aim of case selection process in the design of qualitative studies is to choose cases to undertake an in-depth within-case analysis, rather than to strive for the generalisation of the results (Ebbinghaus, 2005).

While quantitative analysis is being praised for the generalisability of the results, it actually presents some methodological limitations. It is noted that in studies focusing on nation-states sampling may be falsely random: when the cases are located in a specific geographical area or are members of a same international organisation (such as the EU), the sample is limited to a relatively small number of countries, incurring an "historical contingency problem", in that similar historical and political processes flattened the differences among the cases (Ebbinghaus, 2005: 135-136, 138-139). Moreover, since datasets with a limited number of countries, such as the OECD dataset, include cases with very different characteristics in terms of population, economic performance etc., it is advised not to treat all the cases at the same level, but to use weighted measures (Ebbinghaus, 2005). A way to address the differences among cases would be either the inclusion of control variables or to analyse similar cases; however, both solutions may cause some issues: while the first option would bring about degree of freedom problems or reduce the contribution of the independent variables to the explanation of a phenomenon, the second solution may entail selection bias issues (Ebbinghaus, 2005). A further source of bias is the omission of outliers; in particular, in some studies a clear explanation for and a discussion of the impact of such methodological choice are not provided (Ebbinghaus, 2005). Finally, another issue affecting quantitative comparative

research relates to the inadequate definition and measures of concepts included in the analysis, which may compromise the accuracy of the findings (Hopkin, 2002).

In light of the limitations of both large- and small-N comparative research, in this thesis the selection of the cases explored in the qualitative analysis was made on the basis of the significant predictors identified in the regression analysis. This selection technique enables to account for variations of both the explanatory variables and the dependent variables. The aim of complementing the regression analyses with the qualitative analysis is twofold. On the one hand, the qualitative analysis can further enhance the robustness of the findings of the regression analysis; on the other, through interviews with policy-makers and bureaucrats directly involved in SEUNs it will be possible to shed light onto the motivations for joining networks, which cannot be explained through the aggregate level. Additionally, the selection of cases on the basis of the significant predictors of the regression models allows us to undertake an intensive analysis of the typical cases. This type of selection process reduces the possibility of selection bias[90] and permits the generalisability of the findings to other cases with the same characteristics.

Before illustrating the research design adopted in the thesis, the next section provides an overview of the use of the comparative method in urban politics in order to better understand the choice of this method to explore the topic under study.

5.2.2 The use of the comparative method in urban political research

Within the research field of TMNs only few studies rely on a comparative method. An example is the study undertaken by Happaerts *et al*. (2010; 2011), who employed a comparative qualitative analysis to analyse the involvement of Regions in European networks for sustainable development. This mirrors the general marginalisation of this method in urban politics. In fact, the use of the comparative method in urban politics is relatively limited if compared with other branches of Political Science[91], where cross-country comparisons have been extensively employed (Kantor and Savitch, 2005; Pierre, 2005). In this respect, Pierre (2005) observes that many empirical contributions to urban politics have been designed as single-case studies. In a similar vein, Kantor and Savitch (2005: 135) note a lack of comparative urban studies and highlight that, "what often stands for comparative analysis is comprised of separate chapters on a limited number of cities capped by an attempt to draw some unifying themes."

This criticism illustrates the lack of methodological rigour that often affects comparative research. An attempt to systematise the various techniques employed in comparative urban research was made by Tilly (1984), who worked out a typology of comparative analysis employed in urban research. Tilly's typology is defined by "two dimensions of comparison": the "share of all instances and multiplicity of forms", where the first refers to the analysis of the features of one or many cases, while the latter indicates whether the event under study manifests itself in a variety of ways (Tilly, 1984: 81). The combination of these dimensions provides four types of comparisons (Tilly, 1984: 82-83), as illustrated in Figure 18

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[90] Being a qualitative study, where there are no scientific tools to control for errors, it is unlikely that selection bias is completely avoided, although it is possible to reduce it.
[91] Kantor and Savitch (2005: 135) refer to "studies of political parties, executives and legislatures" as fields where comparative method has been widely used, while Pierre (2005: 446) identifies "political economy, institutional analysis" and "administrative reform".

below. In particular, the first type, the "individualizing comparison", seeks to "contrast specific instances of a given phenomenon as a means of grasping the peculiarities of each case". The "universalising comparison" tries "to establish that every instance of a phenomenon follows essentially the same rule". The "variation-finding comparison" aims to "establish a principle of variation in the character or intensity of a phenomenon by examining systematic difference amongst instances". Finally, the "encompassing strategy" "places different instances at various locations within the same system, on the way to explaining their characteristics as a function of the varying relationships to the system as a whole". It is claimed that, out of Tilly's four types of comparison, probably the most widely used research designs in comparative urban politics are the individualizing and variation-finding comparison approaches (Ward, 2010).

Figure 18: Types of comparison
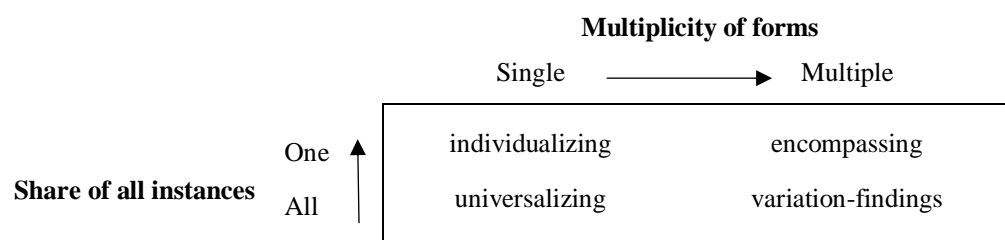
Source: Tilly (1984: 81).

A further way to categorise urban comparative research is by looking at the nature of the cases analysed. Therefore, it is possible to distinguish intra-national comparative studies, when cases are cities within the same country; or cross-national comparative studies, when cases are cities from different countries. The second type of comparative research is more challenging, as problems of case selection and explanatory variables to include in the study multiply. The relatively low level of cross-national comparative research in urban politics can be explained by the fact that, compared with research focused on nation-states, it entails some additional theoretical and methodological problems.

With regard to the theoretical issues, the first problem is concerned with the content of urban politics. In effect, urban politics lacks of a broad theoretical framework to inform cross-national inter-urban research, so that researchers can only rely on "middle range theories" (Kantor and Savitch, 2005: 136). A further problem is that many theories draw on aspects of American cities and cannot be exported *tout court* from the US context to another (Kantor and Savitch, 2005; Pierre, 2005). For instance, the growth machine theory or urban regimes theory cannot be readily adapted to the European context (Kantor and Savitch, 2005). As already discussed, the lack of a theoretical framework in urban politics may be explained by the isolation of urban politics within Political Science. In this respect, urban research is described "as an interdisciplinary field rather than as a subfield of Political Science", which means that "developments in mainstream Political Science will only have a limited influence on the urban politics research agenda" (Pierre, 2005: 447).

The preference for case-studies reflects a second hurdle to the use of the comparative method in urban political research. Here, there is the widespread tendency to use a "holistic and context-embracing approach" to analyse urban processes (Pierre, 2005: 447). This approach clashes with the comparative

method, in that the latter requires "some degree of reductionism" in the selection of cases – although not in the theoretical framework (Pierre, 2005: 447).

A further issue relates to claims about the availability and quality of comparable data. In some cases urban-level data may not be available for some cases and indicators or, if available, they may be outdated. Additionally, the way data are collected and handled may change from one country to another, making it potentially difficult to draw empirically sound comparisons. Furthermore, a same parameter may assume different meaning from one country to another: as an example, the relation between high levels of unemployment and poverty does not hold true everywhere, especially in those countries with a generous welfare system (Kantor and Savitch, 2005).

There is also a problem of selection of the units of observation. In most of urban political research case studies are not selected on the bases of sound empirical criteria. As an example, some contributions in urban politics use as a selection criterion urban size or population (see *inter alia* Brugué and Vallès, 2005[92]; John and Cole, 1999[93]; Martins and Álvarez, 2007[94]). The lack of appropriate selection criteria may cause selection bias, particularly when using qualitative research methods. Several political science researchers claim to undertake comparative studies; nevertheless, the case selection often appears to be based on convenience (e.g. personal knowledge of or proximity to the case study). In this respect, various techniques may be applied to minimise selection bias, such as triangulation, the use of a large sample of cases or the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

A third problem is the comparability of cities' functions and characteristics across countries: the number of and the scope of the competencies of local governments significantly vary from one city to another, not only across different countries, but also within the same country (Kantor and Savitch, 2005). Moreover, the term "city" is described variously across nation-states (Kantor and Savitch, 2005). Such differences in the ways local competencies are defined make it difficult to draw common criteria against which to compare cases.

A final issue is linked to the multiplicity of factors in place at local level. Being the lower level of government, the upper levels (i.e. provinces, regions and central states[95]) impose their legal, political and institutional constraints on localities. Through constitutional arrangements and legal dispositions, the national levels establish the powers at the disposal of local councils and the policy areas where these competences can be exercised. Therefore, the embeddedness of cities in a specific political and institutional context has to be taken into account in comparative urban research.

Despite the limitations discussed above, the comparative method in urban political research can arguably produce valuable results. In this respect, Snyder (2001: 94) identifies three main benefits of applying the "subnational comparative method". Firstly, this method allows the addition of more cases (i.e. local authorities), thus addressing the "many variables, small N" problem. Secondly, while national-level data do not reflect the possible differences existing within a country (leading to what Rokkan (1970) has

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[92] See p. 202-203.
[93] See p. 105-106.
[94] See p. 393.
[95] It should be noted that the name and types of sub-national administrative tiers vary across countries.

defined as "whole-nation bias"), subnational comparative research enables researchers to enhance the explanatory power of the findings. Finally, Snyder (2001: 94) points out that comparative research undertaken on the local level allows for a more detailed analysis of the "spatially uneven nature of major processes of political and economic transformation".

As illustrated by Snyder (2001), the comparative method in urban political research can be effectively applied to analyse the variations of a phenomenon across a broad sample of cases, thus enhancing the strength of the causal explanations. In order to obtain more robust results and avoid the limitations of the comparative method outlined previously, the comparison of the cases can be structured around a quantitative and a qualitative analysis, as will be discussed in the next section.

5.3   The research design: nested analysis

The research questions outlined at the beginning of this chapter seek to examine different aspect of transnational municipalism. The first question implies an analysis of the impacts that urban-level factors exert over SEUN membership. The nature of this question thus requires a quantitative large-scale analysis of the possible variables that affect the participation of European cities in SEUNs. The quantitative method helps to predict the factors impacting on SEUN membership and to generalise the findings beyond the sample with a certain degree of confidence. In so doing, the purpose of the quantitative large-N analysis is twofold: on the one hand, it allows testing of the research hypotheses by identifying the drivers of SEUN membership; on the other, the results of the regression models constitute the basis upon which to build a general theory of network participation. By way of contrast, the second question, which aims to identify the motivations for cities to join, may be best addressed through an intensive analysis undertaken on a small sample of cities. Although the large-scale analysis, relying on aggregated level data, provides generalisable results, it does not provide sufficient information about the motivations for cities to participate in SEUNs. For this purpose, a quantitative aggregate level analysis would not fully answer the question. Firstly, it would be difficult to map all the possible motivations for cities to engage in SEUNs. This issue could be addressed by undertaking a review of the literature in the field. However, there is relatively little research on TMNs and most of the studies on the topic do not explicitly examine the motivations for cities to become involved in TMNs or SEUNs. Given the limited amount of secondary data available, it is difficult to identify all the plausible motivations explaining network membership. Moreover, there is the risk that possible mistakes in the research designs (such as selection bias in sampling technique, under- or over-estimation of negative/different outcomes etc.) or in the theoretical framework (e.g. exclusion of competing hypotheses) of such contributions might be transferred to the new study. Secondly, it would be an extremely challenging task to control for presence or absence of these motivations for all the cases in a large dataset of secondary data, unless the data on cities' motivations for participating in SEUNs were gathered for each case through interviews or questionnaires. However, explaining the motivations underpinning SEUN membership with a quantitative design would mean foregoing the explanatory depth and overlooking possible causal conditions, associations and relations that cannot be captured through quantitative analysis. Therefore, the second question is best addressed by an in-depth comparative analysis of a small sample of cases. The purpose of the qualitative analysis is, on the one hand, to gain an in-depth knowledge of the individual motivations for European

cities to participate in networks for sustainable development, on the other, to test the robustness of the regression models.

In this sense, the combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis can overcome the methodological limitations of both methods while strengthening the reliability of the results. More precisely, the use of both large- and small-N approaches helps to "improve the quality of conceptualization and measurement, analysis of rival explanations, and overall confidence in the central findings of a study" (Lieberman, 2005: 436).

Many contributions in political methodological literature stress the advantages of mixed research designs combining qualitative and quantitative methods (see for instance Ragin, 1987; King *et al*., 1994; Brady and Collier, 2004). The complementary use of quantitative and qualitative methods primarily helps to answer different questions. In particular, given their methodological limitations and advantages, the combination of the two methods can "offset the limits of either method used alone" (Bennett, 2002: 1). When used as "mutually reinforcing methods", small-scale and large-scale studies add up to "cumulative knowledge" (Granato and Scioli, 2004: 314).

The complementary use of large-N analysis (LNA) and small-N analysis (SNA) constitute what has been defined as "nested analysis", which indicates "a unified mixed method approach to comparative research" connecting the quantitative analysis of a wide dataset with an intensive analysis of a few cases included in the dataset (Lieberman, 2005: 435-436). Nested analysis takes its cue from triangulation (Lieberman, 2005), for it enhances the robustness, reliability and validity of the research findings and widens the scope for inference. In effect, through triangulation the researcher adopts "multiple methods to analyse the same empirical phenomenon" (Denzin, 1989: 13). In the methodological literature, there are two interpretations of triangulation: "triangulation as a cumulative validation of research results", for which various research techniques are used to explore a specific process; and "triangulation as an enlargement of perspective", when the combination of various techniques are used to single out several elements of one process (or distinct processes) (Kelle and Erzberger, 2004: 174). With regard to these two definitions, methodological discussions have highlighted that qualitative and quantitative methods as more suited to complementing each other, rather that striving for "reciprocal validation" (Kelle and Erzberger, 2004: 174). Nested analysis differs from triangulation in that it integrates two analytical methods in a two-step research design to gain an in-depth understanding of a research topic, rather than to double-check the validity and reliability of findings, as triangulation does. As Lieberman (2005: 436) puts it, "the promise of the nested research design is that both LNA and SNA can inform each other to the extent that the analytic payoff is greater than the sum of the parts". However, nested analysis may also enable reciprocal validation, thus serving as a triangulation technique. For example, in this thesis the importance of sustainable development for cities, the influence of party politics and the type of economic development are explored in the literature review, in the regression analyses and in the qualitative analysis. The use of different data sources and analytical techniques not only strengthened the validity of the explanations about the role that these factors play in determining cities' participation in SEUNs, but also enabled to check the consistency of the findings.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods may be simultaneous or sequential. In the first case the use of combined methods is complementary and concomitant. For instance, Sieber (1973 in Miles and Huberman, 1994) suggests that quantitative data can support qualitative analysis in the following ways: by informing the sampling process; by providing "background data" and limiting potential bias in the selection of the interviewees during the data gathering stage; or in the analytical stage quantitative data can be used to enhance the robustness of the qualitative findings (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 41). Alternatively, qualitative evidence can assist quantitative studies by providing conceptual tools during the design stage, by facilitating the data collection process, and by improving the interpretation of the quantitative findings (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 41).

Qualitative and quantitative methods can be linked together sequentially to design a two-step research method. More precisely, statistical analysis of a large dataset is employed either to inform the sampling of the cases to be explored in a subsequent qualitative study, or to discard competing hypotheses to be tested in the qualitative analysis. It is also suggested that the order of the two phases may be reversed, so that the qualitative study (for instance, a case study analysis) is employed to build a model in an inductive way, which will be tested with a large-N analysis (Rohlfing, 2008).

From a practical standpoint, nested analysis entails a quantitative analysis, whose purposes are, on the one hand, to strengthen the evidence of the SNA; on the other, to inform the design of the qualitative analysis (Lieberman, 2005). In this respect, the strength of quantitative results will have implications on the design of the small-N analysis: if the findings are sufficiently reliable, then the qualitative study can be used to test the quantitative model (therefore undertaking a "model-testing Small-N Analysis"); if not, the researcher should engage in a "model-building Small-N Analysis" (Lieberman, 2005: 442). In the case of model-testing small-N analysis ("Mt-SNA"), it is suggested to choose those cases "that are well predicted by the best fitting statistical model" and to ensure in the selection of cases significant level of variation of the independent variable(s) (Lieberman, 2005: 444). By way of contrast, when undertaking a model-building small-N analysis ("Mb-SNA"), it is advised to include one or a few cases not on the regression line, especially in those cases where the research questions were not fully addressed by the findings of the quantitative analysis (Lieberman, 2005). On this matter, Bäck and Dumont (2007), in their article on coalition formation, argue that the choice of the case selection technique responds to different purposes: while the selection of cases predicted by the best regression models allows an in-depth analysis of the effects of a number of variables, the selection of a case not predicted by the regression model (the "deviant case") enables the researcher to understands what factors should be included in the analysis to improve the explanation of the phenomenon under study.

For what concerns the methods to be adopted in the large-N and small-N parts of the nested analysis, there are several options available. The choice of the method for the quantitative analysis includes "multivariate regression analysis, fuzzy set/qualitative comparative analysis, bivariate/correlational analysis, or simply descriptive statistics" (Lieberman, 2005: 438). With regard to the choice of the qualitative method, there is little discussion in the literature on nested analysis, and it appears that case study analysis is the dominant method. Nevertheless, the small-N part of a nested design can rely on the (qualitative) comparative method, since the large-N analysis enables to draw a sample of a small number of comparable cases.

Although some authors have stressed the advantages of combining large-N and small-N strategies (e.g. Bennett, 2002; Lieberman, 2005), the bulk of the contributions relying on a mixed design focus on nation-states (see for example Bäck and Dumont, 2007; Luetgert and Dannwolf, 2009), while few researchers have applied this approach to urban research. Nevertheless, nested analysis may provide a useful analytical tool in urban political research. As Lieberman (2005: 436) observes, nested analysis is suited to "any comparative analysis of social units". As discussed later in this chapter, one problem in comparative research, and especially in the field of urban politics, is case selection, since researchers are faced with a wide pool of potential cases from which to choose. Nested analysis helps to overcome this problem: through the use of the regression analysis, it is possible to select cases "on-the-line", "off-the-line" or combine the two selection techniques (Liebermann, 2005: 446), thus to reducing the number of units to compare (for the selection of the cases analysed in this thesis see chapter 7). At the same time, the use of a nested approach helps to address the "many variables, small number of cases problem" that affects many works in urban research. Since the quantitative analysis ensures more degrees of freedom, the qualitative part contributes with an intensive account of the phenomenon under study (Lieberman, 2005).

Rohlfing (2008) points out the main flaws of the nested analysis. Firstly, the lack of methodological prescriptions to avoid errors that might be transferred from the regression analysis to the small-N study may compromise the soundness of the qualitative study (defined as "ontological model misspecification"). Secondly, a nested design, which implies the interconnection of the large-N and small-N methods, may make difficult controlling for the precision and reliability of the model both in quantitative and qualitative analysis, To address these issues, the author advises to employ "a mix of visual, quantitative, and qualitative tests for model misspecification in nested analysis", in order to combine "cross-method" and "within-method validation" (Rohlfing, 2008: 1511).

The limitations of the nested analysis discussed above highlight the risk of potential mistakes affecting the whole design, which may produce unreliable results. Nonetheless, the use of nested analysis cannot be rejected on the grounds of these criticisms. Certainly, to avoid problems of model misspecification, it is necessary that the selection of variables for regression analysis draws on sound theoretical bases and it is embedded in the disciplinary field to which it aims to contribute. In this thesis, the variables used in the regression analysis were selected on the basis of hypotheses stemming from the findings of a comprehensive literature review. This means that, not only the literature on TMNs and SEUNs was examined, but also those contributions from tangent sub-fields of Political Science that might provide suitable explanations. Furthermore, to select the variables used in the large-N part of this research, empirical studies within the field of urban political research were examined.

A further objection to Rohlfing's critique is that regression analysis helps to reduce the number of potential cases to study in the small-N analysis. In comparative politics, especially when the unit of analysis are cities, there are several combinations of cases from which to choose. Hence, how does a researcher proceed to select cases? The first option is to randomly select cases. However, it is not always possible to randomly select cases: linguistic barriers, data availability, possibilities of establishing contacts, and financial resources limit the selection of the cases. Following this argument, a second option would be to use some form of purposive sampling: a researcher chooses those cases that present the characteristic(s) s/he wants to further explore through qualitative analysis. Here, problems of selection

bias may affect the findings of the qualitative study, in that a given hypothesis may be confirmed for that set of cases, but it might not apply for some cases that have been omitted in the study. Therefore, this hinders the scope of inference. A third option is to combine two methods to make the selection of cases easier and strengthen the possibility of inference. Of course, all three techniques to select cases present methodological imperfections, with the risk of producing misinterpretation of the phenomenon under study. Nonetheless, if the research process is constituted by sequential and interconnected stages, each using different theoretical contributions, data sources and analytical techniques, the likelihood of producing reliable results is increased.

For the reasons discussed above, this thesis relies on a nested design, which consists of a regression analysis (large-N part) followed by a qualitative analysis (small-N part) (see Figure 19 below). In particular, the small-N part of this research can be described as a model-testing small-N analysis, since it seeks to verify a set of theoretical assumptions (see chapter 7). As will be discussed in further depth in chapter 7, the selected cases are predicted by the regression models. As for the requirement of the variation of the explanatory variables indicated by Lieberman (2005), this is ensured by including in sample local authorities from different countries. In this sense, the national context can be considered as a control variable that may explain possible differences among the cases.

Despite the flaws identified by some authors, the important advantage of the nested design is the integration of large-scale and small-scale analyses, which is functional to "simultaneously estimate the effects of rival explanations and/or control variables on an outcome" and to provide an exhaustive analysis of a phenomenon by answering those questions that cannot be addressed by one method alone (Lieberman, 2005: 438, 440).

As shown in Figure 19 below, the nested design of this thesis is constituted by a regression analysis that informs the qualitative analysis. The latter relies on two different techniques: a preliminary cluster analysis followed by a thematic analysis. In the next section an overview of quantitative and qualitative methods is provided.

Figure 19: Nested research design of the study
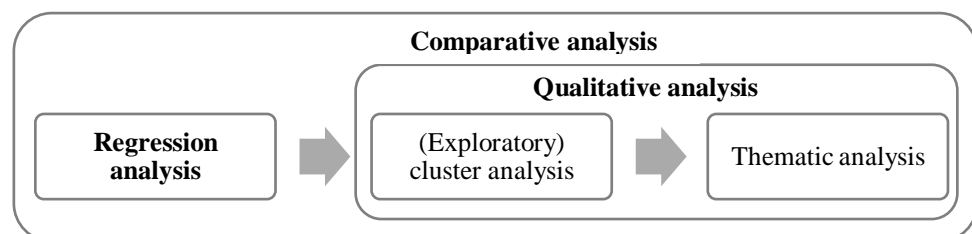
5.4 The data collection techniques and the analytical instruments

Once the data collection stage was concluded, the information obtained was then processed. Obviously, the two types of data, i.e. secondary quantitative data and primary qualitative data, required different analytical instruments, as discussed in the following sub-sections.

5.4.1   Quantitative analysis

For the large-N analysis, secondary data were collected[96]. Secondary quantitative data are commonly used in quantitative studies. In this respect, Dale *et al*. (2008) identify a series of advantages deriving from the use of secondary datasets. Firstly, the use of datasets compiled by statistical agencies and organisations is extremely practical, in that it helps to save time and money. Secondly, secondary quantitative data are useful to obtain generalisable results about a single country or to compare the conditions among different countries or to analyse a phenomenon over several years. Finally, secondary quantitative data enables hypothesis testing through the analysis of the relationships among variables.

Nevertheless, the downside of secondary data analysis is that the user may not fully understand how the information was collected and entered into the dataset, possibly leading to misinterpretation of the data (Dale *et al*., 2008). Furthermore, the user may utilise the secondary data to examine a research object that differs from the original purpose of the dataset (Dale *et al*., 2008). Therefore, it may be necessary to integrate the secondary data with information collected by other organisations. This practice may engender some issues, since data gathered and handled by different agencies may not be entirely compatible in terms of time span, population covered by the survey, reliance on different concepts and definitions and so on. For example, the criteria used to define the term "city" (i.e. settlements with more than a given number of inhabitants) inform the decision as to whether to include or exclude units in a dataset. Furthermore, in some cases, data for a given city may comprise aggregated information on surrounding urban districts (as in the case of metropolitan areas or city regions). In order to avoid misinterpretation of the data, it is important to know how data were collected and coded (Dale *et al*., 2008).

The data collected through desk-based research were used to perform regression analyses. Multivariate regressions analyse the relationship between independent and dependent variables and provide predictions of the impact of one or more independent variables on a dependent variable (Hutcheson, 1999). This method allows the researcher to build models predicting the direction and the magnitude of the impact of a set of explanatory variables on the dependent variable. As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 6, two sets of regression analyses were run: the first set of models predicts the variables impacting on TMN and SEUN membership, computed as continuous dependent variables, using the method of Ordinary Least Square (OLS); the second set of models predict the variables affecting membership in both TMNs and SEUNs, this time computed as dichotomous dependent variables (assuming the values 0-1), through logistic regression. The independent variables used in the regression analyses were built deductively, in that their inclusion was guided by the findings of the literature review.

In addition to provide an aggregate analysis of SEUN membership, the regression analysis also helped to select the cases to be explored in the qualitative study: those independent variables yielding a positive impact on the dependent variable are used to select the cases for the intensive small-N analysis. By providing the possibility of adding control variables to the analysis, statistical methods such as regression are generally more reliable than qualitative methods in identifying different causal factors (Bäck and Dumont, 2007). More precisely, statistical methods allow the researcher to "carry out partial correlations

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[96] A detailed description of the data and the sources used is provided in the next chapter.

in order to estimate regression coefficients on variables in regression equations […] and to provide frequentist probability estimates on the likelihood that correlation among variables could have occurred by chance" (Bennett 2002: 4). In addition, the analysis of the same data can be repeated (Bennett, 2002). Therefore, the regression analyses produce findings that can be generalised to a wider population with a certain degree of confidence. A further advantage of regression analyses is the possibility of identifying both similarities and differences among cases in relation to the dependent variable. In this respect, it is argued that multi-level regression models may provide a tool to employ MDSD in comparative studies (Anckar, 2008).

Regression analyses can also assist the design of the qualitative analysis. As one component of the nested design, the regression analyses were linked to the small-N analysis and constituted the first step in drawing the sample of cases for the qualitative study. The large-scale study identified the independent variables that positively impact on the propensity of cities to join SEUNs, which were used to select the cases for the qualitative analysis. In so doing, the case selection process of the small-N design was methodologically more robust, since it was informed by statistical criteria. Hence, regression analysis, thanks to the wide number of cases included in the dataset, can be used in combination with qualitative techniques to provide with more generalisable results and to test theoretical hypotheses on a wider population.

However, the use of regression analysis in Political Science – as in Social Sciences more generally – is not without criticisms. A first limitation of statistical methods such as regression analysis is that they do not provide a nuanced view on individual motivations and drivers, making it difficult to delve deeper into the causal or intervening conditions that explain a given phenomenon. To make the use of statistical analysis more complex is the fact that there are no established methods to select variables (Bennett, 2002). Quantitative studies often rely on proxy variables to quantify aspects that cannot be directly computed. However, proxy variables may only superficially represent the reality under study. Furthermore, with statistical analysis there are problems in handling "path-dependencies and multiple conjunctural causality[97] […] and difficulties in providing or testing historical explanations of individual cases" (Bennett, 2002: 4). An additional issue with regression analysis – known as "file drawer problem" - is that they are likely to be biased towards positive results: researchers tend to present only models that produce positive results discarding those models returning negative outcomes (John, 2002: 226-227).

Despite such drawbacks, regression analysis can be usefully employed to verify a set of hypotheses stemmed from theories on a large number of cases as well as to assist the design of a small-N qualitative study – as will be discussed in the following sections.

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[97] "Multiple conjunctural causality" indicates "equifinality" (Bennett, 2002: 4).

5.4.2   Qualitative analysis

5.4.2.1   Elite interviews

For the qualitative analysis primary data in this thesis were gathered mainly through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. This type of interview proved to be a very helpful tool to explore in-depth particular issues and situations and to understand cities' participation in SEUNs. Kvale (1996: 14) argues that an interview is "an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasizes the social situatedness of research data." Through interviews, the researcher can collect detailed individual-level information that helps to shed light on complex social and political phenomena.

Given the role of the participants involved in the thesis (i.e. local bureaucrats and local politicians), the type of interview used is generally referred to as expert or elite interview. The main difference between "experts" or members of the "elite" lies in the fact that the first have "specific contextual knowledge of a given research field or […] internal knowledge of the structures, procedures and events in a given organisation" (Littig, 2009: 100), while the second "hold, or have held, a privileged position in society and, as such, […] are likely to have had more influence on political outcomes than general members of the public" (Richard, 1996: 199 in Littig, 2009: 99). Drawing on this distinction, the term elite seems to be more appropriate to define the participants in this thesis, both elected and non-elected officials. In light of the definition provided above, local politicians can be described as elite, since they hold a position to which is associated the exercise of specific powers. Instead, local bureaucrats can be considered as being experts and elite at the same time: on the one hand, they have technical knowledge of the administrative system, which defines them as experts; on the other, thanks to their privileged contacts with local councillors, they can influence policy decisions. Despite such conceptual difference, from an empirical viewpoint expert and elite interviews do not differ significantly (Littig, 2009).

The particular status of the interviewees affects the conduct of the interview in a number of ways. Firstly, it may be difficult for the researcher to establish contacts with the targeted interviewees - i.e., "access problems" (see *inter alia* Cochrane, 1998; Littig, 2009). With regard to the data collection stage of this thesis, it was not straightforward to get in touch directly with some of the targeted respondents, especially councillors working on network matters. To some extent, local officials acted as gate-keepers to facilitate the access to councillors or to other colleagues directly involved in SEUNs.

Secondly, some of the potential participants may refuse to participate in the study due to existing commitments (Littig, 2009). In this research, when arranging face-to-face interviews was not possible, telephone interviews were carried out. When participants declined the invitation to participate in an interview due to time constraints, semi-structured questionnaires were sent out. The questionnaires contained all the questions asked during the interviews. Unfortunately, as a static data collection tool, it did not permit to expand on unexpected and interesting points stirred out by respondents. Nevertheless, the answers in the questionnaires and interview transcripts were consistent with each other.

Thirdly, the position of the researcher is influenced by the status of the respondent. More precisely, while in qualitative research with lay people the researcher may affect the answers provided by the interviewees, in research with elites it is the participant that has more influence over the course of the interview (Cochrane, 1998). Therefore, "with elite interviewees the relationship is inevitably asymmetrical regardless of the research strategies deployed" (Desmond, 2004: 265). By the same token, it can be argued that elite interviews are less affected than other types of interviews by the social desirability bias. Lay respondents may be inclined to convey a positive image of themselves, thus portraying a misleading reality. By way of contrast, members of the elite (especially if holding institutional positions) are more likely to provide answers that do not sway from the position of their party on a given matter. In this sense, participants' responses reflect institutional rather than personal views. Given the peculiar "power relationship" between the researcher and the respondent that characterises elite interviews, Cochrane (1998: 2130) suggests that the researcher should keep a perspective that he defines as "committed scepticism", i.e. giving importance to respondents' views, while not accepting them non-critically.

With regard to this thesis, additional issues were encountered during the data collection stage. Firstly, identifying potential participants was not straightforward, since membership does equal activism[98]. Sometimes, cities appear to be active members of networks, but actually they simply pay membership fees and do not participate in networks' activities. This was the case of the city of Trento[99]. In the desk-based research, the city appeared to be engaged in the Climate Alliance network. After contacting the officers in charge of environmental policy and European affairs, it emerged that Trento was not actively involved in the network, therefore not included in the final sample. Secondly, network membership may change over time, thus making it difficult to prepare a definitive list of network members. Although networks publish the lists of members on their websites, these are not always updated. In other words, while it is possible to identify city-members, it is difficult to collect data on the length of the membership[100]. For instance, the initial sample included the city of Leeds as a low-propensity network member. However, according to an officer responsible for International Relations in the council, the city withdrew from all the European networks of which it was a member. Despite these occasional limitations, the interviews provided valuable evidence to explore in depth the topic under scrutiny.

In this study, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim[101]. The following stage is the analysis of the evidence collected. With regard to the analysis of expert interviews, Meuser and Nagel (2009: 35-36) identify the following phases:

1.   "Transcription […] of thematically relevant passages" of the interviews;
2.   "Paraphrase", which should consider the views of the participants;
3.   "Coding", whose purpose is "to order the paraphrased passages thematically";

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[98] A complete list of the participants is reported in chapter 7, section 7.1.
[99] As will be discussed in further detail in chapter 7, this local authority, located in North-Eastern Italy, was chosen as a case of a city with a low propensity to participate in networks.
[100] The networks included in the analysis were contacted with the purpose of obtaining the lists of their members and the respective length of membership. However, many of the networks did not have such information.
[101] Only the digressions not pertinent to the topic of the interviews were not transcribed.

4. "Thematic comparison", which enables to compare pieces of information provided by the participants;

5. "Sociological conceptualisation": at this stage the differences and commonalities between interviews are examined and interpreted in light of the theoretical framework, and

6. "Theoretical generalisation": the final stage of the analysis entails the systematisation of "the categories according to their internal relations".

The main strength of this approach is its "recursiveness": "while the process of interpretation is progressing it often proves necessary to go back to an earlier stage in order to check the adequacy of generalizations as grounded in data (Meuser and Nagel, 2009: 36). In a similar vein, in this thesis the analysis of the transcripts was carried out in different stages, with a preliminary examination of the evidence and a subsequent in-depth analysis of the themes.

5.4.2.2 The interpretation of qualitative data: thematic analysis

The interview transcripts were read and preliminarily scanned for recurring topics. Then, the first step of the qualitative analysis was undertaking a cluster analysis to explore the evidence collected. The cluster analysis consists in the identification of the most recurring words and in grouping them by semantic domain. The cluster analysis produces a dendrogram, that is a graph showing the correlation among items. The closer the items in the dendrogram, the more similar their word content. By way of contrast, the higher the branches linking clusters the more dissimilar are the latter (Figure 20).

Figure 20: Dendrogram
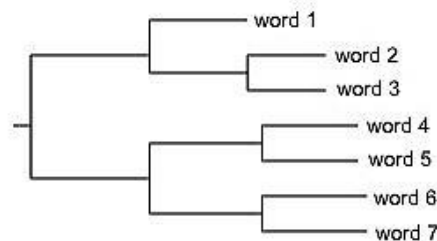
The associations among the most recurring words in the dendrogram provide a preliminary understanding of the main topics discussed by the participants. In this sense, the cluster analysis was exploratory, in that it helped to identify a set of themes recurring in the interviews and/or questionnaires to be further examined in the thematic analysis. On an operational level, the cluster analysis guided the coding process of the thematic analysis.

According to Boyatzis (1998: 4), thematic analysis indicates "a process for encoding qualitative information". In this sense, the purpose of thematic analysis is to "move beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes" (Guest *et al*., 2011: 10). A theme can be defined as "a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum, interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998: 4). From a methodological viewpoint, themes may be created either inductively from the data, or deductively from existing theories and research (Boyatzis, 1998). This

means that thematic analysis can be theory-driven, insofar as theoretical assumptions are verified through the analysis of the themes identified in the evidence gathered; alternatively, it may be data-driven, when the data suggest explanations for the phenomenon under study. These two types of thematic analysis can be fruitfully combined. In so doing, the mapping and the analysis of the themes is guided by theoretical knowledge, while searching the evidence for new themes.

The themes discovered in the evidence are then transformed in codes. Codes can be described as "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study", whose purpose is "to retrieve and organize the chunks" of the evidence collected (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 56-57). In other words, the coding units contain the meaningful sentences or fragments reporting opinions or statements about the themes identified in interview transcripts and questionnaires (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

Miles and Huberman (1994: 62-63) suggest that codes should be organised and linked in a "coding scheme", that is not "a catalogue of disjointed descriptors or a set of logically related units and subunits, but rather a conceptual web, including larger meanings and their constitutive characteristics". Following this methodological advice, in this thesis codes are organised hierarchically by thematic families. A coding family is made of a main concept and its sub-concepts – which in NVivo are defined as "child-nodes". The purpose of creating a hierarchy of codes is to capture the complexity and the variety of themes emerging out of the interviews. Given the qualitative nature of this thesis, the objective is to find patterns of opinions and attitudes rather than their frequency. Therefore, some codes, although including a small number of references, were kept in the analysis because they were considered relevant to the topic under study.

The codes created out of the data gathered can be of three types: 1) "descriptive codes", 2) "interpretive codes", and 3) "patterns" (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 57). While the first type of codes does not require any interpretation by the researcher, the other two do (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In particular, pattern codes are a helpful tool to organise the evidence in a "cognitive map" of the relationships between facts and subjects (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 69).

It is crucial to develop an articulated and exhaustive "coding frame" in that it works like a "filter" to skim the irrelevant material (Schreier, 2012: 61-62). The selection of the relevant material is not an arbitrary process: through a systematic coding procedure, themes that covered issued not related to the research topic under study or that were not pertinent to the overarching questions were left out in the coding process. The coding scheme was created in a two-stage process. In the first stage, broad-brush coding was undertaken, during which codes were created for overarching themes. In the second stage, more detailed themes were codified through the creation of sub-codes (i.e. child nodes). The coding process was concluded once theoretical saturation was reached, that meaning that no new information emerged in the creation of new nodes[102]. Once the coding process was finalised, the nodes created enabled to systematically organise the thematic analysis of the evidence. In this respect, there are no rigid guidelines dictating how to undertake thematic analysis. Therefore, this may be performed using a variety of techniques to examine the themes, such as "comparing code frequencies, identifying code co-occurrence,

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[102] The data handling was undertaken with the use of the software NVivo 10.

and graphically displaying relationships between codes within the data set" (Guest *et al.*, 2011: 10). The purpose of these techniques is ultimately to explore similarities and differences among cases and to develop explanations of the phenomenon under study.

5.5   Concluding remarks

In this chapter the methodology of this thesis has been set out. As discussed previously, the topic under study, which involves several units of analysis across different countries, and the nature of the research questions - which imply both the macro- and micro-level of analysis - suggest a comparative design (Table 12).

Table 12: The research methodology

Methodological structure	Research design		Data collection techniques	Type of data	Analytical instruments
Comparative method	Nested design	Large-N	Desk-based research	Secondary quantitative data	OLS/logistic regression models
		Small-N	Elite interviews/Questionnaires	Primary qualitative data	Cluster analysis
					Thematic analysis

From an operational perspective, the comparative architecture of this research is built on a nested research design, which entails the interconnection between a large-N and a small-N analysis. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods allows us to obtain robust and reliable results as well as to build a theoretical model of SEUN membership. In particular, the purpose of the regression analysis, which constitutes the quantitative component, is to test the research hypotheses, build a model of membership and inform the case selection process for the small-N analysis. The latter allows us to test the validity of the regression model and to shed light on the motivations for cities to participate in SEUNs.

The comparative approach and the nested design are also instrumental to verify the theoretical validity of the urban approach. While the comparative method allows the researcher to verify the validity of the arguments by including in the analysis cases across different countries, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods ensure breadth and depth of the causal explanations. In more detail, the different types of factors outlined in the previous chapter require different analytical instruments to understand the impact on and the relationship with the dependent variable (i.e. SEUN membership) (Table 13).

Table 13: The urban approach to transnational municipalism in Europe: theory and methods

Factors		Method	
		Regression analysis	Qualitative analysis
Contextual	Urban economic development models	✓	✓ X
	Institutional arrangements	✓	X
	Urban politics	✓	✓
Attitudinal	Functionalism/rationality (incentives)	X	✓
	Agency	X	✓
	Values/attitudes	X	✓
	Tradition/experience	X	✓

The findings of the regression analysis and the qualitative analysis are presented and discussed in the following chapters.

6. REGRESSION ANALYSIS

6.1 Introduction

The large-N part of this thesis is aimed at assessing the impact that the urban-level factors exert on SEUN membership as well as to facilitate the case selection process for the qualitative part.

Quantitative methods have been extensively used in Political Science, but scholars in the sub-field of urban politics have shown a certain preference for qualitative methods. In particular, there is little large scale research exploring the engagement of local governments in supra-national organisations and initiatives. A relevant example is the study conducted by Marks et al. (1996), which relies on univariate and multivariate logistic regression analysis to understand why subnational governments were drawn to Brussels and which subnational governments were or were not represented. Similarly, the body of research on local governments' involvement in SEUNs and TMNs is mainly qualitative, where case studies are widely used (Lee, 2013). The relationship between cities and their involvement in sustainability initiatives has been explored by a small number of quantitative studies (see Portney and Berry, 2010; Krause, 2011; Castán Broto and Bulkeley, 2013). With regard to the specific topic of TMNs, only a few studies rely on quantitative methods (see Zahran et al., 2008; Sharp et al., 2011; Lee, 2013). Additionally, as Lee (2013) observes, most of the large-scale studies focus only on US cities (see for instance, Feiock et al., 2009; Krause, 2011; Portney and Berry, 2010; Sharp et al., 2011; Zahran et al., 2008). While some authors have explored global cities worldwide (see Broto and Bulkeley, 2013; Lee; 2013), European cities have received little attention. Moreover, existing quantitative research does not provide an in-depth analysis of the impact of the urban dimension on cities' involvement in international initiatives. Therefore, the quantitative part of this thesis seeks to verify the impact of urban-level factors on the involvement of local authorities in SEUNs.

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, the aim of the quantitative analysis is to answer the following questions:

1. *What factors predict the participation of European cities in SEUNs?*
2. *What factors impact on the propensity of cities to join SEUNs?*

Drawing on the theoretical premises discussed in chapter 4 and summarised in Table 14, a set of research hypotheses can be developed to address these research questions:

H1: the type of development matters in the decision to join; thus, *the more advanced the urban economy the more likely a city is to be member of a higher number of SEUNs*;

H2: the participation in networks widens the sphere of authority of cities. However, international activities of local governments are possible if they have a certain degree of financial, administrative and political autonomy from central government. Thus, it can be hypothesized that:

H2a: *the more financially autonomous a city the higher the propensity to join;*

H2b: *the higher the administrative status of a city the higher the likelihood to be engaged in a wider number of SEUNs;*

H2c: *the higher the level of local political representation the more likely is the city to participate in SEUNs;*

H3: parties' position on the EU affects the decision to join SEUNs. In particular, centre-left and left-wing parties, which have an associational and participatory view of the European engagement, may be more inclined to participate in European organisations; therefore, *local governments that have been led by centre-left and left-wing parties will be more likely to be highly engaged in SEUNs;*

H4: since urban environmentalism is more motivated by the goal of boosting the city profile than improving the quality of the urban environment, *the level of urban environmental quality does not affect SEUN membership;*

H5: The decision to join a SEUN can be influenced by the local government's general propensity to cooperate with European cities. Thus, *the higher the propensity to join to a variety of networks, the higher the number of sustainable development related city networks of which a local authority is a member.*

These hypotheses were tested employing both logistic and OLS regression analyses. A detailed description of the data and method used is provided in the next section.

Table 14: Research hypotheses for regression analysis

Factors		Hypotheses
Type of local economic development		H1: the more advanced the urban economy the more likely a city is to be member of a higher number of SEUNs
Local governments' autonomy	Financial autonomy	H2a: the more financially autonomous a city the higher the propensity to join
	Administrative autonomy	H2b: the higher the policy-making capacity the higher the likelihood to be engaged in a wider number of networks
	Political autonomy	H2c: the higher the level of local political representation the more likely is the city to participate in SEUNs
Political leaning		H3: local governments with a centre-left/left-wing political leaning are more likely to engage in SEUNs
Urban sustainability		H4: the level of urban environmental quality does not affect SEUN membership
Local governments' cooperative attitude		H5: the higher the propensity to join to a variety of networks, the higher the number of sustainable development related city networks of which a local authority is a member

6.2   Method and data

The research hypotheses were tested with logistic regression and Ordinary Least Square Regression. The use of both types of regressions provides a comprehensive analysis of the impact exerted by urban-level factors on membership in general and sustainability-related networks (Table 15). While logistic regression helps to understand what factors play a role in determining network membership, linear regression identifies the factors impacting on the propensity to join a lower or higher number of networks.

The regression models were run using the data included in the Urban Audit dataset developed by Eurostat. The Urban Audit dataset comprises around 360 local authorities in the EU-27 member states, Norway, Switzerland and Turkey, with a population ranging from 50,000 to 10 million (Feldmann, 2008). To adapt the dataset for the purpose of this thesis, the following selection criteria were applied. Firstly, only cities from the EU-15 group were included, since a lengthier period of EU membership[103] means that local authorities from these countries have been widely involved in transnational urban networks. Furthermore, a lengthier EU membership results in greater availability of data in European statistical resources. Secondly, capital cities were excluded, since, thanks to their strong connection in the global economy, they have not been affected by de-industrialization as much as other cities. Therefore, their inclusion would have skewed the results. The final dataset, which includes 210 cities[104], comprised mostly second and third cities[105] in 14 European Member-States[106][107]. The cities included in the analysis are displayed in Figure 21[108].

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[103] Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the EU-12 in 1995.

[104] As a result of the exclusion of some entries, in the final dataset only 7 cities exceed 1 million inhabitants: Barcelona, Hamburg, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Milan and München (total resident population 2004, Urban Audit).

[105] One limitation of the dataset is the exclusion of small agglomerations. However, this thesis focuses specifically on cities, intended as those conurbations with a certain degree of political and economic influence not only within city's boundaries, but also in the surrounding areas.

[106] The 15th EU Member-state would be Luxemburg, but only data on the capital city were included in the original dataset.

[107] In the data collection stage some issues were encountered. Firstly, there was a problem of data availability, in that a comprehensive and updated database including political, economic, environmental and social information at urban level is not yet available. The Urban Audit data date back to 2004, with updates for 2007 only available for some entries. For some environmental indicators figures for 2004 were not available for some cities and therefore were replaced by data for 2001. However, for some entries or indicators no figures were available for both years. The collection of data from other sources was excluded due to a problem of comparability. The use of different data sources is particularly difficult when comparing cities from several countries, where information may be classified differently, or the indicators may be created using different data sources or processes. Therefore, this may result in a situation where such data cannot be compared.

[108] The complete list of number of TMNs and SEUNs of which the cities included in the sample are members are reported in Table 29 in Appendix.

Figure 21: Cities included in the analysis and SEUN membership
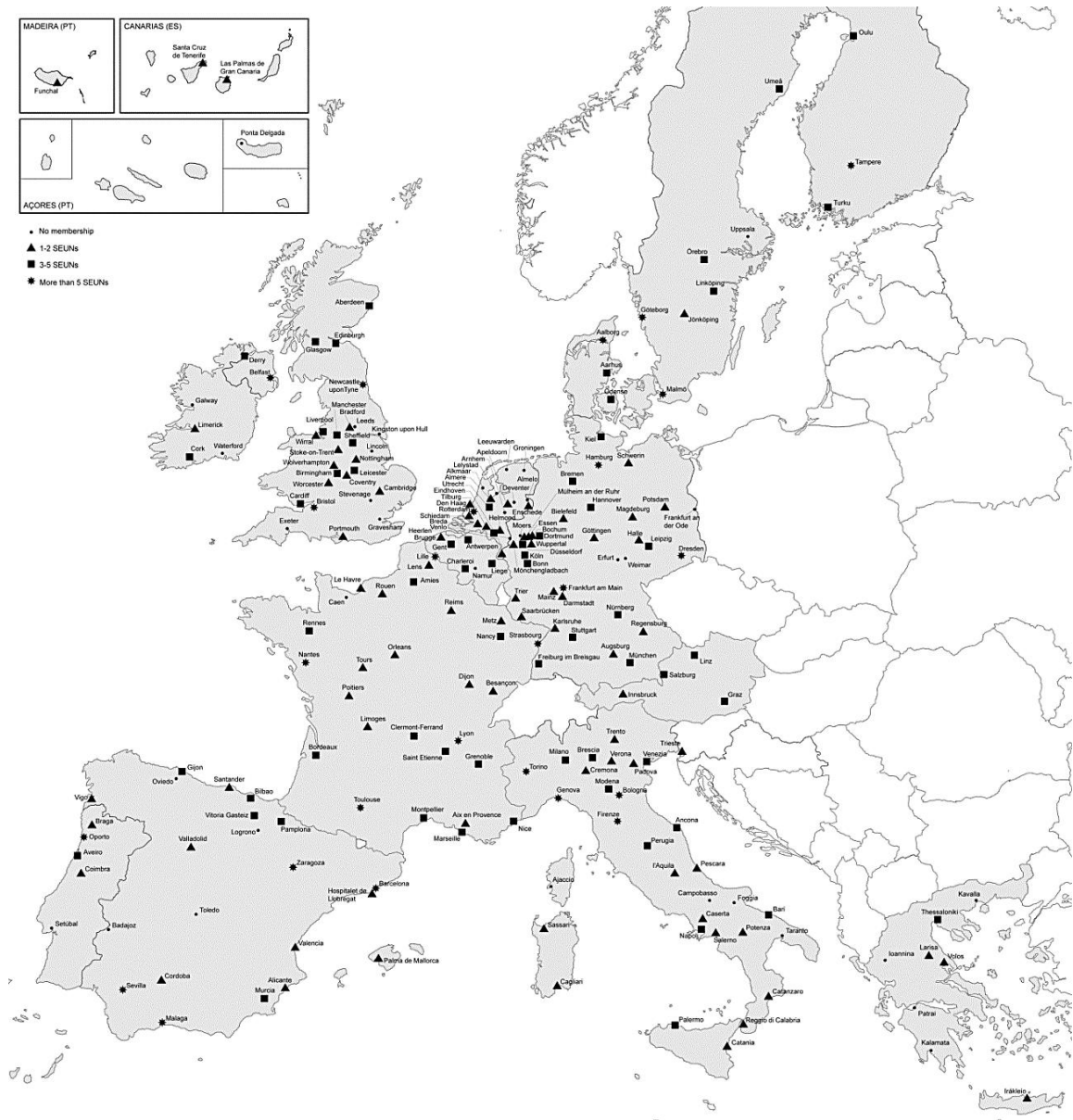
6.2.1 Dependent variables

Most of the quantitative studies mentioned in the introduction of this chapter include as dependent variables only one or two networks or programmes in which cities are engaged. This makes it difficult to extend the finding to a wider number of networks. In some cases, engagement in sustainability initiatives is an explanatory variable (see Castán Broto and Bulkeley, 2013). European cities are engaged not only in more established and big networks, but also in small networks focused on specific issues. If one takes only big networks into consideration, then the drivers of membership might be completely different from small ones. Hence, in this thesis the dependent variables group all European urban networks existing at the time of writing[109].

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[109] The number of European city networks results from web searches integrated with existing research (see Keiner and Kim, 2007; Labaeye and Sauer, 2013).

The logistic regression models use two dichotomous variables: European urban network membership, which indicates whether a city is a member of at least one European urban network, and SEUN membership, which refers to of the participation in at least one socio-ecological network.

In the linear regression models the dependent variables used are two continuous variables: the total number of European urban network, used in the general model, indicates the number of all the networks of which a city is a member (including networks for sustainability); and the number of SEUNs, used in the sustainable development models, is a scale variable indicating the number of networks focusing on sustainable development of which a city is a member. It should be noted that the category SEUNs includes not only those networks with environmental protection or sustainability as the sole purpose, but also those networks whose portfolio of programmes and projects includes more loosely sustainable urban development (Table 15).

The reason for running regressions with both variables – either dichotomous in the logistic regression or continuous in the OLS – is to control for whether the decision over SEUN membership is affected by the same factors determining membership in all city networks.

Table 15: List of city networks

European Socio-ecological urban networks	Non SD-related European urban networks
ACR+	European cultural tourism network (ECTN)
Civitas	EFUS European forum for urban security
Climate Alliance	European Association of Historic Towns and Regions
Energy cities	European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL)
Eurocities	Les Rencontres
Euromed reseau des villes	Major Cities
European Green Cities Network (EGCN)	Platform Network
European New Towns and Pilot Cities Platform (ENTP)	REVES
European sustainable cities platform	The Europe 2020 monitoring platform
Eurotowns	Xarxa
ICLEI Europe	
Ludens	
Medcities	
METREX	
PIMMS sustainable transport	
Polis	
Union of Baltic Cities (UBC)	

6.2.2   Independent variables

The quantitative studies on the topic under exploration generally include in their analyses four main types of urban-level independent variables to examine cities' participation in international initiatives for sustainability: institutional, political, socio-economic and environmental. Institutional variables include the type of city government (Feiock et al., 2009[110]; Krause, 2011[111]; Sharp et al., 2011[112]), city's level of decentralization (Lee 2013) or metropolitan fragmentation (Sharp et al., 2011). Variables reflecting the

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[110] City manager form of government.
[111] Existence of a mayor-council form of local government.
[112] Mayoral or city manager form of government.

local political context comprise measures of political ideology (Portney and Berry, 2010), electoral preferences of citizens in a specific year (Krause, 2011; Portney and Berry, 2010), citizens' participation either in environmental groups (Zahran et al. 2008) or in other political initiatives and groups (Lee, 2013; Portney and Berry, 2010). Additionally, Lee (2013) considers the participation of cities in local organisations, but none of the studies include the political leaning of local authorities overtime. Moreover, socio-economic variables, such as population size, income and education are included in these studies. Only a few authors take into account the type of local economy, using variables indicating the presence of manufacturing (Krause, 2011; Sharp et al., 2011), or the local financial resources (Krause, 2011; Sharp et al., 2011). Finally, environmental variables are used to identify cities' potential ecological risks (Feiock et al., 2009; Lee, 2013; Zahran et al., 2008) or local performance using a specific environmental indicator, such as numbers of unhealthy days (Feiock et al., 2009; Krause, 2011).

Whereas these categories were taken into consideration, different variables were employed in this thesis. This choice was due to the lack or unsuitability of the variables previously indicated to test the research hypotheses, here. Previous quantitative studies fall short of providing a comprehensive theory-based analysis of the urban political and economic drivers underpinning cities' engagement in environmental initiatives. Therefore, the primary aim of this quantitative analysis is to isolate and examine the impact that urban-level factors exert on SEUN membership. For this purpose, state-level variables were excluded. Similarly, measures of civic participation were omitted, since the analysis takes into account the perspective of local political elite. Drawing on these considerations, the following independent variables were employed.

To measure the level of financial autonomy of cities the variable *financial power* was included in the model. This variable was modelled on the "index of city power" developed in the European Commission "State of European Cities Report" (2007) and revised in the second report (EC, 2010). The city power index is built on the following components: 1) city size; 2) governance and political status of cities; 3) "spending power", i.e. the size of budget controlled by the local authorities and 4) "control over income", which represents the extent to which cities can influence income levels through taxation and charges (EC, 2007: 123). As explained in the EC (2007) report, cities were ranked according to each variable and attributed a score, representing their relative position in the ranking. Cities were then grouped in four categories ("most powerful", "more powerful", "less powerful" and "least powerful"). However, since city size and political status have been taken into account in different variables (city types and administrative status respectively), the power index has been revised to address the purpose of the analysis. Therefore, the variable financial power includes only the factors related to the municipal financial situation[113]. As with the power index, the variable financial power assumes values from 1 to 4[114].

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[113] The variable financial power includes the following four components used in the "State of the City" report (2010): "annual expenditure per resident"; 2) "proportion of municipal authority income of local taxation"; 3) "local taxes and contributions in relation to total taxes and contributions" and 4) "local government expenditure in relation to total government expenditure".

[114] In the "State of the European Cities Report" (EC, 2007) it is specified that data on spending per inhabitants (in absolute terms), and city authority income derived from taxes were taken from the Urban Audit, while harmonized data on the proportion of total public spending spent by local government and the proportion of total tax revenue received directly by local government from Eurostat.

To analyse the urban socio-economic profile the "typology of urban competitiveness" developed in the EC (2007) report was used (Table 16). This typology – which combines city size, economic structure, economic performance and drivers of competitiveness - groups European cities in the following categories: 1) international hubs, which include knowledge hubs, established capitals and re-invented capitals[115]; 2) specialized poles, comprising national service hubs, transformation poles, gateways, modern industrial centres, research centres and visitor centres; 3) regional poles, including de-industrialized cities, regional market centres, regional public service centres and satellite towns.

Using the EC (2007) city-types, the dichotomous variable *modern city* was created to identify those cities with more advanced economies. The value 1 was attributed to those cities classified as international hubs, transformation poles, modern industrial centres and research centres – while 0 indicates cities with less advanced economies.[116]

Table 16: City types 2007

City types 2007	
International hubs	Knowledge hubs
	Established capitals
	Re-invented capitals
Specialised poles	National service hubs
	Transformation poles
	Gateways
	Modern industrial centres
	Research centres
	Visitor centres
Regional poles	De-industrialised cities
	Regional market centres
	Regional public service centres
	Satellite towns

Source: EC (2007).

The models include the political leaning of the local governments[117] from 1985 to 2013. This period covers the time span during which several European urban networks were created. Given that different local government systems are in place in Europe, the way to account for the political leaning of a council varies, as shown in Table 17. In those cities where there is a mayor or a political leader retaining executive functions or acting as a figurehead for the city, the party supporting the mayor/leader represents the dominant party in the council. Even in those cities where the mayor is not directly elected but nominated by the municipal council, it is usual that the choice of the mayor rests on the bargaining

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[115] Since national capitals were excluded the categories established and reinvented capitals are not represented.

[116] It should be noted that, due to missing data for the modern city variable, the number of cases dropped from 210 to 165. Given the high number of missing cases for the modern city variable, all models were run without this variable. For the OLS regressions, the results showed that without modern city, the significance of the other variables does not change considerably. Conversely, the omission of modern city changed the results of the logistic regressions: in the general model none of the variables were significant (with progressive city having a significance value of 0.052), while in the sustainable development model the variables strong mayor and cooperative attitude are highly significant.

[117] The political leaning variable was created using data from several sources, including: websites of National Interior Ministries; websites of National Parliaments; websites of National Statistical Offices; websites of local governments; websites of local libraries; academic articles; books; newspapers; online databases (collecting data on mayors and local elections); websites of political parties.

capacity of the parties in the council. Therefore, the most influential party in the political negotiations will be more likely to see the mayor appointed within its ranks. However, in those countries where the executive is the highest political organ, the political outlook of the council is represented by the party with the highest number of seats in the executive board, insofar as a significant presence in the executive may give the party a greater weight in policy decisions.

Table 17: Political leaning by country

Countries	Political leaning
Austria, Belgium[118], Denmark[119], Germany, Greece, France, Italy, Portugal, Spain	Party/coalition of the mayor
Finland[120], Ireland, Netherland[121], Northern Ireland[122]	Party with highest number of the seats
Great Britain	Position of the party taking control of the council or the position of the party of the Leader of the council if an election results in a hung council
Sweden[123]	Position of the party of the chair of the municipal executive or the party/coalition with the highest number of seats

The political parties across the 14 countries included in the analysis were grouped in five comprehensive categories: 1) progressive parties, including centre-left and left-wing parties; 2) centrist parties, which include liberal-democratic parties both secular and confessional; 3) conservative parties, which encompasses parties from centre-right to far-right; 4) no overall control, which refers to those situations where in the council there is not a clear-cut majority, and 5) independent, when a candidate was not affiliated with any party. The political leaning variable was then recoded as a dichotomous variable – *progressive city* – where the value 1 indicates whether the city has been governed mostly by centre-left/left-wing parties and 0 if otherwise[124].

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[118] The executive (composed by mayor and aldermen) represents the political power. Despite being appointed by the central government, the mayor is a member of the council and is usually "the leader of the majority group" (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002). Hence, the political leaning is given by the party of the mayor, while controlling for party with majority of the seats.

[119] Despite not being a typical strong mayor type, it is suggested that the mayor can act as a strong political leader (Goldsmith and Larsen, 2004). Hence, the party of the mayor represents the political outlook of the council.

[120] The chair of the city board represents the political control of the council. However, since data were difficult to find in English, the party with majority of the seats was used. In fact, the executive board (the municipal government) is composed in proportion to the parties sitting in the council.

[121] The executive, composed by Aldermen and the mayor (which is appointed by the central government and is not a member of the council) represent the political arrangements among the parties in the council. Its composition may either reflect the distribution of the seats among the parties or represent the coalition formed by some parties. This coalition is generally led by the party with the majority of the seats. Hence, the party with the majority of the seats reflects the political leaning; when two parties reach the same number of seats, then the result is "no overall control".

[122] In Northern Ireland, due to the STV, hung councils are the norm. Here, the mayor is elected every year and has a ceremonial role. Especially after 1997, the practice of "power- or "responsibility-sharing" is widely practiced. Hence, the political leaning is given by the party holding the majority of the seats.

[123] The political outlook is represented by the party of the chair of the city executive. However, only for Malmö and Goteborg was possible to find this information. Since the committees are composed by the members of the council proportionally, the party with the highest number of seats indicates the political outlook of the council. When data were available, the leaning of the winning party coalition was used.

[124] After a series of trials, the dominant political leaning was computed using the same party/coalition that was in government for 55% or more of the time span, or for 45% or more and the difference between the

The level of political autonomy of local governments is represented by the type of mayor. This variable was built on Mouritzen and Svara's (2002) typology of local government[125], which includes the following four models: 1) the "strong-mayor model": the elected mayor controls the majority of the council and retains all executive functions. This mayoral model characterizes most of the European countries, such as Austria, Germany, Greece, France, Italy, Portugal and Spain[126]; 2) the "committee-leader model": this model describes those countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, where one person is the political leader and s/he may have or not the title of mayor. Although the political leader may have responsibility for some executive functions, other competencies rest with a collegiate body; 3) the "collective form": it can be found in Belgium and the Netherlands, where a collegiate body is responsible for most of the executive functions. The mayor is appointed by the central government and is the ceremonial leader; 4) the "council-manager form": this model is adopted in Finland and Ireland. All the executive functions are in the hands of a professional manager, the city-manager, appointed by the municipal council. Here the mayor has a representative and ceremonial role.

This variable was then recoded in the dichotomous variable *strong mayor*, where 1 indicates whether a city has a strong-mayor model and 0 if otherwise.

In addition to local governments' financial and political autonomy, a measure of the policy-making competencies was included. The variable *administrative status* reflects the scope of the competencies of which local authorities are entitled by constitutional arrangements. At an operational level, this would require a comparison of the competencies within different policy domains of which local authorities are entitled. However, the lack of available and comparable data for all the cities included in the dataset hindered such a detailed analysis. To overcome this problem, a variable representing the administrative status of a local authority was developed, which considers whether a city has no particular status or is a province, a regional capital or both a province and a regional capital. This indicator represents by approximation the scope of the competencies for which a local government is responsible, since a set of functions established by law is associated to each status, therefore measuring the level of administrative autonomy. Furthermore, this variable seeks to define the administrative influence of a city over the surrounding area. In order to identify and compare the sub-national administrative divisions, the nomenclature of territorial units for statistics (NUTS)[127] and the local administrative units (LAU)[128] were used.

1st and 2nd party in terms of years in government was equal to or greater than14% (i.e. a difference of 4 years). When no party/coalition controlled a given council, then it was classified as "alternate".

[125] To account for the different mayoral models in place within the same country, an additional variable indicating whether the mayor is directly elected was created. The two variables were separately entered in the models to control whether they would have produced different results. Since that both variables produced similar results, the mayoral model variable was kept as it draws on a more articulate typology.

[126] Mouritzen and Svara (2002) do not cover all the countries in the EU-15 group. Particularly, drawing on further research on the subject (Magre and Bertrana, 2007; Ejersbo and Svara, 2012; Kuhlmann and Wollmann, 2014), Austria, Germany and Greece have been included in the strong mayor form. It should be noted that in some countries, such as Austria and Germany, mayoral models differ across local authorities. Although the taxonomy used does not account for such differences, it is a useful tool to shed light on the various administrative arrangements existing in Europe.

[127] See Eurostat (2011).

A further variable included in the analysis is *environmental sustainability*. Since the concept of sustainable development encompasses environmental, economic and social aspects, the inclusion of a measure of urban sustainability incorporating these three components was considered. However, the use of socio-economic indicators (such as GDP per capita, unemployment level, employment by sector, level of education of the population etc.) were likely to create problems of multicollinearity, since these types of indicator are already accounted in the variables modern city (sectoral employment, educational levels of the population, GDP etc.) and financial power (public spending).[129] Therefore, only environmental sustainability was taken into account. The environmental variables – drawn from Urban Audit data for 2004[130] - are: 1) number of days per year that NO_2 concentrations exceed 200mg/m3; 2) number of days per year that PM10 concentrations exceed 50Âµg/m3; 3) accumulated ozone concentrations exceeding 70Âµg/m3; 4) proportion of area in green space; 5) water consumption per inhabitant (cubic metres per annum), and 6) proportion of solid waste processed by recycling. The choice of the environmental indicators was informed by methodologies adopted in studies developing environmental indicators, such as the European Green City index (2009) and the European Common indicators (2003). Using factor analysis, a sole variable - environmental sustainability – was created and included in the regression models.

Finally, a measure of the general propensity to participate in networks – the cooperative attitude – was created by computing the difference between general and sustainability-related networks. A summary of the variables included in the regression models are shown in Table 18.

Table 18: Overview of variables

Variables		Range	Description
Dependent variables	TMN membership	0-1	Membership to European urban networks
	SEUN membership	0-1	Membership to European SEUNs
	Total number of TMNs	0-12	Number of networks of which a city is member
	Number of SEUNs	0-9	Number of SEUNs of which a city is member
Independent variables	Modern city	0-1	Advanced urban economic development
	Financial power	1-4	Levels of financial autonomy of a city
	Administrative status	1-4	Local authorities' policy-making capacity
	Strong mayor model	0-1	Existence of a strong mayor model
	Progressive city	0-1	Local council mainly governed by centre-left parties during the period 1985-2013
	Cooperative attitude	0-4	Difference between total number of networks and number of SEUNs
	Environment sustainability	-1.4-9.2	Factor 1 including urban environmental quality

Before running the regression models, multicollinearity diagnostics were undertaken, since some of the independent variables were correlated[131]. However, the values of tolerance and the variance inflation factor (VIF) were acceptable, with the first measure lower than .10 and VIF greater than 10. Additionally, also the eigenvalue and the Condition Index were at acceptable levels (see Table 30 in Appendix).

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[128] See:
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/nuts_nomenclature/correspondence_tables/national_structures_eu

[129] Additionally, the creation of an indicator representing the inclusiveness in the city political life was not possible for lack of data.

[130] When data for 2004 were not available, they were replaced by figures for 2001.

[131] The multicollinearity diagnostic was performed only for the linear regression.

6.3   Results

Two sets of analyses were run. A logistic regression analysis was conducted to predict membership in SEUNs. Regression analysis using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) was run to examine the level of city membership in sustainability-related networks.[132] In each set of analyses two models were estimated: general and sustainability: the first model estimates membership in European urban networks regardless their mission, while the second model estimates membership in SEUNs.

6.3.1   Logistic regression models

In the general model the dependent variable is a dichotomous variable indicating whether a city is a member of at least one European urban network. The results are shown in Table 19. The modern city variable has a positive and significant effect on the dependent variable. This means that cities with advanced economic activities are more likely to be members of European urban networks. Conversely, higher levels of financial, political and administrative autonomy do not correspond to an increased probability to join a network, nor the political leaning of local authorities, failing to reach statistical significance, despite being positively signed.

In the second logistic regression model the dependent variable is a dichotomous measure of membership in European socio-ecological urban network. The predictors are the same as in the previous model with the addition of environmental sustainability and cooperative attitude, where the latter can be considered as a control variable. The results reported in Table 19 show that financial power, modern city and cooperative attitude have a significant and positive effect on SEUN membership. Here, the significant and positive effect of the financial power variable indicates that the higher the competence of a city to manage its budget the higher the probability to join a network. As with the general model, in the sustainable development model the type of urban economic development impacts on the decision to join a SEUN. Modern cities are in fact 10 times more likely to join sustainable development-related networks than cities with a less innovative and advanced economic profile. Conversely, the level of environmental sustainability of a city does not affect the participation in SEUNs. This means that local governments' environmental concern does not appear to determine their engagement in European urban networks for sustainable development. Finally, it has to be noted that membership in non sustainability-related networks increases the likelihood that a city becomes a member of a SEUN. In other words, membership in SEUNs is affected by a general propensity to participate in European urban initiatives.

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[132] Before choosing the OLS for the quantitative analysis a Poisson estimation method was also applied to earlier versions of the dataset. Since the distribution of the data is skewed towards one end, a Poisson estimation method would be the preferable technique. However, the results obtained by applying this technique were similar to those produced by the OLS, both in terms of direction of B and statistical significance. Since the OLS provides a clearer description of the predictors of networks membership, it was chosen as the analytical technique.

Table 19: The propensity of local authorities to join European city networks logistic regression result (general and sustainable development models)

Variables	General TMNs					SEUNs				
	B	S.E.	Exp(B)	Sig.		B	S.E.	Exp(B)	Sig.	
(Constant)	.231	1.065	1.260	.828		-1.630	1.182	.196	.168	
Financial power	.286	.249	1.332	.251		.539	.252	1.715	.032	*
Progressive city	.361	.555	1.434	.516		.069	.556	1.071	.901	
Modern city	2.121	.781	8.336	.007	**	2.325	.784	10.225	.003	**
Administrative status	.277	.250	1.319	.269		-.066	.261	.936	.800	
Strong mayor	-.459	.725	.632	.527		1.468	.778	4.340	.059	
Environmental sustainability						-.057	.409	.945	.889	
Cooperative attitude						1.414	.536	4.112	.008	**
N			165					165		
Model X^2			14.919					30.149		
Nagelkerke R^2			.174					.304		

*$p. < .05$; **$p < .01$

6.3.2 Linear regression models

In the general OLS model, the dependent variable is the total number of European urban networks of which a city is a member. In this model all the variables except for financial power and strong mayor are statistically significant with $p<.01$, and have a positive impact on the dependent variable (see Table 20). The results show that the type of urban economic development plays a significant role in determining the propensity to participate in networks. Modern cities are more likely to participate in a higher number of European city networks than less economically developed cities. Moreover, it appears that those local authorities with a higher administrative status are more likely to join a greater number of networks. Finally, the results show that, when network membership is measured as a continuous variable, the political leaning of the local council seems to affect the decision to join networks, with left-leaning local authorities more likely to participate in more networks.

Three models were then run with the number of SEUNs of which cities are members as the dependent variable. The results are shown in Table 20. The purpose of the three models is to control for the effect that the two variables, environmental sustainability and cooperative attitude, produces on the set of variables used for both the general and sustainability models. In the first model all the predictors used in the general model were included; in the second model, the variable environmental sustainability was included, and cooperative attitude was added in the third model.

In model 1 the results show that all the variables, except for financial power and strong mayor, exert a positive and significant impact on the dependent variable. When the model was run with the variable environment sustainability (model 2), it emerged that the level of urban environmental quality is not statistically significant.

By adding the cooperative attitude variable (model 3), the results provide a similar picture: the higher the administrative status and the more advanced the urban economy the higher the number of SEUNs of which a city is a member. Furthermore, a city with a centre-left political tradition has a higher propensity to join SEUNs. It appears that, whilst the political leaning of the council does not impact on the decision

to join a sustainable development-related network, it does affect the propensity to participate in such networks. The variable strong mayor is not significant, showing that higher levels of political autonomy do not influence the scope of cities' engagement in SEUNs. However, cities with a higher administrative status are more likely to join SEUNs and European networks more generally. Indeed, cities with more administrative autonomy have more decision-making freedom and thus have more room to manoeuvre over their international engagement. Additionally, local authorities with a higher administrative status obtain more benefits from information exchange, as they are entitled of the competencies to implement policy, or at least they have significant political influence in those cases when sub-national administrative levels are entitled of limited competencies. The variables progressive city and administrative status, although statistically significant and positively signed, have a weaker impact than in the previous models. It appears that when a local government is a "serial joiner" - i.e. it has a general tendency to participate in European urban networks - the political outlook and the administrative status play a smaller role in determining the propensity to join a SEUN. More importantly, the three sustainable development models show that the variable modern city is the most significant determinant of local governments' engagement in European SEUNs. Finally, environmental sustainability is again not significant, indicating the apparently limited connection between environmental concerns and participations in SEUNs.

Table 20: The propensity of local authorities to join European networks: OLS regression results (general and sustainable development models)

Variables	TMNs					SEUNs MODEL 1					MODEL 2					MODEL 3				
	B	SE	Beta	Sig.		B	SE	Beta	Sig.		B	SE	Beta	Sig.		B	SE	Beta	Sig.	
(Constant)	-.147	.815		.858		-.098	.663		.882		.085	.680		.900		.014	.634		.983	
Financial power	.206	.193	.082	.287		.186	.157	.093	.236		.157	.158	.078	.324		.158	.148	.079	.285	
Progressive city	1.132	.382	.205	.004	**	.921	.311	.210	.003	**	.957	.312	.218	.003	**	.753	.294	.171	.011	*
Modern city	1.986	.373	.360	.000	**	1.565	.304	.356	.000	**	1.580	.303	.359	.000	**	1.207	.293	.275	.000	**
Administrative status	.815	.174	.358	.000	**	.552	.142	.304	.000	**	.520	.144	.286	.000	**	.312	.141	.172	.028	*
Strong mayor model	-.880	.501	-.148	.081		-.458	.407	-.096	.262		-.516	.409	-.108	.210		-.115	.390	-.024	.768	
Environmental sustainability	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		.192	.160	.088	.231		.074	.151	.034	.627	
Cooperative attitude	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		.864	.174	.354	.000	**
N	165					165					165					165				
Adj. R^2	.259					.229					.231					.332				

*p<.05; **p<.01

6.4 Discussion and conclusions

In this chapter a set of hypotheses about the drivers of participation in SEUNs has been developed and tested. Drawing on an urban approach, it has been shown that the urban context affects local governments' choice to engage in European urban networks for sustainability. In particular, the findings of the regression analysis support Hypothesis 1, according to which the type of urban economy affects participation in SEUNs and European urban networks more widely. This result suggests that cities with an advanced economy (in terms of technological innovation capacity and highly skilled human capital) are more likely to participate in SEUNs (as well as other city networks). In turn, this shows that those cities that have been able to move from an industrial to a post-industrial economy have used a variety of strategies, including the development of their European profile. Additionally, their high propensity to participate into networks tackling themes related to sustainable development reflects how urban sustainability is a pivotal discourse in urban economic development.

Hypothesis 2 is partially confirmed, in that the results show that the administrative autonomy of local authorities affect positively the propensity to join SEUNs. Therefore, the findings suggest that local authorities with a high administrative status have the policy-making capacity and/or the political influence to develop innovative ideas circulating in the networks and translate them into policies. Conversely, the financial wellbeing and the spending power of a local authority do not affect participation in either SEUNs or TMNs. Similarly, local governments where the executive power is exercised by a strong mayor are no more likely to get involved in SEUNs.

With regard to Hypothesis 3, the results suggest that the political tradition does not impact on the decision to join, but it does affect the level of participation: cities with governments of different political colours are TMN and SEUN members, but municipal governments with a centre-left political outlook appear to be more likely to join a higher number of TMNs and SEUNs. In other words, whilst the political leaning of a council does not seem to affect the decision to join a network, the local governments with a centre-left political tradition are more likely to engage in a higher number of European inter-urban organisations. Although deemed as a non-party and non-political concept, sustainable development seems to appeal to more progressive parties. This is not surprising, as sustainable development encapsulates concepts, such as social justice, which are more in tune with the ideological foundations of centre-left parties, and the empirical testing appears to confirm this point.

Hypothesis 4 is confirmed, as the implementation of environmental policy, resulting in better levels of urban environmental quality, does not impact upon SEUN membership. The results appear to indicate the political opportunism underpinning the involvement of cities in European initiatives for sustainability, in that the engagement in socio-ecological networks helps local governments to achieve urban development rather than improve environmental quality. This claim recalls Blühdorn's (2004: 36) "post-ecologist approach", arguing that environmentalism has been diluted in liberal democracy, insofar as any radical ecological claims have been softened and adapted to the capitalist paradigm. Of course, any generalisation has to be avoided: there may be local political personalities particularly concerned about the future of the urban environment. Notwithstanding, there is no repeated evidence of a link between environmental quality and propensity to join SEUNs.

Finally, the findings show that cities with a higher propensity to join SEUNs are also members of other European city networks, therefore confirming Hypothesis 5. It appears that the cooperative attitude of the serial joiners is path-dependent, as it may be the result of positive past European experiences that reinforce their present involvement.

The findings of the regression analysis reach similar conclusions as previous empirical research on the topic. In line with Krause (2011), who examined the participation in U.S. Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement, this analysis points out the role that party politics plays in affecting the propensity to join SEUNs. With regard to the local financial levels, the studies on the topic under exploration use different measure of financial wealth of cities, which makes it difficult to draw comparisons. However, some authors conclude that fiscally stressed cities are more likely to join a network for the potential cost savings (Sharp et al., 2011). Conversely, Krause (2011) found that cities with higher levels of per capita general revenue are more likely to participate in the U.S. Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement. By way of contrast, the findings of this analysis suggest that considerable local financial resources and high levels of spending autonomy do not impact on cities' engagement in European urban networks.

The institutional context – measured in previous studies by the level of decentralization - appears to be a significant driver of participation in some networks (Lee, 2013), but not in others (Sharp et al., 2011). The analysis undertaken in this thesis found that the administrative status affects the scope of the participation in SEUNs. Moreover, while some studies suggest that environmental variables influence the involvement of cities in sustainability networks or initiatives, such as coastal cities (Lee, 2013) or climate change stress (Zahran et al. 2008), others found that the level of environmental quality - although variously measured – is not statistically significant (see poor air quality in Feiock *et al.*, 2009; unhealthy air days in Krause, 2011, or climate change risk in Zahran et al., 2008). In line with the latter, the findings of this study suggest that the level of environmental quality does not impact on SEUN membership.

In terms of the type of economic development, the results show that cutting-edge cities are more likely to get involved in SEUNs and display a higher propensity to join these organisations. To some extent, this result is in tune with Krause (2011), who found that cities with a strong manufacturing sector are less likely to participate in U.S. Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement. Finally, with regard to city's participation in other organisations, Lee (2013) found that cities' propensity to join local associations was not significant. Conversely, this study showed that participation in non sustainability-related networks is a significant driver.

The quantitative analysis presented in this chapter provides a novel contribution to the literature on the involvement of cities in supra-national activities. Whilst empirical approaches taking into account the national and international scales have been widely used in the literature, this study has focused on the political, institutional and economic factors that define the context within which the decision of local governments to participate in SEUNs is made. Drawing on the urban political scholarship, the empirical analysis has hinged on a different conceptualisation of the drivers of local governments' engagement in SEUNs, which brought to the use and creation of variables not employed by other empirical works on this topic. The results show that urban-level variables exert a significant influence on the decision of cities to engage in European urban networks. Therefore, an urban approach, which accounts for the political,

institutional and economic changes occurred in European cities in the last three decades, is better suited to explore the phenomenon of transnational municipalism for sustainable development.

This analysis adds some new insights on the factors underpinning the European involvement of cities. The findings highlight that participation in European SEUNs is not determined by principally environmental concerns of local governments, but it is part of a wider strategy to regenerate cities. This argument casts some doubt on the emphasis placed by some scholars onto the role played by cities in the struggle against climate change and environmental degradation. Primarily, the participation in international initiatives, such as SEUNs, gives local authorities the opportunity to increase their international visibility. Serving as a shop window, the networks help local authorities to show off their image of being a modern city – the one that is creative, cutting-edge and green. By marketing themselves, cities seek to attract inward investments from businesses that can be used to stimulate the local economy.

7. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

7.1 Introduction

As discussed in chapter 5, a nested research design posits that the quantitative analysis informs the choice of the cases to be analysed in the qualitative analysis. While the regression analysis has shown the significant predictors of membership in SEUNs, the small-N part of this thesis has two main objectives: on the one hand, it aims to substantiate the findings of the regression analysis with an intensive analysis of the typical cases; on the other, it seeks to address those questions left unanswered by the large-N study. To do so, a set of explanations about the engagement of European cities in SEUNs, both theory-driven and inductively derived, can be formulated. In this respect, it can be theorised that:

E1: *the engagement of cities in SEUNs is functional (or incentive-oriented).* This means that cities' participation in SEUNs is motivated by three types of incentives[133]:

> E1a: *economic incentives*, which may be:
>
> - *Short-term*: SEUN members aim at gaining access to EU funding, or
> - *Long-term*: through participation in SEUNs cities seek to attract inward investments;
>
> E1b: *formative incentives*, which derive from the opportunity for learning and sharing knowledge and practices;
>
> E1c: *political incentives*: participation in SEUNs enables cities:
>
> - To strengthen their bargaining capacity – and therefore their political influence - at EU level through lobbying and
> - To widen their autonomy from the national level.

E2: *Cities' engagement in SEUNs is embedded in municipal politics.* This means that the engagement of SEUNs is influenced by the political milieu of the local government. The scope of cities' involvement is influenced by a series of factors:

> E2a: the scope of the participation in SEUNs is affected by *municipal politics*. In more detail, the *political party* that rules the council and the individual *political personalities* are determinant agents of SEUN involvement (agency);
>
> E2b: cities' *past experience* in networks explains the current involvement of cities in SEUNs (path-dependency or institutional inertia), and

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[133] It should be noted that Betsill and Bulkeley (2004) distinguish between material and nonmaterial resources provided by networks.

E2c: *institutionalised values*, such as Europhilia or Euroscepticism and environmentalism (represented by the incorporation of sustainable development in political discourse) that characterise the political environment of a local council determine SEUN engagement.

The explanatory validity of the assumptions set out above have been verified through a preliminary cluster analysis followed by a thematic analysis of a series of interviews with local policy-makers and officials engaged in networks for sustainable development. The findings are reported in the ensuing sections and discussed in detail in the following chapter.

7.2 The participants

In order to verify the validity of the assumptions outlined in the previous section, a small sample of cases was selected to undertake a qualitative analysis. Since this research relies on a nested design, the cases were selected on the explanatory variables that resulted to be significant predictors of SEUN membership in the quantitative analysis, which are the following:

- progressive city=1,
- modern city=1,
- administrative status>0, indicating a city with some administrative competencies or territorial influence,
- cooperative city>0, i.e. member of non sustainability-related networks.

By using these predictors as selection criteria, a smaller sample of potential cases was obtained. To ensure a degree of variation in the selection of the cases, the sample was divided in three groups according to cities' propensity to participate in European urban networks for sustainability, which can be:

- Low: membership in 1 to 3 networks,
- Medium: membership in 4 to 6 networks,
- High: membership in more than 6 networks[134].

Then, it was possible to identify the final cases, which are reported in Table 21.

Table 21: Case studies by propensity to join socio-ecological urban networks

Propensity to join SEUNs	Case
Low	Cremona Manchester
Medium	Birmingham Hamburg Torino
High	Lille Malmö

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[134] It should be noted that the maximum number of networks of which cities in the sample are members is 9.

The participants included 5 local councillors and 10 officers with knowledge and experience of socio-ecological European networks (Table 22). Both categories of respondents were involved at various degrees in different networks with different roles. While some of the participants held executive positions, others had no prominent roles within networks. Additionally, the interviewees worked on different thematic areas of a network, such as energy, environment or culture. Similarly, councillors and officers participating in the interviews worked within their local councils on two main areas: environment/sustainability/climate change or International/European affairs [135]. It should be noted that one participant (LLL3) was more involved in an international urban network than in European networks. The participant was included in the study since some of the networks considered in the quantitative study have also an international reach, such as Euromed[136]. Furthermore, MNC3 was not a member of any European networks, but agreed to participate in this study after having experience in working with partners from other European cities and from working with colleagues involved in networks. In this sense, the participant can be considered as an informant, displaying knowledge of the topic derived by the role covered, albeit not being directly involved in networks, as well as expertise on the environmental aspect.

The reliance on a limited number of participants does not undermine the explanatory validity of the findings. The reason for the small sample is due to the fact that the study relies on the contribution of political elites and experts, which are for obvious reasons a limited number of people. Furthermore, this thesis focuses on the specific topic of European urban networks for sustainability. Other studies focusing on the general involvement of local authorities in European settings may benefit of the contribution from a wider pool of participants, as more officers and councillors are involved in some kind of European activity. Therefore, the small number of interviews is also justified by the research focus.

Table 22: The participants in the study

Participant (code)	City	Country	Role	Method of data collection
BGM1	Birmingham	UK	Officer	Semi-structured interview
BGM2	Birmingham	UK	Councillor	Semi-structured interview
CRM1	Cremona	IT	Officer	Questionnaire
HMG	Hamburg	DE	Officer	Questionnaire
LLL1	Lille	FR	Officer	Semi-structured interview
LLL2	Lille	FR	Councillor	Semi-structured interview
LLL3	Lille	FR	Councillor	Semi-structured interview
MLM1	Malmö	SE	Officer	Semi-structured interview
MLM2	Malmö	SE	Officer	Semi-structured interview
MNC1	Manchester	UK	Officer	Semi-structured interview
MNC2	Manchester	UK	Officer	Semi-structured interview
MNC3	Manchester	UK	Officer	Semi-structured interview
MNC4	Manchester	UK	Councillor	Semi-structured interview
TRN1	Torino	IT	Councillor	Semi-structured interview
TRN2	Torino	IT	Officer	Questionnaire

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[135] It should be noted that the data collection process was carried out in compliance with the ethical code of the University. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the method used and information about confidentiality. To ensure anonymity of the participants, they will be identified through the use of codes (Table 22).
[136] Network of cities located in Mediterranean area.

7.3 Cluster analysis

As discussed in chapter 5, the identification of the themes was preceded by an explorative cluster analysis of the evidence, which provided an initial broad understanding of the content of the interviews and questionnaires. The cluster analysis of the interview transcripts enabled to develop a preliminary coding scheme to begin the analysis of the qualitative evidence. Once the analysis of the evidence was completed, this scheme was then modified to include new themes.

The dendrogram in Figure 22, which reports the 50 most frequent words used in the interviews and questionnaires, is a useful tool to show the association between words when they are occurring together in the text[137]. The words are grouped in 10 clusters and the generation of the graph is based on the Pearson's coefficient as a measure of dissimilarity. The complete list of similar words used to design the dendrogram can be found in Table 31 in Appendix.

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[137] The word frequency query criteria used to design the dendrogram are the following: words with minimum of two letters and stemmed words grouped together. It should be noted that the phrase "sustainable development" and "European Union" were included in the search using their abbreviations – "sd" and "eu" respectively - in order to avoid any imprecise associations. Likewise, the phrases "local government(s)" and "local authority(ies)" were both curtailed in "lg".

Figure 22: Dendrogram of sources by words similarities
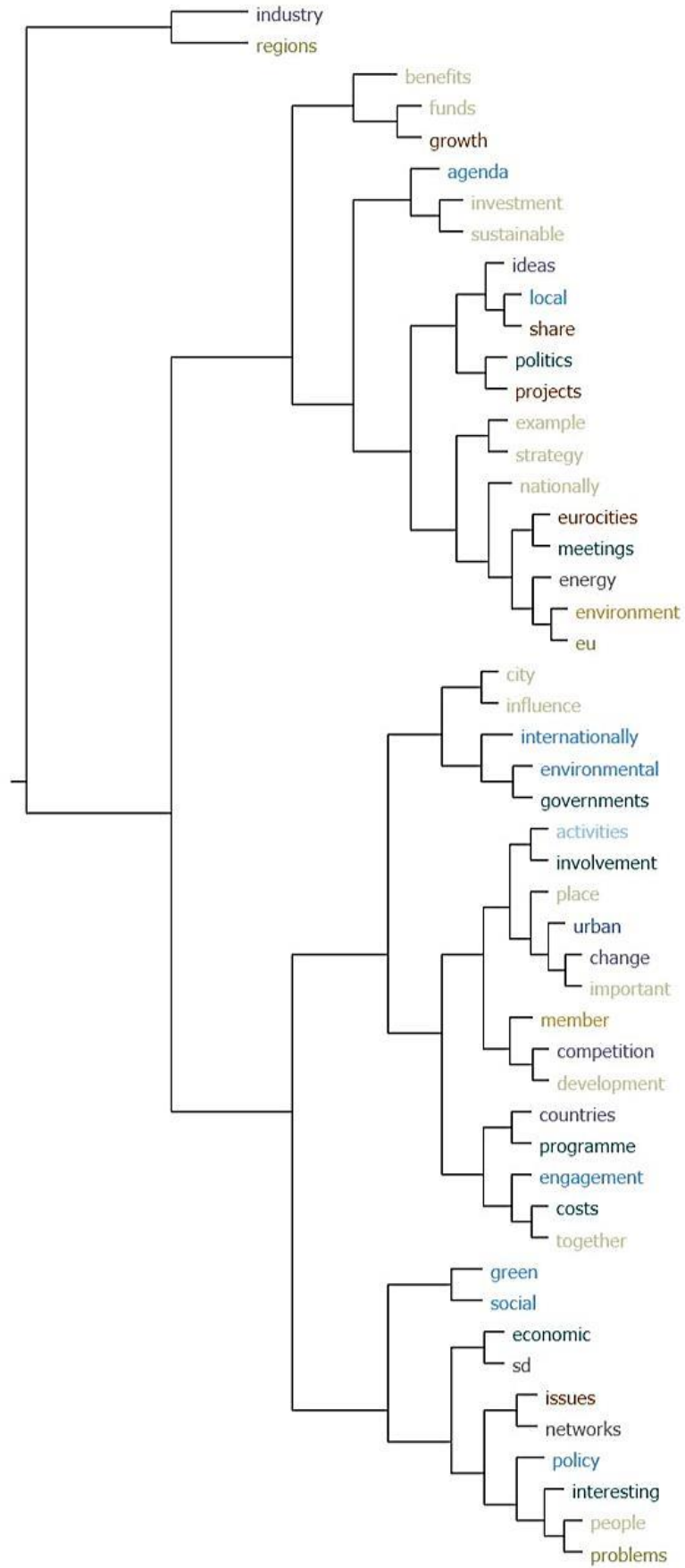
In the dendrogram the cluster comprising the words "regions" and "industry" emerges as an outlier group. The association of these two words suggests the recurrence in the evidence of the discourse about the decline of the industrial[138] sector in sub-national areas. The following cluster interestingly links the word "benefits" to a sub-cluster associating "funds" - which refers to the funding, especially European - and "growth". This cluster suggests that for the respondents funding is one of the benefits of engaging at EU level, which is in turn associated with the idea of growth. This cluster therefore seems to suggest that cities consider EU funding as a means to boost growth.

The third cluster from the top associates the word "agenda" to the sub-cluster linking "investment" and "sustainable". This association may indicate the local authorities' commitment to sustainability and the existence of a political design to invest resources to pursue it. The association of the words pertaining to the semantic fields of economy and sustainability recurs in the last cluster of the dendrogram. Particularly noteworthy is the close association between the words "economic" and "sustainable development", which shows the prominence of the economic aspect of sustainability and suggests the use of the sustainable development discourse within an economic context.

The sub-group in the third cluster from the top refers to the sharing of ideas. In the following cluster two sub-groups are of particular interest. The first sub-cluster linking "strategy" to "example" suggests that the respondents may have defined plans or policies based on specific reference cases. The second sub-group associates "environment" with "EU", which indicates how respondents conceive the environment as an issue pertaining to the EU level. This relationship between environment and supra-local level recurs in the subsequent cluster. Here, the adjective "environmental" is linked to "government" – which refers to national government – and further up to "internationally", again conveying the relevance of supra-local levels authority in tackling environmental issues. Nonetheless, although national and international levels might play a major role in green issues, cities appear to exert an influence in this domain – as shown by the sub-cluster "city"-"influence". Moreover, the environmental theme appears again in the second-last cluster from the bottom. Here, it should be noted the correlation between the adjectives "green" and "social", which recalls two of the three pillars of sustainable development. As discussed previously, the economic pillar is in a different cluster, whereas fairly close. This finding seems to substantiate the argument that the economic aspect of sustainability has gained more importance at the expenses of the social and environmental domains.

Another interesting feature of the graph is the sub-cluster grouping together "involvement" and "activities", indicating the pro-active participation of the members in the networks. In turn, these two words are closely associated with the sub-group that unites the urban dimension to the idea of change. This suggests that participants repeatedly talks about changes – which maybe past and/or future - at urban level. Of particular note is the sub-cluster further down, where "member" is linked to "competition", suggesting that network members may compete with each other[139].

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[138] As indicated in Table 31 in the Appendix, the word "industry" also includes the adjectives "industrial" and "post-industrial".

[139] In this sub-cluster the presence of the word "development" is of difficult interpretation, since it has various meanings.

The idea of participation conveyed by the word "involvement" discussed above appears again in the subsequent cluster expressed by the term "engagement". This word is closely correlated with "costs" and "together", suggesting potential drawbacks engendered by participating in EU activities.

Finally, the last cluster of the dendrogram links the word "networks" with "issues" and in the following cluster to "policy" and "problems". This cluster may suggest that networks offer the opportunity to cities to discuss about the challenges they face and, possibly, developing adequate solutions[140].

The findings of the cluster analysis helped to identify a preliminary set of themes that recurred in the interview transcripts (see Table 23), and served as a preparatory phase before undertaking the thematic analysis, whose findings are reported in the following sections.

Table 23: Main clusters and deriving themes

Clusters	Preliminary themes
Region-industry	Local decline of the industrial sector
Benefits-funds-growth	European funding as a means to boost local economic growth
Agenda-investment-sustainable and economic-sustainable development	Interconnection between economy and sustainability
Ideas-local-share	Exchange of ideas
Strategy-example	Plans to follow the example set by other cities
Environment-EU and Internationally-environmental-government	The environment as a supra-local issue
Involvement-activities	Pro-active engagement in networks
Urban-change-important	Urban transformation
Member-competition-development	Competitive relation between network members
Engagement-costs-together	Potential financial drawbacks of participation in networks
Green-social	Relationship between social and environmental domains

7.4 Thematic analysis

The exploratory cluster analysis helped to identify the topics recurring in the interviews and questionnaires and how these are related. In other words, the cluster analysis provided the bases for the thematic analysis. As discussed in chapter 5, the latter refers to a technique of interpretation of qualitative data consisting in the identification of units of meaning within a corpus of textual data. As a result, the data are systematised in specific thematic nodes and searched for patterns of similarities. Within the context of this thesis, two comprehensive thematic categories were derived: the first comprises the motivations provided by respondents (reported in Figure 23 below and Figure 34 and Figure 35 at the end of this chapter); the second systematises a set of themes related to the municipal political environment of the case studies, which correspond to the political drivers of participation in SEUNs. In the following sections the themes that emerged in the thematic analysis are presented.

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[140] The word "people'" that appears in the last cluster indicates both network members and citizens.

7.4.1   The incentives to participate in SEUNs: an overview

In this section an overview of the motivations for cities to engage in SEUNs is reported, which helps to organise the presentation of the findings. The thematic analysis identified the following motivations:

1. Learning and sharing;
2. Finding potential project partners;
3. Lobbying;
4. Networking;
5. Development of the city profile;
6. Comparison with/emulation of other network members, and
7. Saving time.

The importance of each motivation for the respondents can be visualised in a tree map, shown in Figure 23. Although the purpose of the thematic analysis is not to quantify the evidence, the count of the items coded under a specific theme helps to indicate the importance of a motivation. As the map shows, the most cited reason by the respondents is the possibility of learning from other European counterparts and sharing knowledge and experience. A second reason is the chance to find project partners to bid for EU funding, followed by lobbying. The latter refers the possibility of influencing the EU funding programmes and legislation. Additionally, networking and the opportunity to develop their profile appear to be significant reasons for participating in SEUNs. Finally, some of the respondents indicated as a motivation to engage in SEUNs the opportunity to compare their cities with other peers and find successful examples to emulate.

Figure 23: Tree map: motivations by number of respondents (nodes compared by number of items coded)
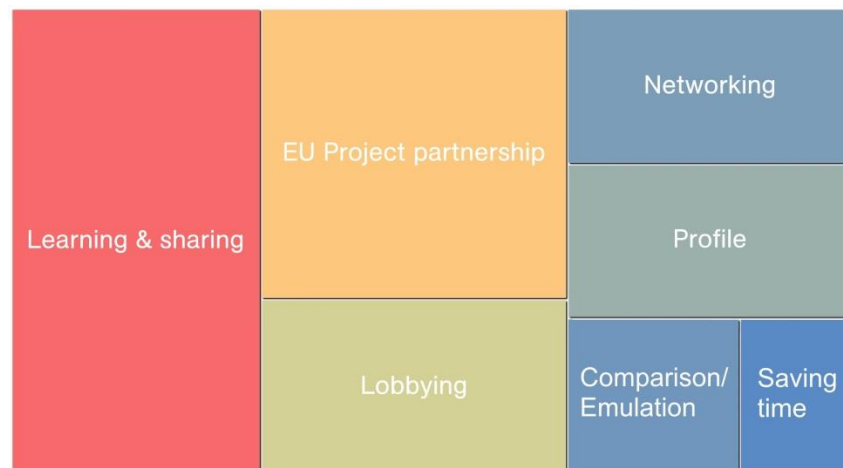
Before presenting a detailed analysis of the findings, two methodological aspects should be clarified. Firstly, the interviews and the questionnaires included two separate questions about the motivations for participating in SEUNs and the benefits gained from it. The answers showed an overlapping between the motivations and the benefits. In other words, the motivations for participating in SEUNs broadly match the benefits that cities gain. This is not surprising, as the local authorities included in the sample have been engaged in various European networks for several years – for instance, some cities have been

engaged in Eurocities[141] for more than twenty years. This means that their present membership is justified by the benefits they have obtained over the years. Therefore, motivations and benefits were unified in the category "incentives". Secondly, the incentives identified by the respondents refer to their experience in SEUNs. However, as discussed in chapter 3, the participation in any group is motivated by the prospect of gaining benefits (both collective and selective). Therefore, it seemed appropriate to separate the network dimension, which refers to the motivations for participating in European networks regardless of their focus, and the interest in European networks for sustainable development.

In the next subsections a detailed analysis of the incentives provided by the participation in SEUNs is provided.

7.4.2   The economic incentives of membership

In the preliminary cluster analysis as well as in the thematic analysis a recurrent theme was concerned with the economic incentives associated with cities' engagement in SEUNs. Some of the participants highlighted the economic benefits derived from European networking (LLL1), while several respondents indicated a motivation to join networks being the possibility of finding partners for projects. As shown in Figure 23, the opportunity to find EU project partners is the second most cited motivation for participating in a network. The establishment of project partnerships among network members opens up opportunities for cities to access European funding. Thanks to the personal connections developed among members, the networks allow potential partners for EU projects to be found. As BGM1 argued, by developing personal contacts, members create a "readymade" network of potential partners for EU projects. For example, one respondent (HMG) indicated as a motivation for participating the opportunity "to connect with and as a reliable partner, to develop cooperation projects." All the respondents agreed on the fact that funding is definitely not the main motivation to engage in a network. As BGM2 stated, participation "is not just about the money, it's about a wider regeneration agenda. And learning from partner cities is crucial to that". Hence, membership is not driven primarily by economic motivations; rather, an important motivation for the involvement in SEUNs is regeneration, and "that's about European funding" (BGM2). Obviously, network engagement does not directly deliver urban renewal. Rather, participation in SEUNs provides cities with short- and long-term economic benefits and with the opportunity to find innovative ideas – as discussed in the following sections.

Some respondents suggested that being a network member does not give automatic access to EU funding: although networks are a means to find project partners, in order to obtain funding it is necessary to be actively engaged in a network and propose a good project to the European institutions (MLM2; TRN1). Therefore, network membership does not increase the likelihood to get funding *per se*. What matters is the ability of cities to develop innovative projects, which is a key factor to obtain EU funding.

The respondents showed different degrees of interest in EU funding. For example, one participant stressed how European funding constitutes an important source of money (BGM2), while another respondent stated that EU funding, although helpful, does not constitute a primary incentive to participate

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[141] Eurocities was founded in 1986 by Rotterdam by Barcelona, Birmingham, Frankfurt am Main, Lyon, Milan and Rotterdam (Kern, 2009).

in SEUNs (LLL1). More generally, some respondents stated that EU funding complements, but does not replace local and national funding (BGM1; BGM2; MNC1). Similarly, CRM argued that EU funding provides local authorities with extra money in addition to national funding. In this respect, respondents from the two British cities appear to have a more functional approach to network membership, insofar as the promise of economic benefits constitutes a significant incentive to become involved.

Participation in SEUNs also helps cities to develop their image. In this respect, some participants identified visibility and the possibility to raise cities' international profile as benefits deriving from engagement in European networks (LLL3; HMG; MLM1; MNC1; TRN1). Some interviewees suggested that the involvement in European networks is a way to market cities (BGM1 and TRN1). In more detail, European networks can serve as channels for "territorial marketing" (TRN1). Within networks, cities have the chance to talk about themselves, to showcase to other European local governments the successful achievements of policies and projects implemented at urban level, and hence to build their international reputation. As observed by TRN1, the greater the European engagement of a city, the more attractive it becomes. A case in point is Manchester. The strong engagement of the local council in Eurocities - which is signalled by their presence in the network executive committee, their nomination to the presidency and the hosting of network events - was motivated, in addition to the other factors discussed previously, by the willingness to put "Manchester back on the map" (MNC1).

Therefore, the engagement in European networks is one of the various components of local authorities' international strategies. For some respondents, the international strategy of their local council is aimed at maximising the city's impact at international level, and enhancing its influence and reputation. This latter objective mirrors the will of raising city's profile, by showing that the city is "a serious player" (BGM1), a "reliable partner" with which developing cooperation projects (HMG) and an "open city to the world" (MNC3). BGM1 highlighted that urban networking responds to the city's international strategy, whose ultimate goal is to maximise funding opportunities or strengthening economic and commercial partnerships.

To summarise, SEUN engagement provides member-cities with economic incentives only indirectly. SEUN membership does not ensure access to EU funding, inasmuch as cities have to form partnerships and prepare projects to be funded. Likewise, SEUN membership does not constitute the direct route to international investment, but it provides the opportunity to boost their visibility and possibly build an international reputation, which may help local authorities to attract international investment. The economic incentives are graphically illustrated in Figure 24.

Figure 24: Economic incentives of SEUN membership

— Direct benefit
- - Potential outcome
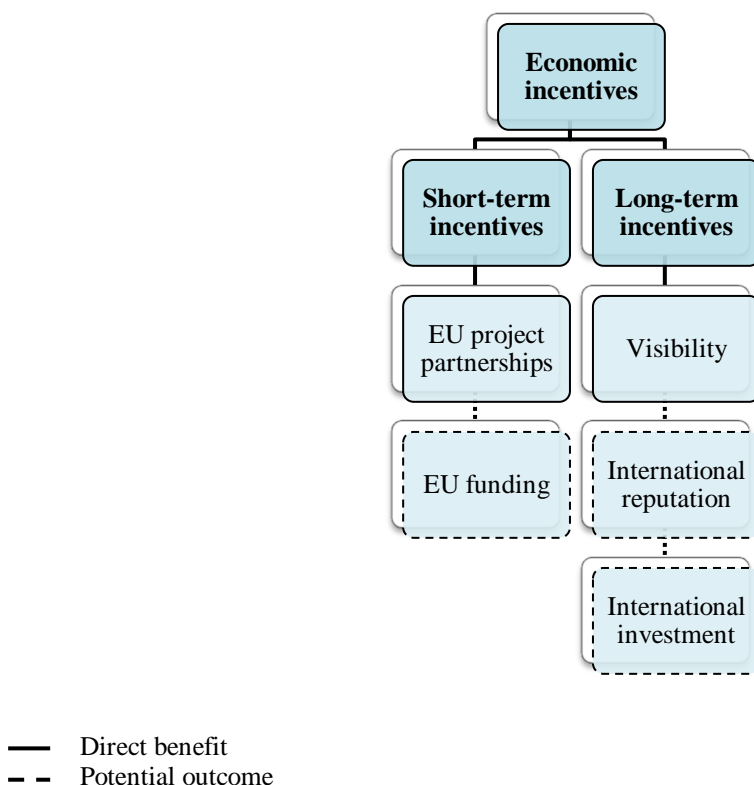
7.4.3   The formative incentives

7.4.3.1   The network as a "learning environment"

As Figure 23 above suggests, the most significant incentive for local authorities to participate in SEUNs is the opportunity to learning and sharing ideas and information. Through networks, cities can gather information about policies and projects developed by other European peers, but also about how EU legislation was interpreted and implemented in other cities. In this sense, the network is a "learning environment" (TRN1), where participants get to know new ideas and practices developed in other European cities. In particular, European urban networks deliver the flow of information from the EU institutions more quickly, because there is not the intermediation of national or regional governments (LLL1). By exchanging ideas and practices, cities can also receive advice and feedback from other cities (MLM1).

The opportunity to exchange information and learning from other experience is made possible by the establishment of permanent contacts among the members. In fact, some respondents identified the networking aspect as a further incentive to participate in SEUNs. Through networks, the members have the chance to personally know other colleagues in Europe and get in touch with experts and/or local officers (BGM1; BGM2; CRM; HMG; MLM1; MLM2; MNC3). Further, LLL3 observed that European networking helps the European integration process:

> "I think the fact that European cities talk to each other is really good; first of all, is good for European integration; it's good because they have an incredible know-how and they have a lot of experience and I'm talking from the perspective of being in a world organisation, where we are not France, Germany, Romania… We sit behind the desk that says "Europe" and then you have the five continents. And then, we realise that we have so many things in common, so many values in common, that's a real lesson."

For HMG, an indirect benefit of participating in SEUNs is the possibility of "being in permanent contact to the international community" which allows for "solving daily problems better and faster" and "having a number of 'references' for solutions" (HMG).

This latter aspect suggests that the network provides members with the chance to find solutions for their problems. Through the networks, local authorities have the chance to discuss common problems and to learn how other cities have dealt with specific issues (CRM). As LLL3 stated, one of the main benefits is the opportunity to gather "knowledge about how others work", which gives "the perception that there isn't just only one way of doing things, but many ways of doing things with the same objective. All that is really enriching". This problem-sharing aspect gives network members the perception that they are not alone in tackling problems and that there are different solutions available for them (LLL1). Similarly, cities can save time in implementing policy solutions (LLL3).

Of particular importance is the contribution that the policy learning has offered in the realm of urban regeneration. Cities have looked out for ideas on how to redevelop their localities and the networks have been an important source of information for cities. For example, MNC1, talking about Eurocities, said that it "is a great network for learning from other cities and sharing what you have, your areas of specialty. For example, in the 1990s we learnt a lot from other cities about regeneration and how to turn your city around."

In addition to learning new ideas, network members have the opportunity to improve their knowledge and technique. By cooperating with other members in project partnerships, officers and policy-makers gain more competences in project writing (MNC1). TRN1 pointed out that, as a result of bidding into EU funding, members can gain competencies in dealing with funding and applications. Furthermore, TRN1 argued that the network dimension has improved the local administration's "know-how" and competencies in dealing with some problems. Another benefit identified by CRM is the fact that local policy-makers can get a broader perspective on local problems. On a more practical level, the networks seem to provide the members with instruments to facilitate their participation. For instance, BGM1 pointed out the benefit of getting practical tools, such as newsletter, summaries of funding calls, partner searches etc..

The exchange of ideas through the networks results in an innovation push (Figure 25). Being exposed to other cities' experiences, members are inspired to implement innovative local policies. In this respect, LLL3 stated that within networks "you get a lot of new ideas that you would not get if you do not participate and you do not make the mistakes you would make". Furthermore, the network provides the information and the stimulus to experiment innovative policies at local level, or for some, simply to "upgrade" and improve policies (MLM1) or to get further experience (HMG). According to the evidence, policy innovation can be described as a two-way flow whereby, as suggested by some participants, there is an "incremental continuum between innovation and learning" (TRN1): the particular experience of

each city feeds into the process of policy diffusion generating further policy innovation. For instance, TRN1 argued that in the field of neighbourhood regeneration, intercultural and integration policies Torino has been considered as one of the most innovative European cities. As TRN1 continued, this boils down to the fact that on these issues the council

> "have learnt and tried to implement policies producing innovation. We have not done this by ourselves […]; we have tried, through the work with other cities, to implement local actions taking into account approaches developed by others. This is the most meaningful value of the participation in networks: you get to see things from a different perspective, but you have to adapt the different experiences to the local level".

It is clear that within the networks cities mutually influence each other. As LLL3 argued, "once you're really active in a network, I think you have an influence". In this respect, the overwhelming majority of the respondents indicated that specific projects, patterns of urban regeneration or governance models implemented in their cities have been regarded with interest by other European counterparts. For instance, BGM1 stated that some cities have been interested in their policies, such as Rotterdam, which was interested in the use of public procurement to create jobs and skills. This interest was due to the fact that "Rotterdam has a similar policy, but they were interested in how it was actually implemented". Similarly, MNC3 stated:

> "the way in which we've made this transition from industrial to post-industrial is something that I think we certainly have a lot of visitors that come and see us […], who are interested in our regeneration initiatives and are very interested in the story of Manchester in terms of how we have done that".

TRN1 stated that the city's experience on urban regeneration has been used as an example of good practice by other Italian cities; but also, to some extent, by some European peers, especially by cities in the Southern area of the Continent. Furthermore, LLL2 suggested that gathering information about successful examples implemented in other cities provide the legitimacy to reinforce their objectives in their territories. In this sense, network members use the experience of other cities as a reference case to support policy changes at local level. This latter aspect is further discussed in the next sub-section.

Figure 25: formative incentives
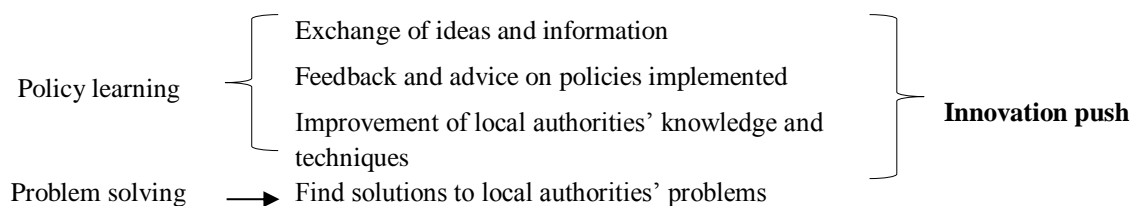
7.4.3.2 The "virtue of imitating": trend-setters and followers

Whereas cities influence each other, some cities seem to exert a stronger influence than others. The dynamics of policy innovation seems to be led by the "trend-setters" to which the "followers" conform. Within the networks cities look out for new ideas that might suit their policy objectives. In this respect, networks offer the possibility of emulating other cities – what one participant defined as "the virtue of

imitating" (LLL2). At the same time, member-cities strive to become themselves examples of successful urban renewal. From the evidence it appears that members look up at those fellow cities that have successfully solved specific urban issues, especially those caused by de-industrialisation. Cities look at their peers and find inspiration from those cities they "admire" and "can learn from" (MNC1). These are the cities that distinguished themselves by following innovative development trajectories and thus, become the trend-setters, i.e. the models to emulate. By way of contrast, the cities where the transformation is still *in fieri* become the followers, aspiring to achieve the objective of urban regeneration (Figure 26).

The "foreign" examples are used by individual network members as reference cases to show to their local government that a specific policy can be implemented. The selection of the examples has to be carefully done: the "model-city" has to be a successful example of policy implementation, but - as LLL2 argued - it cannot be culturally too distant, otherwise it might find the resistance of the colleagues in the council and of national policy-makers, which may consider the urban example "too forward". Therefore, it is necessary to provide both national and international examples (LLL2).

In most of the interviews it emerged that respondents look at those cities with which they share significant similarities, especially a common economic background characterised by the post-industrial transition. For example, for Birmingham the post-industrial crisis in the late 20th century played a significant role in the city's engagement in Eurocities, making the city realise that they "need[ed] to engage with other cities that [were] experiencing similar problems" (BGM2). Therefore, the need to reinvent the urban identity in a period when traditional industries were dismantled pushed cities to develop inter-urban linkages. Similarly, MNC1 stated that Manchester was a very different city in the 1980s and 1990s when industrialisation had come to a standstill. The problem was how to transform the city and "how to find a new vision" for it (MNC1). To this end, Manchester "learnt a lot from cities like Barcelona [and] Lyon at that time" (MNC1). Therefore, cities learn from those places with which they have a "commonality" (BGM2). In this respect, BGM2 stated that "there's massive scope there for information exchange, for learning from each other, and becoming stronger because of that knowledge of what's going on in comparable places". Such "comparability aspect" was also indicated by MLM2, who stated that in networks cities are able to compare themselves with other peers and understand what they are good at and what they are not good at.

The emphasis placed by some participants on the similarities with other European cities suggests that nationality is not perceived as a discriminatory factor. Actually, the "comparable places" are often located outside the national boundaries. In this respect, BGM2 argued that, underpinning the city's engagement in European networks, there was "the recognition that Birmingham has lot more in common with Frankfurt and Lyon than it has in common with Cornwall. So, you needed that European perspective". Likewise, TRN1 stated that, for what concerns the issue of urban sustainability and reconversion of de-industrialised land, the city has more in common with some European cities than with other Italian peers: "we have more commonalities with the German cities in the Ruhr region or with the former textile manufacturing centres in the North of England than with Siena, for example" (TRN1). Additionally, MNC4 claimed that "[Manchester] probably ha[s] much more in common as a lot of European cities than just those in the UK".

Mostly unprompted, the respondents – except for CRM and HMG - indicated some cities or specific European geographical regions - both included and not included in the study – as being comparable places or as successful examples in some sectors of urban policy (such as sustainable mobility, employment policy, knowledge society etc.). These represent the urban models at which the respondents look. Most of the participants named at least one German city (or region) that has somehow influenced them, followed by French cities, particularly Lyon, and former industrial English cities. Moreover, participants indicated as influential examples some Northern European cities (Helsinki and Tampere in Finland; Stockholm and Malmö in Sweden) and a few cities in Southern Europe, particularly in Spain, such as Barcelona, Figueres and Victoria Gasteiz. Interestingly, it can be noted that no cities in the member-states of the former eastern bloc and only a few in the Southern European region were mentioned. This finding may suggest how northern and continental metropolitan areas are regarded as the leaders in post-industrial urban regeneration, and are significantly influencing the European urban development model (Figure 26). These findings hint at the existence of a cluster of European cities that set the trends of urban policy followed by other local authorities.

Figure 26: Influence among European cities

☐ Case studies
◯ Cities mentioned as examples
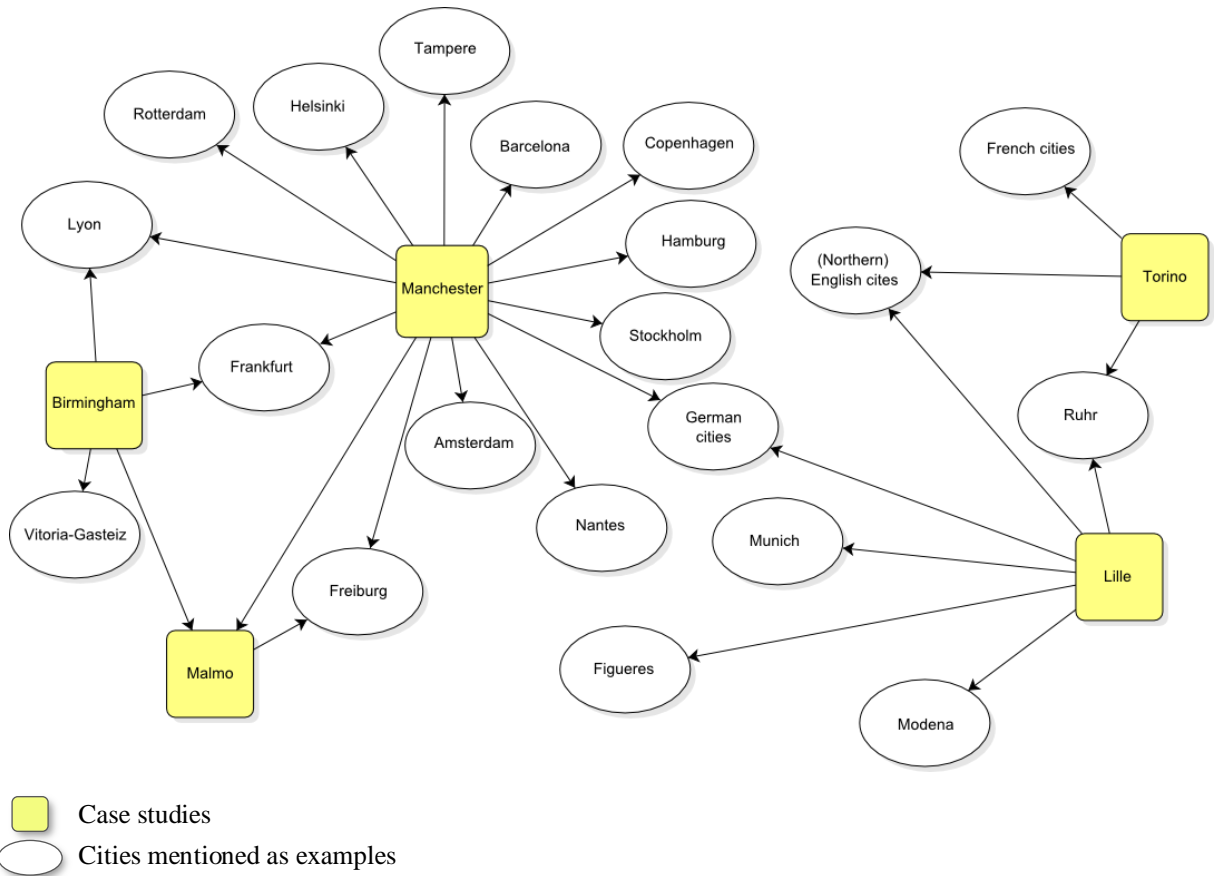
Although cities seek a specific model, it cannot be concluded that the trajectory of European urban development will end up producing homogeneous cities. Network members search for new ideas to solve specific problems in their localities; but the transfer of policies or initiatives from one city to another is neither simple nor immediate. Ultimately, it is necessary to adapt one policy solution to the specific social, economic and cultural characteristics of the urban context. As MNC1 argued: "there are common

themes across the cities, but we're all individual in how we approach them". MNC4 suggested that the exchange of ideas with other cities informed rather than totally shaped the policies of the local authority. Similarly, HMG stated that "regional/local policy is less direct result of international experience but of transforming international experience on regional and local demands. Then elements of these transferred results are translated into local demands/challenges, sometimes implemented in local policy." Therefore, it is clear that knowledge exchange is about finding "inspiration" (MLM1). Likewise, BGM1 argued that the international engagement of cities

> "is about being inspired by ideas, being inspired by new ways of thinking of a problem or an issue and about taking aspects of a policy or project and using that in project development in your own city, sensitive to national legal frameworks and maybe how you work with local partners."

Furthermore, some respondents claimed that policy transfer is not feasible due to local problems – especially of financial nature. As highlighted by LLL1, the exchange of ideas does not necessarily lead to their translation into policies, since local authorities might lack the means to implement those ideas. Likewise, CRM argued that the networks give the opportunity to learn from other cities innovative praxes, although for various reasons[142] these are not easily applied at local level.

The evidence shows that participation in SEUNs provides the members with the opportunity to compare themselves with other European peers and as a result, to identify their strengths and weaknesses in terms of urban policy and planning. Furthermore, those cities that have successfully tackled specific urban problems become a source of inspiration for other cities (Table 24).

Table 24: The "virtue of imitating": summary of findings

Comparability	• Network members compare themselves with other peers that share a common economic background and similar urban development objectives • By comparing themselves, cities identify their strengths and weaknesses
Emulation	• Member-cities find inspiration from trend-setters, i.e. those cities successfully moved from industrial to post-industrial • Cities use foreign examples as reference cases for policy implementation at local level

7.4.3.3 The paradox of the networks

The two previous sections examined two aspects of cities' engagement in SEUNs that seem to suggest a contradiction. On the one hand, participants emphasised the learning and sharing potential of networks, thanks to which they can learn from each other, discuss common problems and develop new solutions. On the other, cities are in competition to secure EU projects. Additionally, cities compete for highly mobile investments, which could go to several different cities (BGM2). Hence, it seems that, while within SEUNs – and networks more generally - cities cooperate, outside the networks they compete against each other.

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[142] The respondent did not indicate for what reasons the practices learnt from other cities are then not developed by the local government.

In this respect, respondents' opinions are discordant. For some participants there is no economic competition among member-cities (LLL1; MNC3), with one interviewee suggesting that economic competition is between cities of the same country (LLL2). Rather than competing, some respondents stressed the importance of cooperation among members – what BGM1 defined as a "sense of comradery"- witnessed by the exchanging of ideas and visions among members. Similarly, HMG stated that European networking impact on the economic competition among cities, stating that "alliances are stronger than 'stand-alone-cities'". By way of contrast, LLL3 spoke about the "paradox" of the network: while cities are supposed to work together and cooperate, they are still in competition with each other. This view is to some extent supported by another respondent, for which European urban networking is "a mix of collaboration and competition" (MNC4). MNC4 admitted that, while learning from other experience and sharing ideas with other cities, they "are probably in competition with some of them at the same time". Moreover, one respondent claimed that network membership does not reduce competition:

> "there's always going to be competition with other cities, and there needs to be" […]
> "Because that's how the global economy works […]. There's competition in different places and it means you have to think innovatively, you have to think about what your offer is and how you sell your city" (MNC1).

The co-existence between cooperation and competition emerged also in the interview with MNC1, for which, in addition to other motivations, network[143] engagement was about "making sure that [Manchester was] networking with other cities who are competitors".

Despite this tension, there seemed to be agreement on the fact that learning is a more fruitful option than competing: within networks it is possible to have "constructive, collaborative discussions about other people's views and what they've learnt without competition impinging on it" (MNC4). One respondent argued that the networks are not responsible for triggering competition; but it may happen that, as a result of learning from other examples, a city can become more competitive (MNC3).

7.4.4   The political incentives for engagement in SEUNs

The third type of incentives that SEUNs provides to member-cities is the political incentives, which include lobbying and the possibility to influence indirectly the nation-states. The network enables the development of direct liaisons among cities, and between cities and European institutions. More indirectly, the pressure exerted by cities onto the EU institutions – especially the Commission – affects national governments. Therefore, the participation of local authorities in European activities does not only impact on the relations between the EU and local governments, but also on the local-national relations.

7.4.4.1   The institutional relationship with the EU: lobbying

A significant motivation for participating in networks is lobbying. The network provides cities with the opportunity to increase their influence over policy and funding decisions of the EU institutions. The evidence gathered seems to suggest that the network enables the establishment of a close and direct relation between local authorities and the EU. As suggested by TRN2, networks allow the creation of a

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[143] The interviewee referred to Eurocities.

"strong link" between cities and the EU Commission, the Parliament and the Committee of the Regions and with other member-states. In this sense, participation in a network constitutes a shortcut for cities to directly reach the supra-national level. Thanks to European city networks and other local government organisations, such as the covenant of Mayors, local authorities have the possibility of liaising directly with the EU institutions, without necessarily passing through the national state. Within the sample, only one respondent reported that European networks are perceived as "far" from the activities of the local administration (CRM).

Through networks, local authorities can lobby at European level with the aim of making sure that the Commission and other EU institutions understand the urban dimension (BGM2) and the challenges faced by cities (BGM1). In this sense, the ultimate goal of lobbying is to make sure that role of cities is recognised in the various European funding programmes and EU legislation (BGM1; BGM2; MLM2; MNC1). In particular, some participants highlighted the importance of including the urban perspective in EU legislation, in order to avoid adverse impacts on some cities while benefiting others (MCN4). Similarly, BGM1 argued that the lobbying activity of network members can effectively influence EU policy, funding and programmes by making sure that "policy is not harmful to cities" and that "the viewpoint of cities" is included in policy. Therefore, through the network, members try to influence EU decision-making by sending a "collective political message" to European institutions (MNC1). As HMG put it, European urban networking allows member-cities "to join against the Commission" and "to get allies" to deal with important issues more effectively than just one city would do.

To summarise, through the networks, the collective action of member-cities has both direct and indirect objectives. Local authorities seek to influence the European legislation and the allocation of the structural funds. In turn, this engenders an indirect influence on the national legislation and policy priorities. This claim was supported by BGM1, for which the role of cities in networks "is about getting at the European level into the policies, all the directives, the legislation." In this sense, cities seek to influence the EU to incorporate the aspects that matter for cities in funding programmes, policies and legislation, which the national government might overlook when translating it into national legislation. But, if agreed at European level, the central government has to take into account cities' requests (BGM1). As BGM1 put it clearly, for the local government "European engagement is a way of influencing national policy, bypassing it sometimes."

According to some respondents, the common European praxis is that the EU deals with member-states, which implement directives into national legislation, and then this goes down at regional and local level (MLM2). Local governments are generally excluded by the European policy-making process. As observed by some respondents, the only institutional links between the European Commission and local authorities is provided by the Covenant of Mayors (MLM2). Therefore, through lobbying activities cities are trying to get more recognition for their role. In this respect, all the respondents stressed the importance of cities within the European context, in that cities are "engines of growth" (BGM1), the places "where the majority of the wealth is generated and where the majority of people live" (MNC3) as well as the places of action, where things can be changed (LLL2). For these reasons, European institutions should pay more attention to the urban problems.

By participating in European networks, cities can exert a certain degree of influence over EU institutions (BGM1; HMG; MLM1). As the evidence suggests, the network allows cities to undertake collective action and enhance their political weight in the European decision-making. In this respect, BGM1 stated:

> "there are other ways of getting access as an individual city, but you'll always just be an individual city, we'll just be Birmingham or Manchester, or whoever you are. And be able to speak on behalf of all, effectively, all cities across Europe […] lends a lot of more weight to trying to make changes at EU level."

Similarly, MNC4 argued that

> "Groups of cities together with a common agenda can have far more influence on the European Commission for example than by cities acting singularly. I think that particularly coming out of America, the idea of metropolitan areas being masters of their own destiny really. Having a greater say in their own affairs is pretty universal across most cities, but not universally accepted by most of national governments. Certainly not ours."

In the specific field of sustainability, one of the respondents suggested that participation in some SEUNs puts cities in the international game, allowing cities to take part in global climate negotiations, which this would not be possible for single cities (MLM2).

The evidence suggests that national governments do not serve as a mediator level between local authorities and the EU institutions. By way of contrast, the findings depict an image of the EU as a mediator between local authorities and national governments. In this respect, networks are the means for cities to lobbying at the EU institutions (especially the European Commission) and to influence the latter to enshrine the importance of cities in directives and structural funding programmes. Since nation-states have to implement European directives into national laws, lobbying at EU level also exert an indirect influence on national governments.

7.4.4.2   The relationship with the central state

As discussed in the previous section, cities' engagement in networks enables them to exert an indirect influence over national decision-making. The chance of influencing national policy was only a direct benefit of membership for HMG. The mediated pressure exerted by local authorities on national governments through the EU institutions provides cities with more political leeway. For TRN1, to some extent the networks have enabled cities to bypass the central state, a process fostered by the subsidiarity principle, which has enforced the participation of those non-state actors closer to citizens in the decision-making. For some participants networks give a certain degree of economic autonomy (BGM2; CRM; MCN4), insofar as the network membership assists the local economic development, which in turn provides local authorities with a certain degree of "self-sufficiency" (BGM2). Similarly, MNC4 stated that cities acquire more policy autonomy from participating.

However, as most of the respondents acknowledged, their capacities are bound to national laws and constitutional arrangements. Therefore, the evidence shows a widespread perception that the national level constrains local governments' actions. In fact, some respondents argued that in some policy-field (such regeneration, environmental policy etc.) their city has been more cutting-edge than the central state

(BGM1). Given the domestic institutional arrangements, cities cannot really acquire more autonomy by participating in European networks. For example, BGM2 stated that "the UK is relatively peculiar in terms of the degree of dependence of cities and other local authorities upon central government." This impossibility to widen local autonomy is reiterated by LLL1, who argued that "France is very Jacobean", that is a very hierarchical system, where decisions go through "the national, the regional, the departmental, the local" levels. Likewise, TRN1 observed how Italy is a centralist country, despite the general belief that significant powers are devolved to regional governments. Furthermore, with regard to the UK, MNC3 argued that

> "it's […] a very centralised state. I don't think at the moment the network[144] necessarily delivers more autonomy for us, because we are conditioned and constrained by national laws and national ways of funding things. I think that in the future we would see that the importance of cities to city relationships is becoming much more significant and they themselves in term could lead to more resources being made available by natural basis between cities."

By way of contrast, HMG argued that cities are not trying to get more autonomy by participating into networks, since

> "[i]n Germany the roles of the Länder, Cities and the Federal Government are fixed and defined in the constitution. There is absolutely no need and also there are no efforts to gain autonomy from the Federal Government. As cities and regions have their own range of possibilities in international networking to deal with their own issues it's in the cities own responsibility and it's their own decision how far they use this range."

Nevertheless, European involvement enables cities to influence national policy – that is, to influence the "philosophy" of national administration (LLL2).

The evidence appears to portray a triadic relationship between local authorities, national governments and the EU institutions, where alliances are formed between and against each level (Figure 27). From the data collected, it seems that local authorities join together to try and influence the EU institutions in order to avoid potential negative impacts of EU legislation and funding. Additionally, it appears that the endemic opposition between national and local level about the definition of their competencies is projected at the European level, where local authorities can find allies on this issue. In particular, the collective action undertaken at EU level strengthens the scope of the requests for more freedom – or, rather, "self-sufficiency", as BGM2 defined it. Interestingly, MNC3 argued that the network is

> "a forum to make that case and make the point about EU" and "it is partly a pitch to national government and Europe about recognising the importance of cities and helping cities to have the policy frameworks they need in order to be able to develop the best effect".

As suggested by MNC3, the success of policies implemented in other localities is used by the city "as an argument back to the government […] for more freedom and flexibility" to be able to emulate those examples. Hence, the use of examples from other European cities helps to make the case for broadening their policy-making capacities.

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[144] The respondent refers to Eurocities.

Figure 27: Inter-level relations in the EU

Lobbying
Legislative power
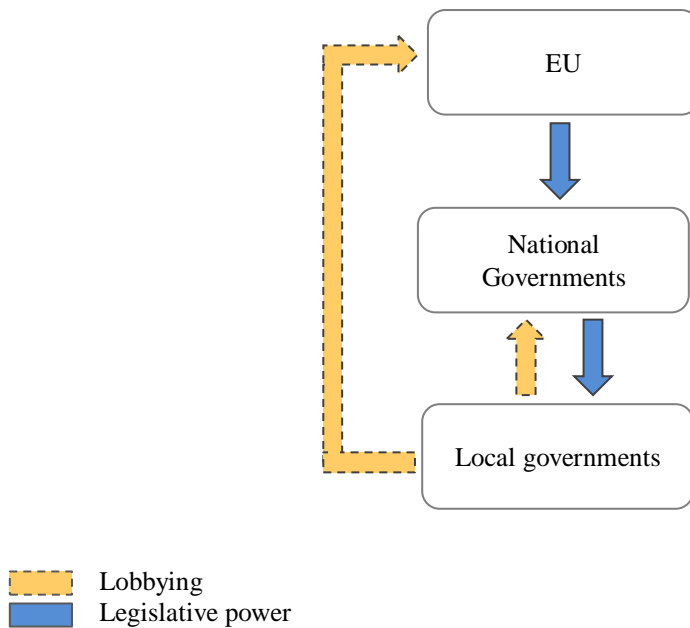
7.4.5   Participation in SEUNs and urban politics

As discussed previously, the prospect of gaining economic, formative and political incentives prompts cities to engage in SEUNs. However, the possibility of obtaining these benefits does not alone explain the different propensity to participate in SEUNs shown by the cities in the sample. As with the regression analysis, the qualitative evidence also suggests different modalities of engagement. As MLM2 argued, "the networks and the members of the networks are quite different" and the level of ambition is different. Furthermore, the intensity of the involvement varies, with some members deeply active in the network activities. In this respect, MLM2 stated that, while some cities are very active, others "are more following and listening." Moreover, those cities that tend to be more pro-active are more engaged in some issues than in others, as suggested by MLM2 with regard to environmental issues, and TRN1, in relation to urban regeneration.

An in-depth analysis of the qualitative evidence found that, in addition to the collective and selective incentives, three elements explain cities' participation in SEUNs: the political influence on SEUN membership, cities' conceptualisation of sustainable development and the values and attitudes underpinning the participation in SEUNs.

7.4.5.1   The political influence on the engagement in networks

The quantitative analysis presented in chapter 6 revealed that party politics does not have a significant effect upon network membership, but it impacts on the number of networks of which local governments are members. In order to shed further light on the relationship between politics and participation in SEUNs, participants were asked questions as to whether local politics influences SEUN membership and how this plays out. The political influence on engagement in SEUNs entails three drivers that may affect the involvement in networks:

1. the political leaning of the council,

2. the role of individual politicians, and

3. the continuity with past experience in urban networks.

In respect of the first point, most of the respondents argued that membership is not affected by changes in the political composition of the local council. Rather, as one interviewee suggested, there is continuity (LLL3). Some respondents observed that councillors of any parties participate in European urban networks. For instance, BGM2 argued that both left- and right-wing parties are engaged in networks, since they are linked by a "common agenda". Indeed, some participants argued that networks are not politically orientated, but they are more "practical" and "pragmatic", in that their work is about planning actions (BGM2; MNC3). In particular, when speaking about Eurocities, MNC3 stated that there is not "an issue about political control of Eurocities or anything like that. It's much more practical in that. […] The political involvement in Eurocities is about making the case for cities." HMG answered that party politics does not affect network membership very much; rather, the city decides to continue their activity in those networks that "bring benefits to the city". Therefore, it emerges from the evidence that the engagement in networks is political inasmuch as cities seek to influence EU decision-making; however, it is not ideologically-driven, since it is not affected by the party affiliation of the members.

However, some respondents argued that to some extent party politics may influence European city networking. In this respect, BGM1 asserted that, with the recent change in the political composition of the local council, the focus of international relations of the City shifted. In particular, the previous Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government was more concerned with the development of relations with emerging economies (such as China and India), with the aim of enhancing investments and partnerships with them. However, the respondent pointed out that such orientation was dictated more by the international strategy proposed by the Conservative party in the council, while the Liberal Democrat deputy leader was very interested in the European dimension. Therefore, the engagement of the city at European level was supported by the deputy leader. With the Labour party taking the majority of the council, European engagement gained more importance on the political agenda of the council. This view is partially supported by CRM, who argued that the revision of network membership might be prompted by a new party majority in the council or by an external membership request from a network. Furthermore, CRM stated that the content of the initiatives implemented within networks may actually clash with the political leaning of councils – for instance, some working methods proposed by European networks such as citizens' active participation.

Most of the respondents agreed on the fact that, rather than political affiliation of councillors, the individual politicians have played a significant role in determining the scope of local authorities' engagement in Europe. Some of the respondents emphasised the important role of agency in determining the involvement in SEUNs – but also in networks and European initiatives more generally (BGM1; BGM2; MLM2). On this issue BGM2 argued that "it's [not] necessarily about party politics and party lines. […] as just like anything, different politicians will have their own agenda; different mayors, different council leaders will see things in slight different ways." Similarly, MLM2 noted that "the participation in the network […] is also very much down to the individual that is representing the city in the network, how interested the person is in this question or what influence that representative in the

network has at home, in the city." A more nuanced view is presented by LLL1, who argued that the scope of European engagement in networks related to sustainable development is a mix of personalities and parties: generally, greens are more active on sustainable development, but also councils not governed by the green party may have a strong engagement in sustainable development, when there is a political champion supporting such commitment. Therefore, the evidence suggests that individual local politicians act as political champions in determining the scope of the engagement in European urban networks.

Within networks not only councillors but also officers are involved. Obviously, they play a different role. Councillors have a political role, in that they set the policy framework (LLL3). They also guide the decision about membership and the participation within the networks (CRM). As the "figurehead for the city", a politician articulates the vision for their local authority (BGM1). According to MLM2, "politicians are more concerned about [...] policy-making, strategic goals, how to reach these goals, what kind of incentives you could give". Interestingly, MNC3 argued that "the political level [...] it's very much about city leadership and models of governance; issues around how those macro-issues about how cities can try to improve their competitiveness and capability at governance level". MNC3 continued by observing that:

> "they are also politicians and they do political statements in the public domain about the importance of cities and can use the network to provide a forum for cities to make the case for cities as entities in their countries."

By way of contrast, officers have a technical role (BGM1), in that they execute the policy set by councillors (LLL1; LLL3). As MNC3 argued, "at officer level, the connections tend to be more technocratic, tend to be much more focused on specific policy issues or learning". Sometimes officers replace politicians in meetings when the latter are not able to attend (TRN1). However, according to BGM1, officers' personalities also play an important part in European networks, especially because they have to liaise with other peers in Europe. The difference between councillors and officers' involvement also rests with the tasks of which they are in charge. In this respect, MNC4 stated that:

> "politicians tend to come in at the beginning or end of a project, rather than being involved in the actual day-to-day exchanges. It tends to be much more a strategic level", while "some of the officers are much more closely involved with the day-to-day work".

According to the evidence, local politicians contribute to shape the vision of networks, and are concerned about governance models and policy-making strategies, while officers, who have an executive role, are responsible for delivering specific projects.

In addition to the role played by political champions, the participation and the intensity of the engagement is influenced by the past experience in those networks. The commitment in SEUNs – and in European networks more generally – appears to be path-dependent. Some of the respondents asserted that their cities have always been highly engaged in specific networks since they joined, and in some cases they contributed to the establishment of some networks, such as Birmingham and Manchester in Eurocities. This historical path, based on the recognition of the importance of the European dimension and/or the commitment to sustainable development - to various degree marks the present engagement of cities. For example, BGM2 argued that "institutionally, politicians come and go, there will always be recognition in

Birmingham - I would hope - that there is an important European dimension to our work, there is an important urban dimension to our work that goes beyond the city boundaries." Moreover, the continuity of the participation may be influenced by the reputation that a city has built overtime within a network. BGM1 stated that the city, through the work of both officers and politicians, acquired over the years a distinctive reputation in Eurocities for their high level of commitment, especially in the environment forum. However, in some cases, the continuity of network membership is motivated by institutional inertia. In other words, some cities continue their involvement because they have always done so. For example, LLL3, while discussing how network membership is revised, argued that this is not formally discussed; rather, the interviewee observed that "sometimes networks are there because they have been there for 30 years" and nobody questions them. Additionally, the respondent reported that the local government was still member of a European organisation grouping cities with a textile industry, although in Lille this sector was dismantled long time ago.

Therefore, local governments display different attitudes towards the ongoing participation in networks: while for some cities their active participation is part of a strategic decision to keep their commitments in continuity with the past, for others their lingering membership is the outcome of a non-decision to withdraw from a given network.

As summarised in Table 25 below, the evidence shows that party politics and ideology seem to exert a significant influence neither on the functioning of the networks nor on the relationships among the members. By way of contrast, agency and path dependency appear to affect the decision of maintaining network membership over time.

Table 25: Political influence over SEUNs: summary of the findings

Political influence over SEUNs:
- Change in local council composition does not affect membership;
- Networks are practical and not politically oriented;
- Member-cities linked by a common agenda, not aligned by party affiliation;
- Mix of personalities and parties:
  - Content of network initiatives may have political implications;
  - Political personalities champion cities' engagement in European networks and sustainable development initiatives;
- Previous experience in networks influences cities' participation.

7.4.5.2 The concept of sustainable urban development: urban environmentalism

As suggested in the introduction to this thesis, to fully understand the motivations for participating in SEUNs, it is necessary to examine separately the network dimension and the thematic dimension of networks. In effect, the focus of some networks on sustainable development is not a motivation in itself for cities to participate. Rather, it is an added value for the networks. Given the importance that sustainable development has acquired in European networks, participants were asked a set of questions about how they define this concept and how cities contribute to sustainability.

The participants provided various definition of sustainable development. This concept is explained by most of the interviewees with the well-known three-pillar definition of the Brundtland report, for which environmental, social and economic aspects are closely intertwined. Only one respondent emphasises the

importance of the cultural dimension to sustainable development (LLL3). While defined by some respondents as a broad term (BGM1; MNC2), for others sustainable development is not a vague concept (LLL2). For instance, it is described by one respondent as an inclusive vision that encompasses transport, housing, population etc. and affects not only cities, but also the rural areas around them (LLL3). Another interviewee argued that sustainable development may be an abstract term for lay people, but it defines something concrete for ecologists (LLL2). Further, for HMG, "development without sustainability is without sense."

For most of the participants, sustainable development is a political concept. According to CRM, the local council's vision about urban development is political insofar as it impacts on the local community, economy, environment, transport system and quality of life. Similar opinion is shared by MNC3. Additionally, the political component of sustainable development lies in that it is concerned with changing attitudes and behaviours, and impacts on citizens, economic development and urban environment (LLL1). One respondent suggested that, if one takes an inclusive view of sustainable development, then the existing economic models have to be questioned (LLL3).

The broad definition of sustainable development leaves room to various interpretations. In this sense, political parties may elaborate different definitions of sustainable development. In this respect, one respondent mentioned that the different parties manifest a different degree of interest on sustainable development, for example signalled by the presence of a cabinet member working on sustainability matters (BGM1). Another respondent observed that, whereas sustainable development is a concept sweeping across the whole political spectrum, there might be a left- and right-wing reading (MNC3). For example, the left may emphasise the social justice agenda, while the right may pay more attention to the economic aspects (BGM2). By way of contrast, MLM2 and MNC2 stated that cities committed to sustainability are governed by councils of various political leaning. However, these may have a "different way of implementing" sustainable development (MLM2).

The interest of local governments in sustainable development has developed for four main reasons. Firstly, the aftermaths of the de-industrialisation process. For most of the participants, the interest of cities in sustainable development was motivated by the willingness to recover from the problems engendered by deindustrialisation, such as unemployment, soil and air pollution, and economic instability (LLL1; LLL3; MLM2; MNC1; TRN1). Similarly, for CRM sustainable development addresses urban environmental problems affecting industrialised cities. For LLL1, sustainable development offers opportunities for economic recovery. The accent here appears to be on the green economy, which could generate green jobs and green growth at local level. Additionally, for some respondents, sustainable development is about quality of life for citizens: this means improvements in liveability and attractiveness of cities (CRM; MLM2; MNC3; TRN1). But to do so, it is necessary to improve environmental quality, democratic participation of citizens as well as the economic situation, the latter being "part of daily life", which allows people to "live and thrive" (MLM2). Improvement in quality of life may have a two-fold advantage: by making cities liveable and healthy places, one meets the sustainability agenda; at the same time, cities present "an extremely attractive inward investment case" (BGM2). In brief, it appears that the idea of sustainability has conceptually informed urban regeneration. For some participants sustainable

development is important in that it couples economic growth with environmental and social concerns, and future development of cities should be built within the sustainability framework (BGM1; BGM2; TRN1).

A second reason explaining the interest of cities in sustainability is the role of local politicians in championing sustainable development in the city council. One respondent (LLL1) reported how individual councillors with a strong interest for sustainable development have helped the city to take steps towards actions for sustainability. Thirdly, the emphasis on sustainable development is also explained by the commitment of the EU on this matter, both in terms of international negotiations and EU laws, which have informed member-states' legislation (BGM1; LLL1). Fourthly, the presence of local pressure groups. Some respondents reported how the presence and the pressure of activist groups or non-governmental organisations have been a spur for local authorities to make their cities more sustainable (LLL1 and MNC3).

The discourse behind the idea of sustainable development assumes different connotations. In particular, most of the respondents mentioned the need to change the current economic model, but the extent of such change varies. Looking at the trade-off between economic model and magnitude of change expressed by the respondents, the findings seem to suggest the existence of three different types of sustainable development discourses within the sample:

- *radical sustainability*: this type of discourse acknowledges the need to change radically the present economic development model by changing behaviour about production and consumption;

- *adaptation*: discourses about adaption recognise that the status quo has to be changed; therefore, it is necessary to find creative and innovative solutions to develop cities in a sustainable way;

- *green capitalism*: upholders of green capitalism emphasise the distributive potential of green economic growth, without supporting an alternative idea of society.

The first vision of sustainable development emerged in interviews with two respondents from Lille (LLL1 and LLL3). For them sustainable development entailed the transition towards a new economic model. In particular, the respondents acknowledged the unsustainability of the present economic model and pointed out the need for elaborating a new and alternative economic and social model. The two British cities displayed a more practical and less idealistic perspective: respondents from both cities reckoned the need to change the approach to the economy, but in a more eco-compatible way. Significant is the view expressed by BGM2. The respondent observed how, while "the limit to growth" report identified the economic growth as a disaster,

> "the sustainable development agenda was about saying […] the economic growth is the only way that we can meet the need of the present, meet the challenges of the developing world, stimulate the economies and also facilitate the growth of social services. But there is a way of doing that without leaving the sort of Armageddon scenario set out in "the limit to growth". So, in a sense, sustainable development was a […] very successful way of short-circuiting that kind of quite negative debate between growth on the one side and the environment on the other, and demonstrated that was possible to bring the two things together".

For Manchester sustainable economic growth is a goal that, although involving physical development, it is also about changing and adapting the existing situation, "making a more attractive and better city for the uses people want today" (MNC4). One respondent observed the cities need to grow but in a more sustainable way, i.e. reducing carbon-fuel dependency (MNC3). Malmö stands in an intermediate position, supporting the need to change lifestyle, while creating a more environmental-friendly economy. In this respect, MLM2 argued that:

> "sustainable city development means that you need to do more than business as usual. It's not about managing the city, but it's about developing the city. So […], you need to be innovative and find new solutions and ideas and so on. So, the networks have quite a lot, because you get lot of contacts with other cities."

Similarly, TRN1 argued that, for the city, sustainable urban development is about increasing the quality of life. For the respondent, urban quality means quality of the public spaces, sustainable mobility, improvement of environmental conditions, and social sustainability, avoiding that "multi-speed cities" co-exists within the urban fabric.

All the respondents agreed in defining cities as pivotal actors to deliver sustainable development. As suggested by some participants, the main social, environmental and economic issues are concentrated in cities; they are the places where there are extreme levels of environmental problems and social deprivation (MNC1; MNC2; TRN1). For these reasons, it is important to intervene in cities. By the same token, for most of the respondents, cities are the places where actions to deliver sustainability can be taken. Environmental targets can be achieved through implementation of projects at the urban scale (MLM2; MNC1). In this sense, local rather than national governments could lead the way through sustainability. As MLM2 argued, the national level is not too practical, not too direct in dealing with concrete problems. Hence, policy implementation at the local level is more effective, in that it is much closer to citizens, industries etc. (MLM1; MLM2; MNC2). According to BGM2, thanks to the density of the population and the economic opportunities, cities may act as "greenhouses" where innovative practices and ideas may develop.

Following the reasoning behind the potential economic competition among network members, participants were asked whether within SEUNs there is an "environmental" competition among them to become a sustainable city. Some respondents (CRM; LLL1) stated that there is not such competition, since "in the sustainable development model you don't think in terms of being the first, but you cooperate, have a transversal vision" (LLL1). Similarly, HMG stated that "each city has its own responsibility, its own aims and tries to reach them as it makes sense. Each city is 'sustainable' in its own way". Conversely, other participants claimed that there is such competition (MNC1; MNC4; TRN1). In particular, MNC4 stated that there is competition for becoming a sustainable city, but it is not "as great as the competition for economic growth". A more nuanced view is shared by some respondents, for which the idea of sustainable city, promoted for instance by awards such as the European Green Capital, seems to trigger a sort of "healthy" competition among cities (BGM1), or rather, a "healthy desire to be seen as particularly good, as particular advanced in this field" (BGM2). The competition to become sustainable provides thus a "good inspiration" (MLM1), an "encouragement" for cities to improve themselves (LLL3). LLL3 observed that those cities that decide to invest in sustainability do not obtain economic

benefits in the short run; only in the long run will they probably get economic benefits. As LLL3 highlighted, the commitment to sustainable development is a matter of political will.

The discussion outlined above shows that the interpretations of concept of sustainable development and the ways to achieve it differ across the cities of the sample. Nevertheless, the respondents agreed on the importance of sustainability and the crucial role that cities could play to deliver it (Table 26). This widespread interest in sustainability explains – along with the incentives discussed in the previous sections – the preference of cities for urban networks that focus on the different aspects of sustainable development.

Table 26: The value of sustainable development in SEUNs: a summary of findings

Sustainable development as a political concept:	*Interest of cities for sustainable development due to:*
- Local governments' vision of urban development impacts on the local community; - Sustainable development implies changes in attitudes and behaviours; - Political parties may elaborate different. definitions of sustainable development	- De-industrialisation; - Agency championing sustainable development at local level; - EU commitment to environmental issues; - Local environmental pressure groups.
Sustainability discourse: - Radical sustainability; - Adaptation; - Green capitalism.	*Cities and sustainable development:* - Cities are the main actors to deliver sustainability; - Cities cooperate in the realm of sustainability; - Cities have a "healthy desire" to be considered innovative in field of sustainability.

7.4.5.3 Institutionalised values and attitudes towards networks

The third element that completes the analysis of the drivers of participation in SEUNs is the values and attitudes that characterise the political milieu of the local government. The overall attitude of the respondents towards networks can be explored by comparing the interview transcripts and questionnaires. In so doing, it is possible to identify similarities between the respondents in terms of the themes discussed. From an operational perspective, the evidence collected from the respondents of the same city was merged to generate aggregate-level data for each local government.

Figure 28 and Figure 29 below show the case studies according to their word similarity[145][146], which identifies the use of a similar language among the sources. By looking at the dendrogram in Figure 28, which provides a map of the correlation among the participants, it appears that the cases are split into two groups: the first groups the cities of Cremona and Hamburg, while the second group comprises all the remaining cases. This suggests that most of the participants expressed relatively similar views about their engagement in SEUNs.

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[145] The measure of similarity is the Pearson's coefficient.
[146] For Pearson's coefficients see Table 32 and Table 33 in Appendix.

The isolation of Cremona and Hamburg from the other participants and the degree of closeness between the two cities may be partially explained by their demographic and economic characteristics that make them different from the other cases in the sample: while Cremona is the smallest (and the least engaged[147]) city, Hamburg is the largest and one of the wealthiest cities in the sample. Furthermore, the position of the two cities on the topic under study may be partially explained by the data collection method applied to the two cases: data were gathered through questionnaires and only one respondent from each of these cities participated.

Word similarities can be further explored by using a 3D cluster map. Figure 29 shows a similar picture to the dendrogram, with Cremona and Hamburg further apart from the other cases. However, the 3D cluster map shows that also Torino is far from Birmingham, Manchester, Malmö and Lille, while it is closer to Cremona and Hamburg. Therefore, it appears that the evidence gathered from Torino displays also some similarities with the two "outliers" of the sample.

Figure 28: Sources clustered by word similarity: dendrogram

Figure 29: Sources clustered by word similarity: 3D map
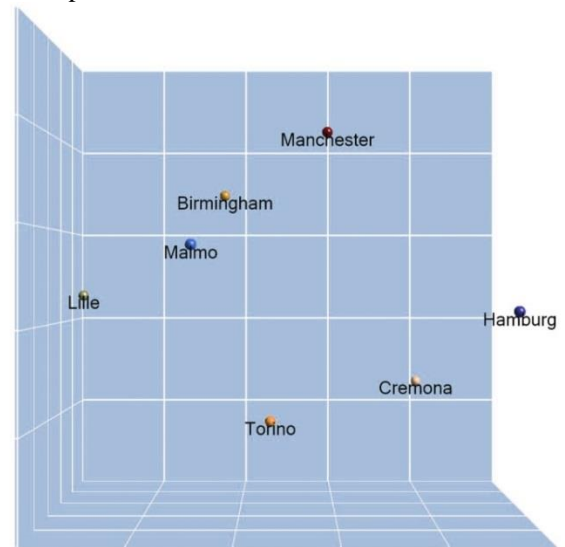
The similarities among the participants slightly change if the coding (i.e. the organisation of the sources in the themes) is compared. The dendrogram in Figure 30 groups the respondents into two main clusters, which are different from those in the dendrogram in Figure 28. The first cluster groups the North-European cities in the sample, where Malmö and Birmingham seems to be closely related. The second group, which includes the remaining cases, comprises two sub-clusters grouping, on the one hand, Lille and Torino, and on the other, Cremona and Hamburg. By displaying the results of the cluster analysis in a 3D cluster map (Figure 31), it emerges that Torino and Cremona actually discuss similar themes. Additionally, it seems that Birmingham is closer to Manchester than to the other cases, although the latter appears to be in an intermediate position between Malmö and Birmingham with regard to the opinions expressed during the interview. Similarly, Lille is positioned mid-way between Torino and Malmö. Finally, Hamburg appears to be isolated far on the right, but in line with Lille.

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[147] Cremona is the only case in the sample that member of one SEUN.

Figure 30: Sources clustered by coding similarity: dendrogram
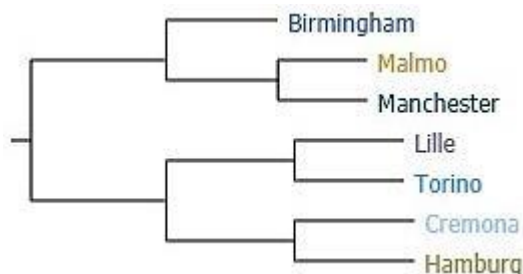
Figure 31: Sources clustered by coding similarity: 3D map
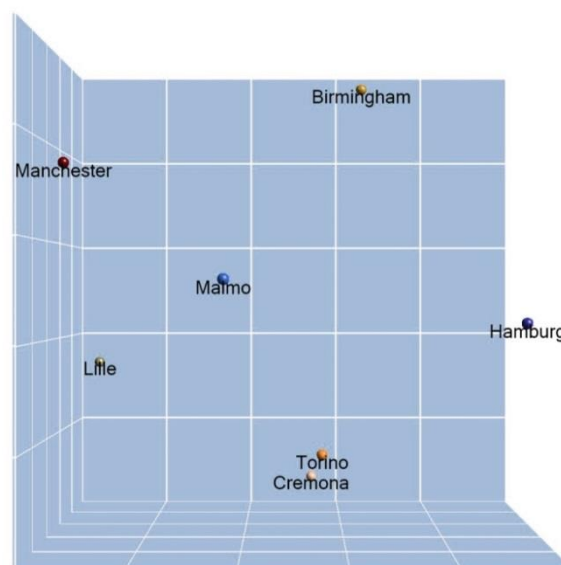
In order to shed further light on the topics that concern the respondents the most, a word frequency query was run to find the most recurrent words in the data sources. Then, the resulting words were grouped by semantic similarity (Figure 32). This technique made it possible to identify the topics that are discussed the most by the respondents[148], which can be grouped in the following eight categories:

1. *Concern*: this category includes the words related to the sphere of concern for SEUN members, including words such as problem, issue and interest[149];

2. *Economy*: groups together terms pertaining to the economy semantic field, included words such as competitiveness, development[150], growth and investment;

3. *Europe*: comprises any word related to the EU;

4. *Innovation*: groups words such as change, experience and idea;

5. *Institutions*: indicates any reference to government, thus including words such as local, regional, national, and international as well as political and public;

6. *Policy-making*: comprises words such as policy, project, programme and strategy;

7. *Participation*: includes words pertaining to city's involvement in networks, including the words members, cooperation, engagement and involvement;

8. *Socio-ecological dimension*: includes words related to environmental and social sustainability.

The chart displayed in Figure 32 shows that Manchester highly focused on the economic aspects of SEUNs. It might be hypothesised that the prospect of economic benefits deriving from the engagement in European city networks is what appeals the most the city. Likewise, the content of the interview with the respondents from Birmingham mostly pivoted around the economic field, although to a lower degree than Manchester. By way of contrast, the participants from Malmö seem to have little interest on the economic

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[148] It should be noted that all the words associated with network and city were excluded in the word count: being directly linked with the topic under study, they were obviously the most cited words.

[149] Here interest does not have an economic meaning.

[150] The term 'development' is here used in its economic meaning, thus excluding any reference to sustainable development.

theme, while being more focused on the "concerns" for the city. For Hamburg, the semantic area "policy-making", which groups words such as policy, projects, actions etc., seems to matter the most for the city. Furthermore, the aspect of the participation in the networks plays a relevant role for Birmingham, Torino and Malmö. Another theme identified in the sources is "innovation". This semantic field includes the concepts of "change" and "ideas", in addition to words stemming from innovation. This aspect is not widely discussed by participants, especially by Birmingham, Cremona and Hamburg. The socio-ecological dimension is discussed by all the respondents, although it does not occupy a primary position as one might expect. In particular, the evidence collected from Hamburg and Torino does not count many references to environmental and social sustainability. Finally, the institutional sphere seems to be an important topic for the participants, especially for Hamburg and Lille.

Figure 32: 25 most frequent words by semantic group
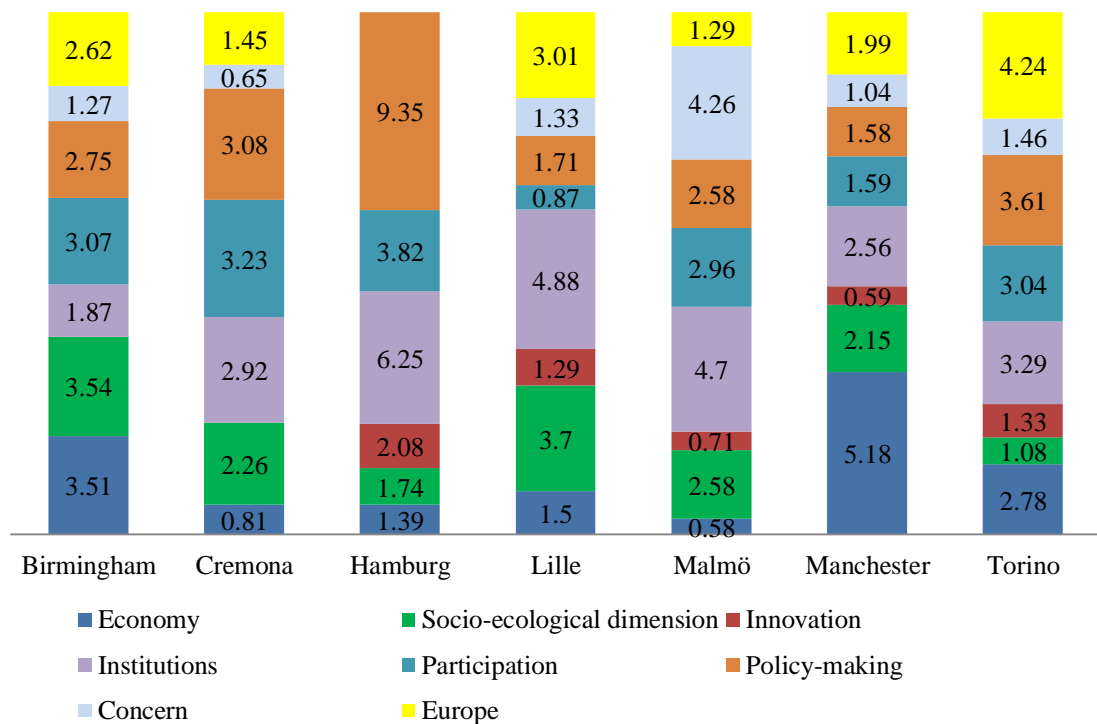
The chart in Figure 32 helps to shed light on the type of attitude towards SEUN engagement. In this respect, Manchester appears to have an instrumental approach to the EU: the city primarily engages in European networks because of the economic benefits they provide. More widely, as emerged in the interviews, the city gives importance to both economic (possibility to partner with other cities to bid into EU funding, place promotion etc.) and informational benefits, i.e. knowledge exchange. As the chart shows, the institutional context, especially national, also plays a significant role in the discourse on network involvement. Hence, it may be argued that, Manchester's low-medium propensity to participate in European networks for sustainability is due to a rationale use of available resources, used for achieving a high level of involvement in well-established and influential networks. Birmingham seems also to be significantly interested in the economic incentives of SEUNs. Here, the respondents give almost equal

importance to the socio-ecological dimension and the economic aspect, suggesting how these two themes are strongly intertwined.

For Malmö network participation is strongly connected to the national context. Furthermore, its involvement in European SEUNs is about city's objectives and priorities with networks' work (see "concern" in Figure 32). Similarly, for Hamburg the institutional relationships are a relevant theme, although preceded by the topic "policy-making". This suggests that the city conceives SEUN membership as a strategy to deliver specific policy outputs. Likewise, the importance of the networks as a means for achieving policy objectives is also important for Cremona, which places considerable emphasis on the aspect of "participation" in the networks.

With regard to Lille, the institutional context is pivotal in the discourse on the engagement of the city in SEUNs. This theme is followed by the socio-ecological dimension, indicating how for Lille the environmental discourse is central to their participation in SEUNs. Moreover, the theme "Europe" recurs relatively frequently in the evidence on Lille. As an example, the respondents pointed out the long history of European engagement of the city and one of the interviewees (LLL3) emphasised how the geographical position of the city - at "the hearth of one part of Europe" - has played a significant role in determining the high level of interaction with other European cities[151]. In this case, the peculiar geographical position of the city has contributed to the creation of a European culture.

The theme "Europe" is even more relevant for Torino, whose European dimension has a long history dating back to the beginning of the 20th century, and which still characterises the municipal politics[152]. This theme is followed by "policy-making". This may suggest the use of the European dimension to find policy solutions to tackle local problems. A closer analysis of the evidence supports this claim. TRN1 argued that the city began to engage at European level around the mid-Nineties, in correspondence with its industrial decline. As a result of the management of EU structural funds dedicated to industrial areas in decline, the city worked more with the EU level than with the central level. Actually, it was claimed that the European dimension became very important for the city in terms of innovative and advanced ideas about urban policy. Within the European dimension, it was possible for the city to learn from and work with other European cities affected by de-industrialisation process.

The evidence seems to suggest that the discourse around the involvement of local governments in SEUNs has different facets, and the attitude towards SEUNs changes from one member to another. Some members have a functional approach, using the network to achieve their economic or policy objectives. Some cities have a more value-oriented attitude, whereby SEUN membership stems from institutionalised values, such as a diffuse European culture or environmentalism, embedded in local politics. Finally, noteworthy is the importance that respondents place onto the institutional dimension: although cities autonomously decide to engage at European level, their action is bound to the central governments.

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[151] A case in point mentioned by the respondent is the engagement of the city in the creation of Eurométropole, or Lille-Kortrijk-Tournai Eurometropolis, which is a European Territorial Cooperation Group grouping together 147 French and Belgian cities. See: www.eurometropolis.eu
[152] On this topic see Marucco and Accornero (2012).

In light of the above discussion, it can be argued that SEUN engagement is determined by a blend of institutionalised values and attitudes incorporated in local politics. As displayed in Figure 33, the following attitudinal factors appear to determine cities' involvement in SEUNs:

- *Centrifugal localism vs centripetal nationalism*: the relations with supra-local levels of government. A city with a stronger urban identity and/or centrifugal tensions tends to be keener to engage in supra-national urban networks;
- *Economic opportunism*: those cities that see the European (or international) engagement as a means to achieve local economic goals tend to be more likely to participate in networks;
- *Environmentalism*: the degree of interest in environmental protection exerts some influence the scope of involvement in SEUNs;
- *Europhilia vs Euroscepticism*: positive or negative attitude towards the EU institutions affects participation in SEUNs;
- *International openness (or cooperative attitude) vs international isolation*: a city with a wider portfolio of international political activities tend to be keener in engaging in SEUNs;
- *Policy functionalism*: those cities that emphasise the collegial policy-making that characterises networks' activities tend to be more likely to engage in SEUNs.

The combination, the direction (positive or negative) and intensity (high or low) of these attitudes and values determine the degree of participation in SEUNs. This argument complements and sheds further light on the findings of the quantitative analysis. As with the qualitative analysis, the regression analysis also showed that a general propensity to participate in TMNs (the variable "cooperative attitude") influences the scope of the engagement of cities in SEUNs. By way of contrast, the quantitative results showed that the concern for environment, measured by the levels of a set of environmental variables, does appear to affect neither the decision to participate in SEUNs nor the number of sustainability-related networks of which a city is a member. While environmental concern is not a significant variable at aggregated level, it cannot be ruled out that at individual level – i.e. local level – a long-standing environmental political tradition or the presence of political personalities championing environmental-friendly policy do not exert any sort of influence on SEUN membership. Obviously, urban environmentalism is not the main factor underpinning SEUN membership; however, along with other more important factors such as economic opportunism and cooperative propensity, it contributes to explain cities' participation in SEUNs.

In addition, the thematic analysis showed the importance of other institutionalised values and behaviours not included in the regression analysis. In this respect, the existence of a conflictual relation with the central government, the quest for economic benefits and the embeddedness in local politics of pro-European values emerged as attitudinal factors that play a role in the decision as to whether and how much to participate in SEUNs.

Figure 33: Institutional embeddedness of SEUN engagement: values and attitudes

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                        ┌──────────────┐
                        │  Europhilia  │
                        └──────────────┘
  ┌──────────────┐                        ┌──────────────────┐
  │    Policy    │                        │ Environmentalism │
  │ functionalism│                        └──────────────────┘
  └──────────────┘
                        ┌──────────────┐
                        │     SEUN     │
                        │  engagement  │
                        └──────────────┘
  ┌──────────────┐                        ┌──────────────┐
  │   Economic   │                        │  Centrifugal │
  │  opportunism │                        │   localism   │
  └──────────────┘                        └──────────────┘
                        ┌──────────────┐
                        │  Cooperative │
                        │   attitude   │
                        └──────────────┘
```
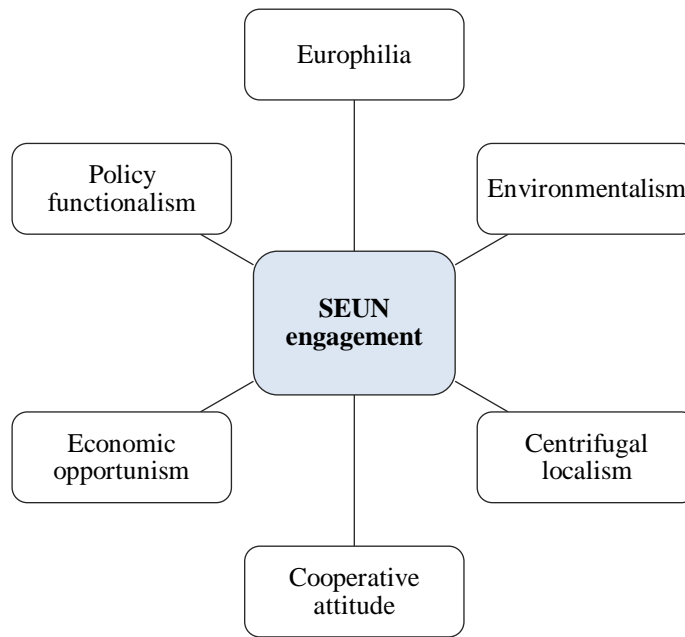
7.4.6   The assessment of network membership: the costs of participation

Before concluding the analysis of the evidence, it seems appropriate to complement the discussion of the motivations underpinning cities' engagement in SEUNs with an appraisal of the costs of participation. In this respect, the respondents did not identify any significant disadvantage deriving from network membership. The main financial costs indicated by the majority of the respondents are the membership fees. A second type of costs associated with participation in networks' activities are the travel costs, which indicates both money and time for attending meetings and events organised by the networks (BGM2; HMG; LLL1; MLM2; MNC3).

For what concerns non-financial costs, generally, the main issue with engagement in SEUNs is the lack of time (BGM1; LLL1; MLM2; MNC1; MNC3). Some of the respondents argued that a fruitful and serious involvement in networks is time consuming and requires the commitment of the officers to deal with project management, meeting attendance etc. (BGM1; CRM; HMG; MLM2). Such workload adds up to other activities to which the council staff is already committed (MNC1). But it is a cost - an "initial investment" - that members have to pay to be involved, otherwise membership would be a waste (LLL3). In this respect, HMG stated that "joining networks without internal transition, without local reflection and without the attempts to get local effects is just [a social event[153]]" (HMG). Similarly, TRN1 stated that the network does not provide any benefits if it is not used.

A second issue brought up by some respondents is the limited human resources working on networks' matters (CRM; LLL1; MNC4; TRN1). On this point, TRN1 highlighted the lack of linguistically competent personnel. Finally, MNC4 pointed out the possible negative electoral payback of using part of the local budget to subsidize the network activities:

[153] The respondent used the phrase "cocktail-front-visiting".

> "it's quite difficult to explain to our citizens sometimes that we're investing in European networks when we're having to make decisions about closing facilities and services. Explaining balance of development and economic growth alongside their desire of not seeing their local library closed is quite hard, it's a real challenge. And it's not going to get any easier in short term either."

Given the current economic conditions, cities weight financial considerations in the decision to remain members. If network engagement comes to a high cost, then local authorities have to balance out the costs and benefits of participation (BGM1; LLL1; MNC4). In this respect, MNC4 stated that:

> "I think we will consider [network membership] alongside everything else. And we would never stop. We might have to scale back slightly, because of the economic situation. But in terms of the investment it brings, it has generally a very good rate of return."

Despite the financial expenses, all the respondents agreed that the costs are offset by the benefits deriving from network engagement, provided that cities assume a proactive role in the networks' activities. The participation in networks appears to be perceived by members as an investment, since they have to sustain financial costs - in terms of staff salaries, travel costs, event organisations and membership fees – to obtain some rewards. By weighting costs and benefits, cities decide whether they want to be fully committed or just being nominal network members. In this sense, the decision to engage in SEUNs and the intensity of the participation is a rational choice, based on a cost-benefit analysis. However, the possibility of obtaining selective and collective incentives greater than the costs of participation in SEUNs is not the only motivation prompting cities to engage in networks. As discussed in the previous section, the scope and the intensity of local governments' involvement in SEUNs are also influenced by institutional values. Therefore, the choice of engaging in network is not simply dictated by a rational calculus of the pros and cons of membership, but it is bounded to the values and politics characterising the urban context. More precisely, it is the variation in the local political and cultural context that explains why not all the European cities display the same attitude towards participation in sustainability-related networks.

7.5   Concluding observations

In this chapter the findings of the qualitative analysis have been reported. This has included a cluster analysis of the interview transcripts and the questionnaires, which have helped to identify with greater precision the themes discussed by the respondents. The themes have been systematised in analytical categories, corresponding to the different types of incentives provided by participation in networks (i.e. economic, formative and political incentives) and the political factors underlying network engagement. As shown in Figure 34 and Figure 35, which summarise the findings of the thematic analysis, the qualitative evidence indicated that the possibility of obtaining economic, policy and political incentives significantly motivates cities' participation in SEUNs. However, the magnitude of such influence varies from one city to another. Furthermore, the findings highlighted how institutionalised values, such as environmentalism and Europhilia, as well as attitudes in place at local level, such as an oppositional relation with the central level, affect the politics of SEUN membership.

While the aim of this chapter was to report the findings of the thematic analysis, in the following chapter these will be discussed in light of the theoretical framework set out in the first part of this research and compared with the results of previous research.

Figure 34: Motivations and benefits of SEUN membership

EU project partnership

		Motivation	
		Yes	No
Benefit	Yes	BGM2 HMG LLL3 MLM1 MLM2 MNC1 MNC3 TRN1	BGM1 LLL1
	No	CRM	LLL2 MNC2 MNC4 TRN2

Learning and sharing

		Motivation	
		Yes	No
Benefit	Yes	BGM1 BGM2 CRM HMG LLL1 MLM1 MNC1 MNC3 MNC4 TRN1	LLL3
	No	MLM2 MNC2 TRN2	LLL2

Lobbying

		Motivation	
		Yes	No
Benefit	Yes	BGM1 MLM1 MLM2 MNC1	MNC4
	No	HMG TRN2	CRM LLL1 LLL2 LLL3 MNC2 MNC3 TRN1

Networking

		Motivation	
		Yes	No
Benefit	Yes	HMG MLM1 MLM2	BGM1 BGM2 CRM MNC3
	No	LLL3 TRN1 TRN2	LLL1 LLL2 MNC1 MNC2 MNC4

Profile/visibility

		Motivation	
		Yes	No
Benefit	Yes	HMG MLM1 MNC1 MNC4 TRN1	LLL3
	No	BGM1	BGM2 CRM LLL1 LLL2 MLM2 MNC2 MNC3 TRN2

Figure 35: Other motivations and benefits of SEUN membership

Respondent	Motivations		Benefits		
	Comparison-Emulation	Saving time	Competencies gaining	EU integration	Practical tools
BGM1					✓
BGM2					
CRM		✓	✓		
HMG					
LLL1					
LLL2	✓				
LLL3		✓		✓	
MLM1	✓				
MLM2	✓				
MNC1	✓		✓		
MNC2					
MNC3					
MNC4					
TRN1			✓		
TRN2					

8. ANALYSIS OF THE QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

8.1 Qualitative findings and the urban approach

The qualitative analysis shed light on the motivations for cities to participate in SEUNs. In more detail, the qualitative analysis sought to verify the validity of the assumptions outlined in chapter 7 and summarised in Table 27 below.

Table 27: Assumptions for the qualitative analysis

Dimension of the analysis	Type of engagement in SEUNs	Explanatory factors

Horizontal	*Incentive-oriented*: cities participate in SEUNs in order to gain benefits	• *Economic incentives* (E1a):
		  ○ *Short-term*: EU funding
		  ○ *Long-term*: external investments
		• *Formative incentive* (E1b): exchange of knowledge and information and policy learning
		• *Political incentives* (E1c)*: lobbying to influence the EU institution and indirectly the central level

Urban	*Embeddedness in municipal politics*: the engagement of SEUNs is influenced by the political environment of the municipal government	• *The role of agency* (political personalities) and *political parties* (E2a) • The *past experience in networks* (E2b) • *Political values* (E2c): pro-European and environmental-friendly attitudes

As shown in Table 27, the motivations for cities to participate in SEUNs pertain to both the horizontal and the urban dimensions. With regard to the first dimension, the qualitative evidence showed that the engagement of European cities in SEUNs is fuelled by economic, formative and political incentives. As will be discussed in further detail in the ensuing sections, this thesis has confirmed the findings of previous research on the topic, especially with regard to the incentives for cities to participate in SEUNs (see chapter 2). However, while in several contributions the economic, formative and political incentives are conceived as functions or benefits for cities to join, here are considered as motivations. In other words, rather than being conceptualised as the outcomes of participation in SEUNs, these factors are treated as the motivations of SEUN membership. This means that cities participate in SEUNs because of the possibility to learn from other peers and share knowledge, to network, to lobby at EU level and for the opportunity to develop partnerships for EU projects and to build an international profile[154]. More indirectly, cities engage in SEUNs because of the possibility of influencing EU legislation and EU programmes to their advantage, to gain easier access EU funding and attract international investment. Ultimately, participation in SEUNs fits into a broader strategy of undertaking urban regeneration, inasmuch as it provides European local governments with ideas and possibly, funding (Figure 36).

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[154] However, networking also provides indirect economic incentives by enabling members to find project partners.

Figure 36: Incentives to participate in SEUNs

Formative/political incentives
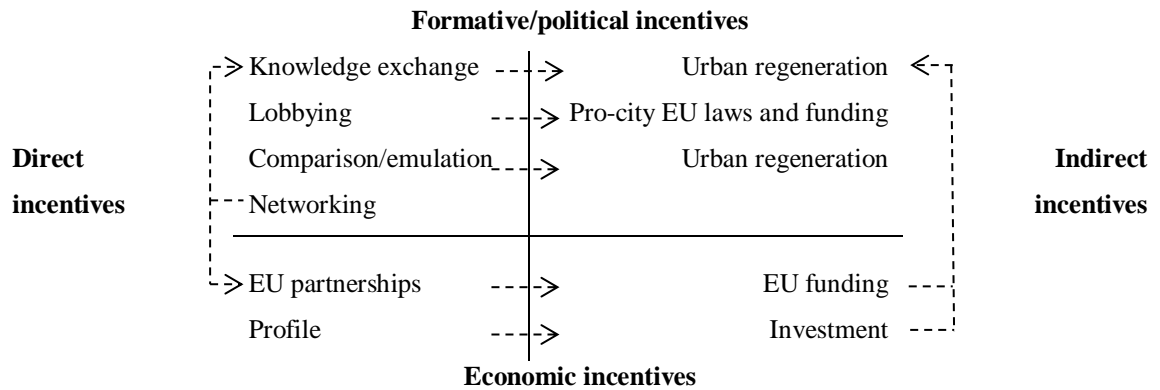
For what concerns the urban dimension, the qualitative analysis has shed light on the role that values and attitudes play in explaining SEUN membership. In particular, the findings showed that the political environment of the local government, the presence of political champions and the previous experience in networks influence the participation in SEUNs.

In the following sections the findings of the qualitative analysis are discussed in relation to the two analytical dimensions, horizontal and urban, which constitute the core of the analytical approach adopted in this thesis.

8.2 The horizontal dimension of cities' engagement in SEUNs

As discussed in chapter 2, the horizontal dimension focuses on the collective action undertaken by cities in networks. It should be noted that the focus of the analysis is not on the structure and organisation of the network; this means that the analysis is not concerned with the functioning of the networks and the relations developed among the members. Rather, the horizontal dimension is conceptualised in rational and instrumental terms: the aspect of the network dimension that is of interest here are the incentives that the individual participants derive. Such incentives are economic, formative and political.

8.2.1 The economic incentives of membership

The evidence shows that the prospect of gaining financial benefits only partially influence the decision of local authorities to actively participate in SEUNs. This is due to the fact that city networking offers mainly indirect economic incentives. This claim needs to be explained further. As shown in Figure 36, one primary incentive of SEUN engagement is to network with other European cities. In so doing, cities can set up project partnerships with other European local authorities (see also on this point Bulkeley et al., 2003; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Ward and Williams, 1997). As emphasised by the councillors and officers that took part in this study, the prospect of gaining access to EU funding is an indirect incentive for participating in networks, firstly because European funding for cities complements rather than replaces local and national funding, and secondly, because the mere participation of cities in SEUNs does not immediately provide them with funding. Although participants mentioned the importance of EU funding as a motivation or benefit for engaging in networks, they explicitly highlighted that network

membership is not seen as a way to get easier access to EU funding. Hence, network membership does not *per se* ensure automatic access to funding, as it is necessary for cities to present innovative projects. In other words, it is the prospect of obtaining funding rather than funding itself that incentivises cities to engage in SEUNs. In a similar vein, Betsill and Bulkeley (2004) note that, while network participation may increase the chance to access funding, exclusively those members that obtain the grants can take advantage of EU funds. In turn, this means that local governments have to allocate dedicated staff and resources to develop successful bids.

Furthermore, the network offers the opportunity for cities to discuss with other European peers about their achievements and future projects. In this sense, European inter-urban networking can be seen as a city marketing strategy that provides cities with the opportunity to market themselves – and show themselves off. The place marketing potential of network is also highlighted by other authors (see for instance Church and Raid, 1996; Ewen, 2008; Phelps et al., 2002). As discussed in chapter 6, the networks function as shop-windows through which cities display their image of attractive places to live and invest. In an international economic context where local governments compete with each other to attract external capital, gaining visibility becomes a crucial strategy. In an attempt to boost economic growth, local governments strive to adapt their urban system to the economic development model dictated by businesses and supported by national politicians. This model currently emphasises technological innovation and industrial modernisation as means to achieve the status of green or sustainable city. Joining a TMN (and SEUN in particular) helps local authorities to build a reputation as modern cities, i.e. European – or international – forward-looking, post-industrial, green and innovative. Similarly, Betsill and Bulkeley (2004) acknowledge the importance of the CCP network in helping some members to develop an environmental profile. In turn, the creation of a positive reputation may increase the financial return of cities by attracting businesses, companies and tourists. Likewise, Keiner and Kim (2007: 1393) argue that some cities - for example Barcelona - have been able to use transnational municipal organisations to their advantage: they have developed a profile as "future-oriented environmentally-friendly liveable cities" and at the same time they have capitalised on the development of the service sector. Innovation diffusion may help cities to foster a new and more appealing image for investors. But this may be an indirect and uncertain result of European involvement. On this point, Payre (2010) observes that for some cities in the Midlands (UK), economic benefits constituted a primary motivation for their involvement in international and European organisations, which was seen by local politicians and economic actors as an opportunity to address the problems derived from the decline of the industrial sector and in particular to boost the tourism sector. However, as discussed previously, economic benefits, such as EU funding and international investment, are not directly correlated with network membership.

The evidence seems to suggest that the cooperative relationship among members of SEUNs and European urban networks more generally is in contrast with the individual aspirations of cities to attract investment. The sense of "comradery", evident in the emphasis placed by the participants on the mutual learning, the knowledge and information sharing, and the collective lobbying at EU-level, clashes with the individual economic and personal interests. These are represented by the cities' quest for investment pursued through their identity building as international cities and the establishment of EU partnerships. The co-

existence of cooperation and competition among cities is also acknowledged by some authors[155] (see for example, Payre and Saunier, 2008). Additionally, Kern and Bulkeley (2009: 328) found that, as a result of "horizontal Europeanization", local governments, on the one hand, collaborate to address common issues, on the other, they are in competition "when they engage in benchmarking exercises or vie for awards for their local activities".

Being on the brink between competition and collaboration, collective and selective incentives can co-exist. In this sense, the network dimension constitutes a "paradox", as defined by one respondent. On the one hand, the collective dimension of network appears to be a significant reason underpinning cities' participation. On the other, cities are in competition for investments outside the networks. This tension between collaborative and competitive relations can be conceptualised in terms of collective action problem. This can give rise to two types of scenarios, which are displayed in Figure 37. For sake of simplicity, we can imagine a network constituted by four cities, City 1 (C1), City 2 (C2), City 3 (C4) and City 4 (C4). In the first scenario, which can be defined as *diffuse collaboration scenario*, the network is conceptualised as an organisation where all the members cooperate to achieve the same objective; that is the satisfaction of collective interests (tackling urban social and environmental issues) and selective interests (economic, formative and political incentives). Therefore, all the cities cooperate within the network. Since all the cities develop linkages, it may be hypothesised that there is a low probability that they compete within the network (for instance, for funding) and, for the same reason, there is a high probability that at least some of the member-cities will continue to cooperate outside the network environment, perhaps through town twinning or in other networks or projects. Nevertheless, the collaborative linkages do not necessarily eliminate competition among cities. As discussed in chapter 4, localities are engaged in a stiff international economic competition to attract capital, which is pivotal to increase the local budget. In light of such economic (and political) priority, it is unlikely that cities will withdraw from the international quest for investments.

As shown in chapter 2, cities can form partnerships engaging only a small number of members. Therefore, in the second scenario – the *selective cooperation scenario* - it can be hypothesised that within a network City 1 cooperates with City 2 by participating in a specific programme or by bidding for EU funding. In so doing, the two cities enter into competition with City 3 and City 4, which have formed their own partnership. Hence, within the network both cooperation and competition coexist. Outside the network, all the four cities compete against each other to attract investments, tourists, new residents etc.. However, there may be the possibility that the cooperative relations initiated in the network continue outside of it. In this case City 1 will keep collaborating with City 2 and City 3 will cooperate with City 4. By the same token, it may be also possible that cities that compete within a network for a specific project may collaborate for another one, or they may collaborate in another network or have in place between them other forms of collaborative arrangements (Figure 37).

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[155] It should be also noted that some authors (Bulkeley et al., 2003: 246-247; Keiner and Kim, 2007: 1385; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009: 324-326), while recognising the co-existence of cooperation and competition between networks, do not acknowledge this contradiction among city-members.

Figure 37: Cooperation and competition among network members: two possible scenarios

Diffuse collaboration scenario

	Cooperate	Compete
Within network	C_1, C_2 C_2, C_3 C_1, C_3 C_2, C_4 C_1, C_4 C_3, C_4	C_1, C_2 C_2, C_3 C_1, C_3 C_2, C_4 C_1, C_4 C_3, C_4
Outside network	C_1, C_2 C_2, C_3 C_1, C_3 C_2, C_4 C_1, C_4 C_3, C_4	C_1, C_2 C_2, C_3 C_1, C_3 C_2, C_4 C_1, C_4 C_3, C_4

Selective collaboration scenario

	Cooperate	Compete
Within network	C_1, C_2 C_3, C_4	C_1, C_3 C_1, C_4 C_2, C_3 C_2, C_4
Outside network	C_1, C_2 C_2, C_3 C_1, C_3 C_2, C_4 C_1, C_4 C_3, C_4	C_1, C_2 C_2, C_3 C_1, C_4 C_2, C_4 C_1, C_3 C_3, C_4

■ High probability
□ Low probability

The two scenarios outlined above exemplified the tension between cooperation and competition. The networks contribute to develop a sense of camaraderie through the establishment of personal relations among members. In this sense, the network can be conceived as a channel of transmission of ideas and potential solutions for the local level, or as a forum for cities to confront themselves with other European peers. However, competition is still in place, no matter whether member-cities engage in collective actions with all the members of the network or they develop closer relations with a small number of project partners. When cities engage in networks, competition is suspended to leave room to cooperation and their individual aspirations are juxtaposed - but not replaced - by collective interests to resolve common problems and challenges. Put in diplomatic terms, network membership represents an armistice, but not the end of the longstanding inter-urban conflict for capital.

8.2.2   The formative incentives: policy learning and policy innovation

The findings suggest that the formative incentives offered by networks to cities constitute the primary motivation for cities to engage. In particular, the possibility to share information and experience as well as learning from other cities is a significant spur for cities to participate in SEUNs. This result finds wide support in the literature. In this respect, the importance of networks as a means for information and

knowledge sharing and problem-solving has been highlighted by various authors[156]. However, Betsill and Bulkeley (2004: 490) found in their study that those member-cities that were pro-actively involved in the CCP network were more interested in the economic and political benefits and in "processes of knowledge creation and norm generation" than in the exchange of experiences and competencies. By way of contrast, the findings of the qualitative analysis showed that learning and knowledge sharing is the most important motivations for cities to join SEUNs.

The knowledge and information exchange results in policy learning. Cities within the network have the opportunity to get acquainted with the policies and initiatives implemented by other cities. The most successful examples become then a source of "inspiration" for other cities. As exemplified in Figure 38 below, there are two possible outcomes of policy learning. The first one is policy upgrade, which indicates a situation where an existing policy or measure is improved as a result of policy learning. Policy upgrade occurs where a given policy is already in place, but, thanks to the exchange of information and the learning of innovative examples, there is a general improvement. The second possible outcome of policy learning is policy transfer, whereby a policy or a specific measure developed in one place is emulated in another. Policy transfer implies the absence of the policy that is imported. However, policy transfer should not be intended as the mere reproduction of a policy in another city. It is necessary that the policy in question is transformed and adapted to the specificities of the urban context.

The formative potential of networks has been widely emphasised in the dedicate literature. For example, Le Galès (2002: 107) argues that transnational networks, besides enabling the circulation of competencies and capacities, are "places for learning policy norms and styles". Moreover, the author found that an important aspect for local personalities engaged in these networks is:

> "'learning Europe', that is, not only understanding the dynamics of policy-making at the EU level, or how to obtain funds, but also making sense of new repertoires and norms, understanding the logic and uncertainty associated with some programmes, understanding the dynamics of coalition-building and the diversity of interests represented within the EU, and, not least, understanding profoundly different institutional settings." (Le Galès, 2002: 107)

Additionally, "mimetic institutionalization" occurs in urban networks, whereby participants "learn from each other, and both behavioural norms and norms for implementing EU programmes emerge" (Le Galès, 2002: 107).

It can be inferred from the evidence that the exchange of information and knowledge, and the consequential policy learning, does not always end up with the migration of policy solutions. In this respect, in their study on the CCP programme, Betsill and Bulkeley (2004: 486) found that the exchange of knowledge and experiences did not automatically lead to policy learning and when this occurred, it took the form of a "discursive process", in that the programme was used to develop new interpretations of urban climate policy and to gain "legitimacy and authority". Similarly, Betsill and Bulkeley (2003 in Bulkeley et al., 2003: 248) claim that "policy learning", conceived as a "discursive process", is more

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[156] See Acuto (2013); Andonova *et al.* (2009); Bulkeley and Betsill (2003); Bulkeley *et al.* (2003); Bulkeley and Newell (2010); Clarke (2009); Ewen (2008); Ewen and Hebbert (2007); Goldsmith (1993); Happaerts et al. (2011); Kern (2009); Keiner and Kim (2007); Kern and Bulkeley (2009); Le Galès (2002); Marshall (2005); Ward and Williams (1997).

likely to take place within networks than "diffusion" and "transfer". In fact, policy learning may simply improve existing policies or even not producing any effects. This is the case in which a given local authority does not have the resources to implement the transferred idea; alternatively, policy learning fails to alter the status quo when local actors engaged in networks, by reporting back home their experience, do not make the case for change. Therefore, knowledge exchange is more about using other cities' successful stories to make the case with local governments and to some extent with the central government to obtain more freedom in policy implementation.

The migration of ideas under the form of policy upgrade or policy transfer may yield policy innovation. Policy innovation occurs when the upgraded or transferred policy results in a new policy never implemented before (Figure 38). As the evidence seems to suggest, local policy innovation is the result of incremental changes, rather than of sudden radical transformations. Hence, innovative elements modify previous policies. In more detail, the evidence shows that there are three types of policy innovation cities look for: 1) *policy content innovation,* which refers to the introduction of new types of projects, initiatives and programmes never implemented before; 2) *policy instrument innovation*, related to the introduction of new ways of achieving an existing policy objective 3) *process innovation*, which refers to new modes of administration and governance. All the three types of innovation are obviously aimed at renovating and improving the way local administrations operate in their territories.

Figure 38: The outcomes of knowledge exchange
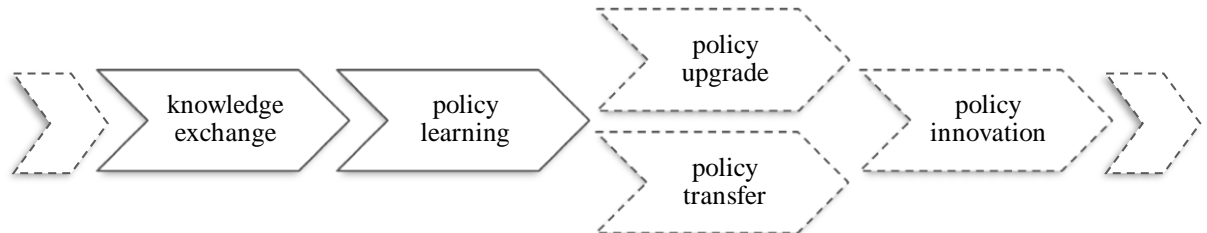
As a result of knowledge and information exchange, cities have the opportunity to know how other cities have dealt with common urban issues. Those cities that have tackled successfully a given problem become an example to reproduce at local level. The aim of reproducing foreign examples is to improve specific urban policy fields - for instance environmental quality - but also to improve or renovate urban governance, i.e. improving administrative practice. It is also argued that the participation in such networks has required the development of European contacts and the establishment of dedicated teams, therefore affecting the internal organisations of local councils (Le Galès, 2002: 107). In this sense, in European cities "local authority managers are learning and building a kind of new urban management culture" (Le Galès, 2002: 107).

In light of these findings, another aspect of the policy-making process deserves further attention. As seen before, the quantitative and qualitative findings of this thesis (despite the exceptional view of some participants) suggest that partisan politics does not appear to influence the work of SEUNs, which have pragmatic objectives. The diffusion of ideas and practices among network members reflects the

increasing de-politicisation of policy-making, which has become more technical, professionalised and a-political. Although policies cannot be plainly transferred from one place to another, politics does not seem to affect significantly policy design. In this respect, Church and Reid (1996: 1311) in their study on European cross-border cooperation argue that "policy standardisation", which is encapsulated in cooperative EU initiatives, may be detrimental to the independence of urban policy-making. On a more critical stand, Clarke (2012: 39) maintains that "contemporary urban policy mobility both produces and is produced by anti-politics". On the one hand, transnational municipal networks generate "generalisable" policy; on the other, as suggested by the "anti-politics" and "post-politics" scholarships, various factors (such as the unsuccessful endeavour of left-wing parties to rebuild their identities following the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1989, the economic neo-liberalisation in the 1980s, and the diffusion of new modes of governance) have sustained a trend towards a more technical policy-making (Clarke, 2012: 35-36). Similarly, it is argued that one of the assumptions on which municipal relations drew was that both "municipalism" and local authorities were not embedded in politics, but aimed at addressing social needs, thus making possible to establish linkages among individuals of diverging political views and transforming policies and experiences into a rigorous and a-political "communal science"[157] (Saunier, 2002: 522).

If politics and policy-making are kept as two separate domains, policies can be implemented by every local government, regardless of their political colour. If this is true, then it can be argued that local policy-making has lost any ideological component and has become more functional, revolving around the delivery of specific urban objectives. Rather than de-politicised, urban networks may be better conceptualised - borrowing Dunleavy's (1981: 7 in Hill, 2009: 57) phrase related to policy communities - as "systems of ideological corporatism", stemming from "the acceptance or dominance of an effectively unified view of the world across different sectors and institutions". Obviously, it cannot be concluded that all the cities across Europe share the very same viewpoints. However, it appears that in European politics some concepts and ideas have become dogmatic. An example is sustainable development. In this thesis it has been reported that all the participants expressed various opinions about sustainability; but these resemble variations on a theme. In fact, none of the respondents denied the conceptual and practical validity of sustainable development, which seems to be beyond question. Therefore, participation in networks does not homogenise European cities, which, as discussed previously, maintain their social, political and cultural characteristics. However, network engagement, as a result of the requirements set by EU funding programmes and the influence of the "trend-setters", may broaden the consensus on concepts, policy objectives and practices, while marginalising dissenting views.

8.2.2.1 The uneven role of European cities in the policy innovation process

As previously discussed, another incentive for cities to join SEUNs is the comparability aspect and the consequential "virtue of emulation". Within the network cities have the chance to confront themselves with other peers and receive feedback and suggestions from other cities that can be used to improve the content of policies, the policy-making process or the policy instruments. This finding is in tune with Saunier's historical review of international municipal connections, where he observes that municipal

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[157] See Payre (2002).

examples were implemented through various processes, including "imitation, reappropriation or adaptation" (2002: 519). In other words, transnational municipalism provides cities not only with techniques and competencies, but also examples of policy innovations to be used as "a rhetorical armoury" in discourses to change or improve urban conditions (Saunier, 2002: 520). Leitner and Sheppard (2002: 513) observe that "imitation", incentivised by the exchange of experience and knowledge, may be detrimental to the development of innovative solutions. In this sense, the possibility to find readymade solutions (proposed by the trend-setters) to urban issues in the networks may weaken the innovation capacity of the city-members.

The exchange of information and experience is more intense between comparable places, which share commonalities in terms of socio-economic characteristics of the territory and their vision for the future. Previous research has pointed out how policy learning in TMNs is regulated by the principle of "homophily", by which members sharing the same language or regional background are more likely to develop linkages (Lee and Meene, 2012). This comparability aspect has always been a salient element of transnational municipalism, resting on the idea - underpinning "municipal connections" - that all cities across Europe (and beyond) share common beliefs and norms: an example is the competition among localities to resemble the "ideal 'modern' city", which spanned across the late years of 19[th] century to the 1940s (Saunier, 2002: 522). In a similar fashion, contemporary transnational municipalism promotes a new urban archetype of modern city, where sustainability and innovation are crucial aspects. The evidence gathered suggest that those cities that have been able to reinvent their image (in terms of development of new industries, re-skilling of people, and physical regeneration of their territory) have set the trend in urban development policy, which other cities seek to emulate. These different trajectories of urban development have been determined by a mix of factors, such as financial availability and political agency, which have determined the more or less successful recovery from the process of de-industrialisation.

The presence of two groups of members, labelled here as trend-setters and followers, has been found in other contributions on the topic, although the criteria used for categorising city-members are different. For instance, Kern and Alber (2008: 14) report the presence of "pioneers and laggards" in inter-urban networks, which seek to reduce the differences between them "by setting tiered standards that attract members with differing levels of performance and ambition". Likewise, Kern and Bulkeley (2009: 326, 329), in their study on the networks Climate Alliance, Cities for Climate Protection and Energie-Cités, argue that these networks "are networks of pioneers for pioneers", which are those cities that have been actively engaged in networks since their outset. Furthermore, Keiner and Kim (2007: 1393) distinguish the presence in TMNs of the "giving end", i.e. "the forerunner cities" that have a leading role, and the "receiving end", which exploits what networks offer. In this respect, Leitner and Sheppard (2002: 512) claim that within networks "unequal power relations" are likely to develop: the different economic background of cities affects the capacity to negotiate, so that the advantages of network involvement are not equally spread among members at the expenses of deprived localities.

It is noteworthy to explore which cities constitute the trend-setters within European urban networks. By placing the model in Figure 26 (chapter 7) onto the European geographic map, it emerges that the cities with which the respondents compare themselves – either because they share commonalities or are good

policy examples - are mainly concentrated in the Northern-continental Europe, with some centres in South-West Europe. In more detail, the cities mentioned by most of the respondents[158] are located mainly in Germany, followed by some centres in Northern England, France and Northern Spain (Figure 39).

Figure 39: Urban influence in the EU

The geographical location of the "influential" cities broadly recalls the area identified by Brunet in 1989 as the European backbone *("dorsale")*, famously named "blue banana" (Figure 40), which stretches from Northern England to Northern Italy. This area "was different from the rest of the European locations based on demographic, economic level as well as in a cultural and in infrastructure level" (Metaxas and Tsavdaridou, 2013: 16). In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the cities in the central area had an economic advantage due to the development of advanced production, while marginal cities, such as "Dublin, Lisbon, Seville, Palermo, Cagliari, Athens and Thessaloniki", did not have these resources at their disposal (Hall, 1992; cited in Lever, 1993: 936).

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[158] Here the respondents refer to the aggregate data for each city.

Figure 40: The "blue banana"
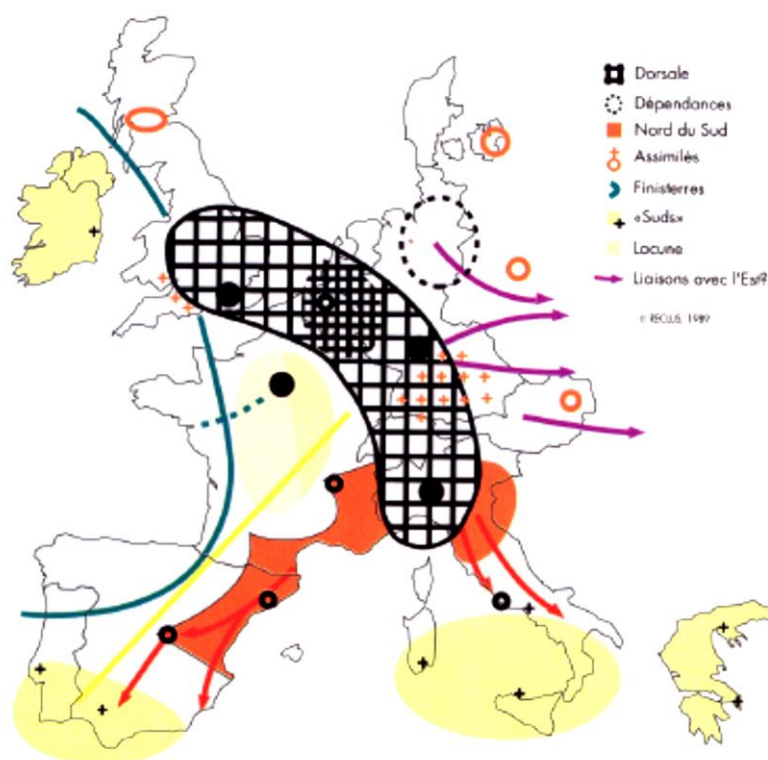
Source: Brunet (1989) in ESPON and INTERREG (2006: 10).

To some extent, the findings seem to suggest a parallelism between the relations among network members and the European urban economic geography. In other words, it appears that the relationships among network members reproduce the long-lasting pattern of the European urban development: the poles of economic growth – located in the core of continental Europe with few centres in the North and South-West – seem to assume the role of trend-setters.

The argument about this overlapping between inter-member relations and patterns of urban development is also reinforced by the silence of the respondents about Eastern European cities. In effect, no cities from the Eastern bloc were indicated by the interviewees, either as noteworthy examples of urban policies, or as project partners with which they have shared experience and information. This finding can be partly explained by the recent interests of Eastern European local authorities in TMNs. In effect, the study conducted some years ago by Keiner and Kim (2007) on transnational networks for sustainable development found that most of the big cities in Eastern Europe were not members of any networks (Keiner and Kim, 2007). However, to date the presence of several Eastern European cities - not only capitals - in SEUNs is increasing[159]. This finding is in contrast with some previous research: for the case of Eurocities, Kübler and Piliutyte (2007) argue that more disadvantaged cities as well as those from recent member-states, unlike well-off European capitals, are more attracted by the possibility offered by

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[159] For example, some cities in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, and Poland, as well as Bratislava, Budapest, Ljubljana, Riga, Tallinn, Timisoara, Vilnius and Zagreb are full members of Eurocities. A few Eastern European cities are also members of Iclei Europe; additionally, Budapest and Tallinn are members of Polis.

TMNs to take part in European projects. Conversely, it appears that inter-member relations reproduce not only the long-standing North-South divide - albeit less marked than it was during the Fordist period – but also a stark difference between Western and Eastern European cities.

A final observation on the geography of inter-member relations should be made on the concept of polycentrism. As discussed in chapter 2, TMNs are described as "polycentric", insofar as decision-making rests with a plurality of centres (Bulkeley *et al.*, 2003; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009). The decision-making polycentrism does not appear to match an equal distribution of the influence among network members. The presence of trend-setters mainly located in the old European backbone of economic development suggests that cities outside this area are struggling to position themselves on the European urban map. Following the parallelism between the geography of economic development and the location of the influential member-cities, then it can be argued that the networks do not reflect a "polycentric Europe"[160]. From an economic perspective, this model indicates an urban system where inter-urban competition is "complemented by an element of cooperation and mutual help among regions and cities" - graphically represented by the "European grape"[161] (Figure 41) (Kunzmann and Wegener1991: 291). Conversely, the findings seem to suggest that within SEUNs there are not several influential cities scattered across Europe. Additionally, the less influential role within networks of Eastern European cities, as suggested by the findings of the thematic analysis, does not reflect another economic model, which foresees the emergence of influential member-cities in Eastern Europe. Accordingly, cities such as Warsaw, Prague and Budapest would become important economic nodes, as exemplified by the image of the "Red Octopus" (Van der Meer, 1998) (Figure 42).

Figure 41: The "European grape"   Figure 42: The "Red octopus"
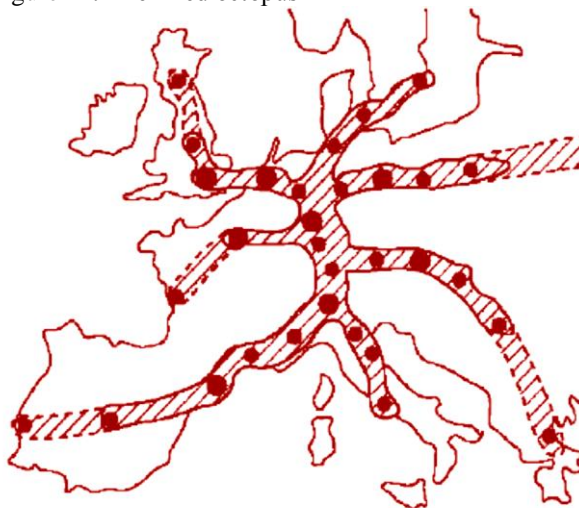
Source: Kunzmann and Wegener (1991: 291).   Source: Van der Meer (1998) in Metaxas and Tsavdaridou (2013: 18).

To some extent, the presence of trend-setters and followers seems to suggest a multi-speed model of network membership, whereby a number of more economically and socially advanced - and as a

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[160] See also TAEU 2020 (2011).
[161] Kunzmann and Wegener' (1991) "European Grape" suggested that the geography of Europe would have been drawn by several groups of cities of different sizes (Metaxas and Tsavdaridou, 2013: 17).

reflection more influential – cities are more tightly connected in collaborative relations, constituting the core of the urban Europe.

8.2.2.2 Learning urban sustainability

The knowledge and information exchange occurring within the networks prompts cities to question and analyse their urban policies, which, through policy learning process, may be improved or renewed. The need for local governments to find new ideas to improve the local economic performance as well as the social and environmental situation in their territories responds to the urban regeneration objectives of urban economic restructuring, physical requalification and social renewal. Urban regeneration is important for local political elites in that any improvement in terms of quality of life may result in an electoral payoff. In this sense, European urban networking fits into a wider plan to boost urban development. This claim is supported by Ewen's historical analysis of Birmingham's international engagement (2008: 103), where it is argued that "municipalities continued to play the leading role in forging new policy networks in regenerating cities, through a process of transnational municipalism".

Therefore, the relatively recent interest of local governments in the idea of urban sustainability has to be interpreted in light of urban regeneration, as it serves as a framework for the latter. As widely discussed in the previous chapters, sustainable development responds to the willingness to undertake regeneration within ethical – but not ideological - principles. In effect, the promise of economic growth coupled with social fairness and low environmental impact aptly works as an ethical frame to guide regeneration plans.

The sustainable development discourse is also instrumental to policy innovation. The challenge posed by sustainability implies the development of innovative and creative solutions to achieve economic growth while ensuring social equality and environmental quality. In this respect, the goal of sustainability has contributed to drive policy innovation at local level. Sustainable mobility plans, measures to reduce carbon emissions, natural capital management, green procurement etc. represent important policy instruments that local authorities have been increasingly using in their territories.

Most of the respondents seemed to be committed to sustainable development, although assuming critical stances in this regard and showing different opinions. Here, agency plays a significant role in determining the scope and intensity of the European commitment of local governments to sustainable development. While it cannot be ruled out the possibility that some personalities in local councils may see sustainable development as a label to shake off the image as an industrial city and attract investments, this argument cannot be generalised. Actually, with the incorporation of sustainable development - and of environmentalism more widely - in political values, it is not unusual to find in local governments sustainability champions, i.e. councillors or officers committed to sustainability issues. This finding is consistent with Betsill and Bulkeley (2004: 481), who argue that the presence of "political champions" was a relevant element for encouraging and maintaining cities' engagement in the CCP programme, although it should not be emphasised.

If policy learning constitutes one motivation for participating in networks, the focus on sustainable development is an added value to the motivations to participate in SEUNs. The importance of sustainable

development for cities (witnessed by the preference for TMNs with a focus on sustainable urban development) is that it can be used as a guiding principle – a vision – to undertake urban regeneration. However, urban restructuring is not a direct motivation for cities to get engage in SEUNs, but it is rather a secondary or indirect objective. Cities participate to learn from other cities and showcase their experience with the aim of becoming more advanced. In this sense, policy learning in the realm of sustainable development is the vector of urban restructuring.

8.2.3 The political incentives of networking

The third type of selective incentives provided by network membership is constituted by political incentives. The opportunity of lobbying at EU level and to indirectly influence through the European channel the central state are significant drivers of cities' engagement in networks.

8.2.3.1 Lobbying the EU institutions

In addition to the economic and learning opportunities, networks offer political incentives. The most relevant political incentive for local governments to participate in European networks is the possibility to lobby. The importance of lobbying for network members has been highlighted by several authors[162]. However, lobbying is not the ultimate purpose or a function of networks, as claimed by some of these contributions (see section 2.1.2), but rather a motivation for cities to engage. In other words, the possibility for cities to influence the EU funding programmes and legislation to their advantage is one of the reasons that explain why local governments join networks.

Through the networks cities can act jointly to make their voice heard by the EU institutions and indirectly by national governments. This would be much more difficult if each European city sought to lobby alone. Therefore, thanks to the possibility of undertaking collective action, cities can strengthen their political influence on the EU political agenda. Similar argument can be found in Payre and Saunier (2008). With regard to the case of Eurocities, the authors suggest that this network can be conceived as "a pressure group that represents the interests of large cities in and around the European Union's institutions" (Payre and Saunier, 2008: 72). Additionally, Kübler and Piliutyte (2007: 370) argue that, by participating in networks, cities have the opportunity to enhance their importance on European issues (i.e. "collective incentives") and fine-tune their knowledge and competences on a particular theme, which in turn allows them to improve their position on the European stage (selective incentives). By assuming a pro-active role within the networks, especially by acquiring executive positions, cities seek to demonstrate that they are seriously committed to tackle social, economic and environmental urban problems. This in turn contributes to improve their credibility in negotiations with EU institutions.

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[162] Bennington and Harvey (1994); Betsill and Bulkeley (2006); Bulkeley and Betsill (2003); Bulkeley *et al*. (2003); Clarke (2009); Ewen (2008); Happaerts et al. (2010); Happaerts *et al*. (2011); Heinelt and Niederhafner (2008); Kern (2009); Kern and Bulkeley (2009); Kübler and Piliutyte (2007); Labaeye and Sauer (2013); Le Galès (2002); Marshall (2005); Niederhafner (2013); Phelps *et al*. (2002); Ward and Williams (1997).

The aim of lobbying is to negotiate with EU institutions over the content of funding programmes and legislation that may impact on local authorities. Therefore, the lobbying activity is the political manifestation of networks, insofar as the "message" that city-members want to convey to the EU institutions is the expression of their views and priorities. Furthermore, the lobbying activity carried out through networks reproduces on a lower scale the negotiation practices proper of international diplomatic relations - the paradiplomatic activities of local governments (see on this point Kern, 2009). By acting as collective units, the networks enable cities to strengthen their bargain power and to acquire a certain influence on the policy-making of the EU institutions.

8.2.3.2 Engagement in SEUN and local-centre relationship

In addition to influencing EU legislation and funding programmes, cities conceive networks as an indirect channel through which to influence the central state. By using other European peers' examples, cities try to make the case with the national state to obtain more flexibility and freedom to better address local problems. To some extent, European examples become the argument for negotiating more autonomy with the central state. This argument can also be found in Payre and Saunier (2008: 73), who argue that local governments' supra-national engagement have equipped cities with "political, intellectual, and practical resources to enable a given municipality to adjust its presence on the intermunicipal map, develop its agency within national politics, and fulfil its search for local support".

However, the greater autonomy that cities gain though networks should not be overstated. The political freedom of member-cities is constrained by the very same existence of the central state: while the latter does not assume an interventionist role in the international activity of local governments, nonetheless it establishes by law the perimeters within which local authorities are free to move. Therefore, as one of the respondents suggested, local governments do not increase their autonomy, but their self-reliance through the participation in SEUNs. The tension between the local and the national levels has been identified by some authors. For example, Bulkeley and Betsill (2003: 190) found that the CCP programme, on the one hand, has enabled the members to adopt independent decisions and "bypass" central governments; on the other, it is "a state-based organization" inasmuch as the member-cities often collaborate with the nation-state. In particular, Bulkeley and Betsill (2003: 191) in the conclusion to their book on the CCP programme, observe that this initiative pointed out that in the field of climate change the "hollowing out" of the state and the prominence of multi-level governance do not imply the reduction of sovereignty of the nation-state. In this sense, the "hollowing out" of the state does not equate with the "withering away of the state". Similarly, Le Galès (2002), while analysing the reduced role of the nation-state as a result of European integration and the devolution of powers to sub-national authorities, also admits that nation-states are an integral part of the European architecture. In particular, he argues that

> "[l]ocal authorities and pressure groups that are marginal in the national political system have found that the European political space in the making offers them the possibility of organizing trans-nationally and at the European level. [...] Yet this is equally true of the state and its elites, notably its administrative elites" (Le Galès, 2002: 95).

Therefore, the European system has favoured not only local governments but also national bureaucracy, which has had "the opportunity to regain certain areas of autonomy in regard to organized interests, cities,

or the most disadvantaged groups and territories" (Le Galès, 2002: 95). Similarly, the study conducted by Church and Reid (1996) on the *Transmanche* region found a growing participation of the central government, evident in the presence of officials from the national government in the *Interreg* programme management.

The autonomous action of local governments is bound to constitutional arrangements, which impose policy-making and budgetary constraints. Therefore, it cannot be argued that transnational municipalism increases the autonomy of cities. Nevertheless, participation in networks broadens the room for manoeuvre of local governments. Firstly, the engagement in European networks increases cities' economic self-sufficiency, thanks to the possibility to build up partnerships to bid into EU funding. Secondly, the lobbying activity at EU level contributes to substantiate the political influence that cities can exert on both EU legislation and funding programmes and national policy-making. Networks are structures where cities pursue policy and political goals that originate at local levels. As Leitner and Sheppard (2002: 509-511) argue, European urban networking provide "new political spaces for localities" helping them to reinforce their political clout.

Transnational municipalism is a means for local authorities to find the solutions to their problems that central governments have not provided. To some extent, transnational municipalism reflects the tensions between the central and local levels; but it cannot be concluded that this phenomenon proves the progressive "delinking" of cities from the national level. The growing importance of cities has been enabled by the devolution of powers from the central to the local level. However, local authorities are still dependent on the national level, due to the financial and political trade-off between the state and local governments. The latter are still reliant on national financial transfer – although the regulation of the central-local relationship varies from one country to another. Moreover, party politics still constitutes a unifying role, in that local and national politicians affiliated to the same party tend to share the same views and policy practices. The central-local interplay is visible in the increasing importance that local politics is assuming in national politics.

To summarize, the evidence shows that cities' engagement in SEUNs is motivated more by the prospect of influencing EU institutions and indirectly the national level than by the willingness to increase their autonomy.

8.3   The urban-level perspective on SEUN membership

While the political, formative and to a lesser extent economic incentives represent the reason for cities to participate in SEUNs, the drivers of transnational municipalism for sustainability have to be found at urban level, as hypothesised in chapter 4. While some of the drivers were explicitly mentioned in the evidence, such as political personalities and parties, others were not discussed directly by the participants, such as the values and the attitudes towards the networks, but these could be inferred from the answers provided.

8.3.1   The political milieu of SEUN participation: parties, personalities and values

The qualitative analysis examined the relationship between politics and transnational municipalism. In this respect, it is assumed that cities' engagement in SEUNs is embedded in the political environment of the local government. This means that SEUN membership is a function of the following factors:

- party politics and political agency,
- the previous experience in networks, and
- the institutionalised values and attitudes.

With regard to the influence of party politics over SEUN engagement, the findings of the thematic analysis are contradictory: while for some respondents party politics does not affect network membership, for other participants it does. This second opinion emerging from some responses seems to be in tune with the results of the regression analysis, which showed that centre-left local councils have a higher propensity to engage in networks. The mixed findings on the influence of party politics can be explained by taking into account the fact that membership and participation in networks are two distinctive phenomena. Membership implies a one-off choice – or at least a decision taken at one point in time - in which party politics might exert an influence along with other factors, such as political agency, a city's international reputation and financial situation. By way of contrast, participation is an on-going commitment, where the personalities involved play a far more significant role than party politics. In particular, the role of political champions is crucial to determine not only the choice of the networks in which to participate, but also the type of engagement. However, it should be noted that, in the long run, the benefits deriving from participation in a network affect even more significantly the choice to stay in or withdraw from a network.

The role of local politics in determining the engagement of cities in European networks has been acknowledged by some authors. For instance, Payre and Saunier (2008: 73) argue that the prospect of gaining "political and policy resources" prompted Lyon to take part into UIV and Eurocities. In particular, the authors see "the political affiliations and worldviews of mayors and councillors, the existence of knowledge-based transnational networks amongst municipal technicians, and the adaptation or resistance to changes in the urban world order" as "important mitigating factors" affecting cities' choice as to whether to participate in an urban organisation (Payre and Saunier, 2008: 72-73). By way of contrast, Church and Reid (1996: 1310) found that the diverging political leaning of the two members of the *Transmanche Metropole* did not hinder their collaboration, partially due to their availability to reach an agreement.

Moreover, Payre and Sunier (2008), exploring the involvement of the city of Lyon in Eurocities, suggest that politicians engaged in networks to increase their political appeal in their territories. This argument has not found direct corroboration in this thesis. However, it can be speculated that local politicians' reputation may benefit indirectly from European exposure. As stated by some of the participants in this study, local governments' engagement at EU level appears to be a way to increase their visibility, to position themselves onto the European map. This latter finding is in tune with some studies (see for instance Happaerts et al., 2010; Payre, 2010). Raising a city's profile yields an economic return, in terms

of inward investments. If a city succeeds in attracting external capital, then there will be a political gain for local elected engaged in such activities.

In addition to the role played by "political champions", the previous experience in networks exerts some influence on SEUN membership. In some cases local governments may maintain their membership because a long-lasting involvement in a given network. In this sense, it can be argued that network engagement is path-dependent. In particular, the "historical members", who have devoted many years in a network and even have assumed prominent positions, seem to be more likely to maintain their commitment. However, a lengthy membership may be the result of a non-decision. While some cities decide to maintain their active participation in a network, others keep being network members simply because membership is not formally questioned. In this latter case, institutional inertia explains the length of network membership.

Finally, the thematic analysis examined the role that local governments' values and attitudes play in determining participation in SEUNs. As discussed in the previous chapter, participation in SEUNs is primarily motivated by the prospect of gaining economic, formative and political incentives. According to the evidence, it appears that the decision to participate in SEUN stems from a cost-benefit analysis: cities engage in networks if the benefits are greater than the costs. This finding is in line with previous research on the topic. For example, Kern and Bulkeley (2009: 326) found that for the "pioneer cities" in the UK and Germany the advantages of participation in TMNs were greater than the costs, in particular because the membership fees were compensated by the funding received through EU projects. In this sense, network involvement appears to be primarily functional and opportunistic. However, the participation of European local governments in urban networks is not only incentive-oriented, but it is also shaped by values and attitudes that characterise the political environment in which local governments are embedded. In other words, the set of values and attitudes in which the decision to join a network was made helps to explain cities' engagement in European urban networks.

8.4   Concluding remarks

The qualitative analysis has sought to shed light on the incentives and factors that explain European cities' participation in SEUNs through a series of in-depth interviews and questionnaires using a sample of European second cities. Although this might be seen as a limitation, given the considerable number of cities involved in European urban networks for sustainable development, it actually constitutes a methodological strength. A wider sample including small and capital cities would have made it difficult to undertake an intensive cross-case analysis. Furthermore, the sample of cases used in the qualitative analysis is justified by the nested design of this research, which has made more robust and reliable the case selection process. As a limitation of qualitative studies, the conclusions reached by this thesis may not provide an explanation for other forms of sub-national mobilisation or for other types of networks. Nevertheless, the confirmation of the findings of the qualitative analysis provided by previous research on TMNs as well as the results of the quantitative analysis seems to suggest that a certain degree of inference is possible.

The evidence of the thematic analysis provides support to the assumptions formulated (see chapter 7 and section 8.1) and proves the validity of the urban approach as an analytical tool. For what concerns the horizontal level of analysis, the findings have shown that the learning potential of networks and the political incentives seem to be significant motivations for cities to participate in SEUNs. In effect, the prospect of exchanging information and experience with other European peers, especially those cities sharing similar characteristics in terms of socio-economic background, constitutes a significant spur for cities to engage in SEUNs. In so doing, members have at their disposal a series of policy solutions from which they can take cue to tackle local issues. Moreover, the involvement of cities in these organisations is motivated by political incentives, in that local governments use the network as a means to widen their political influence on the EU institutions and to some extent on central governments. Finally, the possibility to build project partnership with other network members constitutes a motivation for cities to participate in SEUNs. However, the economic incentives do not seem to be a direct motivation for joining SEUNs. EU funding can be obtained only through the establishment of partnerships with other cities and the submission of a winning application for funding. Likewise, inward investments are an indirect incentive of network membership, since only through the development of an international profile, can cities increase their chances to attract capital. Therefore, the prospect of economic benefits constitutes a second-level explanation to inter-urban cooperation.

With regard to the urban level of analysis, the evidence seems to suggest the importance of political agency in determining the engagement in SEUNs. By way of contrast, the role of politics is not completely clear: while for few respondents some aspects of SEUN engagement seem to be affected by political positions of the members, for others SEUNs are not influenced by political views. Moreover, the answers provided by some of the participants suggest that past experience in networks, both in the form of path-dependence or institutional inertia, determines present involvement in SEUNs. Through a more in-depth analysis of the evidence, it was possible to infer that values, such as Europhilia and environmentalism, and attitudes towards European networks may play a role in explaining the international commitment of cities. Since participants did not declare explicitly their positions on European integration or on ecological matters, but they were inferred from an in-depth analysis of the evidence, the impact of values and attitudes on SEUN engagement should be treated with some caution.

This latter point illustrates the fact that some factors (or variables) wield more influence than others on the decision to participate in SEUNs, thus holding a greater explanatory power. While it is not possible to assign precise numerical values to evaluate the magnitude of the impact exerted by the explanatory variables on the dependent variable, the themes identified in the qualitative evidence can be classified and organised hierarchically according to their contribution in explaining the phenomenon under study. In this sense, the use of "orders" allows us to distinguish and categorise the contribution of each explanatory variables in understanding SEUN membership. To assess the explanatory power of the factors identified in the thematic analysis it is important to consider if one factor is explicitly mentioned by the respondents along with any evaluation of its importance or if it is inferred from the evidence. Following these guidelines, it is possible to categories the motivations and drivers of SEUN membership according to their explanatory power in the following four orders (Table 28):

- *1ˢᵗ order (explicit)*: the factors are quoted explicitly by the respondents and provide a direct contribution to explain cities' participation in SEUNs;

- *2ⁿᵈ order (explicit)*: the factors are mentioned in the evidence and the participants explicitly declare the non-immediate relevance;

- *3ʳᵈ order (implicit)*: these are not explicitly mentioned by participants, but they are inferred from the analysis of the evidence;

- *Fuzzy*: mixed results not providing a clear explanation.

These four orders can be conceptualised as the qualitative equivalent of the size of the coefficient in the regression analysis. Unlike statistical methods, qualitative research is not meant to measure the magnitude and the effect of one factor over another. Nevertheless, the depth and detailed nature of the qualitative evidence enables to detect or infer which reasons, actors or facts constitute the most significant drivers of a given phenomenon.

Table 28: Assumptions of the qualitative study and strength of the explanatory power of SEUN membership

Explanations	Explanatory variables		Type of explanatory power			
			1^{st} order	2^{nd} order	3^{rd} order	Fuzzy
Functional membership	Economic incentives	EU project partnerships	✓			
		EU funding		✓		
		City's profile	✓			
		External investments			✓	
	Formative incentive	Knowledge exchange and learning	✓			
		Comparison/emulation	✓			
	Political incentives	Lobbying EU institutions	✓			
		Influence on the central state	✓			
Politically embedded membership	Political agency		✓			
	Political parties					✓
	Political values				✓	
	Path-dependency/institutional inertia				✓	

As shown in Table 28, the formative and political incentives as well as building EU project partnerships, the development of the city's profile and the presence of a political personality keen in European engagement or concerned about sustainable development are important drivers of a pro-active participation in sustainability-related networks. Moreover, the possibility of accessing EU funding was mentioned by some respondents, but some of them explicitly emphasised that this was not a primary motivation underpinning their involvement in SEUNs. Therefore, this economic incentive can be considered as a secondary driver of SEUN engagement. Furthermore, the prospect of gaining external investments, the political values fostering inter-urban European involvement and the precedent experience in networks (path-dependency/institutional inertia) were not explicitly mentioned as drivers of SEUN membership. However, after a careful in-depth analysis of the evidence, it was possible to identify these factors. Finally, the contribution of partisan politics to gain an understanding of cities' engagement in SEUNs is not clear, since for some respondents it does affect SEUN membership while for other it does not.

In light of the above discussion, it can be argued that the thematic analysis proved to be a flexible tool to analyse the considerable amount of data collected through the interviews and questionnaires. The thematic analysis, while leaving freedom to handle the data, is a helpful method to identify and categorise recurring topics in a textual corpus of data. In so doing, it was possible to delve deeper into the reasons underpinning cities' participation in networks for sustainability, while exploring those aspects not analysed in the quantitative part of this thesis.

This chapter concludes the empirical part of this thesis comprising the quantitative and qualitative analyses. Final considerations on the whole research process and the contribution of this thesis are provided in the next chapter.

9.   CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides some concluding reflections on the thesis. In the first section a model of cities' participation in SEUNs is presented, followed by a discussion of the contribution of this research in the discipline. In the final section some concluding observations on the findings are provided.

9.1   A model of transnational municipalism for sustainability

In the introduction of this thesis a series of research questions were set out. These have been answered through a review of the literature, a quantitative and qualitative analyses. In more detail, a comprehensive review of the literature was undertaken, which included not only the contributions on TMNs and transnational municipalism, but also research in European and urban studies. As a result, it was possible to develop the urban approach as the analytical framework for the thesis. The urban approach outlined in the first part of this thesis hypothesised that cities' participation in inter-urban networks for sustainable development is influenced by the political, economic and institutional urban context and motivated by the prospect of gaining collective and selective incentives. These hypotheses have been tested by undertaking regression analyses and a thematic analysis of interviews and questionnaires. The quantitative analysis has found that "modern cities" and local governments with a tendency to participate in TMNs are more likely to participate in SEUNs. Furthermore, the results of the regression analyses have shown that party politics does not impact on the decision to join SEUNs, but it affects the propensity to join networks, with centre-left local governments more likely to be members of a higher number of SEUNs. The qualitative findings suggest that the involvement in SEUNs is motivated by the possibility to obtain formative, political and economic incentives that help European local governments to improve their policy-making and develop their cities. Furthermore, the thematic analysis suggests that the political environment of the local government influences SEUN engagement: agency, path-dependency and institutionalised values concur to explain the reason underpinning network membership.

To conclude, it is possible to define a model of the participation of local governments in SEUNs. This model, displayed in Figure 43, summarises the urban approach developed in this thesis and is informed by the findings of the quantitative and qualitative analyses. As shown in Figure 43, the causal factors (or the drivers) of cities' participation in SEUNs have to be found at urban level, which is described by the economic, political and institutional domains. These drivers prompt cities to develop strategies and find solutions to address local economic problems (e.g. regeneration) or political demands (such dominant political positions and values). One of these strategies is the participation in European urban networks, such as SEUNs, which provides local governments with formative, political and economic incentives. In this sense, it can be argued that SEUN participation is both embedded in the urban context, in that the urban system provides the backdrop to transnational municipalism, and incentive-oriented, insofar as cities instrumentally exploit the networks to obtain collective and selective benefits, which in turn help to tackle urban issues.

Figure 43: Model of European cities' participation in urban networks for sustainable development: the application of the urban approach
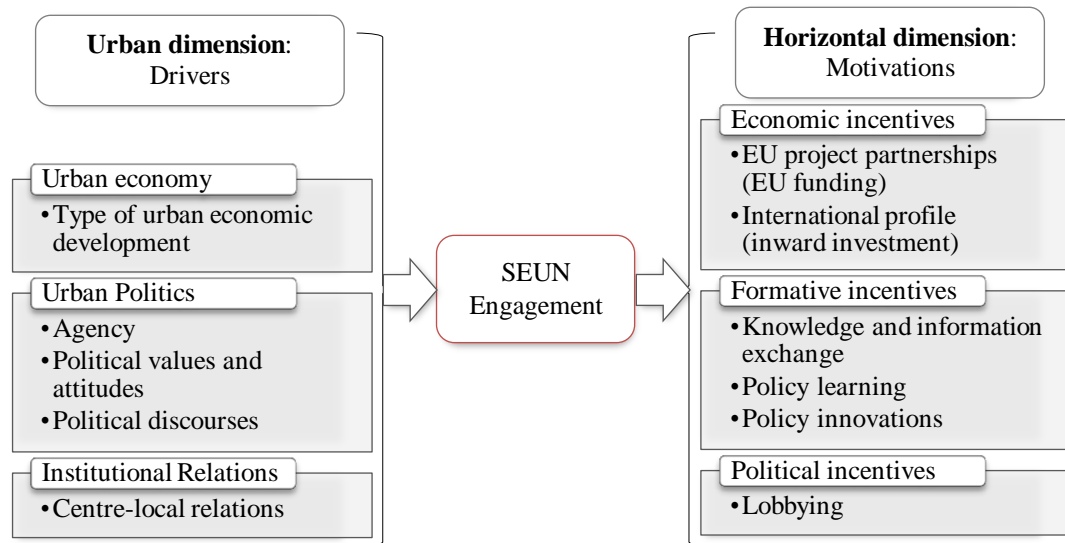
This model provides a tool to understand transnational municipalism for sustainability in the EU. Although this thesis has focused on the engagement of cities in networks for sustainability, this model can be applied also to explore the engagement of sub-national authorities in other types of organisations. As will be discussed in the next sections, the use of multiple methods permits a certain degree of inference.

9.2   The contribution of the study

This thesis sought to shed light on the drivers and motivations for European cities to join inter-urban networks for sustainable development. The choice to focus on this specific category of municipal network was dictated by two reasons. On the one hand, the number of cooperative urban networks whose mission includes more or less specifically sustainability has grown sizeably in the last decades. On the other hand, the sprawling of these organisations has been paralleled by a burgeoning literature exploring this phenomenon. Nevertheless, the existing research on this topic presents some limitations. Firstly, the body of research on TMNs for sustainability seems to lack methodological rigour in the research process (from case selection to data analysis). Secondly, there seems to be a mismatch between the theoretical framework(s) used – especially when a multi-level governance perspective is adopted - and the findings. As observed in the first part of this thesis, the theoretical premises do not seem to match the method adopted. Thirdly, previous studies have treated environmental networks as self-standing and peculiar forms of organisations. Lastly, research on the topic has paid little attention to the political meaning of transnational municipalism for European second cities.

This research has sought to address such limitations by providing a contribution on two levels: analytical and methodological. From an analytical perspective, this thesis constitutes an attempt to develop an approach to examine the research topic adopting a different angle from previous studies in the field. While multi-scale approaches have been widely used and praised as comprehensive analytical frameworks to phenomena that, like transnational municipalism, interlink multiple scales, the usefulness

of an analysis focused on the urban level has been often dismissed. By adopting a critical stance towards multi-scale approaches, this thesis has opted for a perspective focusing on the city, in an attempt to rehabilitate the distinctiveness of the urban dimension, which, as some theoretical approaches suggest, seem to be dissolved in the global world. In so doing, this thesis has rejected multi-scale approaches as means to analyse the engagement of cities in SEUNs and has drawn upon the urban political scholarship complemented by the collective action theory applied to policy networks. This framework, which combines the urban-centred and horizontal perspectives, has enabled us to understand the relationship between the urban economic and political context and the development of transnational strategies to address local issues.

Additionally, the urban approach has paid significant attention to two aspects of transnational municipalism for sustainability that have been overlooked by many contributions in the field. Firstly, the thematic dimension has been analysed separately from the network dimension. This is because SEUNs are first and foremost organisational structures whose rationale rests with collective and selective incentives to undertake action. The sustainability dimension is a plus, which adds up to the motivations prompting cities to engage supra-nationally. Drawing on contributions of urban political scholarship, this thesis has rejected a normative view of sustainable development and environmental policy. In this sense, the involvement of cities in European urban networks for sustainability is motivated primarily by incentives that are instrumental to achieve urban economic development, although conceived in environmental-friendly terms. The preference of cities for networks focusing on sustainable development is the result of the mainstreaming of environmentalism in post-materialist politics. The fact that many politicians pay more attention to environmental issues than in the past is evident in the number of national and international agreements signed up by nation-states and by the wealth of political documents and discourses replete with references to socio-ecological issues. The environment has been popularised across the whole political spectrum because it has opened up new opportunities to sustain growth. It is symptomatic the fact that ideas such as sustainable development and green economy, which do not propose any radical change to the current economic system and lifestyle choices, have obscured other socio-ecological alternatives. Post-growth theories, such as "degrowth" or "simple living", and more radical alternative economic systems, for instance the "Blue Economy"[163], have been marginalised both in the political and academic debates. Sustainable development is not ideology-oriented, but is political, insofar as it helps local political elites to pursue economic and political objectives. This thesis has sought to show that, despite the wealth of research arguing that local governments are really committed to tackle environmental issues, their involvement is primarily - although not exclusively – instrumental to address economic and political rather that socio-ecological objectives. This is also due to the fact that local authorities' environmental action is constrained by a series of factors: institutional (relationship with nation-state and the limited powers of policy implementation), political (ideological position towards environment and international participation; relationship with central parties; electoral payoff), and economic (need to growth; employment generation). As the findings of this thesis have shown, the conditions of the urban context push local governments to implement strategies to tackle local issues.

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[163] The Blue Economy, developed by Gunter Pauli (2010), is an economic model based on emulating natural systems and exploiting physics to reduce consumption and waste and generate jobs.

Among such plans, transnational municipalism, in particular in the realm of sustainability, represents a means through which to address urban regeneration.

The second central component of the urban approach is the role of parties and political actors. The findings have shown mixed results, highlighting how party politics, although not exerting a strong influence on the decision to join, may affect the scope of the commitment to networks. In other words, while it cannot be argued that networks are ideologically oriented, in that local governments of different political outlook are members, they are politically oriented: the choice of some policies and practices over others and the requests made by members to EU institutions are political. While the influence of party politics on SEUNs is weak, political agency plays a crucial role in determining the participation in SEUNs. The presence of politicians in the council with a personal interest on European affairs or environmental issues seems to be a more decisive factor of SEUN participation.

As a second contribution, this thesis provides new empirical results, both quantitative and qualitative, that cast further light on transnational municipalism for sustainability. Research on local governments generally lacks of a rigorous empirical analysis, especially quantitative, due to the methodological limitations discussed previously. Emblematic of these difficulties is Le Galès' (2002) remark in the introduction to his book *European cities*, according to which: "[w]riting on European cities is an impossible task for at least two reasons: the diversity of cases and the lack of data" and, admitting the limits of his work, he adds, "[b]eyond population figures and figures comparing cities within a given nation-state, there is not much on offer" (Le Galès 2002: 18-19). While this statement leaves little hope for advancing empirical research in urban studies, this thesis has sought to give a small contribution in this direction. It is certainly true that researching local governments in a comparative perspective, even in a relatively similar regional context such as the EU, is challenging. The limited amount of updated and comparable data on various indicators - especially political - for European cities has constituted a significant concern in the research process. Nonetheless, this thesis has tried to tackle the issues of data availability and quality and provide an empirical analysis of transnational municipalism in Europe. In particular, this thesis has sought to address and solve the limitations of urban quantitative research by assembling in one dataset data collected from different sources and for several European cities. Through a careful selection of the data to avoid problems of comparability, it has been shown that empirical urban comparative research is feasible. In particular, this thesis has made an effort to move away from the dominant research tradition in the field based on case studies. The aim was not to produce an anthology of urban narratives on transnational municipalism, but to explain the decision of cities to join TMNs through a sound empirical analysis. As a result, this thesis has relied on a nested design combining quantitative and qualitative analyses of the drivers and motivations for local governments to participate in networks for sustainability. This method has not been used yet to explore the topic under study, and only few examples can be found in urban political research. The main advantage of the nested analysis is the possibility to widen the scope for generalisability without losing the analytical depth of qualitative methods.

Thanks to the development of an urban-centred approach and the application of a nested design, this thesis has not only confirmed the findings of previous research on transnational municipalism, but also provided new data to cast further light on the phenomenon.

9.3   Final reflections on the findings

To conclude, it seems appropriate to provide some final observations on local governments, which are the units of the analysis of this thesis, and their role within the EU. The evidence collected confirms the existence of inter-linkages between local governments and the EU institutions, which have also reflections on the central governments. This is not surprising, in that the EU architecture is multi-tiered, as described by the multi-level governance framework. While this approach emphasises the importance of a new mode of governing characterised by different actors across different scales interwoven in a complex web of relations, the role of the different actors is actually bound to their competences. Indeed, from the qualitative evidence emerged a vision of the multi-level nature of the EU different from the one presented in the related literature: the participants in this research appeared to be well aware of the administrative boundaries between levels and how these define and limit their actions within networks. Hooghe and Marks (2001) liken multi-level governance to the famous Escher's web of stairs, describing it as a system where "there is no up or under, no lower or higher, no dominant class of actor; rather, a wide range of public and private actors compete or collaborate in shifting coalitions" (Bulkeley and Betsill, 2003: 28). By way of contrast, rather than an entanglement of endless staircases, the EU architecture appears to be a much more orderly designed structure with a clear and recognizable summit. Obviously, sub-national and non-public actors can take part into EU activities, but this is possible only within their sphere of competence and within specific organisations. As an example, cities can act through specific institutions (such as the Committee of the Regions or the Council of European Regions and Municipalities) and organisations, such as inter-urban networks. In other words, it is true that European cities can exert a certain degree of influence onto EU institutions in order to tilt EU legislation to their advantage. But such influence is limited to those policy areas for which they are competent. The findings of this thesis suggest that within SEUNs local authorities do not increase their autonomy, as this is constitutionally defined. At best, they can become more self-reliant, thanks to the political and economic benefits associated with participation in network activities. Surely, cities are influenced by European processes and dynamics; nevertheless, they still have a distinctive identity, which is ultimately shaped by social, political and cultural processes in place at the urban level.

The growing importance of cities in Europe indicates the transformation towards a more flexible EU, where actors other than states can have a voice in political negotiations. The acknowledgement of the increasing role that sub-national authorities, non-governmental organisation and civil society are playing in the transnational arena has led some authors to speculate a new world order, where the power and importance of nation-states and supra-national organisations (the EU *in primis*) will fade away. Political theorists with a more or less explicit libertarian and utopian bent have elaborated various political scenarios where cities would become one of the central actors of the new political order. Libertarian municipalism[164], neo-medievalism[165], neo-localism and the "democratic glocalisation" (foreseeing a "world parliament of Mayors")[166] are just but few examples of locally enthusiastic theories. While different, these visions share an idealistic conception of the city as the basic and crucial node of the organisation of the political and social life. Here, the Athenian *polis* and the medieval communes

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[164] Biehl with Bookchin (1998).
[165] Friedrichs (2001); Zielonka (2006; 2014).
[166] Barber (2013).

represent the archetype of a new hypothetical democratic system. Less radical but equally urban-enthusiast, long-standing integrationist ideas such as the "Europe of the cities" or communal autonomy[167] propose to rebuild a Europe where cities would play a crucial role.

To summarise, the rejection of multi-scale approaches does not mean to deny that European integration and globalisation have had any impact on local authorities. Nevertheless, the urban-centred analysis here proposed does not hinge on "urbanophile" theories emphasising the importance of cities in the international political system. More simply, the urban approach has been developed as a heuristic device to explore the involvement of cities in supra-national affairs. Clearly, local authorities are gaining more influence and recognition at international level, and the establishment of supra-national municipal organisations witnesses the desire of cities to be "masters of their destiny". However, any discussion on the role of urban governments in transnational governance should avoid overestimating their influence. Although the role of local governments in Europe is important, and paralleled by a retrenchment of the nation-state, we are far from seeing a Europe of cities – if it will be ever possible.

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[167] The Swiss historian Gasser in the 1940s supported the idea of municipal confederations in Europe, from which the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) was borne out. See: Gasser, A., 1946. *L'autonomia comunale e la ricostruzione dell'Europa*, Casa Editrice La Fiaccola.

APPENDIX

Table 29: Local authorities and network membership

Country	City	Total number of networks	Number of SEUNs
Austria	Graz	4	3
	Innsbruck	2	2
	Linz	3	3
	Salzburg	3	3
Belgium	Antwerpen	7	5
	Brugge	3	1
	Charleroi	6	5
	Gent	5	5
	Liège	5	3
	Namur	0	0
Denmark	Aalborg	6	6
	Aarhus	3	3
	Odense	3	3
Finland	Oulu	4	3
	Tampere	7	6
	Turku	6	4
France	Aix-en-Pr.	1	1
	Ajaccio	0	0
	Amiens	5	3
	Besançon	3	2
	Bordeaux	6	5
	Caen	0	0

Country	City	Total number of networks	Number of SEUNs
	Mönchengladbach	1	1
	Mülheim an der Ruhr	1	1
	München	7	4
	Nürnberg	4	4
	Potsdam	2	1
	Regensburg	3	2
	Saarbrucken	3	2
	Schwerin	1	1
	Stuttgart	5	4
	Trier	1	1
	Weimar	0	0
	Wuppertal	2	2
Greece	Ioannina	0	0
	Irakleio	2	2
	Kalamata	0	0
	Kavala	1	0
	Larisa	1	1
	Patras	0	0
	Thessaloniki	4	4
	Volos	1	1
Ireland	Cork	4	3
	Galway	1	0

Country	City	Total number of networks	Number of SEUNs
	s' Gravenhage	1	1
	Schiedam	2	1
	Tilburg	3	2
	Utrecht	7	5
	Venlo	0	0
Portugal	Aveiro	3	3
	Braga	2	2
	Coimbra	2	2
	Funchal	1	1
	Oporto	6	6
	Ponta D.	0	0
	Setúbal	1	0
Spain	Alicante	1	1
	Badajoz	0	0
	Barcelona	12	9
	Bilbao	5	5
	Córdoba	2	1
	Gijón	3	3
	Hospitalet	3	2
	Las Palmas	1	1
	Logroño	0	0
	Málaga	7	6

	Clermont-F.	3	3		Limerick	2	1		Murcia	4	3
	Dijon	4	2		Waterford	0	0		Oviedo	0	0
	Grenoble	6	4	**Italy**	Ancona	4	4		Palma	2	2
	Le Havre	2	1		Bari	4	3		Pamplona	3	3
	Lens - Liévin	1	1		Bologna	8	7		Santa Cruz de Tenerife	1	1
	Lille	11	9		Brescia	4	3		Santander	1	1
	Limoges	2	1		Cagliari	1	1		Sevilla	6	6
	Lyon	10	6		Campobasso	0	0		Toledo	0	0
	Marseille	7	5		Caserta	1	1		Valencia	2	2
	Metz	1	1		Catania	1	1		Valladolid	1	1
	Montpellier	4	3		Catanzaro	1	1		Vigo	2	2
	Nancy	3	3		Cremona	3	1		Vitoria/Gasteiz	4	3
	Nantes	10	8		Firenze	8	6		Zaragoza	7	6
	Nice	4	4		Foggia	0	0	**Sweden**	Göteborg	9	6
	Orléans	1	1		Genova	9	6		Jönköping	1	1
	Poitiers	4	1		L'Aquila	2	2		Linköping	4	4
	Reims	2	1		Milano	7	5		Malmö	9	7
	Rennes	6	5		Modena	8	5		Örebro	3	3
	Rouen	1	1		Napoli	4	3		Umeå	6	5
	Saint-Et.	4	3		Padova	1	1		Uppsala	1	0
	Strasbourg	8	7		Palermo	4	4	**United Kingdom**	Aberdeen	5	4
	Toulouse	10	7		Perugia	5	4		Belfast	8	6
	Tours	3	1		Pescara	1	1		Birmingham	6	4
Germany	Augsburg	3	2		Potenza	2	2		Bradford	2	2
	Bielefeld	1	1		Reggio Calabria	1	1		Bristol	6	6
	Bochum	1	1		Salerno	2	2		Cambridge	2	1
	Bonn	3	3		Sassari	1	1		Cardiff	3	3
	Bremen	6	5		Taranto	0	0		Coventry	2	1
	Darmstadt	1	1		Torino	9	6		Derry	4	3
	Dortmund	3	3		Trento	2	1		Edinburgh	5	5
	Dresden	7	7		Trieste	3	2		Exeter	0	0
	Düsseldorf	5	4		Venezia	5	4		Glasgow	4	4
	Erfurt	0	0		Verona	1	1		Gravesham	0	0
	Essen	2	2	**Netherlands**	Alkmaar	1	0		Kingston upon	0	0

	Frankfurt/Oder	0	0		Almelo	0	0	Hull		
	Frankurt/M.	6	6		Almere	2	2	Leeds	0	0
	Freiburg	4	4		Apeldoorn	2	1	Leicester	3	3
	Göttingen	2	1		Arnhem	1	0	Lincoln	1	0
	Halle an der Saale	1	1		Breda	3	2	Liverpool	3	3
								Manchester	4	3
	Hamburg	7	6		Deventer	1	0	Newcastle	7	6
	Hannover	3	3		Eindhoven	6	3	Nottingham	3	1
	Karlsruhe	2	2		Enschede	2	1	Portsmouth	1	1
	Kiel	3	3		Groningen	1	0	Sheffield	4	3
	Köln	6	4		Heerlen	1	1	Stevenage	0	0
	Leipzig	4	3		Helmond	2	2	Stoke-on-Trent	2	1
	Magdeburg	1	1		Leeuwarden	1	0	Wirral	1	1
	Mainz	1	1		Lelystad	0	0	Wolverhampton	2	2
	Moers	0	0		Rotterdam	10	8	Worcester	2	1

Source: Author's own data.

Table 30: Collinearity diagnostic (OLS regression)

General Model (OLS regression)

	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		
Financial power	.767	1.303
Progressive city	.940	1.064
Modern city	.986	1.014
Administrative status	.771	1.297
Strong mayor model	.642	1.557

	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions					
			(Constant)	Financial power	Progressive city	Modern city	Administrative status	Strong mayor model
1	4.583	1.000	.00	.00	.01	.01	.01	.01
2	.547	2.895	.00	.00	.17	.42	.03	.08
3	.475	3.107	.00	.01	.42	.51	.00	.02
4	.265	4.161	.00	.16	.27	.00	.01	.27
5	.095	6.963	.04	.13	.05	.03	.95	.24
6	.036	11.225	.95	.70	.08	.02	.00	.37

SD model 1

	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		
Financial power	.767	1.303
Progressive city	.940	1.064
Modern city	.986	1.014
Administrative status	.771	1.297
Strong mayor model	.642	1.557

	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions					
			(Constant)	Financial power	Progressive city	Modern city	Administrative status	Strong mayor model
1	4.583	1.000	.00	.00	.01	.01	.01	.01
2	.547	2.895	.00	.00	.17	.42	.03	.08
3	.475	3.107	.00	.01	.42	.51	.00	.02
4	.265	4.161	.00	.16	.27	.00	.01	.27
5	.095	6.963	.04	.13	.05	.03	.95	.24
6	.036	11.225	.95	.70	.08	.02	.00	.37

SD model 2

	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		
Financial power	.749	1.335
Progressive city	.931	1.074
Modern city	.985	1.016
Administrative status	.745	1.342
Strong mayor model	.634	1.578
Environmental sustainability	.884	1.132

	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions						
			(Constant)	Financial power	Progressive city	Modern city	Administrative status	Strong mayor model	Environmental sustainability
1	4.583	1.000	.00	.00	.01	.01	.01	.01	.00
2	1.062	2.077	.00	.00	.02	.01	.00	.00	.75
3	.503	3.018	.00	.00	.01	.81	.02	.04	.09
4	.461	3.153	.00	.01	.56	.13	.01	.08	.09
5	.263	4.173	.01	.16	.30	.00	.01	.25	.01
6	.093	7.023	.03	.14	.03	.02	.95	.25	.02
7	.035	11.506	.96	.69	.06	.02	.01	.37	.05

SD model 3

	Collinearity Statistics	
	Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)		
Financial power	.749	1.335
Progressive city	.913	1.095
Modern city	.920	1.087
Administrative status	.679	1.472
Strong mayor model	.607	1.648
Environmental sustainability	.862	1.161
Coopearative attitude	.805	1.242

	Eigenvalue	Condition Index	Variance Proportions							
			(Constant)	Financial power	Progressive city	Modern city	Administrative status	Strong mayor model	Environmental sustainability	Coopearative attitude
1	5.059	1.000	.00	.00	.01	.01	.00	.01	.00	.01
2	1.077	2.167	.00	.00	.02	.01	.00	.00	.71	.01
3	.613	2.872	.00	.00	.01	.13	.01	.07	.00	.38
4	.472	3.274	.00	.01	.28	.61	.00	.02	.00	.03
5	.407	3.526	.00	.00	.36	.18	.02	.01	.23	.38
6	.252	4.480	.01	.19	.22	.00	.00	.23	.00	.08
7	.085	7.710	.03	.11	.05	.05	.95	.29	.00	.10
8	.035	12.094	.96	.70	.06	.01	.01	.37	.05	.00

Table 31: Word frequency 50 words by word similarity

Word	Length	Count	Weighted %	Similar Words
city	4	732	5.04	cities, city
eu	2	355	2.44	eu, Europe, European
networks	8	314	2.16	network, networking, networks
sustainable	11	143	0.98	sustainability, sustainable, sustainably, sustained
eurocities	10	138	0.95	eurocities
funds	5	138	0.95	fund, funded, funding, funds
example	7	135	0.93	example, examples
people	6	119	0.82	people
development	11	105	0.72	develop, developed, developing, development, developments, develops
policy	6	98	0.67	policies, policy
economic	8	96	0.66	economic, economically
nationally	10	96	0.66	nation, national, nationally, nations
governments	11	80	0.55	govern, governance, governed, governing, government, governments
projects	8	80	0.55	project, projects
involvement	11	79	0.54	involve, involved, involvement, involves, involving
politics	8	78	0.54	political, politically, politics
interesting	11	78	0.54	interest, interested, interesting, interestingly, interests
sd	2	76	0.52	sustainable development
issues	6	75	0.52	issue, issues
member	6	73	0.50	member, members
energy	6	71	0.49	energy
change	6	70	0.48	change, changed, changes, changing
important	9	68	0.47	importance, important, importantly
urban	5	66	0.45	urban
growth	6	62	0.43	growth
local	5	61	0.42	local, locally[168]
share	5	61	0.42	share, shared, shares, sharing
regions	7	60	0.41	region, regional, regions
benefits	8	59	0.41	benefit, benefits, benefitted
internationally	15	58	0.40	internal, internally, international, internationally
competition	11	57	0.39	competition, competitive, competitiveness
programme	9	57	0.39	programme, programmes
investment	10	56	0.39	invest, invested, investing, investment, investments, invests
costs	5	55	0.38	cost, costs
green	5	55	0.38	green, greens
engagement	10	54	0.37	engage, engaged, engagement, engaging
place	5	54	0.37	place, placed, places
agenda	6	53	0.36	agenda, agendas
ideas	5	51	0.35	idea, ideas
social	6	51	0.35	social, socialism
strategy	8	51	0.35	strategies, strategy
industry	8	50	0.34	(post-)industrial, industrialized, industries, industry
activities	10	49	0.34	activated, active, actively, activities
environmental	13	49	0.34	environmental, environmentally
countries	9	48	0.33	countries, country
environment	11	48	0.33	environment, environments
meetings	8	46	0.32	meet, meeting, meetings, meets
problems	8	45	0.31	problem, problems
influence	9	45	0.31	influence, influenced, influences, influencing
together	8	45	0.31	together

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[168] This cluster does not include the phrases "local government(s)" and "local authority(ies)".

Table 32: Sources clustered by word similarity

Source A	Source B	Pearson correlation coefficient
Manchester	Birmingham	0.723959
Lille	Birmingham	0.682442
Malmo	Birmingham	0.652976
Manchester	Malmo	0.634596
Torino	Birmingham	0.612542
Torino	Manchester	0.611627
Malmo	Lille	0.581149
Torino	Malmo	0.55777
Torino	Lille	0.512544
Torino	Cremona	0.507779
Manchester	Lille	0.463832
Malmo	Hamburg	0.456218
Torino	Hamburg	0.441118
Malmo	Cremona	0.437972
Manchester	Cremona	0.420411
Manchester	Hamburg	0.416909
Cremona	Birmingham	0.411325
Hamburg	Birmingham	0.38712
Hamburg	Cremona	0.383641
Lille	Cremona	0.334271
Lille	Hamburg	0.285933

Table 33: Sources clustered by coding similarity

Source A	Source B	Pearson correlation coefficient
Manchester	Malmo	0.307492
Torino	Malmo	0.18845
Malmo	Birmingham	0.185998
Malmo	Lille	0.104379
Torino	Lille	0.103445
Manchester	Birmingham	0.089794
Torino	Manchester	0.078424
Torino	Birmingham	0.077952
Manchester	Lille	0.076325
Hamburg	Birmingham	0
Hamburg	Cremona	0
Lille	Hamburg	0
Malmo	Hamburg	0
Manchester	Hamburg	0
Torino	Hamburg	0
Torino	Cremona	-0.037184
Malmo	Cremona	-0.057143
Lille	Cremona	-0.073996
Cremona	Birmingham	-0.091934
Manchester	Cremona	-0.099887
Lille	Birmingham	-0.152254

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