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City Networks and the Multilevel governance of
migration. Policy discourses and actions

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Abstract

Existing literature on City Networks (CNs), including studies on the migration and diversity policy field, look at CNs as instances of Multilevel Governance (MLG) policy-making. Yet, systematic research on the link between CNs and MLG is still scarce. The goal of this working paper is to understand how CNs on migration in different contexts conceive and frame their role in the governance of migration. What type of vertical and horizontal relations are CNs engaged in? And to what extent do these relationships configure the emergence of MLG-like policymaking processes? To answer these research questions, I undertake a policy frames analysis of the official discourses and main policy actions promoted by four CNs in different multilevel political settings, i.e.: the Eurocities Working Group on Migration and Integration, the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR) and the Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC) in Europe; Welcoming America in the United States. A key finding is that MLG, far from being an automatic outcome of city networking, is only one possible frame of policymaking interactions and not even the more relevant one.

Keywords

Multilevel governance, migration, city networks, policy frames.

Introduction

In the last two decades, City Networks (henceforth CNs) have started to be regarded as key actors in the governance of globalisation, linking cities across nation states as well as with supranational governance institutions. According to Barber (2013), founder of the Global Parliament of Mayors,

Cities are increasingly networked into webs of culture, commerce and communication that encircle the globe. These networks and the cooperative complexes they embody can help to do formally what they now do informally: govern through voluntary cooperation and shared consensus (p. 5).

Such an argument is of extreme interest to migration policy scholars, who have stressed the relevance of taking a local turn approach and a multilevel governance (henceforth MLG) perspective (Zapata, Caponio and Scholten, 2017) to make sense of processes of ongoing restructuration of state-centred modes of governing migration-related challenges. At the same time, among policy practitioners a normative discourse on local-level pragmatism has been emerging, emphasising the greater capacity of local authorities to accommodate migrants' diversity and enhance bottom-up participation (see e.g. Gebhardt, 2014; Taran, Neves de Lima and Kadysheva, 2016 on the recent migration and asylum crisis). CNs on migration are regarded as key actors in bringing about MLG policy processes based on interdependence, cooperation and consensus, rather than hierarchy, imposition and power.

However, contrary to other policy fields, systematic research on CNs dealing with migration and diversity is still scarce. Some authors have looked at CNs as a specific development of policymaking processes on migration in the multi-layered EU political context (Penninx, 2015; Penninx and Martiniello, 2004). However, CNs on migration and diversity have emerged also beyond Europe (Filomeno 2017), and can play a key role in the institutionalisation and grounding from below of international law (Oomen and Baumgartel 2018). More in-depth research is therefore needed in order to make sense of why, how and with what effects CNs voluntarily mobilise in order to enhance cities' capacity to govern global challenges such as migration.

The goal of this working paper is to analyse how CNs in different contexts conceive and frame their role in the governance of migration. I aim at answering the following questions: What type of vertical and horizontal relations are CNs engaged in? And to what extent do these relationships configure the emergence of MLG-like policymaking processes? To answer these research questions, I carry out a policy frames analysis (Schön and Rein 1994) of the web pages and official documents available therein of four CNs on migration: the Eurocities Working Group on Migration and Integration, the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR) and the Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC) in Europe; and the Welcoming America network in the United States.

The paper is structured as follows. In the first section I discuss how the nexus between CNs and MLG, although often taken for granted, needs to be problematized, and I clarify how an approach based on policy frames can contribute to move the research agenda forward. I therefore propose a typological space that portrays CNs' possible frames of policy-making interactions on migration-related issues. The second section presents the empirical study and provides methodological details. Hence, the third section is devoted to the description of CNs policy frames. In section four I discuss the results of my research and in the conclusion their relevance for the undertaking of a research programme on the MLG of migration.

1. CNs and the MLG of migration. A policy frames approach

Since the early 2000s there has been a multiplication of initiatives aimed at establishing links between cities experiencing similar migration challenges in Europe and beyond, sparking confidence on cities' capacity to pursue innovative and pragmatic solutions vis-à-vis the ideological sclerosis of national debates.

More specifically, political geographers and economists have looked at cities' networking as reflecting cities' increased investments in international relations in the context of economic globalisation and processes of rescaling of political power (Brenner, 2004; Leitner, 2004). In Europe, political scientists have linked the flourishing of CNs in the 1990s to the reform of the EC structural funds (1988-1993) and the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty (1992), which had the explicit goal of establishing forms of direct collaboration between cities/regions and EU institutions (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). Following these footsteps, scholars working on different policy fields such as environmental policies (Gustavsson, Elander and Lundmark 2009; Keiner and Kim 2007; Kern and Bulkeley 2009), urban policy (Béal and Pinson 2014; Phelps, McNeill, and Parsons 2002; Payre 2010), innovation and ICT (Salskov-Iversen and Hansen 2006) and, more recently also migration (Penninx 2015; Caponio 2017; Scholten et al. 2017), have emphasised the link between CNs and MLG. CNs, intended as organisations that gather together, on a voluntary basis, local authorities in order to pursue some kind of perceived collective interest or purpose, lack authoritative power, and therefore need to rely upon horizontal coordination and mutual cooperation to carry out and implement their initiatives. It follows that CNs put concretely in place governance, and they do it in a multilevel manner. On the horizontal dimension, CNs establish new relations between cities and with non-public actors mobilised at a city level; while on the vertical dimension, they interact with actors – both public and non-public – that operate at different territorial scales.

However, how these interactions concretely take place and to what extent configure a new, multilevel mode of governing is still an open matter. The main node is that of the elusive character of the notion of MLG. As noted by critics, MLG while “has the virtue of being capable of being invoked in almost any situation, that is also its great problem. Any complex and multi-faceted political process can be referred to as multi-level governance” (Peters and Pierre 2004, 88). To answer to this criticism, more constraining conceptualisations that identify MLG with a specific and distinctive configuration of policy-making arrangement have been put forward.

These more constraining definitions have gone in two directions (Caponio and Jones-Correa 2017). The first departs from a – often implicit – normative understanding of governance as “coordinated action”. For Alcantara, Brosheck and Nells (2015), a core feature of MLG is that relationships between “government(s) and non-governmental actors are less hierarchically organised and decision-making is negotiated and shared between actors in large part because none of the participants possesses the authority or the capacity to undertake the issue alone” (p. 8). In a similar vein, according to Scholten *et al.* (2017), MLG is characterised by the presence of “vertical venues for governments from different levels to jointly engage in policy coordination...”, while “horizontally it includes structured arrangements between a variety of public, private or societal actors active on multiple levels” (p. 3). For these authors MLG implies coordination, negotiated governance, consensus and, in the very end, policy convergence.

Other scholars, instead, do not establish a link *ex-ante* between MLG and policy convergence, but look at MLG as a specific mode of governing that presents some minimum characteristics. Piattoni (2010, p. 83) for instance, identifies three conditions in order to test whether a given policymaking process is or is not an instance of MLG: 1) different levels of government are simultaneously involved; 2) non-governmental actors at different levels are also involved; 3) relationships defy existing hierarchies and take the form of non-hierarchical networks. Similarly, Caponio and Jones-Correa (2017) propose a definition of MLG as a type of policy-making arrangement that 1) challenges vertical, state-centred hierarchies of distribution of power and blurs state/society boundaries; 2) involves interdependent actors, in the sense that a certain policy cannot be carried out by just one level of government but requires the involvement of other tiers and non-public actors; and 3) implies interactions characterised by negotiation and cooperation among all the involved actors. Yet, whether and to what extent these processes actually result in structured arrangements for coordinated action and lead to policy convergence are open questions.

This second approach problematizes the link between MLG and policy convergence and makes it possible to distinguish the two facets of MLG as a specific type of policy arrangement: a facet involving the ideas and discourses that policy actors elaborate on MLG in terms of cooperation, coordination, consensus, participation, policy learning and policy convergence; and another facet involving the practices of MLG that are concretely deployed, i.e. the interactive processes through which different actors produce and implement public policy, and that can be more or less consistent with discourses and ideas. It follows that to understand the link between CNs and MLG, research should not just focus on general statements on how policies *should be* decided upon, but consider also what CNs *actually do*, and most of all, *with whom* they do it.

To this end, I use Schön and Rein (1994) policy frames analysis. Policy frames have been defined by these authors as interpretative schemata and ordering devices needed by policy-makers in order to make sense of a situation and attach a meaning to it. Policy frames do not only structure policy-makers' perceptions of the reality, but promote a certain course of action. By interpreting a situation, i.e. defining what it is that is going on, policy-makers can imagine what is coming next, i.e. what ought to be (1994, 240). This normative leap is evident in the two components that Schön and Rein (1994) identify as constitutive of policy frames, i.e.: rhetorical frames or the espoused theory (see also: Argyris and Schön 1978), which consists of the persuasive use of story and argument in policy discourse; and action policy frames or enacted theory, which inform policy practice and are used by an institutional actor to construct the problem in a specific situation.

Hence, to understand the link between CNs and MLG on the politically topical migration issue, in this paper I analyse how CNs frame the interactive policy-making processes in which they are engaged in order to carry out their initiatives and actions. I look at both the *espoused theory*, i.e. what CNs declare about such interactive relations; and the *theory in use*, i.e. the relations that CNs concretely establish on the vertical and horizontal dimensions of MLG. More specifically, on the vertical dimension we should expect that CNs, in the attempt to realise MLG-like policy arrangements, will engage in bottom-up initiatives aimed at coordinating policy agendas with higher levels of government (e.g. national government, EU institutions, international organisations). In other terms, we should expect discourses and policy actions which pursue dialogue and mutual adjustment between different tiers of government, and therefore an approach going beyond traditional lobbying activities. On the other hand, on the horizontal dimension, CNs should be explicitly engaged in establishing relations that blur boundaries between public and non-public actors, for instance by emphasizing in their discourses the need to cooperate with stakeholders (e.g. NGOs) and by concretely promoting collaborative relations in their policy actions.

As illustrated in figure 1, the vertical and the horizontal dimensions can be understood as continuums delimitating a conceptual space on which four different ideal-modes of framing CNs' interactive policy-making processes can be identified.

Figure 1 - CNs' frames of interactive vertical and horizontal policymaking processes

		Horizontal dimension - Coordination with stakeholders	
		+ High	Low -
Vertical dimension – Intergovernmental cooperation	+ High	MLG Mobilization	Intergovernmental coordination
	- Low	Grassroot governance	Peers-networking

The *MLG mobilization* frame is characterized by discourses and policy actions oriented towards engaging the CN in intense bottom-up vertical cooperation and horizontal coordination with a variety

of stakeholders. This mode of framing policy-making interactions reflects the defining features of MLG policy arrangements in scholarly literature. As mentioned above, MLG implies at the same time a move beyond traditional hierarchical relations and beyond state-society boundaries. In the *intergovernmental coordination* frame, discourses and policy-making interactions are primarily aimed at challenging hierarchical modes of governing, while on the contrary, in the *grassroots governance* the emphasis is on collaboration with stakeholders. The last type is the *peers-networking* frame, which is characterized by a limited engagement in vertical interactions and scarce attention for stakeholders, resulting in networks that are exclusively aimed at promoting collaboration among municipalities, i.e. local institutions operating at a similar territorial scale.

These abstract, ideal-modes of conceiving policy-making interactions have been identified assuming consistency between discourses and policy actions; yet as we shall see below, gaps are often evident between the two. Ideal-types should therefore be intended as benchmarks against which to analyse specific CNs' frames of policy-making processes on migration that can be characterised by inconsistencies and contradictions between discourses and actions.

2. Methodological note

To analyse CNs policy frames of interactive policy-making processes, this study takes an inductive and interpretative approach. More specifically, the method adopted is that of qualitative frame analysis (Yanow 1996), which I use to identify frames of policymaking relations rather than of specific policy outputs.

So far, studies on migration carried out in the policy frames methodological tradition have been aimed at constructing taxonomies of policy models with the goal of identifying frames' ambiguities or inconsistencies (see e.g. Dekker 2017). More specifically, scholars have proposed different integration policy frames, i.e. multiculturalist, assimilationist etc. to demonstrate how these ideal-type policies are often translated by policymakers into ambiguous and inconsistent practices (Dekker 2017; Schiller 2016). The idea of 'frame ambiguity' or 'inconsistency' rests upon a static conception of policy frames, one which assumes that frames are 'cognitive objects' that should link ideas and practices consistently and in a straightforward manner (Van Hulst and Yanow 2016). The goal of this article is a different one. Starting from the assumption that inconsistency and ambiguity are inherent features of policymaking processes (Kingdon 2014), I take an inductive approach to understand how a specific type of organisation, i.e. CNs, make sense of their role in the governance of migration and conceive their engagement in vertical and/or horizontal policy-making processes.

As pointed out by figure 1, I also identify ideal-types, intended as abstract, ideal modes of conceiving policymaking interactions, based on a hypothetical consistency between discourses and policy actions. However, these ideal modes are only benchmarks that I use to assess CNs' concrete modes of framing policymaking relations. A first step, then, is that of inductively reconstructing CNs' discourses and policy actions on the vertical and horizontal dimension of policymaking, to see in a second stance to what extent CNs policy frames approximate the ideal modes presented in figure 1.

To this end, I have systematically analysed the web pages and the official documents available therein of four CNs on migration founded in the early 2000 and operating in two different multi-layered political settings, i.e. the supranational European Union system and a classical federalist polity like the United States. In the first case, I have analysed the Eurocities Working Group on Migration and Integration, the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR) and the Intercultural Cities Programme; in the second I consider the Welcoming America network. Using qualitative content analysis, I investigate the two components of policy frames specified by Schön and Rein (1994) and already discussed above: the *espoused theory*, i.e. what CNs declare about their goals and the relations that should be established in order to pursue them; and the *theory in use*, i.e. what CNs actually do and

the relations they actively engage on the horizontal and the vertical dimension. The content analysis has been guided by a series of ‘critical questions’ (Yanow 1996) as specified in table 1.

Table 1 - Critical questions operationalising MLG policymaking relations

The policy in theory or rhetoric frames	Official goals or what should be done	- What are the CN’s official goals?
		- How should these goals be achieved? - Actions to be pursued - Relations to be established/strengthened
The policy in practice or action frames	Concrete policy actions	- CN’s genesis: How was the CN founded? Who took the initiative?
		- Structure: How is the CN concretely organized? Who does what? - Actors represented in the decision-making board or committee
		- Characteristics of the main actions and projects promoted by the CN - goals pursued - Actors involved - Role of the CN in policymaking relations

The critical questions provide an operationalization of the two facets of policy frames. Regarding the policy in theory, the key indicator is represented by the CN’s official goals in terms of the declarations on policy actions to be pursued and relations that should be established in order to implement such actions. As for the policy in practice or enacted theory, the main indicator is represented by the policy actions concretely undertaken. These are analysed under three profiles: the CN’s genesis, which tells us how the network was initially conceived, with what purposes and which relations were established to pursue its goals; the CN’s organisational structure, since how the network is routinely organised and managed gives us important hints on who the key actors are in setting the network’s strategy and goals (e.g. internal staff and employees; cities representatives; other organisations with a seat in the decision-making venues etc.); the main features that characterise the actions/projects promoted by the CN, which are indicative of the goals concretely pursued, the actors engaged in the network initiatives, and the role that the CN actually plays vis-à-vis these actors.

The comparison between the policy-making in theory, i.e. discourses and ideas on the role of CNs in migration policy processes, and the policy-making in use, i.e. concrete actions, enables us to reconstruct inductively how the four CNs frame the interactive policy-making processes they are engaged in, and to position them on the two dimensions’ conceptual space presented in figure 1. Therefore, our analysis goes beyond the narratives of policymaking deployed by CNs in their official statements, to account for CNs’ enacted theories of policymaking and MLG.

3. CNs on migration. An analysis of discourses and policy actions

The Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC)

The Intercultural Cities Programme (ICC) supports cities in reviewing their policies through an intercultural lens and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies to help them manage diversity positively and realise the diversity advantage (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/home>).

This general statement posted on the homepage of ICC highlights the network's mission: to effectively implement a specific policy approach to immigrant integration, i.e. the intercultural approach, which has its foundations in the work on conflict prevention and reconciliation that has been carried out by the Council of Europe (CoE) since its outset in 1957 and culminated in the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, adopted by the foreign ministers of 47 member states in 2008 (CoE 2013, 19).

The network's general goal, as well as its history, clearly reveal the centrality of the vertical dimension in the ICC Programme, taking seemingly a top-down direction, from CoE, where the programme is based and managed, downward to cities, which are in charge of implementing the intercultural strategy. However, the ICC Programme, which officially started in 2008 as a joint initiative of CoE and the European Commission, has been building also on the external contribution of researchers, and more specifically that of the British think tank Comedia, which in 2004 published a book on the intercultural city (White 2004), as well as on the views and experiences of member cities. Since the beginning, CoE solicited the bottom-up contribution of municipalities in reviewing their policies: the indicators used for this review process "emerged from the first city practices across Europe and have been validated by the 11 cities involved in the first pilot Council of Europe/European Commission project".¹ Hence, at least at its outset, the network assumed the form of a partnership between supranational institutions and local authorities.

Since then, the organisational structure of ICC has developed both on the horizontal and vertical dimension. More specifically, two phases can be singled out. In the first phase, corresponding to the years between 2008 and 2015, the ICC Programme has been structured as a 'learning community' mobilising primarily municipalities.

The Intercultural Cities Programme enables network exchanges between cities... Cities can be full members of the network with privileged access to all international activities and dedicated experts support. Alternatively they can focus on exchanges within a national intercultural cities network, where such a network exist, or opt only for diagnostic of their policies through the Intercultural cities index (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/international-network>; accessed on May 7th 2018).

This networking strategy 'à la carte' is presented extensively in the document 'The Intercultural City step by step', published by CoE in 2013. The goal of the 'learning community' is to provide "practical assistance to local authorities and stakeholders wishing to benefit from the advice and support of peers from other cities; [...] develop collaborative projects on specific themes; showcase their own good practices". Stakeholders, and more specifically businesses and civil society organisations, are mentioned as partners. Yet, local authorities remain the main target of the actions promoted by the network. This is the case of the Intercultural Cities Index:

Following the accession process, member cities set up an intercultural support group and start the process of reviewing different urban policies from an intercultural perspective, re-shaping them and integrating them into a comprehensive policy strategy... The cities are encouraged to involve citizens broadly in the strategy development process, identifying indicators for success, monitoring

¹ Intercultural Cities, The Intercultural City Index and Benchmarking Tool, document downloaded from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/about-the-index> (last access: 16/05/2018).

progress and implementation. A methodological guide for this work is available [...] the Council of Europe can provide experts and facilitators for the policy discussions within the city (CoE 2013, 9).

Hence, the involvement of stakeholders and citizens takes place at a territorial level, during the policy review process, which can be assisted by ICC experts. This is the case also of almost all the initiatives presented under the heading ‘Thematic Actions’, like, for instance, the Deli Project (Diversity in Economy and Local Integration) implemented in 2014-2015: stakeholders were not involved in the project’s conferences or meetings of the steering committee, but their inclusion was somehow indirect and took place through the involvement in the activities implemented by the municipalities.

However, in 2016 the document ‘ICC Programme – Medium Term Strategy 2016-2019’, approved at the Reykjavik Annual Meeting of the Coordinators, which every year brings together the representatives of member cities (100 in 2016) and CoE’s team dedicated to the network, marks the starting of a new and explicit multilevel governance strategy. Four goals are listed: controlled expansion of the network’s membership; devising new tools to support cities in developing, implementing and applying intercultural strategies; deepening the policy know-how of official and other actors involved in the intercultural work in cities; increasing outreach and impact. This latter goal in particular is presented in terms of the limits of the local level focus to ensure the full deployment of the benefits and advantages of the intercultural approach to immigrant integration.

For the Intercultural integration approach to effectively influence policies across Europe, it is necessary to enlarge not only the number of cities which embrace it but also to reach out to other important actors, in particular regional and national authorities, academia and NGOs.²

To implement this goal, two measures are proposed: the set-up of a formal platform for ‘constructive thematic policy dialogue’ between local and national policy makers; the training of ICC advocates/evangelists among people who can have an influence on national policymaking, including leaders from NGOs and academia. Following these plans, in 2017, the first Inclusive Integration Policy Laboratory (Policy Lab), called the ‘Squared Circle’, was launched to involve local and national officials, NGOs and academics in promoting the intercultural approach at different levels of governance.³ So far, two Policy Labs have been held, one in 2017 and the other in 2018. From the documents available on the internet, these seem to have involved representatives of CoE, of some national governments and of ICC member cities. As stated in the conclusion of the 2018 Annual Meeting of the Coordinators held in Rijeka, there is still a need to “expand the coalition [...] Leaders from the NGO world, as well as media, business and Associations of Local and Regional Authorities should be involved in the conversation”.⁴ To this end, ICC has launched three pilot projects in 2016 in the context of CoE’s ‘Building Inclusive Societies Action Plan’, i.e.: Diversity Rating for Businesses, the Diversity Connector for Start-ups and the Diversity Accelerator for Media (Div-A).⁵ However, the involvement of NGOs and immigrant associations still seems to take place primarily at a local level, through the participation of these stakeholders in the specific intercultural policies promoted by the ICC member municipalities.

² Intercultural Cities Programme – Medium term strategy 2016-2019, document available at <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806a5e96>, last access December 10th, 2018, p. 5.

³ Intercultural Cities Annual Report 2016, *Sharing our cities sharing the future*, available at <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806c9674>, last access December 10th, 2018, p. 6.

⁴ Meeting of Intercultural Cities Coordinators - Conclusions, Rijeka 26-27th September 2018, <https://rm.coe.int/meeting-of-intercultural-cities-coordinators-rijeka-26-27-september-20/16808eca6c>, last access December 10th, 2018, p. 9.

⁵ For details see: Intercultural Cities Annual Report 2016, pp. 7-8.

The European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR)

The goals of ECCAR are featured in the home page as follows:

- Fighting any form of racism and discrimination at a municipal level and thus making a contribution to safeguarding and promoting human rights and respect for diversity in Europe;
- supporting member cities in this task via the “Ten-Points-Plan of Action” [...] and assisting them in establishing priorities, optimising their strategies and intensifying their co-operation;
- representing and promoting the common interests of member cities at the European Union, the Council of Europe and with the governments of European states; strengthening the co-operation with institutions and organizations which are also committed to fighting racism and discrimination, as well as with other European municipal networks;
- sensitising the European public to the values of a just and solidarity-based society and motivating the public to promote equality and to counteract with determination any racist or discriminatory opinion and behaviour.⁶

These goals are indicative of the network’s commitment both on the horizontal and vertical dimensions of multilevel policymaking processes. The horizontal dimension is defined in terms of enhanced cooperation and communication among cities (goal 2), with other CNs (goal 3) and with stakeholders, i.e. other organisations and institutions working on issues of racism and discrimination. As for the vertical dimension, this is essentially conceived as bottom-up mobilization and lobbying vis-à-vis the EU, CoE and, notably, national governments. A more top-down approach is adopted towards the ‘European public’, that should be ‘sensitised’ and ‘motivated’, rather than included or engaged.

Similarly to the ICC Programme, ECCAR was founded on the initiative of an international organisation, Unesco, which in March 2004 launched the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICCAR) that was expressly supported by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Cities of Local Governments (UCLG). ECCAR was established in November that year as one of the regional CNs of ICCAR on racial and ethnic discrimination.⁷ In February 2008 the then 23 member cities of ECCAR decided to give a legal framework to the network, which became a registered association in the District Court of Nuremberg. The organisational structure⁸ is articulated in three tiers: the Board, formed by a president and three vice-presidents, all from member cities; the Steering Committee, composed of 25 voting members, 23 representing cities, one representing Unesco (Paris) that has a permanent seat, and one for the city hosting the administrative secretariat; the General Assembly, where all cities participate. There is also an administrative office, hosted by one of the member cities, and a Scientific Secretariat, hosted by Unesco in Paris, whose role is not only monitoring the implementation of the network’s initiatives and advising member cities, but also promoting cooperation with inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations, as well as with universities and other institutions that can provide research-based support to the implementation of ECCAR’s goals.

Regarding policy actions, the main policy action is represented by the so called Ten-Points Plan of Action, mentioned also in the official goals reported above. This is a sort of fundamental charter of the network, open for signatures to European cities wishing to join ECCAR. It specifies 10 commitments that cities have to implement by devoting the necessary human, financial and material resources, even

⁶ ECCAR Basic Information, Document downloaded from http://www.eccar.info/sites/default/files/document/ECCAR_basic%20information%202_0.pdf, accessed on May 7th, 2018.

⁷ Other CNs have been founded in Asia and the Pacific (August 2006), Africa (September 2006), Latin America and the Caribbean (October 2006), North America (2007), the Arab Region (2008) and the United States (2013).

⁸ ECCAR Basic Information, p. 2.

though cities are left free to choose the policies that they see as the most relevant or urgent.⁹ While The Ten-Points address primarily municipalities, the actions presented as conducive to their implementation seek often the involvement of key stakeholders, target groups and civil society organisations more generally. For instance, regarding point 1, ‘Greater vigilance against racism’, the setting-up of a monitoring, vigilance and solidarity network is recommended; to this end, collaboration with civil society organisations and consultation with various social actors (e.g. young people, artists, NGOs, community leaders, the police, the judiciary) is suggested. On the vertical dimension the Action Plan should enable “attempts to influence and collaborate with other government levels with the relevant competences”.¹⁰

Actually, from an analysis of the actions suggested on each of the 10 points, it emerges how CSOs and NGOs are key partners, mentioned not only at point 1 but also 3 (Better support for the victims of racism and discrimination), 4 (More participation and better informed city dwellers) and 10 (Hate crimes and conflict management); research institutes are mentioned at point 2 (Assessing racism and discrimination and monitoring municipal policies) and 10; local businesses (firms, shops, professionals and estate agents) at point 5 (The city as an active supporter of equal opportunity practices) and 7 (Fair access to housing); discriminated groups and communities at point 6 (The city as an equal opportunities employer), 9 (Promoting cultural diversity) and 10. Other levels of government are just mentioned once at point 9.

Linked to the ECCAR Ten-Points-Action Plan is the Toolkit for Equality, realized in 2014 on the basis of an EU funding.¹¹ The Toolkit provides an inventory of cities’ practices based on a survey distributed among the 120 member cities to which 40 responded; to provide very concrete and practical advice on processes of implementation 24 city visits were also made and 78 interviews with civil servants were conducted. A particularly emphasised result of the analysis is the key importance of the horizontal dimension, while the vertical one is regarded with more scepticism:

Anti-discrimination policies require the recognition and attention of a number of stakeholders: city government, city parliament, a number of city departments, NGOs/civil society organisations, migrant associations, semi-private service agencies (e.g. social service agencies, housing agencies), interest groups, and influential individuals. Interestingly, multi-level-government approaches (e.g. local, regional and national) are not among those reported as successful.¹²

Along with the Toolkit, another key action of ECCAR are the General Conferences, organized almost every year from 2009. Each event is dedicated to a specific theme (e.g. Cultures, Sports, Diversities in 2018; Welcoming Cities in 2015), and member cities are brought together in workshops to discuss policies and practices adopted in specific cities and learning from them.¹³ Among the participants, apart from Mayors and city levels officials, other categories of actors that feature prominently are academic experts and researchers, EU DGs and representatives of Unesco, NGOs and CSOs organisations.

⁹ In principle new signatory cities should implement at least one action as soon as possible in respect of each of the commitments, while cities that have already implemented some of the proposed actions are requested to enhance them or supplement them by further action (<http://www.eccar.info/en/10-point-action-plan>).

¹⁰ ECCAR Basic Information, p. 11. Document downloaded from http://www.eccar.info/sites/default/files/document/ECCAR_basic%20information%202_0.pdf, accessed on May 7th, 2018.

¹¹ <http://www.eccar.info/en/eccar-toolkit-equality>

¹² ECCAR Ten Points Action Plan, Toolkit for Equality, p. 10. Document downloaded from: <http://www.eccar.info/en/eccar-toolkit-equality>

¹³ <http://www.eccar.info/en/conferences>.

The Migration and Integration Working Group at Eurocities

This Working Group (WG) is focused on guiding the cities to embrace the diversity of their population and ensure equal opportunities for their population. The aim of the WG is to use a bottom-up approach to ensure that local experiences play an important role in drafting the EU migration and integration policies. It works as an environment for mutual learning on integration governance, by using mentoring activities and sharing experiences and good practice between cities.¹⁴

As emphasised in the home page of the Migration and Integration Working Group, as well as in other official publications, both the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of policymaking emerge as crucial in the goals pursued by the WG. On the vertical dimension, and consistently with the story of Eurocities as we shall see below, official statements underline the ambition to shape the EU agenda from below, i.e. from a city perspective. On the horizontal dimension the WG is conceived as a ‘community of practitioners’, addressing public officials at a municipal level, to share good practices and promote mutual learning. The inclusion of stakeholders and civil society organizations does not feature as a priority.

Turning to the theory in use, the genesis of the WG, as well as its structure, are strictly entrenched with the history and organisational development of the Eurocities network (see: Eurocities 2014). Eurocities was founded as early as 1986 as a bottom-up initiative of six European ‘second’ cities in the context of Jacques Delors’ presidency of the European Commission and the introduction of European Regional Development Fund. The vertical dimension had a key relevance in this process, since Eurocities had the ambition to institutionalize bottom-up cities-EU relations vis-à-vis the reluctance of national governments to fully acknowledge the urban dimension of economic development (ibid.). At the same time, this move upwards triggered increasing mobilization and institutionalization on the horizontal dimension, with a growing number of cities joining the network throughout the years and the emerging of ad hoc working groups on specific policy issues. The WG on Migration and Integration was founded in the context of the internal re-organisation promoted by Secretary General Catherine Parmentier (2000–2008) as one of the eight working groups of the Forum on Social Affairs. The chair, who represents one of the member cities, can rely upon three the permanent staff units of the Eurocities Brussel’s office, i.e. a policy advisor and two project officers.¹⁵

Regarding the policy actions carried out by the WG, two initiatives emerge as particularly relevant: the Integrating Cities (IC) Process and the Solidarity Cities Project. As for the former, IC¹⁶ was launched in 2006 “as a partnership between Eurocities and the European Commission to promote the local-level implementation of the Common Basic Principles (CBP) on Integration.” Rather than shaping the agenda from below, the IC Process can be better defined as an exercise of participatory implementation by the EC that sought collaboration with municipalities to put into practice an agenda that had been already decided upon in 2004. However, if one considers that the CBP just provide a broad framework and list of integration measures without prioritizing any specific line of action (for an analysis see: Campomori and Caponio 2015), it becomes clear that cities enjoy a relevant margin of manoeuvre in deciding the specific policy strategies to be adopted. Against this background, the goal of IC is to certify the ‘good practices’ undertaken by member cities through a process of horizontal, peer-to-peer, policy validation.

In fact, looking more in-depth at what has been carried out under the umbrella of the IC Process, a strong emphasis on goals such as policy learning and benchmarking can be pointed out. The Inti Cities project, funded by the European Integration Fund (EIF) in 2007, is a case in point.

Our aim is to provide a platform for municipal integration experts to meet with counterparts in other cities and find inspiration in approaches to local integration policy taken elsewhere. Our ambition was to organize this exchange in an intensive and focused way. To this end, the project chose to

¹⁴ http://www.eurocities.eu/eurocities/working_groups/Migration-and-integration-&tpl=home

¹⁵ http://www.eurocities.eu/eurocities/about_us/staff#

¹⁶ <http://www.integratingcities.eu/>

implement a peer review process based on a common benchmark and standardised methodology (Eurocities 2007, 6).

A similar approach has been adopted also by the Dive and Mixities projects, both funded by the EIF. The main outcome of the latter project was the Integrating Cities Charter, which lists the commitments to which cities should subscribe to provide equal opportunities for all residents and to promote migrants' integration. Regarding stakeholders, the Charter mentions the need to facilitate the engagement of migrant communities in policymaking processes; and suggests removing possible barriers to access tendering for migrants' associations as suppliers of services.¹⁷ Evaluation Reports have been compiled in 2013 and 2015 based on surveys carried out among signatory cities (22 in 2013 and 30 in 2015). The reports present cities' self-assessment and provide examples on how they attempted to meet their commitments, de facto validating cities' different approaches in dealing with the Charters' obligations.

To strengthen policy exchange and mutual learning among cities, the ImpleMentoring (2012-2014) and CityGrowth (2017-2019) projects, both funded by the European Commission, adopted the methodology of cities-to-cities mentoring:¹⁸ cities with experience on the specific issues addressed by each project (e.g. in the case of ImpleMentoring, managing diversity in public administration and service provision, enhancing participation in diverse neighbourhoods and promoting political participation of migrants through local consultative bodies) assumed the role of 'mentors', while others willing to address a policy gap with respect to that issue were identified as 'implementing' cities. In principle, these learning exercises should have engaged also NGOs and other stakeholders involved in implementation; in any case, the mentoring schemes are regarded first and foremost as an instrument to support policy learning among municipalities, therefore targeting primarily public officials and practitioners within the municipal machine.

As regards Solidarity Cities, this is an initiative launched by the Mayor of Athens in 2016. The goals are:

- 1) Information and knowledge exchange on the refugee situation in cities
- 2) advocating for better involvement and direct funding for cities on reception and integration of refugees
- 3) city-to-city technical and financial assistance and capacity building
- 4) pledges by European cities to receive relocated asylum seekers¹⁹

These statements are very illustrative of the Migration and Integration Working Group double strategy based on peer-networking among municipalities and lobbying to EU institutions. The activities carried out under the Solidarity Cities umbrella appear to have gone primarily in the second direction, as showed by the 'Policy Statements' section of the website, which publishes the main documents approved by the WG on the Refugee Crisis. These statements criticize the lack of responsibility showed by national governments while advocating for "a comprehensive EU migration policy that recognises the challenges faced by cities and local level solutions."²⁰

Welcoming America

In the 'Who we are' page of the Welcoming America (WA) website the network is described as a 'non-profit, non-partisan organization' and a movement of 'communities'.²¹ Its goals are featured under the heading 'The Welcoming America Model':

¹⁷ <http://www.integratingcities.eu/integrating-cities/charter>.

¹⁸ <http://www.integratingcities.eu/integrating-cities/projects/implementoring>

¹⁹ <http://solidaritycities.eu/about>

²⁰ <http://solidaritycities.eu/policy-statement/50-open-letter-from-european-mayors-to-eu-leaders-on-world-refugee-day>

²¹ <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/about/who-we-are>

Connect: Welcoming America connects leaders in community, government, and nonprofit sectors. Our networks provide support both locally and nationally.

Build: We build on the great work happening in local communities by providing tested methods and approaches to creating inclusive, welcoming places for immigrants.

Change: Our goal is to change systems and cultures. We help communities create policy, reinforce welcoming principles, and communicate the socioeconomic benefits of inclusion.²²

From these statements the prominence of the horizontal dimension clearly stands out. WA is described as a network that works to strengthen communities and not just municipalities: "Our unique local approach goes beyond a single program or service to work with institutions across the community".

The emphasis on the community reflects the story of the network: the founder, David Lubell, is presented in the website as an 'accomplished social entrepreneur', who started his engagement in the migration field in Nashville in 2001,²³ where he founded the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugees Coalition (TIRC). In a Youtube short film on the Nashville experience, 'Nashville Welcomes', it is emphasised how the TIRC was able "to start changing policies and programmes in Nashville to help them become the most welcoming city in the South East".²⁴

Regarding the organisational structure, the network has a NGO's statute with its headquarters in Atlanta and an office in Washington. The Board of Directors is composed of 11 members, two from WA and the rest from local partnerships, NGOs, independent research institutes and private companies; the Board is supported by Leadership Cohort Members, who are 'dedicated community leaders from within the network membership',²⁵ some of whom are city officials. Furthermore, the network can count upon a staff of 16 officers, most of whom dedicated to the CN's specific projects.

In this latter respect, WA is structured on three networking pillars: Welcoming Cities and Counties, Welcoming Nonprofits and Welcoming Economies. The first two sub-networks promote dialogue among municipalities and NGOs respectively, to share ideas, get new inspiration and receive recognition for their efforts. Welcoming Economies on the other hand, is a project launched in partnership with Global Detroit that gathers together regional economic development initiatives from across the Midwest.²⁶ It promotes peer-to-peer learning through visits, scholarships, conferences etc. Another more recent programme is Welcoming International, which has the goal of fostering collaboration among international partners to advance local level welcoming of immigrants and refugees across the world. In more concrete terms, the network collaborates with similar initiatives in Germany and the UK, while in the case of Australia and New Zealand, WA has provided help in the building of similar, community based, networks.²⁷

Another initiative which shows how the horizontal dimension is conceived first and foremost in terms of inclusion of stakeholders and community building are the so-called Welcoming Weeks. These are annual series of events where communities 'bring together immigrants, refugees and native-born residents to raise awareness of the benefits of welcoming everyone'.²⁸ Welcoming Weeks are not necessarily organised by municipalities: in 2016 for instance, a partnership was launched with YMCA that contributed to organise, together with other 20 organisations, 50 events in local YMCA headquarters

²² <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/>

²³ <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/content/david-lubell>

²⁴ <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/content/david-lubell>; see also: 'Nashville Welcomes', <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mt49BNoAOAs&feature=youtu.be>,

²⁵ <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/about/board-and-leadership>

²⁶ <http://www.weglobalnetwork.org/join-we-network/>

²⁷ <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/programs/welcoming-international>

²⁸ <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/programs/welcoming-week>

around the country.²⁹ WA offers to its members a Welcoming Toolkit and a webinar that provide practical advice and materials to plan the events.

Similar to the European networks analysed above, WA also has a certification project, ‘Certified welcoming’, based on a series of ‘welcoming standards’ developed together with ‘leading experts’, i.e. practitioners, academics, business and civic leaders.³⁰ However, contrary to European experiences, ‘Certified welcoming’ does not evaluate only municipal policies but communities. Even if the application has to be sent by a city or a county government, the assessment criteria assign key relevance to ‘partnership programmes’, defined as ‘coordinated activities of a number of different agencies and organizations. Local government may or may not be the lead on the work of partnership programs’.³¹ To obtain the certificate, cities have to undergo a process that starts with the self-assessment, a two days in-person audit with Certified Welcoming staff and ends with a detailed report specifying eventual actions to be undertaken. If the requirements are met in the agreed upon time frame, the certificate is issued. The Certification has a cost of 6,000\$.

The policy actions promoted by the network seem to imply limited interaction on the vertical dimension. More specifically, the network provides two types of instruments: specific toolkits with explanatory guidelines on national policies such as the DACA Programme; and advice and guidance for the issuing of proclamations or resolutions. Whereas the first type of action is linked to cities’ institutional responsibility in implementing federal laws, the latter can be regarded as a symbolic action, aimed at conveying nation-wide the message and spirit of being a welcoming city. Furthermore, in the section of the website titled ‘Take action’, WA provides advice on how to contact federal and local elected officials.

4. Discussion

If MLG, as argued above, can be identified with policymaking processes that, challenging traditional hierarchical relations and blurring state/society boundaries, put in place forms of coordination on both the vertical and horizontal dimensions, from figure 2 we see that the analysed CNs only partly reflect such an ideal model. The analysis of CNs’ official discourses and policy actions discloses the emerging of different frames of interactive policymaking processes on the migration issue. This result challenges the idea – often taken for granted in the literature – that CNs are quintessential MLG organisations.

Figure 2 - CNs on migration on interactive policy processes conceptual space

		Inclusion of stakeholders	
		+ High	Low -
Coordination on the vertical dimension	+ High	MLG Mobilization <i>ECCAR</i>	<i>ICC 2017 onward</i> Intergovernmental coordination <i>Eurocities WG</i>
	- Low	<i>Welcoming America</i> Grassroot governance	<i>ICC until 2016</i> Peers-networking

Two CNs appear quite specular in terms of vertical and horizontal policy-making interactions, i.e. the Eurocities Migration and Integration WG and WA. Regarding the former, this is essentially conceived

²⁹ Welcoming America – 2016 in review, document downloaded from <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/learn/resources> (accessed on May 4th, 2018).

³⁰ The Welcoming Standards and Certified Welcoming, document downloaded from <https://www.welcomingamerica.org/programs/certification> (accessed on May 4th, 2018).

³¹ The Welcoming Standards and Certified Welcoming, p. 27.

as a community of practitioners which pursues coordination among public actors, i.e. the municipalities on the horizontal dimension and higher levels of government on the vertical. The inclusion of stakeholders takes place only indirectly, through cities' projects, yet NGOs or CSOs are not directly engaged in the network core activities. The main action of the WG, i.e. the Integrating Cities Charter, is a clear case in point: the specified commitments refer to municipal authorities and do not mention neither partnership nor coordination as a way to achieve the stated goals. Partnership is emphasised with respect to EU institutions, both in discourses and actions, as revealed by the IC Process. Yet, at the very end, relations seem to be limited to funding and conferences, with no clear evidence of a partnership leading to coordinated decision-making. The Solidarity City initiative, instead, pursues more traditional goals such as lobbying and putting pressure, and again, does not seem to imply any coordinated action.

WA takes exactly the opposite approach. The inclusion of and the coordination with stakeholders is a key goal both in terms of discourses and policy actions. Municipalities are by no means the privileged target of the network's actions, which are aimed at mobilising 'the community' in a broad sense. The highly demanding Welcoming Standards put policy partnerships on the same plane as municipal policy, and actually seek to promote them. On the vertical dimension, no collaborative relations with the federal government are reported, but just traditional forms of activation from below, e.g. providing legal advice in implementation, petitions etc.

The two CNs that are more in line with the expectations of MLG policymaking are ECCAR and ICC, especially after 2017. ECCAR seems to pursue a quite balanced mobilisation on both the vertical and horizontal dimension with the aim of fostering collaboration and partnership in the implementation of the Ten-Points Action Plan. However, on the vertical dimension national governments are almost completely absent, while on the horizontal one cities are left free to pursue their own strategy in implementing the Ten-Points Action Plan, therefore partnership with non-public actors is not explicitly mentioned as a key requirement. As for ICC, this network started as a partnership between CoE, the European Commission and local authorities, hence privileging the vertical dimension. Yet, since 2017, the new Action Programme has explicitly adopted the MLG approach and actions have been promoted in order to strengthen relations on both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. Yet, especially in terms of actions – more than of discourses – the first dimension seems to have been privileged so far, with increasing efforts devoted to involving states' representatives in the Policy Labs. Furthermore, the vertical dimension seems to be key also in the internal organisation of the network, with CoE playing a key role in the process of setting the goals of ICC, which are then implemented by the cities through the network.

Hence CNs seem to be engaged in very different multilevel political dynamics. Coordination, partnership and/or cooperation on the vertical and horizontal dimensions, while often featuring on official discourses, are pursued often in a piecemeal and somehow inconsistent manner. As a matter of fact, each network seems to have forged a distinctive identity through the undertaking of policy actions on either the vertical or the horizontal dimension, rather than on both.

5. Conclusion

According to Agranoff (2018), in the MLG scenario characterised by the intersection of complex vertical intergovernmental relations (IGR) and horizontal partnership networks, local governments play more and more of a key policy-making role, connecting different public and private actors to serve the needs of their communities. The emergence of CNs supports such a thesis and provides evidence of the importance of networking in enhancing cities' capacity to deal with globalisation challenges such as mobility and migration. However, contrary to other policy fields, scholars have so far scarcely considered cities' networking on migration related issues. The few existing studies, essentially focused on the EU context, looking at these networks as 'new alliances in the MLG of migration in Europe' (Penninx 2015, 106), de facto assuming a link between CNs and MLG.

This paper has sought to contribute to this nascent debate (see also: Scholten et al. 2017; Filomeno 2017) by undertaking an empirical investigation of this link. By taking a policy frames perspective I have identified and operationalized the two key components of the concept of MLG: i.e., the rhetoric and discourses on how policymaking processes should take place in terms of collaboration, cooperation, participation etc.; and concrete policy decisions and actions. Applied to the study of three CNs on migration in Europe and one in the United States, this perspective has enabled us to bring new insights on how CNs actually frame the multiple vertical and horizontal policy interactions they are engaged in. A key finding is that MLG, far from being the essence of city networking initiatives, is only one possible frame of policymaking interactions and not even the more relevant one.

We might conclude, following Scholten et al. (2017) that MLG, while often invoked as a major development of policymaking processes on migration as on other issues, is actually ‘hard to achieve in practice’ (17). CNs may well find more convenient or appropriate to pursue different types of policy interactions, centred on municipal authorities as in the case of Eurocities or on communities as in the case of WA. A different and still unanswered question is whether the framing of policymaking relations as MLG mobilisation actually leads to coordinated action and policy convergence.

In other terms, the key point is that of policy impact. As noted in the introduction, CNs are often regarded with enthusiasm and great expectations. “If Mayors ruled the world”, according to Barber (2013), pragmatism and consensus would prevail over ideology and politicisation. Nonetheless, as eloquently shown by the reception of asylum-seekers and refugees in Europe (and not only there), at a local level welcoming attitudes can well coexist with opposition and rejection, especially in a context of economic crisis, austerity policies and budget cuts (Taran, Neves de Lima and Kadyshева, 2016). If and to what extent CNs can really represent a venue for progressive dialogue and for policy innovation on the politically sensitive migration issue, is an open question. Further comparative research is needed to unravel of the factors and processes that can lead towards more coordinated policy agendas on the vertical dimension and more cooperative relations between public and non-public actors on the horizontal one.

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