Αφηγήσεις Εξευρωπαϊσμού και Διπλωματία Πόλεων: Η Εμπειρία της Δικτύωσης Πόλεων των Ελληνικών Δήμων

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Narratives of Europeanisation and City Diplomacy: The City Networking Experience of the Greek Municipalities

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Abstract

The present article is part of the broader academic dialogue regarding the Europeanisation of local government. Specifically, the relationship between the EU and local government has evolved into a mutual process with many dimensions. Most academic research on the Europeanisation of local government has focused on specific national contexts or particular aspects of it. Within this study, while not disregarding the national context, the participation of Greek municipalities in European city networks during the programming periods of 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 is examined, with a particular emphasis on their local impact within the various narratives of Europeanisation.

Keywords: City diplomacy, Europeanisation, City networks, Local impact, Greece

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Περίληψη

Το παρόν άρθρο αποτελεί μέρος του ευρύτερου ακαδημαϊκού διαλόγου σχετικά με τον εξευρωπαϊσμό της τοπικής αυτοδιοίκησης. Ειδικότερα, η σχέση μεταξύ της ΕΕ και της τοπικής αυτοδιοίκησης εξελίχθηκε σε μια αμοιβαία διαδικασία με πολλές διαστάσεις. Η πλειονότητα της ακαδημαϊκής έρευνας για τον εξευρωπαϊσμό της τοπικής αυτοδιοίκησης έχει επικεντρωθεί σε συγκεκριμένα εθνικά πλαίσια ή σε συγκεκριμένες πτυχές του. Στο πλαίσιο της εν λόγω μελέτης, χωρίς να παραγνωρίζεται το εθνικό περιβάλλον, εξετάζεται η συμμετοχή ελληνικών δήμων σε ευρωπαϊκά δίκτυα πόλεων κατά τις προγραμματικές περιόδους 2007-2013 και 2014-2020, με ειδικότερη αναφορά στον τοπικό τους αντίκτυπο, στο πλαίσιο των διαφορετικών αφηγήσεων του εξευρωπαϊσμού.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: Διπλωματία Πόλεων, Εξευρωπαϊσμός, Δίκτυα Πόλεων, Τοπικός Αντίκτυπος, Ελλάδα

1. Introduction

According to the recent "Our Common Agenda" by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, the involvement of cities is an integral part of the desired "more inclusive multilateralism." In line with this aspiration are the many initiatives that global and regional international organizations have devoted to cities, ranging from platforms to foster their exchange of best practices and joint planning (such as the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Initiative), to capacity-building activities for mayors (Asia Pacific Mayors Academy of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and UN-Habitat), and official gatherings to enable them to develop joint advocacy (Forum of Mayors of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) (Grandi, 2022). As Ivo H. Daalder, former U.S. ambassador to NATO (2009-13), puts it, cities are playing a significant role in "addressing the many global challenges that our nations and others must confront - from climate change and cybersecurity to terrorism and pandemics..." (Amiri and Dossani, 2019). Therefore, it is no coincidence that globally, there might be more than 120 formalized city networks, covering all sorts of thematic foci from climate to health and security, and this number seems destined to grow (Acuto and Leffel, 2021, p.1758).

Following this, it is well understood that the international city networks, as a form of city diplomacy, obviously refer to another model of governance in the context of a "localization of foreign policy" (Hocking, 1993, p.56), in which subnational authorities defend their interests at the international level, challenging traditional foreign policy-making and planning processes. Despite the significant advances in the literature of "paradiplomacy" (Salomon, 2011, p.47), or its subset, "city diplomacy" (Acuto et al. 2021, p. 138; Marchetti, 2021; Leffel, 2018; Acuto et al., 2017; Balbim, 2016; Hocking et al., 2012; Van der Pluijm and Melissen, 2007), city networks deserve special mention among the many diverse forms of city-to-city cooperation. Even though their number has grown since 1985, what is missing from the literature is a full account of their impact on public policy-making at the local level. "Impact" here means changes in local policies, politics and polities as a result of the participation of local authorities in transnational city networks. Most of the theoretical efforts to conceptualize city networks' impact depart from the functions and roles of these partnerships (Bansard et al., 2016, p.232). Yet, these approaches and categorizations do not contribute to the understanding of the networks since, as it is suggested, there appears to be little work on the tangible impact of city networking (Kosovac et al., 2020; Acuto et al., 2016).

This article explores the local impact of the participation of 162 networked Greek municipalities in 242 European city networks during the programming periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, in the framework of the various narratives of Europeanisation. A short theoretical overview of city networking impact and Europeanisation will precede the research strategy, the discussion of the results and the conclusions.

2. Theory on City networking impact and the narratives of Europeanisation

(a) The concept of the city networks

Several definitions of city networks have been proposed in recent years. City networks have been widely understood in the literature as formal or less formal collaborative initiatives to share information and disseminate experiences in urban policy, management and sustainable development (Busch, 2015, p.214; Bouteligier, 2013). Today's global landscape of city networks constitutes a complex ecosystem of a great variety of public-public, public-private and other multi-stakeholder arrangements (Abdullah and Garcia-Chueca, 2020, p.45; Acuto et al., 2017, p.17). We could, in general, argue that city networks have gone beyond mere bilateral agreements or town-twinnings in terms of scope, goals and composition. They include municipal and non-municipal actors (regions, think tanks, universities, private sector, etc.) and provide the necessary infrastructure for cities to operate at the international level, addressing a large list of policy issues, either on a temporary or permanent basis.

In this respect, we can suggest that an international network of cities is a voluntary, multilateral, multi-stakeholder, transnational cooperation between local authorities and other non-municipal actors, more or less organizationally structured, oriented towards one (single-issue or mono-actoral city networks) or more issues (multi-purpose networks) of common interest, and aims to improve the operational dynamics of all participating parties through exchange of actions, influence and targeted projects, in the short or long term.

(b) The classification of the European city networks

The broad interpretation and conceptualization of city networks created the conditions for a series of typologies developed in the relevant literature (Fernández de Losada, 2019, p.23; Bouteligier, 2013; Kern and Bulkeley, 2009; Camagni and Salone, 1993). These typologies serve as both frameworks for analysis and tools for evaluation. Adopting a typology enables the development of quantitative and comparative research, where unambiguous concepts are required to be able to measure and address the various phenomena. It also allows for the clarification and definition of new concepts from a qualitative perspective (Lara, 2020, p.194).

For the research purposes of the current article, the following classification of European city networks is proposed, depending on the authority/organization that took the initiative for their establishment: traditional city networks (e.g., Eurocities); project-bound city networks (e.g., URBACT city networks); internationally-led city networks (e.g., WHO's Healthy Cities); and EU-led city networks (e.g., ELISAN), which are EU initiatives to support cities to exchange know-how and participate in policy-making and are distinguished by their organizational autonomy and

functioning. Adding to that several other initiatives of the EU institutions exist as well, the so-called "EU-led Campaigns" (Espiñeira-Guirao, 2020, p.223), which operate exclusively as platforms, such as the Covenant of Mayors. These city networks feature varied levels of commitment and coordination among their members and uneven organizational and membership status.

(c)The Concept of Europeanisation

Since the early 1990s, when the implementation of regional policies led to an increase in city partnerships at the European level, researchers have tried to describe the changes brought about in state structures and institutions by their participation in the European integration process, resulting in the systematic use of the term "Europeanisation". An ever-increasing number of theoretical and empirical studies have focused their interest on the influence of membership in the European Union and the effect of Community Regulations on the functioning of national institutions and the implementation of public policies (Börzel and Panke, 2022; Featherstone 2003, pp. 5-6).

In general, the term is used to indicate the influence of European institutions and processes in some areas or even in the whole of the national political system. According to Featherstone (2003, p.5), research interest in the concept of Europeanisation focuses on the following:

• Adaptation of the member states to the integration process regarding the behaviours and interests of the agencies in the context of the changes in the internal negotiation structures.

• Understanding of Europeanisation as a historical phenomenon, highlighting the issues of belonging and identity.

• Process of diffusion of transnational cultural norms (e.g., in relation to human rights).

• Adaptation of policies and policy production processes.

Hamsen (1999, p. 82) identifies two versions of "Europeanisation". The first describes the significant increase in the scope and frequency of contacts between the national and supranational levels (participation of civil servants in working groups and councils in Brussels, implementation of the same decisions, etc.). The hypothesis of socialisation is accompanied by another hypothesis: that of optimisation, according to which individual countries will tend to adopt successful institutional forms of other countries. Optimisation could lead, therefore, to the second version of Europeanisation, which is understood as the convergence of the individual administrative systems towards a common institutional standard or as the convergence of these systems.

However, according to Hamsen (1999, p. 84), there does not seem to be a connection between the two versions of Europeanisation. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish the effects of Europeanisation in different policy areas, in different regions, according to the depth and breadth of their penetration into the national environment and according to the "timing and pace" associated

with them (Radaelli 2003, p. 48). In this sense, Europeanisation refers, on the one hand, to the relationship between European imperatives and participation in the EU and, on the other hand, to the respective internal peculiarities. Cowles et al. (2001) use historical institutionalism to interpret changes in informal rules, procedures and practices at different spatial levels. In their argument, the authors focus on a "top-down approach" to Europeanisation ("impact of Europeanisation at the national level"), although they admit that their model exhibits a circular flow (Cowles et al. 2001, p.4). Ladrech (2010) underlines the importance of the intermediate effects of pre-existing internal structures in the process of Europeanisation. Each member state reacts differently in administrative terms towards their participation in the EU system. In other words, the common challenges do not necessarily lead to similar institutional changes both at the level of the content and at the rate of development of the changes. The same European stimulus often produces different national results.

Radaelli (2003, pp. 27-56) proposed the most elaborate conceptualization of Europeanisation, which refers to processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, practices, shared beliefs, and norms that are first defined and consolidated during EU policy-making and then incorporated into the logic of internal "discourses", identities, political structures and public policies. From this definition, three special characteristics of Europeanisation emerge. First, Europeanisation can be the result of different stages and types of policy, from the stage of formulation to the stages of its implementation, institutionalisation and diffusion. Second, it concerns not only formal forms of policy practice (e.g. Regulations), but also informal ones, such as values, ideas and beliefs. Third, it concerns the influence of EU policy in the member states as a process that includes two stages: the stage of policy formulation at the EU level and the stage of its integration at the national level (Bulmer and Radaelli 2004, p.3).

We thus argue that Europeanisation is not a means, nor a theoretical explanatory concept, but dynamic, continuous, multi-faceted and interactive processes of interdependence between the EU and local governments, reflecting the variation of (1) asymmetrical effects at local level; (2) cities' reactions to adaptational pressures from their European engagements; (3) the national filters of institutional frameworks and local resource-related constraints (i.e. availability of human resources, organisational capacities, dialogue with civil society).

(d) The Intermediate Factors of Europeanisation

As seen above, most approaches to Europeanisation share a common emphasis on understanding it as an interactive process (Börzel and Panke, 2022, pp.112-123). Therefore, it is important to analyse the national field that actively interacts in this process with the EU level. Heritier and Knill (2001, p.288) refer to "domestic coordinates", which are based on three factors: the specific stage of liberalisation at which a country is confronted with corresponding European policies; the

sectoral potential for regulatory reforms; and the dominant belief system, which affects the direction of potential reforms at home. As highlighted in the literature, the intervening variables that influence the achievement of reform alignment within a country vary across systems and actors. The same European challenges often produce different national results. Additionally, Cowles et al. (2001) and Heritier et al. (2001) emphasise that the "goodness of fit" is important, which means that policy change depends on the degree of correspondence between European and national policies. In other words, when a member state manages to influence European policy design, using its national model, it is much easier to introduce the corresponding European Regulations within it. However, other studies show that what happens at the national level is more complicated and the dynamic presence in decision-making at the EU level is not enough to implement Regulations within the member states (Boerzel 2003). Adaptation trends emerging from the European level are deflected by specific intermediary factors (e.g., formal institutions, political and organisational cultures), leading to diversity rather than convergence of intergovernmental systems. Others argue that a mismatch is necessary but not a sufficient condition for change (Börzel and Risse 2003). Additionally, Radaelli (2003, p.46) has explained the nature and range of intervening variables, such as the institutional capacity to produce change, the synchronisation of European policies, and the structure of the practiced policy and advocacy alliances. Schmidt (2002, p.899) proposed a typology of mediating factors that is particularly useful for the present empirical research. One of these factors is "economic vulnerability" and refers to the presence or absence of an economic crisis, as well as the state's competitiveness in international markets. It is argued that states are more open to change when they face an economic crisis and when their position in the international political-economic environment is weak. In the present study, as it will become clear, during the years of crisis (2009-2018), the economic factor proved to be an incentive for Greek municipalities to continue the "journey" of Europeanisation as members of European city networks or to make the policies designed and implemented with their European partners sustainable. New institutionalism uses both the rational, self-interested, interpretation of human behaviour and the sociological interpretation, but almost always emphasises the influence of pre-existing contexts and expectations of actors on future outcomes. The neo-institutional approach owes its existence precisely to the answer to the basic question of whether institutions matter in the production of politics (Aspinwall and Schneider 2000, p.3). The emphasis it places on the set of informal and formal structural functions and characteristics contained in an institution is proportional to the emphasis placed on the informal process characteristics (beliefs, codes of conduct, particular culture of each institution), which also significantly influence the operation of an institution (March and Olsen 1989, p.26). For this reason, neo-institutionalism is ideal to interpret the changing geometry of Europeanised cities and serves the purposes of this study. The national institutional framework, local political-administrative

structures, and political culture are some factors with a significant influence on the Europeanisation of European networked Greek municipalities.

(e) The Narratives of Europeanisation

Most of the theoretical efforts to conceptualize city networks' impact depart from the functions and roles of these partnerships (Bansard et al., 2016, p.234). Several other contributions to the literature appear highly descriptive in their attempt to identify and categorize the actions of the networks (Benington and Harvey, 1993; Ercole et al. 1997). "Impact" here means changes in policies, politics and polities at the international, national and local levels as a result of the participation of local authorities in transnational city networks. So, determining the precise impact of those international networks on local urban policies has been truly challenging. Most of the literature limits its focus to the interaction between networks and members and ignores the impacts of membership on internal local public policy processes (Busch et al. 2018, p.225). This is a literature gap that widens remarkably when we refer to the Greek scholarship, where only some minimal attempts were made to map European municipal networking (Karvounis, 2011) and its importance for Greek cities, mainly in the context of territorial cooperation programmes for the exchange of experience and know-how in the early 1990s (Beriatos, 1999). While there is no shortage of research on city diplomacy, most of it has focused on the obvious cases of global or capital towns. The majority of Greek cities stands on the other side of the spectrum with limited resources but remarkably active in international partnerships during the last decade – a side of things less researched with minor exceptions. From this point of view, the present study is called to cover scholarly gaps concerning the added value of European city networking through the lens of the various narratives of Europeanisation of the engaged municipalities.

In this sense, we introduce six narratives of the Europeanisation of networked cities that function as, sometimes, step-by-step discrete phases of a strategic plan and, more often, as overlapping processes.

i.   Sustainable Europeanisation of cities is synonymous with changes in urban governance in five discrete ways. First, the municipalities organizationally create the conditions for successful participation in European city networks and instill the international "networking culture" across the entire local administration. Second, in the framework of a strategy plan, European city networking goes beyond merely quantitative terms of the number of city networks a local authority takes part in or the opportunistic logics of the narrow short-term partnerships of project-bound European city networks, or even the passive attitude of rule-takers in various ad hoc, temporary or permanent networks. In this sense, the partner cities of a European city network are seen as an extra resource for officers or elected representatives in the daily management of local affairs. Therefore, the related city network is not seen as a one-off public relations exercise but as an

important component in the life cycle of policy making at the local level. Third, the member cities of a project-bound city network may exploit their dynamics beyond the time-frame and the specific deliverables of a particular project, as well as the relevant facilitating knowledge or practice sharing activities, and subsequently engender the conditions for setting up a long-term partnership, either with the same or other partners within the particular or other policy domain of this collaboration. Fourth, the sustainability of the results of well-built European partnerships is ensured when the corresponding local communities are coherently woven into the member cities' international strategies. It is highly recommended that educating society to recognize the added value of city networking is a precondition to make the changes significant and permanent (Marchetti, 2021). Fifth, sustainable Europeanisation rests on the coordination of a local authority with national government, being in permanent contact with the official diplomacy and complementing national European agenda. Furthermore, sustainability also depends on the collaboration with other levels of government, which secures that there is no institutional competition and overlapping (Van der Pluijm and Melissen, 2007).

ii.   In the framework of Funding Europeanisation, city networking constitutes a potential means of accessing EU funding and an opportunity for local authorities to plan their projects without the intermediation of the national authority.

iii.   Cognitive Europeanisation is the result of city networks' initiatives to codify and institutionalize forums for cities to exchange knowledge and make plans together (e.g., Knowledge Society Forum of Eurocities). Networks can provide cities with technical expertise, shared resources, and technology they would not be able to access on their own (Bulkeley, 2006, p.1029).

iv.   Administrative Europeanisation refers to the capitalization of the exchange of experiences, innovative approaches and capacity building and their subsequent translation into changes in the way policymakers at the local level address needs and challenges.

v.   Political Europeanisation is not limited "to influence decision-making at the supranational level". The close relationship between city diplomacy and place branding has also been confirmed (Anholt, 2002, p.231). Cities all over the world take specific actions to elaborate their image and perceptions, both in the eyes of the inhabitants and those of potential tourists, investors, users and consumers.

vi.   Idealistic Europeanisation concerns raising awareness of the richness of the cultural and linguistic environment in Europe and the promotion of mutual understanding and tolerance, thereby contributing to the development of a respectful, dynamic and multi-narrative European identity.

3. Hypotheses

Therefore, it is of particular interest, in the context of this study, to capture the concrete narratives of the Europeanisation of the 162 European networked Greek municipalities during the programming periods 2007-2013 and 2014-2020, to

"map" and "measure" the impact of the European city networking initiatives of local authorities, taking into account the intermediate factors. In particular, studying the selected networked municipalities will show to what extent theoretical assumptions on Europeanisation and city networks hold in local governance. Thus, the hypotheses of the study can be formulated as follows:

• The process of Europeanisation has a multidimensional, dynamic character and occurs in five narratives of Europeanisation, as a result of the European city networking of the Greek municipalities.

• The character of each narrative of Europeanisation is conditioned by intermediate factors at the local level.

4. Methodology

The choice of methodology (purposive sampling) should help to connect theory with reality. This research is exploratory because the theoretical framework of Europeanisation has not yet been significantly applied to the field of local governance. Although the chosen cases of European city networked local authorities can support theoretical claims, it is less probable that they will offer the essential information and results to support or refute a theory. Additionally, exploratory research does not offer definitive conclusions; rather, it generates insights that must be contextualized as well as new hypotheses (Singh, 2007). These restrictions are not seen as a concern because the theories on city diplomacy and the Europeanisation of local governance are still in the theory-building and concept-development stages. This article's contribution is not to verify a theory but to confirm or deny our hypotheses on the relationship between city diplomacy and Europeanisation.

A wide range of sources is required due to the exploratory nature of this study and the intricacy of the instances. It is feasible to gather a considerable amount of information, secure a double-check accuracy, and aim for comprehensiveness when using a variety of sources. Primary and secondary literature, information available through IT, interviews, and direct observation were the four main sources from which data were gathered. The information required to study the effects of the municipalities' membership of city networks in the form of the various narratives of Europeanisation was primarily gathered using IT (websites of the networks, the European programmes, and the municipalities), and interviewees were asked very specific, factual questions to avoid discrepancies and gaps.

In particular, three stages made up the construction of the empirical research. Greek municipalities' membership of European city networks during the programming periods 2007–2013 and 2014–2020 was first mapped by receiving questionnaires circulated by e-mail to the total number of Greek municipalities (332). One hundred and sixty-two questionnaires (162) were completed and returned, so the rate of response was 49%. The questionnaires were focused on the following key issues:

• Details about the municipality's membership of European city networks.

- Basic benefits from the European city networking for the involved municipality.
- Specific results (impact) from the European city networking in terms of capacity building, exchange of best practices, adoption of innovative policies, restructuring of the municipality's organization etc.
- Frequency of the municipality's participation in the network's initiatives.
- Adequacy of the supporting structure and personnel within the municipality for its international city networking.

For cross-checking purposes, in order to confirm that actually these were the European city networked local authorities of Greece during the examined programming periods, we also conducted a relevant research in the Hellenic Republic Ministry of the Interior's database of all the approved international partnerships of the Greek local government.

In a second stage, interviews were absolutely necessary for gaining understanding of the effects of the local authorities' participation in multilateral partnerships in addition to providing more factual information. In total 182 hour long interviews were conducted from June to November 2022 with respective members of the representative body (i.e. deputy mayors), political advisers and officers of the competent directorates or units of those 162 municipalities which responded constructively to the circulated questionnaires. Theoretical premises merely provide a rudimentary and abstract reflection. Discovering the potential and boundaries of reforming was made possible through conversations with persons in charge of overseeing municipal membership of city networks. All of the interviews were semi-structured, which means that the primary questions were pre-planned (mainly focused on the questionnaires' key topics), but the follow-up questions were spontaneous and developed as a result of the information provided. The benefit of semi-structured interviews is that the topics of conversation chosen by the interviewer frame the conversation, but the conversation's dynamic can introduce fresh ideas and different viewpoints. Additionally, this kind of interview offers insider insight, depth in the empirical data, and the ability to evaluate theoretical claims (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). In general, participants were eager to contribute their knowledge, and significant challenges were rare. All of the interviews took place over the phone, apart from those with the officers from the municipality of Athens. Constraints related to time, geography, COVID-19 pandemic, and money were the main causes. The relevant transcriptions of the phone interviews were further cross-checked for validation with the operating programmes of the city networked municipalities that either were submitted to the Ministry of the Interior or hosted by the local authority's website.

In a third, stage we conducted a content analysis of the relevant material (interviews' transcriptions, local authorities' operational programmes, information from cities' and Ministries' webpages). The content analysis method was used to search for appropriate information. In more specific terms, 'exchanges of best practices' were associated with 'Cognitive Europeanisation'; 'long-lasting part-

nerships', 'strategies' and 'collaboration with peers' were linked to 'Sustainable Europeanisation'; 'access to EU funding' was related to 'Funding Europeanisation'; 'innovative policies' and 'capacity building' were attributed to 'Administrative Europeanisation'; 'influence-making' and 'place branding' mainly concerned 'Political Europeanisation'; and, finally, 'raising awareness' of European identity and values were connected to 'Idealistic Europeanisation'.

5. Discussion-Results

The case of the Greek local authorities confirms a particular section of scholars who argues about Europeanisation as a multi-narrative concept. Most of the Greek municipalities favoured more than one narratives of Europeanisation, engaging in various European city networks. The latter conditioned the particular narrative of Europeanisation, whereas the intermediate national and local factors functioned as an additional filter for the ensuing local impact of the European city networking. Statistical analysis revealed the diverse types of European city networking of the Greek municipalities as well as the various narratives of Europeanisation. Cognitive and administrative Europeanisation seemed to be the direct impact of city networking. At the same time, it is no coincidence that project-bound city networks appeared to be the most popular form of multilateral partnerships at the European level for most local authorities. This type of European city network leads to tangible results at local level in terms of best practice exchange and innovative policies.

### (i) Types of European city networks as catalysts for reform

Within this methodological framework, we examined the cases of 162 networked Greek municipalities engaged with 242 European city networks, which were classified into four major categories: 187 project-bound, 39 traditional, 12 internationally-led and 4 EU-led (see Figure 1). According to the relevant final reports of the EU-funded projects and the discussions with the project managers of the involved local authorities, the design and implementation of innovative policies at the local level resulted mainly from the membership of project-bound city networks. Statistically these are the most popular European city networks for Greek municipalities for the examined programming periods, under which specific obligations were prescribed for local authorities at the operational level. It is characteristic that, out of the 285 examined cases of Europeanisation, 80 were linked to the membership of project-bound city networks (mainly URBACT networks), which explicitly required their members to draw up a local action plan and set up a local support group, that would undertake the drafting of this plan. The nature of these "engagement mechanisms" inevitably helped local authorities to define strategies and actions that would not otherwise have taken place. This is less true for traditional, internationally-led and EU-led networks, which mainly were related to the creation of working groups (such as EUROCITIES), offering a plat-

form for the exchange of good practices and know-how, along with opportunities for funding and influence-making at EU level. In this sense, belonging to a particular European city network meant specific narratives of Europeanisation.

(ii) The Multi-narrative Europeanisation of the city networked Greek municipalities

In fact, the majority of city networking engagements of the Greek municipalities was not related to a single narrative of Europeanisation; in several cases, a single European engagement was accompanied by more than one narrative of Europeanisation. True, the resulting narratives of funding, political, administrative, idealistic, cognitive and sustainable Europeanisation confirm that section of the literature which has argued for the multi-dimensional nature of the Europeanisation of local authorities (John, 2001; Goldsmith and Klausen, 1997, p.243). As shown in Figure 2 that follows, the European city networking engagement for Greek local authorities: (1) was not accompanied by a long-term partnership strategy and accordingly internal restructuring reforms (very low sustainable Europeanisation); (2) was thus basically restricted to exchange of best practices (very high cognitive Europeanisation); (3) was mainly preoccupied by the delivery of concrete projects (high administrative Europeanisation); (4) was moderately influenced by political strategies and place-branding (political Europeanisation); (5) was slightly preoccupied by funding considerations (except for the programming period 2014-2020); and (6) was poorly saturated by the European ideals and values.

Figure 1: The European City Networking of the Greek Municipalities, 2007-2020
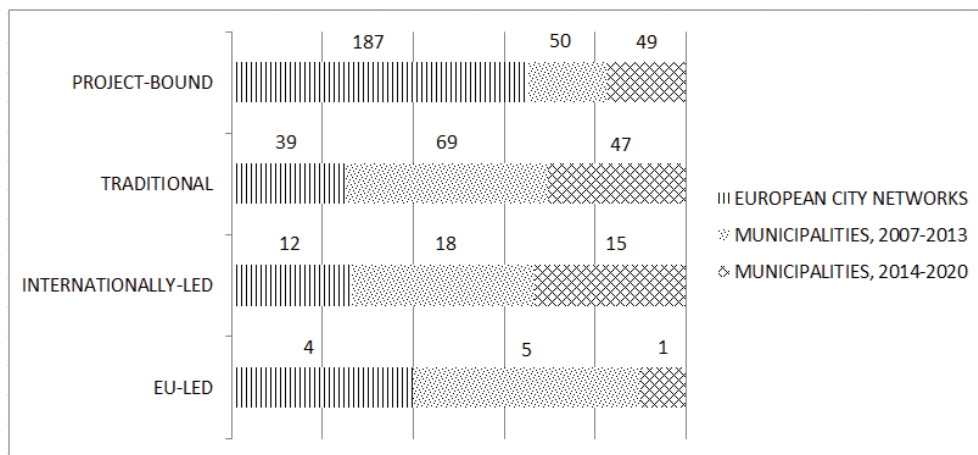
For instance, the officers of the Department of Planning, Information Technology and Transparency of the municipality of Karditsa argued that the main benefits arising from the participation of the local authority in the traditional network of Cities with Lakes concerned the exchange of opinions, ideas and knowledge, information and experiences for the management of water resources (Cognitive Europeanisation), the exploitation of investment opportunities, and the implementation of joint programmes (Funding Europeanisation)[1]. Kozani chose to participate in the project-bound SYMBI network to acquire the necessary experience and knowledge, taking into account good practices of similar European local authorities (Cognitive Europeanisation) "for the creation of the action plan for the circular economy of the municipality" (Administrative Europeanisation)[2]. Trikala successfully participated in the project-bound "Cities for you, cities for Europe (CT4EU)" project as part of its membership of the project-bound city network Strasbourg Club, which was the lead partner of this initiative. According to the company's CEO, the municipality's main benefit from participating in international networks of cities was, among others, the acquisition of know-how (Cognitive Europeanisation), the transfer of digital know-how to its structures (Administrative Europeanisation), the exchange of good practices, the possibility of participating in consortia of European programmes (Funding Europeanisation), as well as in European decision-making bodies for the application of funded projects in various areas of public policy (Political Europeanisation)[3]. Furthermore, in the framework of the project-bound city network titled ANDROMEDA, the mayor of Ag. Paraskevi, Mr. Vasilis Giannakopoulos, noted that "in the era of the globalised economic, spiritual and urban cosmopolitanism, local societies should come together to share and exchange experiences, opinions and values, to learn lessons from history in

order to create for the future" (Cognitive & Idealistic Europeanisation) (Karvounis 2017, p.75). Last, but not least, Amaroussion proceeded to introduce innovative administrative tools internally in its organisation prior to its European city networking engagements (Sustainable Europeanisation). Indeed, the idea for the creation of the traditional "Q-cities" (Cities with Quality) in 2007 was initiated by the Quality Office of the municipality in 2004, after the first implementation of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF), creating the right environment to exploit the results from its participation in this network. Indeed, the municipality of Amaroussion was then the only municipality in Greece that introduced and implemented a quality system based on the ISO 9001:2000 quality system, the EMAS environmental management system and the CAF . In 2009, the municipality proceeded with the third implementation of the CAF, applied in the Offices of Implementation of Internal Procedures and Quality Assurance, of International Relations and Partnerships and that of the Utilisation of National and European Resources. Those three offices constituted the basic functional, programmatic and financial units of the municipality for engaging in European city networking. According to the General Secretary of the municipality, Mr. Christakis, the electronic service of the citizen, the improvement of municipal transport that serves 12.500 passengers per day and the launch of the citizen's line were some of the positive results of the municipality's participation in Q-Cities (Administrative Europeanisation) . "We considered a European Quality Cities Network to be the most dynamic answer to the need for better and more sustainable patterns of European governance. Our vision was to create responsive and efficient public services based on quality in favour of the European citizens", Mr. Christakis added.

(iii)   The intermediate factors of the multi-narrative Europeanisation of the city networked Greek municipalities

At the same time, our analysis does not overlook the internal resistances that, in some cases, mitigated or even cancelled the potential of the above narratives of Europeanisation. The municipal officers of the Planning and European Programmes Directorates of the city networked local authorities were given the space to express themselves to highlight the particular conditions that either encouraged or prevented the long-lasting effects of these results and that, to a large extent, determined the character of Europeanisation at the local level and the reforming potential of these networks and their members. In fact, the main intermediate factors identified in our research were related to the political choices, the internal motives for city networking, the inability of the involved organizational units of the municipalities to express a technocratic discourse, the organizational deficits at the level of structures and personnel, the limitations of the bureaucracy, and, in general, a cultural context that did not tolerate changes.

Figure 2: The Multi-narrative Europeanisation of the Greek Municipalities, 2007-2020
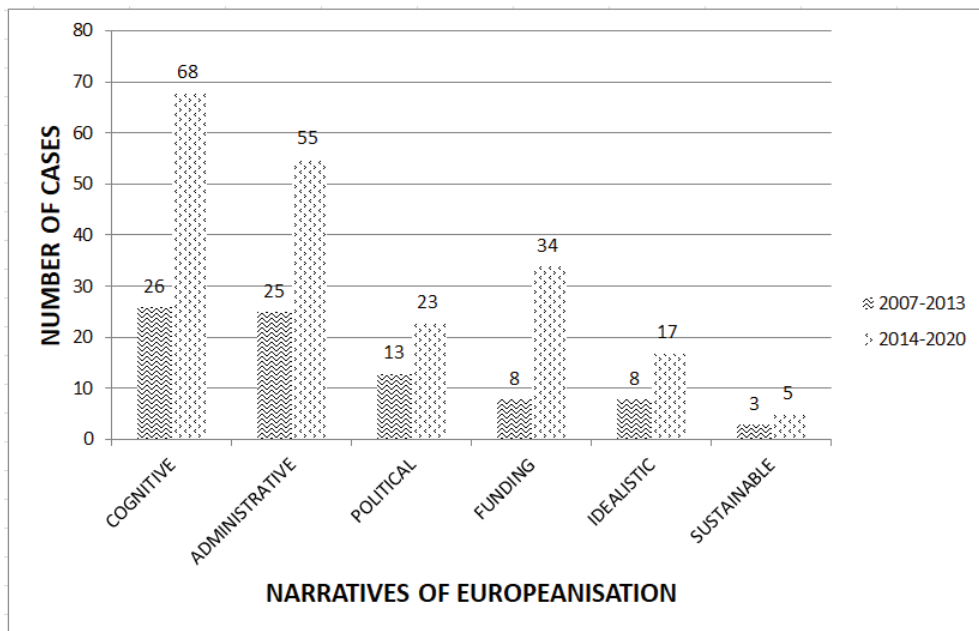
For instance, although the "international specialization of the city of Heraklion" was sought through multilateral collaborations, problems of "insufficient staffing of the European programmes office" were pointed out, while the "lack of culture in matters of inter-municipal cooperation" also hindered the international strategic goals of the local authority (Municipality of Heraklion, 2013). Likewise, another example of a negative intermediate factor was Thessaloniki's decision on the non-necessity of the existence of a support structure for the participation of the municipality (since 2013) in the European Alliance of Cities against Racism (ECCAR). Along the same lines, the municipality of Xanthi met insurmountable difficulties in the dissemination of knowledge and information among its officers; in understanding the advantages of introducing and exercising a new management model aimed at optimizing the efficiency and productivity of the organization's services; in adapting its personnel to the implementation of modern management and operation systems; in the low cooperation between the involved Departments and Directorates of the municipality; in the gradual obsolescence of the available know-how, due to the non-systematic implementation of the appropriate continuing training and capacity building programmes; and in the low adaptation to the new IT Technologies and Communications (Municipality of Xanthi, 2014). Moreover, the municipality of Egaleo confronted the "lack of

an organized unit" for fruitful participation in trans-European networks, although the need for the "creation of networks and development of partnerships at the European level" was still considered important in the field of social policy (Municipality of Egaleo, 2012). For some municipalities, the acknowledged lack of internal structural support meant that any European engagement was deemed worthless (Municipality of Tirnavos, 2015). Furthermore, the dismal condition of local government finances due to the Greek debt crisis led some municipalities to stop paying their membership subscriptions to their city networks. Moreover, in some major municipalities, there has been a fragmentation of responsibility and competence for monitoring their membership of city networks. For instance, in 2014, the monitoring of Athens' membership of European city networks had been assigned to 6 municipal organizational units and legal entities, with apparent gaps of coordination. Finally, the administrative discontinuity that characterizes the Greek public administration also has an impact on the international collaborations of municipalities, so that political changes at the level of the elected personnel often entail a change of priorities in terms of participation in specific multilateral collaborations (Karvounis, 2016, p.234). These were mainly problems of "systemic" nature, structural deficiencies and cultural norms that inhibited or mitigated any reform possibilities that existed at the local level. The Greek literature on this process of Europeanisation makes explicit reference to the peculiarities of the Greek political-administrative system, which led to the slow response of public administration to European challenge (Spanou, 2001), and the "responsive" and "intentional" Europeanisation, reviving old divisions between modernity and tradition (Ioakimidis, 1998). In this sense, the degree of the various narratives of Europeanisation was also dependent on these conditions prevailing at the domestic local and national levels.

6. Conclusions

The previous analysis affirmed our main hypotheses that the Europeanisation exhibited by the Greek municipalities in their city networking initiatives during the programming periods 2007-2013 & 2014-2020 was multi-narrative and conditional upon the domestic peculiarities. Both the concept of Europeanisation (independent variable) and the study of the municipalities' membership of European city networks (dependent variable) highlighted a potentially appropriate behaviour of Greek municipalities in the EU for the implementation of innovative policies and the proper utilisation of human and administrative resources. The study of the two variables was added to our choice to examine the impact of the municipalities' European city networking in the form of the various narratives of Europeanisation. The choice of European city networks is one of the most appropriate research fields for assessing the Europeanisation of the country's municipal authorities. Through this process, for the sake of scientific research, the issue of investigating the concrete narratives of Europeanisation as a tangible impact of city networking, as well as the "intermediate variables" that determine the content of Europeanisation, could not

be ignored. Attitudes, mindsets, motives, permanent administrative practices, and political choices became the filter of the reforming dynamics of the European city networking of the Greek municipal authorities.

Finally, at the research level, we can safely assert that there are still plenty of open research questions one can delve into regarding Europeanisation and international city networking. First, as Europeanisation emerged as a multi-narrative phenomenon/impact of the Greek municipalities' city networking, there is a need for future research to conduct multidisciplinary studies linking researchers from various disciplines (administrative science, sociology, political science, management) to make use of and potentially amplify the above analytical levels of the concept. Second, this study superficially stressed the importance of power relations within international city networks (the so-called "networks of pioneers for pioneers"). Further research on the internal life of the various international city networks could contribute further to the conditions for the production of the outcome of their initiatives. Third, future research can be conducted at the local level on the issue of Europeanisation in South East European countries to draw more secure conclusions, similarities and dissimilarities with the Greek case. With this research we were not able to unpack the complex reality of city networking in the Mediterranean Basin as a whole. However, our findings would be useful for those interested in studying city diplomacy, and city networking in particular, in Mediterranean countries in which the main obstacles are associated with their historical centralization, limited autonomy of municipalities in terms of financial planning and financial resources, which are almost always inadequate in view of the magnitude of the challenges faced.

Notes

1. Interview with Ms. G. Giannoulaki, officer of the Directorate of Planning, IT and Transparency of the municipality of Karditsa (23/11/2022).
2. Interview with Mr D. Kakoulidis, member of the Mayor's Independent Office of the municipality of Kozani (9/8/2022).
3. Interview with Mr. O. Raptis, CEO of e-Trikala (21/6/2022).

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