Researching local and regional government transnational networking in multi-level Europe

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Abstract

A growing body of literature emerged in the 1990s focusing on local government and its relationship with the EU and European governance. This took a number of forms, for example the impact on sub-state–state–European relations, evaluating the extent of Europeanization or advancing modes of multi-level governance. Transnational networking was also identified, where local authorities interact with their counterparts in other—particularly European—countries. Several reasons for this were identified, such as obtaining funding or influencing policy. However, contemporary research in this area is limited.

The aim of this paper is to critically review existing literature on this topic. It assesses the need for further research in this area and proposes the directions this could take. It is argued that this area is under-researched, yet extremely important for understanding local and EU governance in a transnational multi-level environment, especially as it highlights the importance of 'horizontal', rather than 'vertical' relationships. In the context of greater local government competence, localism and decentralization, while simultaneously facing resource cuts, transnational networking offers local and regional authorities an innovative way to promote their interests, achieve goals and participate in European governance.

Researching this area not only has the potential to highlight the extent of this activity and increase academic understanding of the role of multi-level governance, networks and European transnationalization; it also has the potential to yield practical benefits for practitioners and other actors in civil society. This is particularly important if research is to have an impact beyond academia.

Introduction

From the 1990s a growing body of literature emerged, focusing on local government and its relationship with the European Union (EU). This took a number of forms, for example the impact on sub-state–state–European relations, or evaluating the extent of Europeanization. However, rather than focusing on the effect of European integration on the state or the EU's institutional structure—as a majority did—this was more concerned with interactions between sub-state, local or regional actors. The particular area of interest was that this interaction was happening across, rather than within, national borders. The name given to this activity takes many forms, such as "cross-border co-operation", "inter-regional networking", "transnational networking" and so on. What is common is local and regional governments interacting with counterparts in other—particularly European—countries.

The purpose of this paper is to offer a 'state of the art' review in order to provide an overview of this activity and the literature that has focused on it. The aim is to highlight this as an area for further research and along with it some important concerns which merit further investigation.

Context

Of course, literature in this area before the 1990s does exist. Examples include Koch's (1974) analysis of transnational networking by the Alsace regional government or Hansen's (1984) comparative study of transnational networking by local government in France and Mexico. But it was the 1990s that saw a large rise in this literature. This is not a coincidence; rather it follows an observable increase in this activity which was facilitated by a number of contextual factors.

The 1990s saw several conceptual developments in EU literature. Chief among these were policy networks (see Börzel, 1997, 1998) and multi-level governance (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, 2003). These approaches advocated the 'horizontal'

relationships among local government and other sub-state actors which characterize this form of transnational networking. The approaches were particularly compatible with the EU's system of governance, offering alternatives to the traditional neo-functionalism–intergovernmentalism debate (Börzel, 1997, p. 8). It rapidly became recognized that the EU was a "networked polity" (Ansell, 2000), facilitated by its multi-level structure and system of communication between public and private actors at different levels (Börzel & Heard-Lauréote, 2009, p. 138; Kohler-Koch, 2002, p. 4). Consequently, the role of regions and sub-national governments in the EU—and indeed a wider international context—became the focus of much academic interest at this time (for example Goldsmith & Klausen, 1997; Hesse, 1989; Hobbs, 1994; Jones & Keating, 1995; Le Galès & Lequesne, 1998). This led to a focus on the role of 'sub-national mobilization' within the EU (Hooghe, 1995; Jeffery, 2000).

While conceptual developments provided a framework to analyse local government transnational networking, a number of 'real world' contextual factors also played their part in the emergence this literature and transnational networking itself. Chief among these was European regional policy, which—although in existence since the 1970s—was being reformed extensively between 1988 and 1993 (see Bache, 1998, pp. 67–92; McAleavey and Mitchell, 1994). As part of these reforms, the size of the structural funds was increased, occupying 33 per cent of the budget by 1993 (Payre, 2010, p. 267). As well as providing extra funding for regions, the reform process provided an opportunity for local government to involve themselves in European policy making (Lawrence, 2000; McAleavey & Mitchell, 1994).

Payre (2010, p. 267) cites a number of other reasons for the rise in this activity. He notes that from the 1990s local and regional governments started to play an increasing role in economic affairs. Indeed Griffiths (1995, p. 225) notes that many local areas sought to become competitive local economies in order to attract investment. This can be seen as a result of the effects of globalization. The impact of this and the links between economy, society and politics leads Payre (2010, p. 260) to argue local authorities "are inevitably pushed towards internationalization". This was particularly the case for cities and industrialized local areas. In response to these international pressures, many councils set up representation offices in Brussels (Audit Commission,

1991, p.35; Barber, 1997, p.23; Hooghe & Marks, 1996, pp.82–85; John, 1994; Rowe, 2011).

1992 saw the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty and along with it the notion of subsidiarity and the establishment of the Committee of the Regions as part of the EU's institutional structure (Bogdanor, 1992, pp. 5–9; Payre, 2010, p. 267). At the same time a European 'urban policy' was beginning to emerge. There was a rise in funding programmes aimed at urban areas and urban interests started to be taken on board by the Commission (Payre, 2010, pp. 267–268). At the same time, however, there was dissatisfaction with the EU's approach to local issues; specifically that it was too focused on sectoral policy areas—such as agriculture—and regions instead of localities (Griffiths, 1995, p. 217).

The establishment of the single market meant interstate borders became less significant at a time when regionalism was beginning to take hold. There was a rapid rise in cross-border regions (Perkmann, 2003, p. 153). Such regions promoted local authorities to look to their international neighbours. EU regional policy helped facilitate transnational networking. The availability of funds such as INTERREG—founded in the early 1990s—and other initiatives provided the impetus, with transnational networking being a condition of eligibility (Perkmann, 2003, p. 155). Such regional networking was not only supported by the EU but also other international institutions such as the Council of Europe and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (Murphy, 1993, p. 111).

Factors within states were also at play. The early 1990s saw a withdrawal of the state which in turn led to reduced resources for local government. This led local authorities to seek funds from international sources (Payre, 2010, p. 267). In addition, local government in centralized states—such as the United Kingdom (UK)—began to see international activity as a means to counteract centralization (for example Bogdanor, 1992). Indeed, Murphy (1993) argues that transnational networking by local government posed a direct challenge to "the dominance of the state".

It is in this context that local government transnational networking began to proliferate. Academic literature naturally followed (for example Benington & Harvey, 1994, 1998, 1999; Church & Reid, 1996, 1999; Ercole, Walters, & Goldsmith, 1997;

Goldsmith, 1993; Lawrence, 2000; Murphy, 1993; Scott, 1989). Many studies emerged analysing specific cases of transnational networking. The next section identifies some these and the type of transnational networking undertaken by local government.

Existing studies

Murphy's (1993) study of the Four Motors network—between Catalonia, the Rhone Alps, Baden-Würtemburg and Lombardy—showed how links between highly industrialized regions promoted investment and economic development, facilitated by European funds for cross-border projects. Scott's (1989) research follows a similar vein, this time looking at cross-border co-operation in the upper Rhine valley. Other research, such as that by Koch (1974) or Hansen (1984), has also identified a prevalence of networking between regions in the Rhine area, indicating the importance of this activity for industrialization and economic development. For Murphy (1993) this networking presented a challenge to the role of the central state in terms of actual political relationships. However, he also noted it was a challenge to a traditional academic focus on the nation state (Murphy, 1993, p. 114). Leitner (2004) follows a similar line; coming from a geographical background she argues that transnational networking by local government challenges the traditional "politics of scale" where studies focus on local, regional or national levels of analysis (Leitner, 2004, p. 238). However, "transnational networks between cities and regions in the EU cannot be seen as separate from the scalar hierarchies of the EU political space" (Leitner, 2005, p. 250); rather that are multi-scalar and need to be studied as such. Indeed the role of networking in Europe has led to claims that the EU can now be conceived as a "transnational political space" (Kaiser & Starie, 2005).

Perkmann's (1999; 2003; 2007) research explores cross-border regions in much more detail. These can be defined as regions which are "inherent in geography, history, ecology, ethnic groups, economic possibilities and so on, but disrupted by the sovereignty of the governments ruling on each side of the frontier" (Council of Europe, 1972, quoted in Perkmann, 2003, p. 156). Perkmann (2003, p. 153) identifies a rapid institutionalization of these regions in the 1990s, claiming "today there are virtually no

local or regional authorities in border areas that are not involved in cross-border areas that are not involved in cross-border co-operation". He identifies the role of EU funding initiatives—particularly INTERREG—in fostering cross-border networking (Perkmann, 2003, p. 155). The conditions on eligibility for funding require collaboration between local areas on different sides of national borders. Figure 1, which highlights the regions eligible for one of the Commission's funding schemes, illustrates the prevalence and cross-border nature of this funding. While such funding initiatives aim to reduce regional disparities and promote economic investment, Perkmann (2003, p. 155) points to the role of this in breaking down national borders, thus furthering European integration and fostering a transnational European identity.
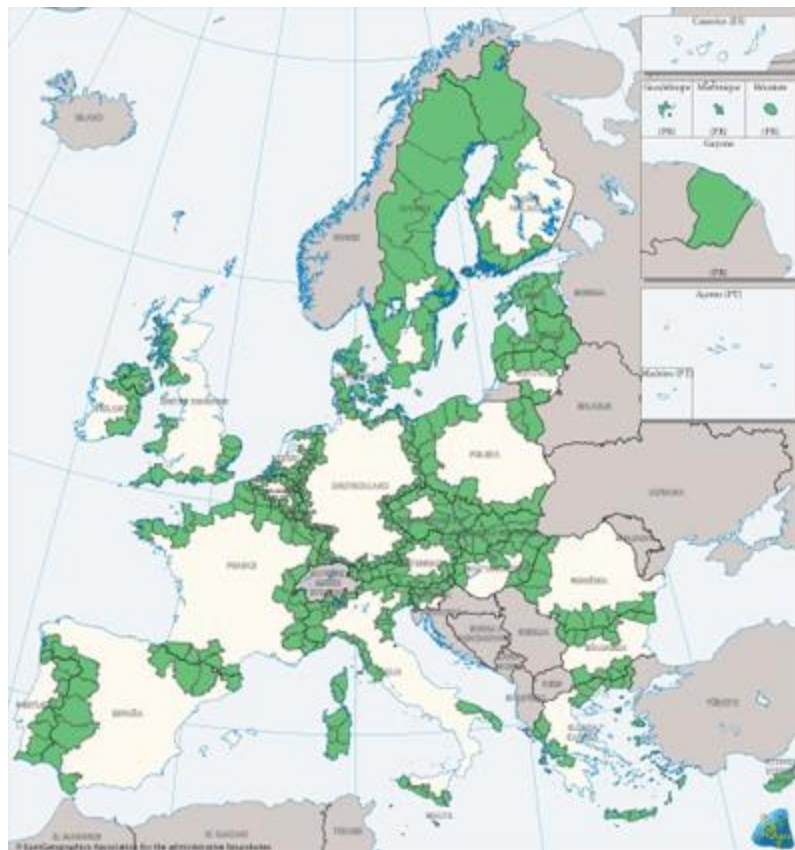

Figure 1: cross-border co-operation in the EU cohesion policy (2007–2013) (European Commission, 2008).

While networks of local authorities come together to bid under the various initiatives, Perkmann (1999, p. 661) notes they often remain in place after funding has been secured. Such networks are known as 'steering committees' and their role is to

institutionalize this co-operation and provide governance arrangements for delivering the various projects. Perkmann (1999, p. 661) notes that:

> as there are no preconstituted public authorities stretching across borders, [cross-border co-operation] cannot be pursed [*sic*] along the conventional lines of public actors. Given this situation of trans-territoriality, some type of network integration among actors is to be expected.

Church and Reid's (1996; 1999) research also focuses on cross-border co-operation and the resulting transnational networking that occurs, using southern England and northern France as a case study. They note the emergence of several networks with differing objectives. Again, they note a dramatic increase in the prevalence of this activity during the 1990s (Church & Reid, 1999, p. 646). Among the examples identified is the Transmanche regions—between Kent County Council and Nord-Pas de Calais—set up primarily to attract INTERREG funding worth £6.4 million (Barber, 1997, p. 20; Church & Reid, 1996, p. 1303). Another network identified is the Arc Manche; this has a much wider membership, including several local and regional authorities on both sides of the channel. Although obtaining funding is one objective of this network, it was primarily focused on influencing European policy especially in relation to maritime and other policy areas pertinent to members in the region (Barber, 1997, p. 22; Church & Reid, 1999. p. 650). Several other examples of local government networking in these regions are also identified by Church and Reid (1996; 1999). These examples show that local authorities are often involved with several different networks, often with "contrasting characteristics" (Church & Reid, 1999, p. 653). Their work is supplement by Barber (1997) who—as an employee for Kent County Council—offers a unique practitioner perspective to local authority transnational networking. Like Church and Reid, he shows that one authority is often involved in several networks, again with differing objectives (Barber, 1997). This trend is also identified by Lawrence (2000, pp. 68–69), who notes that it is often necessary for local authorities to be involved with several networks in order to pursue varying interests.

Barber's (1997) account also identifies three other important aspects to this networking activity. Firstly, that local government networks are not just confined to local authorities, but also involve a range of other actors, such as "universities, chambers of commerce and the private sector" (Barber, 1997, p. 22). Payre's (2010) analysis of the Eurocities network also draws attention to private sector organizations joining such networks. Another insight identified by Barber (1997, p. 19) is the role of individuals and political leadership in establishing effective networks. Payre (2010, p. 264) also notes the role of local political leadership in promoting links with other authorities abroad. The third aspect identified by Barber (1997, p. 23) was the use of Brussels offices by local authorities. These offices almost act as mini-permanent representations for these councils. Again, during the 1990s this activity began to increase, with the Audit Commission (1991, p. 35) at the time noting "an 'embassy' in Brussels is the latest thing in Euro-chic, and is being treated as a vital accessory by ... local authorities". John (1994), Hooghe and Marks (1996, pp. 82–85) and Rowe (2011) also identify this activity.

Lobbying is also an important part of local authority transnational networking. McAleavey and Mitchell's (1994) study looked at how local authority networks lobbied the Commission to secure more favourable funding criteria during the 1988–1993 structural fund reforms. Their research showed that networks were more successful than individual actors in lobbying because the Commission preferred to deal with groups who could claim they were representative of a wider body of actors. In other words they could not be seen to listen to—and thereby favour—single actors (McAleavey & Mitchell, 1994, p. 238). Local authorities also competing against a wide range of other actors, often with greater resources, all trying to gain the Commission's attention (McAleavey & Mitchell, 1994, p. 238). By coming together as networks, local authorities increased their chances of favourable outcomes. Lawrence's (2000) study also investigates structural fund lobbying, however he focuses of the networking undertaken by local government in the West Midlands. Lawrence's (2000, p. 65) work in particular shows there was a fine line between effective and ineffective lobbying. On the one hand the larger networks were more likely to attract the Commission's and Council's attention, but are subject to conflicts of interest among members and lack integrity. While smaller networks overcome these problems, they do not have the

political clout compared with the larger ones (Lawrence, 2000, p. 65). Lawrence (2000, p. 68) also touches on some of the problems faced by these lobbying networks, such as language barriers, leadership and cost.

Other scholars also highlight local government lobbying (for example Benington & Harvey, 1994, pp. 946–947; Hooghe & Marks, 1996; John, 1994; Rowe, 2011; Sørensen, 1998), but there is a tendency for this to focus on funding issues at the expense of other policy areas. Furthermore, others remain sceptical about the impact networking activity has on influencing outcomes. For example, Bomberg and Peterson (1998) note that local government influence at the European level is often determined by the national constitutional context in which the local authority operates. They note that the German Länder are more likely to have influence at a European level compared with British local authorities because German local government is more constitutionally defined and autonomous compared with their UK counterparts (Bomberg & Peterson, 1998, p. 234). Moreover, McAleavey and Mitchell (1994, p. 238) concede that the influence of local government networks is substantially reduced in areas still subject to intergovernmental bargaining. In addition, funding schemes are well regulated and often administered in accordance to strict guidelines, limiting the scope for local government networks to have influence (McAleavey & Mitchell, 1994, p. 239). Nonetheless, there are examples where lobbying has been successful, for example Kent County Council and Nord-Pas de Calais successfully arguing the channel tunnel constituted a land border, thus qualifying them for extra funding (Barber, 1997, p. 20).

While the above examples highlight the role of local government networks in securing funding and economic development, Phelps, McNeill and Parsons (2002) note the role of these networks in identity formation; in other words promoting a local 'brand'. Their study looked at the Edge Cities network; a collection of local councils representing urban areas on the edge of capital cities. This network provided an important function in promoting the identity of its members. This was focused in two areas. Firstly, the network provided a means to promote individual local areas within their national borders. Phelps et al. (2002, p. 219) use Croydon's participation in the network, noting their involvements was rooted "in longer and more firmly locally held beliefs in the borough's being a city in its own right". Secondly, it served to promote local areas at a European level. Again this networking attracts investment, but also sets

the local area or authority apart from others by engaging in an activity normally reserved for nation states by promoting local identity on a European scale (Phelps et al., 2002, p. 219). Payre's (2010, p. 271) more recent study of Lyon's involvement in the Eurocities network—itself a network "concerned to foster its self identification as a network of 'major' or 'important' cities" (Griffiths, 1995, pp. 215–216)—identifies similar reasons, noting it promoted the city as a "brand" which takes the form of "increased prestige of big cities in European public affairs". Similarly, Benington and Harvey (1994, p. 948) note that networking is seen by local government as a way to develop "a higher profile symbolic identity for their area, local authority and political leaders on the European stage". Salskov-Iversen's (2006a; 2006b) research also identifies this in the transnational networking undertaken by Danish local government.

The selection of literature above represents the main reasons behind local government transnational networking, but research by Benington and Harvey (1994) uncovered other reasons. This includes the role of so-called 'horizon scanning', whereby networks are used to inform and prepare authorities for upcoming legislation or European policies (Benington & Harvey, 1994, pp. 945–946). Indeed, in the UK, the Local Government Association (2010, p. 3) estimates "around half of all regulation affecting councils is developed from EU laws", illustrating the need to be prepared for such legislation. Benington and Harvey (1994, p. 948) also noted that networks serve as tools for local politicians to promote their career on a European level, something also identified by Payre (2010, p. 273) who notes local politicians often "'make a career' within the network". Other scholars, such as Adshead (2002), Goldsmith (1993), John (2000) or Marshall (2005) take a much broader approach, focusing on the role of such networks in the Europeanization of local government or how they have contributed to the creation of a multi-level polity.

On top of the academic research that developed in the 1990s, literature also emerged from a practitioner perspective (for example Clifton, 2008; Local Government Association, 2010). In the UK the Audit Commission (1991) published a guide for local authorities while Bogdanor (1992) wrote a paper urging local government to seize the opportunities provided by the Maastricht Treaty. In 1992, the European Commission facilitated a conference on interregional and cross-border co-operation (European Commission, 1994).

To summarize, then, the practice of transnational local government networking began to increase from the 1990s. Academic literature followed these developments. Analyses highlighted the importance of these networks in economic development, securing funding, lobbying the EU institutions and promoting the identity of local areas.

Gaps in the literature

While the above examples point to a growth in transnational activity literature and practice during the 1990s, contemporary research—save for a small number of cases (for example Baldersheim, Haug, & Øgård, 2011; Kern & Bulkeley, 2009; Payre, 2010; Salskov-Iversen, 2006a; 2006b)—is scarce. This has led Kern and Bulkeley (2009, p. 310) to argue that transnational networking by sub-central government "has widely been neglected" by European integration scholars. Indeed, most research in this field appears under the auspices of 'urban studies' or 'spatial planning', with Payre (2010, p. 260) noting that literature has often overlooked important political questions. This maybe as a result of the literature's general preoccupation with transnational networks and access to various European economic development funds; another criticism levied by Kern and Bulkeley (2009, p. 310). Even studies that focus on areas such as lobbying have a focus to them, for example Benington and Harvey's (1998) McAleavey and Mitchell's (1994) and Lawrence's (2000) studies. Given the extent of EU funding for transnational activities, this is to be expected. However, LGTN takes on many other roles that should not be overlooked, especially as funding has shifted its focus to southern and eastern Europe while networking continues in the west. Indeed studies have shown. Indeed, studies have shown transnational networking is important for sharing knowledge, innovation and best practice (for example Payre, 2010; Salskov-Iversen, 2006a, 2006b), linking to debates on the role of local government transnational networking in new public management. These transnational networks also play an important role in shaping local and European identity (Phelps et al., 2002). While it is clear local government are involved in several networks to pursue varying interests (Church & Reid, 1999, p. 653), this rationale is still not fully understood.

However, there are cases of contemporary literature that deserve merit. These include Salskov-Iversen's (2006a; 2006b) study of Danish local government's transnational activity. While the results of this study were inconclusive, it did highlight the important role that sharing knowledge and innovation with international colleagues has. Payre's (2010) study of Lyon's involvement in the Eurocities network also highlighted the knowledge transfer as a motivation for networking. In addition, it identified the role of the network in promoting the city at a European level, thus helping in identity formation and promotion of local areas. Betsill and Bulkeley's (2004), Kern and Bulkeley's (2009) and Ward and Williams's (1997) research shows promise in moving away from funding in their analyses of transnational local authority networking in environmental governance. Despite these developments, however, the volume of literature has decreased in the last five years.

Much of the literature also has a 'western' perspective; for example analyses of local government transnational networking often focus on relationships between the UK and France (for example Barber, 1997; Church & Reid, 1996; 1999), between Germany and France (for example Murphy, 1993; Scott, 1989) or take a wider perspective looking at pan-European networks (for example Griffiths, 1995; Payre, 2010; Phelps et al., 2002). Consequently there is little literature on the central and eastern European states and their local government involvement in transnational networking, although Turnock (2002) does offer an overview of cross-border co-operation in eastern Europe. Much of the literature also focuses on the role of cities or urban areas (for example Church & Reid, 1996; Marshall, 2005; Payre, 2010; Phelps et al., 2002), often neglecting rural authorities despite Woods (1998, p. 18) noting rural councils are becoming more involved at the European level.

Another problem is that much literature focuses on descriptions of networks, seeking to identify and categorize the activity undertaken (for example Benington & Harvey, 1994; Ercole et al., 1997). Ward and Williams (1997, p. 441) note this:

> can be descriptively helpful, although difficulties arise from the fact that networks often have more than one purpose and do not fit neatly into just one category. Moreover, such categorization does not necessarily assist in the understanding of networks.

The solution is to study the dynamics of networks, how they operate and what their impact is. Function, membership and scope become important concerns (Ward & Williams, 1997, p. 441). Studying networks from actors' perspectives can provide useful insights. However, as Hanf and O'Toole (1992, p. 163) note:

> It is rare that the perspective of the actor inside the network is taken, that of someone who is trying to work within and through a set of relationships with other actors, in pursuit of both individual and collective goals.

Hertting (2007, p. 45) argues that most take a structural approach to networks, but it is important to recognize that "networks are products of interactions among more or less rational actors that invest in institutional arrangements". While rationality may be bounded by structural and political contexts, decisions made by actors reflect their interests in utilizing networks and this rationale is usually clearly stated by public bodies who have to justify their resource commitments (Provan & Milward, 1995, p. 3).

A new research agenda

Given these issues, it can be argued that the contemporary impact of transnational networking by local authorities is still not fully understood. In 1998, Benington and Harvey posed the question: "passing fashion or new paradigm?" Arguably this remains unanswered, yet it is vitally important for our understanding of European integration. Recent contextual factors also highlight the importance of research in this field. Resources available to local authorities are being reduced in the wake of budget cuts and public finance pressures. This will lead councils to seek extra funding to fill this gap and, as discussed above, European networking offers a potential source. At the same time the issues of localism and decentralization are once more coming to the fore of political discourse. In the UK, for example, a localism bill has been introduced to

parliament which aims to give local councils greater power of competence. Such moves are likely to see councils become more active in transnational networking. There is also pressure for councils to utilize best practice, which means seeking out and sharing innovation, an important activity for many local government transnational networks (Payre, 2010; Salskov-Iversen, 2006b).

Context aside, it is important to recognize that transnational networking forms an important part of local government activity. For many councils it provides a rich source of income. Southampton City Council (2005, p. 10), for example, secured £13.7 million over a three year period. This has not escaped the attention of local authorities and umbrella organizations, who are keen to promote the financial benefits of European networking (for example Local Government Association, 2010). Transnational networking by local government is also highly prevalent. There are numerous networks in existence, many of which have a wide membership.

As noted earlier, the role of networks in wider European integration and governance is also important. Ansell (2000, p. 303) argues the "web of interorganizational and intergovernmental relationships" in Europe has led to the creation of a "networked polity". Indeed, European governance is now often characterized as "governance in networks" (Borzel & Heard-Lauréote, 2009). Networks themselves have played a key role in the development of European integration, with Kohler-Koch (2002, p. 2) stating that "networks were crucial". The result, according to Heard-Lauréote (2005, p. 43), is that European governance:

> is not through hierarchical coordination by national governments joined in the Council of Ministers or by a supranational actor like the Commission ... Rather, it is through non-hierarchical bargaining and negotiations between public, quasi-public and private actors from different levels of government and spheres of society that coordinate interests and resources.

The study of networks can therefore yield wider insights into European integration and policy making. Research into local government transnational networks—who, it has been demonstrated, are actively involved—can therefore aid in our understanding of

how these horizontal relationships between actors effect wider European governance. As well as enabling contemporary understanding of European governance, these horizontal relationships between actors in Europe have also been studied by historians, wanting to understand the EU's development (for example Kaiser, Leucht & Rasmussen, 2009).

All of this highlights that research into local government transnational networking is warranted. This leads to a number of key areas that should be considered for future research. The first is clear: fresh, up-to-date empirical research is required. As a further step, researchers should be prepared to engage practitioners much more. Both Barber's (1997) and Lawrence's (2000) contributions demonstrate the useful insights practitioners have to offer. Involvement of practitioners is also important in relation to recent calls for research in general to have an 'impact' beyond academia. One way to achieve this is to look at the effectiveness of local authority networking. The effectiveness of networks in general is an area currently gathering a lot of interest in public administration research (see Provan & Kenis, 2007; Turrini, Cristofoli, Frosini, & Nasi, 2010). In this way local authorities and other actors have the opportunity to learn and improve their networking activity. Some research has touched on this. For example, Lawrence (2000, p. 68) highlights some of the obvious challenges facing effective transnational networking, such as language barriers, network size and leadership, but as yet no dedicated studies have been carried out in this area.

Comparative studies are likely to hold the key here as different networks can be assessed to see where they perform well and not so well. Comparison is also likely to uncover various contextual factors—such as state centralization—which are likely to have an impact on local government transnational networking (Bomberg & Peterson, 1998). One example of this is Adshead's (2002) study of local government in Germany, Ireland and the UK. Scott's (1999) study of cross-border co-operation takes this a step further by comparing European local areas with north American ones.

Conclusion

In summary, there has been an observable increase in academic literature discussing local government transnational networking from the 1990s. This has followed an increase in the activity itself in response to various contextual factors. This transnational networking takes many forms—such as obtaining funding, lobbying and identity formation—but in all cases local authorities interact with their colleagues across national borders. However, recent literature in this field is scarce. This, coupled with a rise in localism, a reduction in resources for local government and other contextual factors, prompts the need for further, up-to-date research. Such a need presents the opportunity to involve practitioners and move beyond an academic discussion on the role of networks whereby there is a potential for a 'real world' impact, as well as furthering our understanding of the role of networks in the EU.

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