From regional lobbying to shared governance
Cities, regions and the changed agenda of the EU

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1. Introduction

The problems the European Union (EU) is facing nowadays are different in their nature than before. The European Commission focusses on global issues like climate change, trade agreements with the US and managing the refugee crisis. Also keeping the Union together after the Brexit and dealing with the aftermath of the financial crisis are issues that have shaped the European arena in the last decennium. And now the EU takes its development to the next stage with the European Commission (Commission) focussing on ‘the big things’, ‘do different things’ and ‘do things differently’ (European Commission, 2015, p. 2).

Also for regional and local authorities within the EU, the world has changed. A privileged position that was envisioned in the ‘Europe of the Regions’ did not materialize. Decentralized authorities have become an integral part of the system. And entering the next phase, the EU now focusses on solving the ‘big things’ primarily in cities and urban areas.

This new European arena has implications for the way in which EU policy is implemented and it is no coincidence that the Commission calls upon the regions and cities to come to a modernization of EU regional policy.

With the need for modernization on the political agenda, the question arises why exactly this modernization is needed. And, following that exploration, how a new type of cooperation between the EU and the decentralized authorities is taking shape. This paper adresses these topics.

The paper starts with a brief overview of the different phases regional and local authorities have gone through, finding their way in the EU multi-level and multi-actor governance network. Next, the paper adresses the challenges the EU faces in the present time and how this influences the cooperation between the different layers of government within the EU, with an increasing attention for urban areas. The question why the need for modernization of regional policy has become prominent at this time is further explored. The paper concludes with a reflection on the meaning of these changes when it comes to the local and regional interest representation (the lobbying game) in Brussels.

2. Europe of the Regions: from past vision to new reality

In the 1990s many regions within the European Union embraced the concept of a *Europe of the Regions*. The absence of a clear definition of such an Europe (and the challenges involved), was not an obstacle for this concept to emerge and to obtain visionary proportions. Albeit not defined precisely, for the regions the concept radiated a message of regional influence on the EU process of policy- and decision-making. And the regions sure had reasons to welcome such
a message. After all, the EU did acknowledge the role regions could play in creating a fully-fledged internal market, in which equalizing differences in prosperity between regions played a profound role.\(^1\) In the years to come, other formal agreements entered the stage and strengthened the regional position in the European policy process. For example, with the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) the principle of subsidiarity was formalized. Also Maastricht provided in more funding to contribute to regional goals. A few years later the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999) provided the Committee of the Regions (CoR) of more policy-fields that are subject to the advisory role of the Committee. And thus again, at least on paper, regions were given a stronger position within the EU policy-making process.

In the following years, two different developments can be recognized. First, the involvement of regions in the European policy process was further strengthened. The Treaty of Lisbon (2009) was an important success in local and regional attempts to further strengthen their political positions (Guderjan, 2012, p. 111). This treaty further formalized the principle of subsidiary. Also ‘Lisbon’ lead to the implementation of consultation rounds by the European Commission, prior to the initiation of legislative proposals, in which local and regional interests are brought forward. Another indication of regional involvement is the, ever since the Single European Act, increased number of regional offices in Brussels (Moore, 2007, p. 3). Although the increasing number of representatives in Brussels does not directly lead to the conclusion that regions obtained influence, it does however show that regions do see opportunities and are willing to invest in an active role in the European arena.

The second development is that the concept of a Europe of the Regions seems to have fallen out of favour. Despite institutional changes and the increased activity of regional representatives, the encompassed vision of a powerful regional level within EU governance did not emerge. Elias (2008, p. 485) noticed that by the beginning of the new millennium, the ‘hype’ associated with Europe of the Regions had faded. Whatever images did exist of the concept, it seems that none of them had actually materialized (Jeffery, 2000), (Greenwood, 2003).

Some scholars have analysed the reasons why the envisioned Europe of the Regions did not emerge. For example, Hepburn (2008) who discusses the role of regions who used the imagery of a ‘Europe of the Regions’ to advance on their own specific agenda. Minority nationalist parties wanted to strengthened their territorial demands and made a link between European regional policy and self-determination. Otherwise, state-wide parties used the EU regional

\(^1\) For example: Article 130a of the Single European Act states that: ‘In particular the Community shall aim at reducing disparities between the various regions and the backwardness of the least-favored regions.’
policy to strive for decentralization of competences, mostly based on economical motives. Either way, the regional goals did not match the more comprehensive vision of the EU: regional policy as an instrument to reduce regional economic differences and consequently promote the EU-cohesion policy. Hepburn concludes that many regions did not reach their goals and experienced this as an European neglect of regional interests. Rodriguez-Pose & Courty (2018) confirm this image of regional authorities limited influence. Looking at the distribution of structural funds for regional development, they found that the influence of regional offices on this distribution is negligible. The allocation of funds follows the transparent criteria set by the EU itself. Big offices and staff in Brussels do not seem to lead to favours when it comes to the distribution of funds. (Rodriguez-Pose & Courty, 2018)

Keating (2008) argued that although the EU has not turned into a Europe of the Regions, territorial politics has shaped (and will continue to shape) the European Union for a long time to come. The visionary Europe of the Regions was always overblown. Keating drew the conclusion that this is just a matter of territorial and multi-level politics which already existed since a long time and also be with us for at least another quarter century (Keating, 2008, p. 635). Keating’s observations put the regional activity in Brussels in a normalized perspective: regions became part of the European reality and are one of the many actors in the game of European multilevel politics (Jeffery, 2000), (Moore, 2007). Since the beginning of the new millennium, the regions have earned their place within the institutional structure of the EU. Regional authorities do not find themselves in a more or less ‘privileged’ position, as was envisioned in the Europe of the Regions, but have to act as one of the players within a multilevel- and multi-actor governance network. The focus shifted from Europe of the Regions to Europeanization.²

Acting within this multi-level en multi-actor governance network required for the regions to take the interests of the other actors into account (see also Kiers, 2014, pp. 2-8). So when making the strategic choices in their lobbying process, the regions also had to respond to economical and institutional dynamics that shape the European arena.

² It is noted that Europeanization is a concept that knows a wide range of interpretations and underlying dimension (for more background on these dimensions see: Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013).
Did this change in positions also change the lobbying-game compared to the game that was going on in the 90s? Tatham concluded that such was not the case. He stated that ‘The New Europe’ lead to the situation where the European regions, stemming from EU-10 and EU-15 countries alike, continued playing the same lobbying game, albeit in a much changed setting (Tatham, 2014, p. 343). Tatham noticed that, faced with a higher number of member states and stakeholders, the European Commission has de facto less time for specific regional topics (Tatham, 2014, p.356). By semi-structured interviews with Commission officials Tatham found that since the enlargement of the EU the region-specific queries are more likely to be heared by the Commission when these are being brought forward by a coalition of regional stakeholders or when they are expressed very early in the legislative process prior to Commission communication (see also: Swenden & Bolleyer, 2014, p. 392).

Another indication that the settings of the game had changed can be found in Bruszt (2008). Bruszt looked at the emergence of regionalism in the Central and East European countries and pointed out that the Commission changed its attitude towards subnational actors after 2002. He noticed that the commission stressed the weakness of regional administrative capacities and pushed the applicant countries towards centralized management. This conclusion is to a certain extent confirmed by the EU Commissioner on Regional Policy who, as mentioned before, indicated that not all member states possess an institutional setup that allows for centralized control to be substituted by trust (Huis van de Provincies, 2016). Reflecting on the wider range of member states, Bruszt found that (unlike the 1990s) the Commission did not have policies to strengthen the opportunities for subnational actors. He concluded that central governments are the clear winners of the new Structural Funds, as they control the majority of sectoral programmes. (Bruszt, 2008, pp. 616-617).

At this point, the preliminary conclusion is that the new millennium lead to a new governance equilibrium. The settings of the game changed: regional and local authorities became part of the system. Perhaps the current call for a modernization of the EU-regional policy was fed by these developments. But also more recent (global) issues had a major influence on the agenda-setting of the EU and that affects the lobbying game more than ever, which is further explored in the following section.

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3 The term New Europe comprises the new dynamics of European integration since 2004. These dynamics include not only an enlarged and more heterogenous Europe, but also an EU with a revised institutional set-up and a very different socio-economic context given the unprecedented magnitude of the fiscal crisis and its aftermath (Swenden & Bolleyer, 2014, p. 250).
3. Global issues

3.1 The Pact of Amsterdam

The European Commission adopted a Communication in July 2014 and launched a public consultation round on the so called ‘EU Urban Agenda’ (European Commission, 2014). The Commission points out that: ‘almost 70% of the EU population now live in urban areas. However, they are also home to some of our greatest challenges: economic, social, environmental and demographic, which are often interrelated. Europe’s cities are the engines of the European economy, providing jobs and services, and serve as hubs that catalyse creativity and innovation. That is why a growing number of voices – at EU, national and local level – argue that an EU Urban Agenda is needed so that cities can provide their expertise in developing and putting EU policies into practice and, in turn, that these are better adapted to urban realities’ (European Commission, 2016).

The consultation round generated a strong interest. As a result, the EU ministers responsible for urban matters agreed on the so called ‘Pact of Amsterdam’ on 30 May 2016 (EU Ministers of Urban Matters, 2016). This pact denotes an Urban Agenda for the EU, based on twelve priority themes. In the pact, the ministers point out that more than 70% of the European citizens live in urban areas. They state that urban areas therefore play a key role in pursuing the EU 2020 objectives and in solving the refugee crisis. Specifically, in the selection criteria for establishing the list of priority themes, the ministers point out that the themes must address urban challenges as well as they have to promote the EU 2020 objectives.

With this pact the ministers take the first step towards a new kind of multilevel governance. The pact states that the ministers agree on ‘partnerships’ as being the key delivery mechanism within the Urban Agenda. And that the aim of the partnerships is to develop a multilevel and cross-sectoral governance approach in order to achieve the objectives. (EU Ministers of Urban Matters, 2016, p. 10). Furthermore, the ministers state that ‘partnerships will not generate actions which result in new EU regulations and new or increased funding’ (EU Ministers of Urban Matters, 2016, pp. ii, app.B).

And so the call for modernization is answered by the EU nation states. The ministers, following the Commission, put the big issues on the agenda. And with the Urban Agenda, a clear signal is made that these issues cannot be solves without the cooperation with local authorities. But also some restrictions with respect to regulations and funding are made. It is likely that such

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4 The priority themes in de pact are: migrants and refugees, air quality, urban poverty, housing, circular economy, jobs and skills in the local economy, climate adaption, energy transition, sustainable use of land and nature-based solutions, urban mobility, innovative and responsible public procurement.
top-down restrictions affect the process of building the needed cross-level cooperation. The question arises how the decentral authorities are going to respond to this new situation and how the new settings affect the lobbying game.

One might argue that the lobbying game still will comprise the ‘classical’ game of local and regional authorities that try to obtain funding for their local and regional projects. Hence, the budget of the EU for regional policy (€ 351.8 billion over the period 2014-2020)^5 is mainly still divided over the three familiar funds.\(^6\)

But the game is changing when it comes to the way local and regional authorities can be successful in actually acquiring a share of the funds. This is because global problems have entered the agenda of the European Commission and the nation states. And these problems cannot be solved by the classic approach. Regional and local lobbying for funds or changes in legislation becomes less dominant when the, as the Commission puts it, big things are on the agenda (as is further described in section 4). The EU and the nation states clearly envision a crucial role for the local authorities. To find their role in the arena where the global issues are on the agenda, is now the challenge for local authorities to face. The question is whether local authorities will get the facilities (in terms of time, money and implementation capacity) from the EU and the nation state in order to be able to carry out their tasks. The debate about the EU Urban Agenda to this point did not produce a clear form of new governance structure. It is not clear who is in control when it comes to the implementation of new policies.

And so the debate about who is in control of the new agenda is started. For instance, take the contribution of Benjamin Barber to the debate. Barber points out that there can be little doubt about the decreasing functionality of nation states. As nation states will never be able to provide for peace, prosperity and sustainable economic growth. Nation states are too large for citizen participation to take shape and are too small to cope with the big global issues (Barber B. R., 2013). And although Barber’s proposition to establish a worldwide Parliament of Mayors encounters some criticism for not being practically achievable (Herweijer, 2015), the main idea that local authorities are in charge in the process of solving global problems is definitely on the political agenda.

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^6 The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the European Social Fund (ESF).
The next section focusses on the actual steps the EU is taking towards the modernization of the EU regional policy. The agenda’s and context have changed but how is this going to lead to a new governance structure?

4. The modernisation of the regional and urban EU policy

The process of modernizing the EU regional policy did not come out of the blue. Looking at the communication strategies of the Directorate General (DG) for Regional and Urban Policy, a different approach is signalled from the EU institutions towards the role of local and regional authorities than before. For example in 2008 the DG for Regional and Urban Policy stated that the involvement of regions is necessary to achieve the goals of the EU as a whole (European Union, 2008, p. 1). The 2015 Communication Strategy of this DG starts to point out that ‘investments through regional and urban policy are one of the most tangible and visible areas of EU action for citizens’ (European Union, 2015, p. 2). Support for EU policy turned out to be a more prominent topic than before and it shifted the focus from ‘regions as participants to reach a goal’ to ‘regions as participants to justify a goal’.

Also the the subtitle of the Commission Work Programme 2016 (‘No time for business as usual’) suggested a change in the way the Commission wants to set the priorities for European policy. In the Work programme the Commission clearly stated that it wanted to focus on ‘the big things’, ‘do different things’ and ‘do things differently’ (European Commission, 2015, p. 2).

With the start of the Juncker administration in 2014, the Commission already announced its intention to focus on different themes than administrations have focused on before. Only with the 2016 Work Programme the Commission became more specific with respect to the themes that should be adressed. The Commission set out ten priorities to be working on. Ten priorities that, for an important part, encompass big issues on a global scale.7

The ‘big issues’ the Commission intends to adress, provoke a different political tension when it comes to European governance structure because these global problems are prominent topics not only on the supranational and national agenda’s. To be solved, these problems require efforts of all levels of authority. For example, when dealing with the refugee crisis, it is up to the local authorities to provide shelter and to deal with the different opinions that are present in the local community. So solving these global problems is not a matter of translating

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7 For example, the priorities: a climate chance policy, a balanced free trade agreement with the US, an area of justice and fundamental rights (against terrorism), a new policy on migration and becoming a stronger global actor (European Commission, 2015).
EU legislation downwards to national, regional and local levels anymore. Taking the ability of regions and cities to actually implement the EU-policy on the big issues into account, becomes essential. There is virtually no debate about the necessity to act on these big topics. But there is debate about the way this new policy should be implemented. The change in the type of agenda that is pursued will lead to a different type of governance structure. Benz and Mayntz refer to such a change in the governance structure when it comes to problem situations that extend the borders of single states (like pollution and climate change). They find that, involving such collective multi-level action, the relation between the different levels are defined in functional terms rather than by formal rules (Benz & Mayntz, 2015).

The observation of Benz and Mayntz is characteristic for the search of the European Commission into the possibilities for a new kind cooperation with regions and cities. Hence the meeting (May 2016) between the EU Commisionar of Regional Policy (Corina Cretu) and representatives of European regions in Brussels. In this meeting the EU Commission explicitly called on German and Dutch regions to ally with the Commission in its attempt to modernize the EU regional policy. She emphasized the need for a simpler and more flexible regional policy, that should also be more effective when it comes to reaching goals. In the meeting, the Dutch municipalities pleaded for strengthening collaboration on the base of trust in stead of control. In her response the EU Commissioner indicated that not all member states posses an institutional setup that allows for the Commission to shift the focus from control to trust (Huis van de Nederlandse Provincies, 2016).

Although no member states are specifically mentioned, the signal of the Commission is clear: the regional policy has to be modernized, while emphasizing that the diversity in institutional setup of the member states and their regions does pose some obstacles in finding a generic approach that leads to a modernized regional policy. The establishment of a more functional collaboration is pursued. But the necessity of regulation by formal rules is still prominently present.

From a political point of view, this situation can create tension between the EU and its regions. The EU adresses major (global) problems but in the same time strongly pursues its cohesion policy and even raises the accessory budget from almost €352 billion (2014-2020) to

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The commission acknowledges the specific differences between regions, but also indicates the necessity for formal rules when it comes to the EU regional policy. In a CoR-conference on the future of Europe and the role of the regions, CoR president Karl-Heinz Lambertz stressed that: "Europe is not Brussels, Strasbourg and Luxembourg but its where its citizens live – its regions, cities, towns and villages. A stronger, more united EU is only possible by improving the lives of every citizen. This doesn't mean less Europe but a more effective Europe. This will only be achieved by strengthening the role of local and regional authorities and ensuring every level of government work together to show the EU’s added value in the lives of the people it serves". So the CoR points at the tension between the ambitions of the Commission and the role of regions/cities and their capacities to actually work on the big themes that dominate the EU-agenda. When looking for a modernization of EU regional policy, the way regions and cities are facilitated and enabled to actually implement the policy has to be proinently on the agenda. A new regional policy that is being percepted as a rigid decentralization policy will lead to political tension between the EU and its regions and cities.

Such processes of decentralization (and the corresponding political tension) are not new to regional and local authorities. For example, very prominent in The Netherlands is the decentralization of a large part of the healthcare from the national government to the local authorities. Most local authorities do agree that the implementation of these tasks are suited better at the local level than on the national level. But the political tension arises when budget-cuts or affiliated political issues are at stake. For example, the Dutch national government stated that: Municipalities must be properly equipped to take on these new responsibilities. By working together or merging, municipalities can strengthen their administrative capacity. Central government has given municipalities considerable freedom in deciding how to carry out their new tasks (Government of The Netherlands, 2016). Even when there is agreement on the necessity of the decentralisation of the tasks, the connection that is made with ‘merging municipalities’ will (at least in The Netherlands) definitely lead to a political debate.

The EU finds itself in a comparable situation and the call from Commissioner Cretu is characterizing this situation. Most local and regional authorities probably do not protest against

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11 The new tasks that municipalities have been given are: offering healthcare services to the elderly or chronically ill, helping local people find work or paying their benefit, providing youth care services.
the Commission for shifting its agenda towards the global issues. But when it comes to the implementation of this policies the question is whether cities and regions have the means carry out the tasks or have to rely on the EU for facilitating them.

Another kind of tension that occurs when looking for a modernized regional policy is not dependent on political debates. Also physical properties of regions and cities become more determinative when it comes the degree in which regions and cities are able (or are facilitate by the EU) to implement the EU-policy. As Barbara Duden, president of the Commission for citizenship, governance, institutional and external affairs (CIVEX), points out: "We need to be careful that the ‘Europe of the Regions’, which some consider an outdated concept, is not played off against the ‘Europe of the Cities’ that is nowadays more fashionable. In the CoR, we represent local and regional authorities of very different sizes and structures, and we need both, cities and regions, with a stronger role in European integration, to make it work for citizens." The CoR expresses some worries concerning this topic. Cities and regions have different physical properties and this may now have a stronger influence on the implementation of EU policy than before.

The following section looks closer at the physical properties of regional and local authorities and explores how this affects the regional and local interest representation.

5. Towards shared governance

As pointed out in section four, the lobbying strategies of regional and local authorities still will be based on the ‘old’ settings because of the budgets that are still divides over the familiar funds. But the urban agenda marks the beginning of changes in the EU regional policy. The agendas and priorities of the Commission changed due the global and internal problems the EU is facing. The member states responded to these changes with the Pact of Amsterdam and the local authorities have to respond. Global and local grow towards each other. Global issues are solved at a local level. Glocalization has entered the arena of EU regional policy.

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13 Meaning: a new kind of multilevel cooperation, aimed at actions that strengthen the total arena with recognition of each other’s autonomy and a focus on the meaningfulness of undertaken actions. For more background see (Popering-Verkerk, 2017).
14 In the 1980s, marketing strategies occurred for products to be globally distributed, but being fabricated for specific local requirements. This phenomenon is often referred to as ‘glocalization’. In the 1990’s Robertson further addressed glocalization as a sociological topic (Robertson, 1995).
But how do these changes affect the lobbying strategies of the cities? It can be expected that, as in the situation before the urban agenda, that the specific local interest and resources one possesses determine the lobbying strategy for an important part. We can look further into this by exploring three categories of characteristics of urban areas that will shape the lobbying strategy. These categories are not meant to give an exhaustive list properties of the urban areas. They are chosen to be able to analyse the new situation in more detail at this point. The categories of characteristics considered are: territorial, institutional and substantive properties. The next sections will explore in what way these properties may influence the lobbying strategy of the urban areas.

5.1 Territorial
The first category of characteristics that will shape the lobbying game within the context of shared governance are the territorial properties of the area involved. One territorial property that will influence the lobbying game is the size of the city involved. Large cities already have to deal with the ‘big issues’ like the refugee crisis and already possess administrative resources to do so. This can be an advantage over smaller cities that need more support from the central state to build an administrative organisation that can take up the new tasks. There is also a difference in effect of the implemented policy related to the size of the city. Many of the prioritized themes in the Pact of Amsterdam will have larger effects when these themes are implemented in larger cities (for example: air quality, jobs and skills in the local economy, climate adaption, urban mobility).
Are the EU and the central states primarily going to interact with the big cities? Or will there be sufficient support for smaller cities that enables them to also contribute to the implementation of the shared policies? The different sizes of the cities may thus lead to a different lobby strategy towards the EU and the central state.
This situation may also have further political consequences. For example, as already stated in section 3.1, the Dutch central government indicates that if municipalities do not have the administrative capacity to carry out their new tasks, merging of municipalities will come into the picture as a possible solution (Government of The Netherlands, 2016). Some municipalities already are themselves focussing on merging. Others will be fiercely opposed to such enlargement. How this situation will affect the lobbying game will be, for a major part, dependant on the local politicians.
To conclude the territorial properties, the interests of rural areas have to be mentioned. When the focus of the EU and the nation states is shifting towards the urban areas, what is going to
happen with the interests of rural areas? In these areas addressing poverty and unemployment is often even more urgent than in urban areas. But the Pact of Amsterdam only prioritizes ‘Urban poverty’. Also from a more positive viewpoint, the rural areas can contribute to the urban goals. For instance, within the prioritized theme ‘Energy transition’. It is likely that the spaces needed for clean and environmental friendly types of energy production will be, for an important part, found in the rural areas. The pact of Amsterdam recognizes that some problems can only be solved regionally: ‘A growing number of urban challenges are of a local nature, but require a wider territorial solution (including urban-rural linkages) and cooperation within functional urban areas. At the same time, urban solutions have the potential to lead to wider territorial benefits. Urban Authorities therefore need to cooperate within their functional areas and with their surrounding regions, connecting and reinforcing territorial and urban policies.’ This means that the urban authority stays leading. Rural interest will have to reinforce the urban polices. Herweijer, reacting on the global parliament of majors as suggested by Barber (2013), also points out this problem. He indicates that Barbers suggestion to connect the rural areas to nodal central positioned municipalities will not be possible in many nation states (Herweijer, 2015, p. 39). We can conclude that the interest and importance of rural areas are acknowledged in the urban agenda. Cooperation between the different types of areas is brought forward as a requirement for reaching the challenges that require a larger territorial solution. But there is no clear vision on how exactly to shape the rural role in the process.

5.2 Institutional

A second category of characteristics that will shape the lobbying game in the context of shared governance involves the institutional properties of the local authority.

In the new situation the EU and the cities grow towards each other. Prioritised themes are shared on the agendas. The local authorities are expected to implement the European policies aimed at solving the big problems. But what does this implicate for the nation states? The analysis of Barber is clear on this point: the nation state becomes increasingly dysfunctional (Barber B., 2015, p. 8). And to some extent central governments accelerate this process when decentralizing tasks themselves, in addition to the prioritized themes in the urban agenda. And so the role of the central government changes. When the agenda is set on the EU-level and the implementation of the EU policies is decentralised to the level of local authorities, will the central government have responsibilities other than facilitating the cities in their tasks? The way this facilitating role of the central government is actually taking shape in reality will be dependent on the institutional setup of the nation state involved. When local authorities
already possess legislative powers and have resources themselves, the lobby strategy most likely will not be aimed strongly onto the central government. In nation states where local authorities face a strongly centralized system and do not have their own resources to some extent, the focus may shift to the central government. Being able to live up to the expectations of the urban agenda then will be more strongly dependent on the resources the local authority receives from the central government. In such situations, bypassing the nation state and trying to obtain the direct support on the EU level, will be back on the agenda just as it was in the beginning of the millennium (see also Keating & Hooghe, 2006, for more background on the subject of bypassing the nation state).

5.3 Substantive
A third category of characteristics are the substantive properties of the problems (themes) involved. The prioritized themes mentioned in the Pact of Amsterdam show much variety. For example: improving air quality, reduce poverty and making a digital transition are all listed as prioritized but also are very different in their nature. It is likely that local authorities will engage in strategic lobbying for those themes that are high on the local political agenda. Cities who have to deal with unemployment as a local prioritized problem will perhaps not focus on the digital transition, but will be merely concerned about creating jobs and enforcing the growth of the local economy. Whilst other cities experience that economic (and population) growth may cause more mobility and more air pollution, which puts the problem of air quality higher on the local political agenda (for example the city of Utrecht, see: Gemeente Utrecht, 2014, p. 15). Local authorities may acknowledge the ‘big problems’ of the Commission. But the local lobby strategy will also enclose the local perception and local translation of these problems.

Seen from the viewpoint of the EU, the importance of the specific local interest is not different than before. The basis of the EU cohesion policy still is to reduce disparities between the various regions and the backwardness of the least-favoured regions (European Commission, 2016) and therefore the local differentiation in priorities does not change the lobbying game in itself. However, the problems cities are facing with the urban agenda are of a different scale than before. The goals address problems with an impact on a larger scale. Seen from this context, pursuing own specific goals still is important for local authorities when determining their lobby strategy. But more strongly than before these local preferences will have to fit into the larger picture of the urban agenda. This means that the lobby strategy has to focus on showing progress (or the possibilities for progress) in both arena’s (European and local).
And so the focus shifts from lobbying for one's own goals towards shared governance. The degree in which regional and local authorities are capable of reaching these goals (and implementing the EU policy) will be dependent on the specific local substantive situation.

6. Conclusions

In this paper we addressed the call from the Commission to modernize the European regional policy. The Commission focuses on the big themes that address problems on a global scale. The nation states responded with the Pact of Amsterdam in which these big themes are also addressed and the need for an urban agenda was further pointed out. This urban agenda focuses on the cities and urban areas, for these are the areas that are vital in solving the problems addressed. Local authorities are faced with the responsibility of implementing the European policies aimed at solving the big problems. How regional and local authorities shape their lobby strategy in this process is in itself not different than before. It is the same game, albeit in a changed setting. The specific territorial, institutional and substantive properties of the urban area involved will shape the lobbying process within the new political context.

The EU and the nation states already have contributed to the discussion about the new cross-level cooperation that is emerging. It is now up to the local authorities to respond and adapt their lobbying strategy to this changing European and even global arena. Regional and local goals that are pursued have to fit into the EU agenda more than ever. On the other hand, the EU becomes more depended on the capacities of cities and urban areas for the actual implementation of the EU-policy. The Pact of Amsterdam clearly involves cities and urban areas that are actually capable of reaching the European goals.

As Zhelyazkova, Kaya & Schrama (2016) already concluded, the practical implementation of EU policy is mostly shaped by the institutional capacities of member states (and their institutional setup) and not by the legal top-down enforcement (Zhelyazkova, Kaya, & Schrama, 2016). So also seen from the viewpoint of the EU-institutions, within the European arena the essence of the lobbying game changes towards investing in shared governance.

This new situation imposes some stress on the principles of the EU cohesion policy. Preventing regional political and social tension by supporting economically poorer regions has always been a prominent topic within the EU policy. And still a lot of funding is allocated to support this goal. Within the palette of many different types of regions (physically and institutional), the EU itself always played a central and decisive role in the allocation of funds. Regional lobbying did not have an effect on the allocation of funds and bigger regional offices in Brussels did not
have more influence than smaller offices (Rodriguez-Pose & Courty, 2018). They found that
the allocation of funds always followed the (transparant) criteria of the EU itself.
With the new EU policy (focussing on global themes and urban areas) the European regions
and cities find themselves in an different position. Mainly the physical properties of regions
and cities determine to which extent they are capable of implementing the EU policy. The new
agenda of the Commission does not provide a process how to cope with this differences in the
light of the cohesion policy. Hence the warning of the CoR that the new EU policy may lead to
tension between ‘EU of the Regions’ and the ‘EU of the Cities’.\(^\text{15}\)
And so the Commission on one side sticks to the classic cohesion policy and the central control
of the allocation of funds. And on the other side the Commission, by its working programme
and focus on urban areas, enlarges the differences in possibilities that cities and regions have
to reach their goals within the European arena. With this tension present, the search for a
modernized EU regional policy will not only be a search from the regions and cities. Also the
EU will have to look at their own classical and centrally governed cohesion policy.
The Europe of the Regions has faded. Regions and cities became part of the European
institutional system. And now the next phase has started with the joint search for a
modernized regional policy and shared governance as a base for the multilevel cooperation
within the EU.

Literature


