

A European perspective of Inter-Municipal cooperation: The institutionalisation of the metropolis (2005 - 2015)

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In today's inter-connected world, governments rarely possess the full capability to solve their individual policy areas (Nelles, 2010), municipal borders are often 'fictitious' within larger metropolitan territories and all communities are confronted with the increasing scale and complexity of social processes, which result in increasing number of externalities to local policies. The necessity to think beyond municipal boundaries when dealing with key challenges and opportunities has led several European governments to consider exploring inter-municipal cooperation (IMC) as possible institutional solutions. In European context, national governments and the European Union have increased their focus on IMC for regional and metropolitan governance in the past ten years. This is illustrated by several recent institutional reports on the subject (Ahrend, Gamper, & Schumann, 2014; EUROCITIES, 2011; Göttsche-Stellmann et al., 2011; Griesel & van de Waart, 2011; Meijers, Hoogerbrugge, & Hollander, 2012; Tasan-Kok & Vranken, 2011). Academic literature has not, however, kept up with this policy shift, having far fewer academic Europe-wide comparative studies produced in the same period of time (Feiock, 2007; Hulst & Van Montfort, 2007; Otgaar, 2008). This gap between institutional interest and academic productions is important to acknowledge, as it essentially signifies a contemporary political trend in European metropolitan governance that is undergoing fewer academic methodical analysis than would be expected.

This paper will focus on both academic and institutional perspective of IMC in European metropolitan areas during the past ten years (2005 – 2015) in an attempt to

bridge literature and views. By analysing government rationale for implementing IMC, as well as the existing theoretical framework and the Europe-wide comparative studies, the author aims to propose a unified foundation on which to further analyse the European IMC perspective. Europe as a region has several particular conditions, which make it an interesting region to conduct studies on the subject. When analysing the region as a whole, interesting conditions include having IMC as a widespread phenomenon, the existence of a regional EU framework with legal powers to work with and the fact that IMC has historically had presence in the region for over a hundred years.

The paper will be divided in three main sections: the first section will address definitions, rationale and models of IMC, as well as European government perspectives when adopting this institutional alternative. The second section will cover the most important theoretical academic streams to date analysing how these theories overlap, their similarities and differences. The third and last section will refer to the academic and institutional comparative studies done in Europe, their methodologies and findings. The three sections will be elaborated through literature review and analysis, interviews with key policy makers in European institutions and analysis of current state of IMC bodies. By creating a solid overview of the most recent academic and institutional production and contributions, the author aims to create a foundation on which future studies may build upon.

This study will contribute further conclusions to the existing research, namely through addressing the importance of joining policy interests and academic production. The existing literature offers a surprisingly uncoordinated approach to the subject, both in purely academic terms and between academic and institutional production. Governments keen on exploring IMC have little literature to back their decisions on, as the current uncoordinated approach to the subject makes it especially challenging to reach significant conclusions. This paper aims to bridge this gap, offering a truly European perspective to inter-municipal cooperation. By acknowledging the trajectory IMC research has had in the past ten years, recognizing the gaps that academic production and creating a solid overview of the most recent (2005 – 2015) academic

and institutional production and contributions on IMC in Europe, a foundation is created on which the author believes future studies may build upon.

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