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European Influences and Domestic Adaptations: The Prospects of Strong Circular Cities in Greece

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MLG	Multi-Level Governance
CE	Circular Economy
CP	Cohesion Policy
EU	European Union

Abstract

The goal of this research project is to explore the latest push of the European Union to promote the Urban level for governance for sustainability transitions as well as to examine the institutional influence of the European Union on the Public Administration system of Greece, towards the establishment of stronger and more circular cities. To this end, the implementation of Cohesion Policy and the Partnership Principle is examined in order to evaluate the intensity of European influence towards Multi-Level Governance and the empowerment of Greek local governments. At the same time, the administrational implications of the New Circular Economy Action Plan are considered and then compared with the realities on the ground to reveal how close Greek cities are to the EU vision of Circular Cities. Based on the findings of this research, the influence of the EU seems to be heavily mediated by the domestic political and administrational environment and progress towards Circular Cities in Greece is slow.

Keywords

Europeanisation, Public Administration, EU Cohesion Policy, Circular Economy, Governance of the Circular Economy, Local Government, Cities, Institutional Convergence, Multi-Level Governance

Chapter 1 Background of the Study

1.1 Introduction (Heading Level 2 in the formatting box)

In recent years, cities are seen as major contributors towards the future of sustainable development, as they are the closest to local societies, industries and specificities. International and regional organisations like the United Nations, OECD and the European Union are setting their focus on the local level of governance for the implementation of a large part of the latest sustainability agendas.

The European Union specifically has a long-standing interest in the role of cities within its institutional structure as well as within the public administrations of its member states and has been historically encouraging their empowerment. This trend is now being reflected more than ever in the design and content of the latest European Cohesion Policy (CP) 2021-2027, with significant impacts for Cohesion fund recipient countries like Greece. At the same time, the Circular Economy (CE) has become the choice of Europe as the future economic development model of the Union and a central part of the European Green Deal. This policy also has a strong local character due to the territoriality of its objectives (material flows, recycling, waste prevention, shorter value chains etc.). Cities are indeed the place where most resources are consumed and most waste is produced. Thus, a major part of the EU Circular Economy policy implementation is directly connected to the urban areas of the Union, that are now encouraged to develop, support and manage their local Circular Economy. In Greece, the implementation of the Circular Economy will be funded by and governed to a significant extent by the requirements and regulations of the EU Cohesion Policy 2021-2027, and this is why the choice was made to examine those two policies together.

However, the specific interest in those policies for this paper lies in their potential to strengthen the position of the Greek Local Public Authorities within the governance system of the country and enhance their developmental role for their territories. Both their terms of implementation as well as policy content seem to imply an enhanced role for local administrations as developmental agents and facilitators of circular sustainability transitions. The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether these Urban-centric governance preferences of the EU implied within EU Cohesion Policy as well as the Circular Economy agenda would constitute significant and impactful external pressures for institutional change in Greece.

On the one hand, the vision of strong circular and sustainable cities that the EU is encouraging is set to face significant obstacles in Greece, vis a vis the weak developmental role and capacities of local authorities. On the other hand, however, it is also true that the entrenchment of national administrations and local authorities into the EU bureaucratic system has affected them considerably over time. Since the accession of Greece into the European Union, the country has been gradually reorganising its territorial and local administrative structure in response to EU Integration principles, European Regional Policy requirements and the overall Europeanisation process, more or less effectively in different instances. With these in mind, there seems to be some potential for the Greek local level of government to benefit from these two European policies, as they aim to strengthen its role.

1.2 Research Questions

In this paper the author is attempting to examine the latest push of the European Union to promote the Urban level for governance for sustainability transitions (through its Cohesion Policy and Circular Economy agenda) and the potential of this push to strengthen Greek Local Governments and lead to the establishment of Circular Cities in the country.

Sub-questions:

1) How does the EU Cohesion Policy and the EU Circular agenda promote the empowerment of European Cities and Local Governments?

2) How effective is this European influence in promoting administrational convergence and reform amongst member states?

3) To what extent has the EU influenced the administrational landscape of Greece so far?

4) How do European expectations of urban governance and circularity compare to the administrative reality in Greece today?

1.3 Methods of Data Collection

This study was conducted based on the analysis of secondary (O'Leary, 2017, p 266) and primary data (O'Leary, 2017, p 224). Various strands of literature were reviewed including Europeanisation, Policy Transfer and Institutional Convergence, Territorial Governance, EU impact on national public administrations, EU Urban and Circular policies, the EU Cohesion Policy and other relevant European Union and National policies. Materials used for this purpose were official EU policy documents, legal documents, studies, book chapters and webpages. Primary data were also collected from the field in the form of interviews from political and administrational personnel of the Greek public sector in order to collect expert opinions on the issue.

For this research, a qualitative approach was chosen, as this approach can encompass multiple perspectives, can take into account political agendas and finally prioratises depth over quantity of data in order to understand the underlying processes, interactions and belief systems related to the issue at hand (O'Leary, 2017, p.142). The nature of the problem of this research calls for such an approach, as the function of the public sector as well as the process of sustainability transitions are subject to political influences and preferences. Moreover, the qualitative approach allows for the depth that is necessary to understand the reality on the ground versus what is written in the official policy papers and plans of the EU and Greece.

To this end, the researcher travelled to Greece to explore interview options and availabilities with key informants, have the initial introductions and meetings and build trust. The goal was to identify and engage with experts, insiders or highly experienced informants willing to share their experience and views on the topics at hand. The researcher reached out to suitable candidates via email but also used personal connections in an overall snowball technique, looking for referrals (O'Leary, 2017, p.215). After the identification of the informants, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner (O'Leary, 2017, p.241), starting

with an interview plan that was shared with the interviewees in advance, but allowing for flexibility during the conversation. This allowed for specific questions to be answered but at the same time for issues important to the interviewee to emerge. A total of five interviews was conducted, featuring seven interviewees. Three of the interviews were conducted with one interviewee and two interviews featured two interviewees together, colleagues working in the same government department and the same issue.

In the final selection of the informants, a few things were taken into consideration. First, the goal was to inquire information from individuals that have extensive experience working with local governments in Greece, were connected to the European Union processes and have an understanding of Sustainability Transitions in Greece. The second goal was to identify informants from different agencies/ levels of government in order to get multiple perspectives and a well-rounded view of the issue at hand. Based on these criteria, interviews were conducted with the following individuals:

Table 1: List of Interviews:

Name (s)	Date	Position and relevance to research topic
1.Sokratis Famellos	4/10/2021	Current Member of Parliament (SYRIZA), Former Deputy Minister of Environment and Energy, several years elected member of local administration. Throughout his career mr. Famellos gained extensive experience with local governance as well as matters of waste management, environmental protection. As Deputy Minister he took the first legistlative and policy actions for the Circular Economy in Greece.
2.Dimitris Birmpas	30/10/2021	Member of the European Committee of the Regions (Commission for Natural Resources-NAT), Member of the Governing Board of the Union of Municipalities of Greece (KEDE), former Mayor of Aigaleo Municipality. Mr. Birmpas has extensive experience with greek local governance and is the link between the EU level discussions on waste management and the Circular Economy and the Greek Union of Municipalities.
3.Panagiotis Vlachos and Giorgos Goumas	22/10/2021	Policy Officers at the Ministry of Development and Investments-General Directorate of Public Investments and European Structural Investment Funds. Mr. Vlachos and mr. Goumas have extensive experience with the drafting of the Greek Cohesion Policy agreements with the EU. They also represented Greece in the European Urban Agenda partnership for the Circular Economy.

4.Dimitris Homatidis	6/11/2021	Circular Economy Officer at the Green Fund (the public investment agency for green investments, under the Ministry of Environment and Energy). Mr. Chomatidis operates the EU LIFE programme 'Circular Greece' (EU LIFE-IP CEI-Greece) dedicated to the implementation of the National Circular Economy Plan and Waste Management plans in Greece. He has been working closely with cities and municipalities for many years.
5.Maria Papoutsi and Mathilde Konstandopoulou	8/11/2021	EU URBACT programme- Ministry of Development and Investments- General Directorate of Public Investments and ESIF funds. Ms Papoutsi as the national URBACT focal point works with Ms. Konstandopoulou on the operation of the programme in Greece and Cyprus. They have exptensive experience working with municipalities in the context of EU programmes.

The limitations of this interview process have to do with informant subjectivities (O'Leary, 2017, p.216). Two of the respondents have direct connections to a political party and therefore may present a specific view of the issues. This bias was partially mitigated by focusing the questions on the informant's personal experiences while working with the Greek local governments and not on the political agendas of their party. The researcher could not gain access to interviewees from other political parties.

To analyse the data, a process of reflective analysis was used (O'Leary, 2017, p.326), where the interview transcripts were scrutinised for recurring, common themes and were grouped together in answering the question and sub-questions of this research.

The latest research conducted on the institutional influence of the EU on the domestic public administration in Greece covers a period up to 2013 (Οικονόμου, 2020). The role of interview data in this research is to provide a preliminary update on this matter, to identify change or stagnation in more recent years. Moreover, the interview data will be used to understand the interaction between the Greek local governments and the EU Circular Economy agenda, as mediated by the domestic political and administration system.

1.4 Structure of Chapters

The first chapter of the present paper provides an introduction to the topic and the research questions. Chapter 2 offers a theoretical framework through which the researcher looks at the problem at hand. Chapter 3 is dedicated to understanding the role of Cities as seen by the international as well as the European development agendas historically and the ways in which their increasing importance in recent years has been manifesting politically (EU Urban Agenda/New Leipzeig Charter) but also within specific policies (EU Cohesion Policy). From this historical progression, EU administrational preferences stem (Multi-Level Governance) and are being implicitly promoted within member states (mainly through Cohesion Policy). As the Urban areas are becoming increasingly important policy making and implementing actors of EU policy across the board, Chapter 4 will attempt to explore the Urban dimensions and the expression of the abovementioned administrational preferences within a sectoral policy (New Circular Economy Action Plan), as nudges towards the support of local administrations within their national contexts. After having described these main channels

through which the EU encourages administrational convergence within countries, Chapter 5 will look at the factors that determine how national administrations respond to those influences, towards adaptation or not. The focus will mainly be on the effects of the Cohesion Policy on national administrations. This is because for the case of Greece Cohesion Policy is the most important source of EU administrative influence and at the same time encompasses the implementation of the EU New Circular Economy Action Plan. At this point we will examine the experience of Greece with Cohesion Policy historically in order to understand the context of its implementation in the country. Finally, Chapter 6 will draw from the interviews taken to provide a snapshot of the administrative realities in Greece at the moment in comparison to the European expectations discussed in previous chapters. Finally, in Chapter 7 the researcher will reach conclusions about the extent of the EU influence on the Greek public administration and the potential of change in the balance of powers between levels of government as a result.

Chapter 2) Theoretical Framework

2.1 European Integration

The concept of European Integration is central in this analysis, as it constitutes the guiding principle of the interaction between the European Union and member states. European Integration aims at the economic, legal, institutional and socioeconomic convergence of European countries, towards a harmonious political and economic union (Glawe & Wagner, 2021, p.4). Towards these goals, the EU acts as an institutional catalyst for transformations and reforms in three distinct domains within member states: public policies, institutions and policy processes (Οικονόμου, 2020, p.1).

More specifically, the impact of the EU on the domestic national environment can be described as a process of Europeanisation, defined by Radaelli as the "'Processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles", "ways of doing things", shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies." (Radaelli, 2003 quoted in Ladi, 2011, p.1644). This approach has a "top-down" character and is a useful tool to understand the influence of the EU on the institutional structures of member states in the long term, and in our case, the influence of the EU on the position of Local Public Administration in the political arena of Greece.

At the same time, Policy Transfer is a "soft" mechanism of Europeanisation (Ladi, 2011, p.1644) and a more useful concept when examining specific policies, (e.g. Circular Economy policy), and how they are transmitted from the Union to member states. Dolowitz and Marsh, describe Policy Transfer as "a process by which ideas, policy, administrative arrangements or institutions in one political setting influence policy development in another political setting, mediated by the institutional system of the EU" (Bulmer & Padgett, 2004, p.105). Overall, one can not fully evaluate issues of institutional reform in the Greek context without taking into account the influence of the European Union, in the context of Europeanisation (Ladi, 2011, p. 1643).

2.2 Convergence of Institutions within the EU

To better understand the role of institutions in the European Integration project, we need to examine the concept of Convergence. First, the goal of European Integration has been the raising of living standards within the Union in terms of Gross National Income, towards homogeneity amongst member states. The process can be conceptualised as Income Convergence and is mediated by the EU (Glawe & Wagner, 2021, p.4). The conditions for accession into the Euro Zone (alignment of interest rates, exchange rates, fiscal status etc.), the different regulations of the Single Market as well as the EU regional investment programmes (e.g. Cohesion Policy) constitute examples of the influence of the EU towards economic convergence. However, the sustainability of Income Convergence and the harmonious functioning of the European Monetary Union is theorised to be dependent on Institutional Convergence, referring to the rapprochement of rules, institutions, administrative capacities, judicial effectiveness and more (Wagner, 2013, p.213). Wagner (2021, p.4) argues that in cases where economic growth is mainly dependent on external financial aid (e.g., Cohesion Policy

funds), without meaningful institutional convergence, the sustainability of economic welfare is not guaranteed in the long term.

While institutional convergence has been a central element of the European Integration project, it is not a given that it actually takes place on the ground. According to Cowles et al., domestic institutions filter EU adaptational pressures and shape the extent and speed of adaptation (Andreou, 2006, p.242). Therefore, the examination of external institutional influences should be context specific to the institutional configuration of the country being studied. From that perspective, this research paper is interested in the Institutional Convergence of Greece, and specifically the influence of the EU on the public administration systems of the country towards the preferred European governance model and standards.

2.3 Historical Institutionalism as a lens

Finally, there are many theoretical perspectives through which one can examine Europeanisation and Policy transfer processes. In this research project we will be looking at those processes through a lens of Historical Institutionalism, founding our analysis on the premise that "institutions matter, shaping actor preferences and structuring both the processes of policy making and substantive policy" and that the "Transfer processes and outcomes will thus be shaped by the institutional settings in which they take place" (Bulmer & Padgett, 2004, p.105). This seems to be the appropriate theoretical framework for this analysis for two reasons. First, in the 2010's, growing part of the EU Integration literature utilised Historical Institutionalism, path-dependence and other related concepts to examine convergence and divergence tendencies within the EU as well as explain increasing integration differentiation within the EU (Christiansen & Verdun, 2020). Secondly, recent research looking at the institutional convergence of European countries indeed finds that pre-existing institutional arrangements and path dependence to be major explaining factors for the Institutional growth path of each country (Glawe & Wagner, 2020, p.882).

Chapter 3) The Urban Dimension of Sustainable Development, Policy and Governance

3.1) The emergence of the City as a Global Sustainable Development Agent

The elevation of the City to a global and local development actor has not been an EU innovation. It is rather the focal point of a global paradigm shift towards more localised Sustainable Development application approach, supported by the large International developmental organisations. The United Nations, OECD, the EU and large think tanks work together and aligned their policy approach within international fora, recognising Local and Urban governance as the suitable institutional context for the implementation of the global developmental agendas (Silva & Trono, 2020, p.4).

This development has come as a response to the global trends of rising urbanisation. In 1950, 29.6% of the world population lived in Urban areas (UN-Habitat, 2015, p.1). This percentage rose to 55% in 2018 and by 2050 the Urban inhabitants are projected to reach

two thirds of the world population. It is also important to note that urbanisation and population trends are different across regions and are driven by different dynamics (World Bank Group, 2021, p. 9). Both these two factors make the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals highly relevant to the Local and Regional contexts, including Urban and Regional planning, policy, municipal capacities, local economies, societies, resources and environmental conditions (Silva & Trono, 2020, p.2).

A major step towards the recognition of the role of Cities was the distinct SDG no. 11 of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, under the title "Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable". Parallel to the preparation of the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, UN HABITAT was developing the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning (UN-Habitat, 2015, p. 5), in an attempt to develop a "universally applicable reference framework to guide urban policy reforms" and overall to "improve global policies, plans, designs and implementation processes" of Urban and Territorial Planning towards Social Development, Sustained Economic Growth and Environmental protection (UN-Habitat, 2015, p.1).

The UN Sustainable Development Agenda was adopted in 2015 and directly a year later, in 2016, the UN-HABITAT III Conference adopted the United Nations New Urban Agena (NUA) as a roadmap for the implementation of Goal 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) (Lierop, C.V., 2019, p.5). The NUA sets out a roadmap of principles for the planning, development and improvement of urban areas around the world. These global agendas interact, inform each other and to some extent operationalise the agreed goals. This network of global policies geared towards the local and regional aspects of sustainable development can be seen as a clear paradigm shift in the way urbanisation and cities are perceived: increasingly as spaces of socio-economic and systemic transformations, with great potential to deal with the challenges of climate adaptation and sustainable development (Silva & Trono, 2020, p.3-4)..

3.2) The EU Urban Agenda

"...local and regional authorities implement 70% of all EU legislation, 70% of climate mitigation measures, 90% of climate adaptation policies, and 65% of the Sustainable Development Goals, represent one third of public spending and two thirds of public investment: they will deliver the European Green Deal on the ground" (Committee of the Regions, 2019, p.2). The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) called for the Commission to ensure that the design and implementation of all EU policies are based on a multi-level, place specific and holistic governance approach that enables local and regional authorities to adjust solutions to local specificities (Committee of the Regions, 2019, p.3), underlining that the success of large-scale policies like the EU Green Deal would not be possible without top-bottom as well as bottom- up engagement.

In recent years the role of cities as facilitators of Sustainable Development transformations is increasingly taken into consideration in the design of European Policy. The EU not only participated in the creation of the UN New Urban Agenda but also committed to its implementation within the Union through the initiation of the highly consonant EU Urban Agenda of 2016. Its explicit goal is to support the realisaiton of "the full potential and contribution of urban areas towards achieving the objectives of the Union and related national priorities" (Council of the European Union, 2016, p.5). Very interestingly, the Agenda is not a single policy document produced by the EU. Rather it is a multi-year forum, established at the European level, that provides the space for direct consultation between the

major EU institutions and Europe's local and regional authorities. The purpose of the forum is to produce proposals and guidelines for the better localisation of EU policies at the Urban level, meaning the amendment of existing EU policies and the design of future ones in a way that takes more into account local specificities and empowers local authorities to drive change. The design of the EU Urban Agenda forum and the involvement of Urban and Regional Authorities on an unprecedented scale constitutes an innovation at the EU level, as it one of the most significant examples of Multi-level Governance practices (European Commission, 2019, p.7-8).

Specifically, 12 thematic Partnerships were set up within the forum, where the different stakeholders participated in exchanging ideas and producing 12 Action Plans. Each Partnership Action Plan was to come up "with concrete proposals for Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge, related to the theme of the Partnership, which can be regarded as non-binding contribution to the design of future and the revision of existing EU legislation, instruments and initiatives." (Council of the European Union, 2016, p.10). The Action Plan of each Partnership, therefore, has no binding policy effects, but it is a political document that can only be consulted by the policy making bodies of the EU when formulating or revisiting policy. Nevertheless, the initiative and willingness of the EU policy making bodies to request and receive input on the Urban dimensions of EU policy is indicative of the heightened interest in the Urban level of governance.

EU Urban Agenda Thematic Partnerships:

1. Urban poverty.
2. Housing
3. Inclusion of migrants and refugees
4. Air quality.
5. Sustainable use of land and Nature Based solutions.
6. Circular economy.
7. Climate adaptation.
8. Energy transition.
9. Urban mobility.
10. Jobs and skills in the local economy.
11. Digital transition.
12. Innovative and responsible public procurement.

Finally, the importance of Cities for Sustainable Development was further recognised on a political level with the adoption of the New Leipzig Charter in 2020, as an informal agreement between the EU Ministers responsible for Urban matters. The Charter provides a guide to the realignment of the relationship between the Local and other levels of government, as well as a policy framework for Sustainable Urban development across the EU. With this agreement, Ministers underlined the transformative potential of Cities and the need of the European, national and regional levels to enable and strengthen Urban Governance (Council of the European Union, 2020, p.7).

3.3) Understanding the EU Interest in Cities and the role of Cohesion Policy

The EU Urban Agenda and the New Leipzig Charter constitute the latest political "push" for the empowerment of local voices at the European level. However, the interest of the EU in the national public administration and subnational governance systems of its member states has been long-standing and it is important to understand its basis. How has this interest been expressed historically and how does the EU engage with those administrational spheres at the national level?

Two main coinciding circumstances led to the consolidation of EU interest in Urban policy, Territorial relations and overall Public Administration structure of member states. Firstly, the onset of globalisation affected European local economies and cities in profound ways. As manufacturing industries declined and service sectors emerged, unemployment surged and important urban change and restructuring processes were set in motion. In response to those challenges, European scholarship and politics became increasingly concerned about Urban matters (Cottella, 2019, p.135). At the same time, increasing urbanisation made cities the primary locations of economic activity as well as social challenges, and therefore they gained political attention (Cottella, 2019, p.136). Secondly, European politics were concerned with the potentially unbalancing effects of the European economic Integration process- meaning the opening of national markets and the establishment of a Monetary Union. Specific cities and regions of the Union would be placed in a disadvantaged position as they would become exposed to external economic competition in production and trade, threatening a potential rise in economic inequality between the countries and regions of the Union, and possibly leading to the malfunctioning of the Single market and Monetary Union themselves.

From these concerns, the urgency emerged to ensure that economic and social development would be cohesive, equally distributed in space (territorial approach to economic development) as a condition for the success of the European Integration project (Cottella, 2019, p.136). This was the basis that warranted the supranational interest of the EU in territorial development issues- where Cities hold special importance as the main hubs of economic activity within regions. More specifically, as early as the 1990's the European Union expressed strong interest in matters of territorial governance and public administration and proposed to be granted formal competence in the field of Urban Policy. However, member states were reluctant to give up their sovereignty on those matters and, thus, the official competences of the EU in this area were limited to the facilitation of administrational cooperation within the Union (Cottella, 2019, p. 137). As a result, a distinct EU Public Administration Policy has not been developed (Knill, 2001 cited in Οικονόμου, 2020, p. 53). With a lack of an EU mandate, the existing structure and function of the public administration system of each country plays a very significant role, as it determines who does what, how much attention is paid to regional and urban policy and how much autonomy the subnational authorities enjoy. In turn, the EU is interested in those factors, as they largely determine the effectiveness of EU policy implementation on the ground and finally the distribution of economic development amongst regions.

Even though administrative and urban policy remains contained within the national political sphere, the EU still exerts significant influence on the public administration systems of member states indirectly through its different policies, as "policy content and administrative implementation requirements are often closely related" (Knill, 2009, p.1). In short, European Policies have administrative impacts at the national level. For example, the inclusion of

”cohesive” and “balanced” economic development of the EU regions in the fundamental European Treaties of the 1980’s as main EU policy objectives (policy content), implied the de facto engagement of the EU with the abovementioned territorial governance matters (Cotella & Dąbrowski, 2021, p.49). More specifically, the EU Cohesion Policy was based on those clauses and aimed to provide support for development projects run by and for the benefit of the least economically developed regions of the union. Through specific eligibility criteria and administrational conditionalities tied to the financing of those projects, Cohesion Policy provides opportunities of empowermet for regional and urban authorities within their national administration systems, thus influencing the structure of the system as a whole without holding official competences on the matter. As will be discussed in the following section, the EU does have preferences regarding the public administration structure of its member states and some scholars argue that the absense of a formal EU policy on Public Administration is merely artificial (Οικονόμου, 2020, p.53). Countries that are recipiens of significant Cohesion funds, like Greece, are more exposed to funding conditionalities and therefore to pressures for the adjustment of their administrational structure to the EU administrational preferences.

With time, EU Cohesion Policy paid increasing attention to Cities in particular, with increasing funding for Urban Development and more involvement opportunities for urban authorities. Essentially, an unofficial EU urban policy started to develop implicitly and gradually became consolidated within the already existing EU Cohesion Policy (Cottella, 2019, p. 137).

3.4) Background to Cohesion Policy

What is the concept behind the EU Cohesion Policy? The idea emerged in the 1980’s to accompany the process of European economic integration and the establishment of the Single Market. Urban areas had begun to suffer from the negative effects of globalisation, with the rise of unemployment and social exclusion. At the same time, the process of European Integration itself produced unbalancing economic effects that related to the opening of national markets and threatened the stability of the EU project. A territorial cohesion mechanism to counterbalance these effects was deemed necessary and was consolidated within the EU Cohesion Policy (Cottella, 2019, p.135-136). Liargovas (Λιαργκόβας & Χουλιαράς, 2016, p.13) goes as far as to say that Cohesion funding was perceived as “compensation” to the poorer nations of the union for taking down their trade barriers and opening up their markets to products of the richer countries. Today, the EU Cohesion Policy constitutes the main investment tool of the EU, supporting development projects throughout Europe with the aim to increase social, economic and territorial cohesion between member states. Most importantly, the conditionalities for accessing the Cohesion funds as well as the requirements for the design, implementation, monitoring, reporting and evaluation of relevant EU projects imply specific administrative configurations and thus influence the national administrative and territorial landscape of recipient countries. This form of financial conditionality (Bulmer & Padgett, 2004, p.14) constitutes a very tangible expression of the Europeanisation process itself.

The importance of Cohesion Policy in Greece lies in its reliance, with Cohesion funds being the main source of funding for regional budgets, with some supplementary funding from the state. Most of the developmental projects across the country have been financed by Cohesion funds, including any type of sustainability transition that will be required in the future in accordance with EU priorities (Liargovas & Apostolopoulos, 2015, p.20).

Therefore, the country is significantly subject to the policy and institutional influences that accompany the design and content of the EU Cohesion Policy.

3.5) Multi-Level Governance (MLG), Cohesion Policy and the Partnership Principle

In the previous sections we looked at the interest of the EU in Cities for the achievement of balanced territorial economic development and Cohesion Policy as the main avenue towards this goal. In turn, this interest translates also in specific EU preferences regarding the role that cities and regions play withing their national administrational contexts. With that being said, what are the administrative principles that the EU favours within and beyond its member states?

The Europeanisation process has been strongly connected with the promotion of the subnational institutions of government (regional and local), decentralisation, regionalisation and of Multi-Level Governance (MLG) (Featherstone, 2003 cited in Οικονόμου, 2020, p. 54). In turn these trends are connected with the neoliberal principles of Good Governance (Kovács, 2020, p.50). In more detail, Multi-level Governance can be understood as "the dispersion of authority within and beyond national states"(Hooghe et al., 2020, p.197). In the EU, the dispersion of authority takes place in two directions. Upwards, beyond the national states to the supranational european level to achieve the benefits of scale in the provision of public goods (Hooghe et al., 2020, p.194), and downwards, from the national states to their local and regional autorities as the EU has been promoting the decentralisation of its member states (Marks et al., 2008a & Tatham, 2014 cited in Hooghe et al., 2020, p.194). The model of Multi-Level Governance was initially developed as an analytical tool to explain the functioning of the EU, as decisions are based on deliberations between various EU bodies and the implementation of EU legistation takes place in different politico-administrative levels, territories and institutional settings (Ladi, 2019, p.295). In this context, MLG describes the "highly dispersed policymaking activity and the participation of multiple individual and institutional actors at various political and territorial levels (from the supranational to the local level)" (Ladi, 2019, p.295). At the same time, Multi-Level Governance has become a Policy Paradigm for the EU, a preference for the delivery of its policies. As the Union has been criticised for its democratic deficit, the Commission aims to engage diverse actors and government levels in EU processes. Also, according to Peters and Pierre (Ladi, 2019, p.295), the bureaucracy based in Brussels needs the support of the lower levels of Governance in order to deliver EU policy to all regions.

Cohesion Policy constitutes the most prominent embodiment of MLG and of the EU preference for MLG within member states (Ladi, 2019, p.295). CP is also designed to be one of the most important policy transmission mechanisms within the Europeanisation process, as the allocation of funding is conditioned by the policy priorities and governance preferences of the Commission (Kechagia & Kyriazi, 2021, p.1-2).

How exactly is MLG reflected within Cohesion Policy? The governing regulations of CP mention the Partnership Principle as a conceptual and procedural framework for the policy, referring to the implication of regional, local, civil society and other actors in the selection, programming, evaluation and monitoring of CP projects. National, regional and local authorities are assigned different roles in the process by regulation and are required to cooperate at every stage (Chardas, 2013, p.435). The Partnership Principle therefore promotes the "bottom-up democratic participation in the areas where the EURP (EU Regional Policy) programmes are implemented hence provide opportunities for more active

involvement on behalf of the subnational authorities. In this way centralised patterns of policy making can be challenged towards the direction of participation closer to those envisaged by MLG (Multi-Level Governance)" (Chardas, 2012, p.iii). According to Hooghe και Keating, through the Partnership Principle, the European Commission tried to institutionalise direct channels of support with regional authorities and ensure their access to the union's decision-making process (Οικονόμου, 2020, p.75). This arrangement has been applying cumulative pressure on national governments to upgrade the role of their sub-national authorities in their decision-making mechanisms (Οικονόμου, 2020, p.75). Therefore, the Partnership Principle as the basis of Cohesion Policy is a reflection of the MLG model and directly promotes the decentralisation of powers at the national level (Papoudakis, 2015, p.76).

For example, the obligation of member states to implement the Cohesion programmes at the regional level (Andreou, 2006, p.242) and the requirement for the involvement of regions at the European level (in the Committee of the Regions), led countries like Greece, Ireland and Portugal to undergo significant territorial reforms in order to comply and be able to absorb EU Cohesion funds (Bache, 1998 cited in Kovács, 2020, p.51). Specifically, in 1985-1986, Greece for the first time established a regional level of governance in the form of 13 administrative regions, in accordance with the EU classification of Territorial Units for Statistics (the basic EU measurement system that connects territory with funding) (Andreou, 2006, p.244). Initially, the Greek Regions had the sole purpose of managing their respective Cohesion programmes. It is clear in this case how Cohesion Policy was used by the Commission as a catalyst to promote regionalisation, decentralisation and undermine "the gatekeeping power of central Governments" (Chardas, 2013, p.434).

3.6) The Urban Dimensions of Cohesion Policy 2021-2027

Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 constitutes the most consolidated version of the EU Urban policy, with the increasing importance of Urban areas being reflected in the design (management and implementation) as well as content (policy objectives) of the programmes. Examining the Common Provisions Regulation (CPR) of the EU Cohesion Policy and other Regulatory documents would be useful for this paper in order to understand how the Urban political agendas/discourses are translated into more tangible policy objectives for the EU member states that receive funds through the Cohesion Policy Mechanism.

The CPR of the EU Cohesion Policy governs the implementation of the programme, determining the target policy objectives as well as the procedural management methods, programming, oversight and evaluation mechanisms required to be followed by member states during each programmatic period. For this reason, The CPR is considered one of the most important, tangible expression of the Europeanisation process (Chardas, 2011, p.3), contributing to the convergence not only of policy targets within the Union but also of governance, of institutions and administrational procedures amongst member states.

Before the start of a new programmatic period, the Commission and other EU bodies discuss and adjust the conditions of the upcoming Cohesion programme in accordance with their new policy agendas. Member states are then called to develop proposals for investments, by assessing and prioritising their national developmental goals, but at the same time staying within the indicated areas of European policy interest. Member states need to produce a very comprehensive plan explaining where exactly they intend to spend the Cohesion funding, what European goals and indicators they intend to target and why. Finally, after this

plan is examined and approved by the European bodies, the EU enters into an official Partnership Agreement with each beneficiary state. What the ESIF offers to member states is a high degree of mobilisation of financial resources, European and national, a solid procedural framework and legal certainty for eligible investments.

On the one hand, the design of Cohesion Policy posits Partnership and Multi-Level Governance as the main methodological approach for the implementation of the programmes within the national context (Kovács, 2020, p. 49-50). We can see this reflected in the CPR 2021-2027 (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, 2021, Article 8, p.185-186), as there is a requirement for the involvement of Local and Urban authorities in the design, implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation of the National Partnership Agreement:

> *1. For the Partnership Agreement and each programme, each Member State shall organise and implement a comprehensive partnership in accordance with its institutional and legal framework and taking into account the specificities of the Funds. That partnership shall include at least the following partners:*
>
> *a) regional, local, urban and other public authorities;*
>
> *b) economic and social partners*
>
> *c) relevant bodies representing civil society, such as environmental partners, non-governmental organisations, and bodies responsible for promoting social inclusion, fundamental rights, rights of persons with disabilities, gender equality and non-discrimination;*
>
> *d) research organisations and universities, where appropriate.*
>
> *2. The partnership established under paragraph 1 of this Article shall operate in accordance with the multi-level governance principle and a bottom-up approach. The Member State shall involve partners referred to in paragraph 1 in the preparation of the Partnership Agreement and throughout the preparation, implementation and evaluation of programmes, including through participation in monitoring committees in accordance with Article 39.*
>
> *In that context, Member States shall, where relevant, allocate an appropriate percentage of the resources coming from the Funds for the administrative capacity building of social partners and civil society organisations.*

Moreover, the European Commission provides a specific code of conduct on how to go about the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the preparation of the national Partnership Agreements and throughout the implementation of the programmes (Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 240/2014, 2014). These instructions come in the form of a Delegated Regulation that is legally binding for member states, as they are obliged to implement it even if it clashes with national law.

On the other hand, when it comes to the content of the Cohesion Policy 2021-2027, the CPR targets cities directly within its Policy Objectives (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, 2021, Article 5, p.184), which are then specified further (Regulation (EU) 2021/1058, 2021, Article 3, p.72) as follows:

> *1. In accordance with the policy objectives set out in Article 5(1) of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, the ERDF shall support the following specific objectives:*
>
> *Objective e: a Europe closer to citizens by fostering the sustainable and integrated development of all types of territories and local initiatives (PO 5) by:*

(i) fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in urban areas;

(ii) fostering the integrated and inclusive social, economic and environmental local development, culture, natural heritage, sustainable tourism and security in areas other than urban areas.

Support under PO5 shall be provided through territorial and local development strategies, through the forms set out in points (a), (b) and (c) of Article 28 of Regulation (EU) 2021/1060.

Under these provisions of this framework, Sustainable Urban Development (Regulation (EU) 2021/1058, 2021, Article 11, p.79) is therefore set as a quite distinct policy goal, accompanied by funds to support relevant projects that member states will propose (targeting the territories of Urban Neighbourhoods, Cities, Towns and Suburbs and Functional Urban Areas (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, 2021, Annex 1, table 3, p.277). Specifically, on the national level, governments are now required to spend at least 8% of their total Cohesion funding for Sustainable Urban Development (Regulation (EU) 2021/1058, 2021, Article 11, p. 79), an increased percentage in comparison to the minimum of 5% required for the 2014-2020 period (Regulation (EU) 1301/2013, 2013, Article 7, p.296). Very importantly, under this framework, Cities and local authorities are encouraged to choose their own priorities, create their own programmes and draw funds from the Sustainable Urban Development budget of their country (Regulation (EU) 2021/1058, 2021, Article 11, p. 79).

Chapter 4) The Urban Expectations of Circularity

4.1) Localisation of EU Policy: the case of the Circular Economy

Paying more attention to the Urban applications of policy is becoming a paradigm that permeates not only Cohesion Policy but all sectoral policies of the EU. A good example would be the EU New Circular Economy Action Plan (NCEAP), where due to the content of the policy, like waste management, planning and citizen education, Local and Regional governments have very significant roles to play. According to Knill (2009, p.2), Eu policies have administrational impacts on national administrative structures and styles. Specifically, "EU policies put pressure on national administrations because of the structural requirements they tend to imply. These requirements may address concrete institutional structures related to the presence, design or integration of regulatory authorities in the overall system. For instance, a regulation may call for the creation of new structures (e.g., an environmental agency), the centralisation or decentralisation of regulatory processes (e.g., by introducing uniform reporting requirements to a central authority), or it may demand horizontal organisational change (e.g., by requiring the co-ordination of previousely distinct administrative tasks)." Knill (2009, p.2). In this chapter we will examine how the implementation of the Circular Economy policy within member states implies the need for specific administrational arrangements, towards MLG and decentralisation, and therefore puts pressure on national governments for administrative adjustments.

Before we get into the policy itself, a few words on the EU approach for its implementation would set the context. The New Circular Economy Action Plan (NCEAP) pays attention to the localisation of the CE transformations at the Urban level, as it aims to ensure "that the circular economy works for people, regions and cities" (European Commission, 2020, p. 3). There is no explicit delegation of roles to City Authorities within the NCEAP, as this would be outside the competences of the EU. However, there are many indicators as to the role that the EU is encouraging Cities to take as agents of circular transitions for their regions.

First, at the European level, the Circular Economy has been included as a topic of interest within the EU Urban Agenda that was discussed earlier. In this context, a forum was created for Local and Regional authorities to come together with EU policy making bodies and create proposals for Better Regulation, Better Funding and Better Knowledge for the CE at the local level. One of the main proposals that were brought forward was indeed the inclusion of the CE as a policy objective within the 2021-2027 Cohesion Policy mechanism, in order to make funding available for Cities and Regions (European Commission, 2021, p.45). The proposal was taken into account and for the first time it was explicitly included in Cohesion Policy as an objective eligible for funding (Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, 2021, Article 5, p.184). Secondly, at the national level, the EU supports Cities directly in taking up a leading role for Circular transitions by providing information, consultancy resources and several related programmes. These include the European Urban Initiative, the Intelligent Cities Challenge Initiative, the Circular Cities and Regions Initiative, the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform (European Commission, 2020, p.16) and the Circular City Funding Guide. Finally, on a political level, the EU has included the Circular Economy in the Green Cities Accord, the Circular Cities Declaration and overall aims to "step up cooperation with Member States, regions and cities in making the best use of EU funds" (European Commission, 2020, p.13). All these efforts indicate the European desire for cities to step up for the implementation of the Circular Economy.

4.2) Introduction to the Circular Economy

A short introduction of the Circular Economy as a concept will help us pinpoint its connections with urban space and governance.

The European Green Deal was launched in 2019 and it aims to gear the European economy towards climate neutrality and resource efficiency by transforming sectors like Energy, Agriculture, Industry, Trasport and Regional Development Policy (European Commission, 2022). The Circular Economy is a very important part of the European Green Deals as it addresses the latter goals of increasing resource efficiency within the economy and the decoupling of economic growth from the use of virgin resources. Specifically, it is framed as an economy "where the value of products, materials and resources is maintained in the economy for as long as possible, and the generation of waste minimised" and will contribute towards a "sustainable, low carbon, resource efficient and competitive economy" (European Commission, 2015, p.2). The EU CE policy is intended to "boost the EU's competitiveness by protecting businesses against scarcity of resources and volatile prices, helping to create new business opportunities and innovative, more efficient ways of producing and consuming". Falling under the overarching umbrella of Green Growth, the EU CE agenda is seen as a pro-growth policy, "greening" capitalism by suggesting a gradual change in the political economy of the Union towards balancing environmental protection with economic growth (Belmonte et al., 2021, p.15).

According to the new Circular Economy Action Plan (NCEAP), adopted in 2020, some of the benefits of the Circular Economy is its potential to increase the EU GDP by 0.5% by 2030, create around 700.000 new jobs, strengthen the EU industrial base, increase its global competitiveness and support SMEs and entrepreneurship (European Commission, 2020, p.2). Focused on transforming the way we produce and consume, the NCEAP laid out the plans for new sustainable product design regulations, industrial symbiosis regulations, the creation of strong secondary (recycled) raw material markets as well as individual transition plans for key resource intensive industrial value chains. The NCEAP also lays out plans for the incentivisation of the sharing economy and new business models, establishes the "right to repair" and discourages practices like greenwashing in advertisement and the premature obsolescence of products. Finally, reducing the amount of residual (non-recycled/landfilled) municipal waste is a major target of the NCEAP. According to the policy, decoupling waste generation from economic growth will be achieved by updating the EU Waste legislation, designing out waste at the product design phase, promoting high-quality recycling, establishing extended producer responsibility systems and separate streams in waste collection (European Commission, 2020, p.13).

Whether the Circular Economy as envisioned within the Green Deal can have significant environmental benefits and whether GDP growth can indeed be decoupled from material use is still a matter of debate (Belmonte et al., 2021, p.3). There are doubts as to the scientific foundations of the concept (Fratini et al., 2019, p.975) but delving into this debate is outside the scope of the present research. We will rather focus on the roles that different institutions are supposed to play for its implementation in the European context, focusing on the city level.

4.3)The blurry Vision of the Circular City

The European discourses on circularity, urbanism and territorial governance meet each other at the point of Circular Cities. However, there is no single definition for the Circular City (Fusco Girard & Nocca, 2019, p.3). Rather, the concept can be perceived as a new vision of the city specifically through the lens of natural systems, or "urban metabolisms" that are being transformed from linear to circular, in a comprehensive systematic and interconnected manner. In this sense, the Circular City is not the sum of circular projects and enterprises, but the result of more holistic planning that takes into account the flows of people and materials as well as the urban and peri-urban spaces that comprise the local economy (Fusco Girard & Nocca, 2019, p.3). The European Union, different Think Tanks and other international organisations are making their own proposals regarding the governance of the transition to circularity at the local level. Significant contributions have been made by the Committee of the Regions (COR), the European Investment Bank (EIB), Circle Economy (Circle Economy), Ellen Mc Arthur Foundation (HMF) and the OECD (OECD). These are mainly political documents meant to offer general guidance towards a style of governance more appropriate for the management of complex systemic transitions, like the establishment of the Circular Economy. All contributions pay attention to the role of local authorities for this transition.

Inspired by these policies, or developing their own frameworks, pioneering cities in the field of circularity have been experimenting with different pathways and initiatives to promote, facilitate and enable the Circular Economy in their territory (OECD, 2020, p. 14). The capacities, technical competences, financial resources and scope of competences of each City authority will to a large extent determine the scope of action of each city (Borett et al., 2020, p.4). A multiplicity of highly localised factors determines the approach that each city adopts,

like the size of the city, the location, territorial characteristics, industries and economic sectors present as well as socioeconomic context.

4.4) Local Authorities as drivers of Circularity Transitions

Exactly because the circularisation of the economy is a rather new policy goal for local governments, with a high degree of complexity and multiplicity of actors involved, there is ample space for city authorities to be creative and customise the pathway through which they embed the CE in their area. Analysing the existing literature, OECD documented more clearly the patterns that emerge in regards to the roles that city authorities can play to facilitate the circularisation of their local economies (OECD, 2020, p.138).

First, let's look at sectors that City authorities are responsible for, or can influence significantly towards the circularisation of their local economy. Such key sectors are Waste, the Built Environment, Construction and Demolition, Land Use, Spatial and Urban Planning, Food systems and Rural-Urban networks, Water and Sanitation, Agriculture and Transportation ((OECD, 2020, p.85-88).

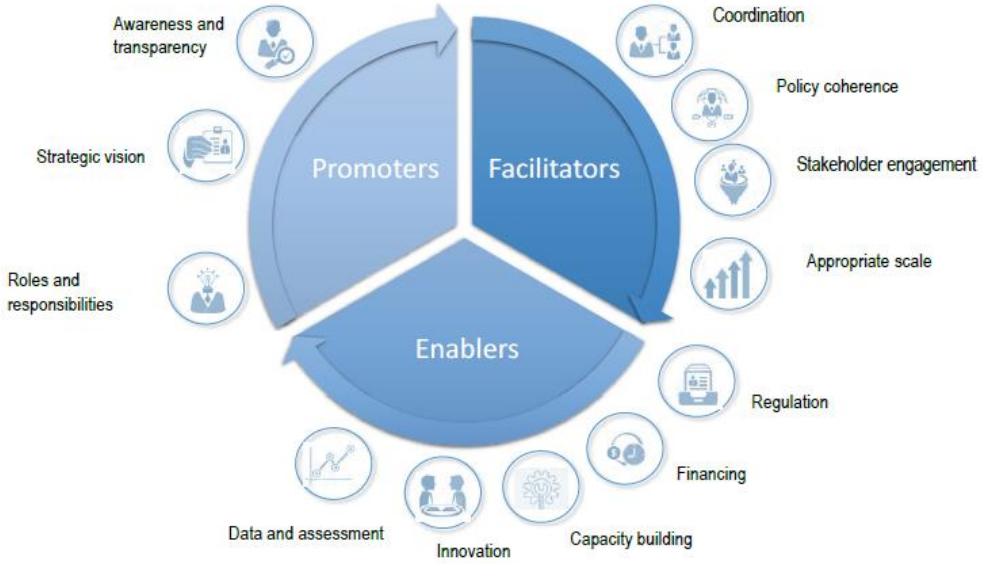
Among these, one of the most important areas for intervention would be the Waste sector ((Borett et al., 2020, p.16). In the Circular Economy context, the local authority can take action in order to prevent waste production by engaging the local society, encourage symbiosis among local businesses and industries to ensure the reduction of produced waste, install separate waste collection streams to increase the recyclability of collected waste, coordinate with other levels of government to install recycling facilities in their region and finally manage landfills in a safe manner for the disposal of the remaining waste residues.

Urban and Spatial planning (land use and the built environment) is another prominent area where productive interventions are possible. The "cross-thematic and integrative" function of planning can incorporate efficiently the complexity of the Circular Economy (Obersteg et al., 2019, p. 28). City authorities develop their territories by assessing social, physical and environmental conditions and then directing funds for public investments, setting regulations and providing incentives towards the goals that it sets. Planning for Circularity in the Urban space will have a great impact on how people, recourses and goods move within the local economy and between urban, peri-urban, rural and regional territories, creating more opportunities for recapturing materials and nutrients in the economy (Borett et al., 2020, p.15).

Special attention should be placed in the Construction sector, as it is one of the major waste producing industries that local authorities can influence positively ((OECD, 2020, p.92). Managing their own construction, demolition and renovation projects with circular methods will already significantly reduce construction waste, but they can also go a step further by encouraging these practices within the private construction sector within their territories (Borett et al., 2020, p. 13)

Now, what roles can city authorities adopt when interacting with these sectors and relevant stakeholders? OECD offers a clearer classification based on the analysis of both scientific and policy literature as well as existing case studies, describing the roles of cities as promoters, facilitators and enablers of the CE.

Figure 1: OECD: The governance of the circular economy in cities and regions: A Checklist for Action



OECD, The Circular Economy in Cities and Regions Synthesis Report, 2020, p. 139.

Specifically, City administrations can be Promoters of the Circular Economy, leading by example (OECD, 2020, p.14). The ability of the local authority to engage with local stakeholders, develop trust and a vision for the Circular Economy in the area is very important in this context as it will lead to a well informed and supported Circular Strategy, where specific goals can be set and roles, responsibilities and funds can be assigned (OECD, 2020, p.143).

At the same time, Green (and Circular) Public Procurement (European Commission, 2020, p.5) is especially important for the promotion of the Circular Economy as it serves as an incentive and a signaling mechanism for local businesses to adopt circular business models. The large purchasing power of city authorities and the potential for long term contracts with the private sector can act as levers of change and the infusion of circular principles in the local product and service market (reparability, durability, recyclability of products, leasing, sharing business models etc.) (Borett et al., 2020, p.11-12). Let's also not forget that public procurement accounts for about 14% of the European Union GDP (European Commission, 2018, p.10), and two thirds of it is managed by local and regional authorities. The ability of the local authorities to engage with the citizen to raise awareness is another factor that makes the city a catalyst for the CE (OECD, 2020, p.145).

As Facilitators of the Circular Economy, Cities have a significant coordinating role. Having an overview over the variety of actors, economic sectors, environmental characteristics and socioeconomic needs of their area, local authorities have the potential to approach and manage the Circular Economy as a system (OECD, 2020, p.146), escaping from the narrow interpretation of waste management. Siloed policies can be integrated more easily under the guidance of circular principles, overall improving policy coherence (e.g., agricultural, environmental and land use policy) (OECD, 2020, p.147). By deploying multi-level governance practices, cities can facilitate collaboration between different stakeholders for the exchange of knowledge, innovation and creation of local and regional synergies (OECD, 2020, p. 148).

Finally, Cities Enable circular transitions by building capacity (Borett et al., 2020, p.7) and know-how and by providing financial support as well as financial incentives. Local authorities in cooperation with other levels of government can develop their own capacities in managing, for example, green public procurement (OECD, 2020, p.64) and at the same time they can provide capacity building training programmes or circular incubators for local businesses. Finally, their capacity to mobilise financial resources and allocate them is also catalytic. Cities have access to different funding instruments and can mediate access for local business (OECD, 2020, p.150), utilising grants, subsidies, public-private partnerships, EU programmes and more (Borett et al., 2020, p. 8). Tax incentives and other fiscal measures can help steer production and consumption behaviour towards circularity, encouraging for example recycling, repair and the use of recycled materials in production (Borett et al., 2020, p. 10).

4.5)What does it take to turn a City Circular?

The success of the new Circular Economy Action Plan of the EU will depend highly on the widespread uptake of circularity initiatives and planning at the local level (Borett et al., 2020, p.65). In the previous two sections we looked at the range of roles that Cites are encouraged to take up to become active agents of change in their areas. The roles that seem to be ascribed to local governments imply the need for significant administrative change, capacity building, decentralisation of powers and increased financial and decision-making autonomy. Across international as well as European agendas on urban policy, the developmental role and capacity of local and regional institutions is highlighted as critical for the achievement of the SDGs, including the transition to the Circular Economy. "Achieving these standards and targets requires strong institutional capacity, both at national and local levels. This calls for the existence, at the local level, of local government with strong organizational, functional and financial autonomy, and capacity to initiate policies as well, conditions that are critical for the localization of SDGs and other goals." (Silva & Trono, 2020, p.3).

More specifically, cities that take up the challenge of turning circular, to some extent need to have the capacities to navigate multi-level governance (interactions between local, regional, national and supranational levels of governance), cross-sectoral governance (interactions between different departments of the public sector-e.g. waste management, environmental planning, spatial planning) and multi-actor governance (interaction and participation of different actors- society, public/private enterprises, scientific institutions, NGOs, industrial sectors) (Obersteg et al., 2019, p.21). City authorities wanting to fulfil those roles more broadly need to be highly capable, organised, well-staffed and funded, operating within an enabling regulatory environment. It is no coincidence that the pioneering cities in circularity currently are Amsterdam, London, Paris, Flanders and Kitakyushu City, Japan (OECD, 2020, p.46). On the opposite side, implementing sustainability agendas on the ground will be a great challenge in the presence of inadequate institutional frameworks and highly centralised states (Silva & Trono, 2020, p.5).

However, these roles for cities are still political visions in most cases and hardly correspond with the possibilities and capacities available on the ground in countries like Greece. In the following chapter we will try to explore whether this gap between expectations and realities can spark action and mobilise reforms.

Chapter 5) Administrational Change and Convergence in the EU

5.1) Partnership Principle of Cohesion Policy: Effective?

In the previous chapters we looked at some important examples of how the EU promotes Cities and Regions by implicating them in EU processes (EU Urban Agenda) as well as developmental processes and EU policies within their national context (Cohesion Policy and the Circular Economy policy). We looked at the practice of Multi-Level Governance in the EU institutional procedures and EU policies as suggestive of the EU administrational preference for its member states. A question arises however, regarding the extent to which member states internalise those influences or adjust their administrative structure in response to them. Is administrational change and convergence taking place within the EU due to European influence? If yes, to what extent?

First, the pressure for administrative convergence and reform comes as a result of the difference between the national institutional arrangements and the institutional and administrative requirements that stem from EU membership, EU policies as well as from Cohesion Policy regulation. These requirements can be seen as "framing agents" of reforms at the national and subnational level (Kratochvíl et al., 2011 cited in Οικονόμου, 2020, p.54). Knill (2009, p.4), from a Historical Institutionalist perspective, argues that weather or not "European policies challenge core institutional patterns of national administrative tradition" can be predictive of national adaptation outcomes, resistance or openness to change. When the "misfit" between European expectations and domestic historically developed administrative traditions is significant, more resistance can be expected (Knill, 2009, p.201). In our case, the domestic element as a filter of EU influence is even stronger due to the lack of an official EU mandate on Administrational and Urban policy issues.

At the European level, the Multi-Level Governance model favoured by the EU has indeed brought Cities closer to the European decision-making mechanism, through the Committee of the Regions, the process of the EU Urban Agenda, EU City networks and other related programmes. The influence of cities on the overall policy making process at the EU level has increased. However, " this process has not yet resulted in structural administrative reforms in most of the member states" (Kovács, 2020, p. 50). At the domestic level, the Partnership Principle of Cohesion Policy creates pressures and plenty of opportunities for the more active involvement of sub-national authorities. However, "the high degree of freedom provided to the Member States, in seizing these opportunities, had partially prevented this from happening" (Cotella & Dąbrowski, 2021, p. 144). Each member state has the discretion to interpret and address the EU Cohesion Policy objectives in a way that is context specific to the country. This is reflected in the different ways that countries draw up their Partnership Contracts with the EU, as they define different key objectives, create different programmes and choose different administration methods. This inevitably leads to a very heterogeneous application of Cohesion Policy and the Partnership Principle between member states (Cotella & Dąbrowski, 2021 p. 145).

In conclusion, while the Partnership Principle is contractually an important, legally binding requirement of Cohesion Policy, it is uncertain whether it is being observed consistently, as the involvement of local authorities in the EU Cohesion programmes has been considerably varied (Cotella & Dąbrowski, 2021, p.148). It seems that the effectiveness of the Partnership Principle reflects the already existing distribution of power, funds and competences

between national and subnational levels of government (John, 2001 cited in Oikonomou, 2020, p. 76). Comparative studies performed on the subject have indeed revealed that "the influence exerted by the principle of partnership is varied, which produces differentiated patterns of MLG in the member states" (Chardas, 2013, p. 434), confirming that preexisting political and institutional arrangements many times prevent the increase of local and regional involvement. The authors of these studies challenge that there is a direct link between the Cohesion Policy Partnership Principle and the elevation of the role of subnational authorities on the ground. Similar were the findings of the ex-post evaluation of the Cohesion Policy Programmes 2000-2006, where only limited evidence was found that Cohesion Policy has influenced recipient countries significantly towards internal Multi-Level Governance (EPRC, 2009 cited in Chardas, 2013, p. 435). Therefore, the Partnership Principle permeating the EU Cohesion Policy may encourage subnational participation and provide opportunities for change in the domestic balance of power, but it can not guarantee it. There is a mismatch between the intentions of the Partnership Principle to encourage Multi-Level Governance within states and the empirical evidence (Chardas, 2013, p.435). Each case needs to be examined individually.

5.2)The Institutional impacts of Cohesion Policy and Europeanisation in Greece

The above observations direct us towards the examination of the Greek experience with Europenisation and Cohesion Policy influences so far, and the specific national filters that determine the impact of European influences on the Greek Public Administration system overall.

The Greek Public Administration system stems from the Continental European Napoleonic administrative tradition, based on a culture of the rule of law and legalism. This tradition is characterised by "a strong centralised government, a comprehensive, political culture-rooted acceptance of (centralised) governmental regulatory authority and a powerful centralised bureaucracy" where "the subnational and local levels are functionally subordinate, so the principle of territorial administrative organisation and institutional subsidiarity is poorly developed." (Ongaro and Peters, 2008 cited in Kuhlmann et al., 2020, p. 12). The Greek administrational system has traditionally exhibited a high degree of clientelism, party patronage and politicisation of the public administration (Kuhlmann et al., 2020, p.13), lack of specialised personnel, lack of fiscal autonomy and the overall weakness of the subnational levels of governance in exercise planning and developmental roles (Οικονόμου, 2020, p.14). This is closely linked to the fact that the economic and developmental planning system of the country has traditionally been highly centralised and resistant to fiscal and administrational devolution to subnational levels (Andreou, 2006, p.246). In turn, this resistance to change in the specific case of Greece is linked with the distributive character of its institutions and their significance in the preservation of the cenrtalised state in the country (Papoudakis, 2015, p.77).

With this institutional background there was a clear "misfit" between the Greek administrational structure and the institutional and administrational requirements set by the EU about MLG, for the management of its funds as well as the implementation of other policies. This "misfit" indeed constituted the initial pressure for national institutions to adapt starting from the 1980's (Οικονόμου, 2020, p.14) but also indicated the high probability of domestic resistance (Knill, 2009, p.201).

A recent study examining the effects of Europeanisation on the institutional structure of Greece for the period between 1986 and 2013, found that the institutional reforms towards decentralisation and MLG in Greece were highly linked with policy influences originating from the European Union, at certain points in time. Therefore, ideas that emerged in the national context relating to the empowerment of the sub-national levels of government did not appear by chance but were largely related to European influences (Οικονόμου, 2020, p.114). In this period, the developmental role of regional and local governments in Greece was somewhat strengthened, through incremental political, spatial as well as administrational decentralisation. Moreover, the regulations for the management of Cohesion Policy funds (planning, monitoring, evaluation) have gradually improved the effectiveness of some parts of the public administration as well as the public procurement mechanisms, towards European best practices (Huliaras & Petropoulos, 2016, p.1344-1345).

Despite these positive effects and significant influences, the balance of powers within the governance system of the country did not change fundamentally between 1986 and 2013, as the central state maintained competences and responsibilities that ensured its position of absolute power in relation to regional and local authorities (Οικονόμου, 2020, p.52). In 1986, the creation of the regional level of government in Greece (13 Regions) was in direct response to the requirements of the EU Cohesion Policy. However, the shape and functions of those Regions was in accordance with the preferences of the central government (Andreou, 2006, p.246). In 2001, Knill poses the question whether policy convergence in the EU also leads to administrational convergence (Knill, 2009, p.2). In 2006, Andreou answers that question for the case of Greece: "the EU influence did not manifest itself principally in the field of territorial relations, but in the domain of policy objectives, policy style and practices" (Andreou, 2006, p.253) as the country adopted an accommodative stance in response to European pressures instead of substantive decentralising reforms (Borzel and Risse, 2000, cited in Andreou, 2006, p.253). This meant that "Greek political actors accommodate Europeanization pressures by adapting existing processes, policies and institutions without changing their essential features and the underlying collective understandings attached to them", by "patching of new policies and institutions onto existing ones—without changing the latter" (Andreou, 2006, p.253).

The financial dependence of the subnational tiers of government to the central state was maintained (Οικονόμου, 2002, p.52), while the lack of expertise of regions and municipalities to manage the Cohesion projects and absorb the funds led to the creation of a new "bourgeoisie", constituted by private consultancies, training centers and other agencies participated heavily in the management of the projects. Meanwhile their contractors, Cities and Regions, did not retain significant know-how and remained dependent on their support (Huliaras & Petropoulos, 2016, p.1342). These agencies developed ties with the political sphere, creating one of the most significant channels through which the distribution of Cohesion funding "became part of the traditionally clientelistic political game" (Huliaras & Petropoulos, 2016, p.1340). Huliaras (2016, p.1340-1342) makes an interesting comparison between Cohesion Policy funding in Greece and Official Development Aid towards the developing countries, finding similarities in their effects in bloating the bureaucracy and strengthening the existing patronage and clientelistic networks.

5.3)The Partnership Principle in Greece

Greece is one of the countries where the operationalisation of the Partnership Principle did not meet the expectations and regulations of the European Commission and did not produce

significant MLG encouraging effects (Chardas, 2013, p.439). It is important to understand why.

During the initial Cohesion programmes, the territoriality of member states regarding EU project implementation was strong. The Commission, at the same time, was unwilling to meddle so much with domestic politics and had not yet developed sufficient control procedures over the implementation of its Cohesion programmes (Andreou, 2006, p.254). At this stage, the existing internal politics, command over resources and negotiating power between different levels of government largely determined the extent to which the Partnership Principle was applied or not. Relevant studies show that the clearly unsatisfactory performance of the country in applying the Principle has to do with the lack of resources and general weakness of regional and local authorities, which were not able to play the role assigned to them by the programmes (Papoudakis, 2015, p.78). The funds were mostly managed at the central level (Andreou, 2006, p.250) as the pre-existing institutional culture persisted in its ways, despite external pressures and reforms that were introduced (Papoudakis, 2015, p.85). At this point, Cohesion funds were used as a political leverage by the governments, instead of strengthening the participation of local authorities and promoting place-based solutions.

In the second half of the 1990's, the Commission became increasingly interested in programme effectiveness while Greece became more attentive to it as well, as the accession to the EU Monetary Union was approaching (Andreou, 2006, p.254). Managerial efficiency and the absorption of funds became the primary goal of the governments, shifting the focus even further from participatory governance and the implementation of the Partnership Principle (Andreou, 2006, p.250). At this point, instead of supporting the regional and municipal governments to participate in the management of the European funds, Greek governments opted for the assistance of private consultants and the creation of special structures and parallel mechanisms that functioned in isolation from the public bodies that could have run the programmes. In this way, the balance of powers was not changed significantly, and "new life" was given to centralism: "Inevitably, then, democratic programming became devoid of substance and the main lines of contention were drawn between the sectoral ministries and the bureaucratic and private interests they represent." (Andreou, 2006, p.255). Overall, the way the Greek governments managed the Cohesion programmes, essentially neglecting the proper implementation of the Partnership Principle, is indicative of the attitude of the state towards the subnational levels of government.

However, the subsequent Greek economic crisis of 2008 revealed contradictions on the European narrative regarding public spending at the subnational level. Chardas points out that European rhetoric about decentralisation, the importance of Multi-Level Governance and the implementation of the Partnership Principle in Cohesion Programmes was set aside by demands of austerity in public spending at any cost (Chardas, 2013, p.441). According to the OECD, before the economic crisis Greece was already one of the countries with the lowest public spending at the subnational level in relation to GDP (Chardas, 2013, p.437). The insistence of the IMF Memoranda of Understanding on cutting public spending and limiting public services was embodied in the decision of the Greek governments to implement territorial reforms in 2010, reducing the number of municipalities. By unifying many of the existing municipalities, costs were cut at the expense of local government capacities in terms of staff, salaries and more (Chardas, 2013, p.438). Public spending for the funding of the subnational level was further reduced during that period (Οικονόμου, 2020, p.32), leading to partial recentralisation of powers between state and local governments (Kuhlmann et al., 2020, p.42), and the reversal of the limited progress made so far towards the empowerment of the subnational level, its participation in Cohesion programmes and local development

overall (Chardas, 2013, p.441). Up to 2013, the monetaristic approach adopted by the lenders in combination with the tradition of centralism in Greece led to decisions that weakened local governance and possibly rendered concepts like Multi-Level Governance and the Partnership Principle meaningless (Chardas, 2013, p.442).

Chapter 6) Current state of affairs and prospects of strong Circular Cities in Greece

6.1) Strong Cities?

The latest research on Multi-Level Governance and the EU institutional influence in Greece looked at the period up to 2013 (Οικονόμου, 2020, p.4). In this section the researcher will draw from the interviews taken in the field to provide a preliminary update on the current state of affairs, 12 years after the initiation of the economic crisis in Greece. After illuminating the conditions in which local authorities currently operate, the section will proceed to explore the extent to which Greek local authorities can become drivers for circular transitions in their areas.

All of the interviewees have extensive experience working within or closely with local public authorities from a variety of positions (related ministries, EU programmes, the Union of Greek Municipalities, EU institutions). During the interviews conducted in the context of this research, a few specific themes emerged repeatedly. First, when asked about their view and recent experience of working with Greek municipalities from their respective positions, all of them agreed that cities have minimal capacities as they have not yet significantly recovered from the effects of the economic crisis. Mr. Famellos, current MP and former Deputy Minister of Environment and Energy specifically mentioned that "The Greek local administration at the moment finds itself in a situation lacking personnel, lacking funds, lacking the political will from the side of the government to promote all these (measures). It (local admin.) is alone and helpless. (...) I think that it is in a very weak position". (Famellos, October 2021). Mr. Vlachos and Mr. Goumas from the Ministry of Developmen and Investments mentioned that limitation of new hiring in the Greek public sector due to the austerity measures of the crisis has indeed lead municipalities to "extreme situations" (Vlachos & Goumas, October 2021). Mr. Homatidis from the Green Fund working on the implementation of the Greek circular economy and waste management plans mentioned the absence of comprehensive training and capacity building for local administrations as detrimental to the abilities of municipalities to keep up with policy developments, participate more broadly in EU programmes and take advantage of EU funds. He specifically brought up the examples of several municipalities not being able to provide basic quality usable data for their areas or provide the required materials and proposals in order to receive funding and support from the Green Fund (Homatidis, November 2021).

All interviewees also agreed that there are cities of two speeds. There are a few cities that have the capacities to be pioneering with the implementation of progressive, experimental policies and european programmes, but the majority of Greek cities are not in the position or do not have the political will to be more active. Ms. Konstandopoulou and Ms. Papoutsi, leading the operation of the EU URBACT programme in Greece and Cyprus noted that most of the municipalities that participate in this programme are the ones with previous experience and higher capacities, while the smaller cities struggle to participate due to the administrative load that accompanies the participation -"(participation) depends on the

individual public servant that works on those issues, on how informed they are, how willing and open to such new initiatives, how much time they have, how much European direction their work has, and their philosophy in the workplace" (Konstandopoulou & Papoutsi, November 2021).

Greek cities interact directly with EU policy and participate in EU programmes (including Cohesion programmes) to the extent of their abovementioned abilities. This was another common point that interviewees agreed upon. Due to the operational and institutional limitations of Greek local governments, it is very difficult for them to follow, directly translate European policy and information into their own local policy or to reach out directly to EU platforms and programmes for support (Birmpas, October 2021). Overall, European policies and projects can be potential catalysts and levers for change and sustainability transitions, but their effectiveness is heavily mediated by the domestic environment that enables (or not) cities to engage with the EU level.

In discussing the Greek domestic environment, the fundamental issue of administrative traditions came up, referring to the differences between the centralised Greek state and other decentralised European states. "It is not easy to transition from the one approach to the other", "...the EU Urban Agenda and the participation in all those initiatives play a role towards this direction, as a lever of pressure, but I will say it again, the steps are very slow" (Vlachos & Goumas, October 2021). Ms. Konstandopoulou (November 2021) agreed, adding that "this is clearly a political matter and clearly depends on how each government perceives the function and the progress of the public sector. It is a matter of political decisions and governance in general and goes beyond our competences and activities"

6.2)MLG Update

Delving more deeply into the issue of European influence on the structure of the Greek public administration, the researcher asked questions regarding the impact of the new urban-centric Cohesion Policy framework and the application of the Partnership Principle in the design of the latest Cohesion programme 2021-2027. This was to understand the role that was given to local governments in the development planning of the country. Did the new provisions in Cohesion Policy overall encourage Multi-Level Governance in the context of this programme?

According to Mr. Birmpas who is a member of the Governing Board of the Union of Municipalities of Greece, the participation of municipalities in the initial design of the Cohesion programme 2021-2027 was "minimal to zero". Regions were summoned at this stage because 30% of the Cohesion funds must be managed by them. Regions become the mamagers of those funds and are responsible for putting together regional development plans and open calls for cities to submit proposals for funding for different projects (Vlachos & Goumas, October 2021). At this second stage of planning at the regional level, there is an opportunity for cities to be involved more in the drafting of the regional development plans. However, inviting cities to participate in this process is at the discretion of each Region Governor "and most of the times this does not happen through institutional avenues like in the rest of Europe" (Birmpas, October2021). It was made clear that cities in Greece were seen as fields of implementation of Cohesion policy and not as development agents themselves. The mandatory 8% of Cohesion funds dedicated to Sustainable Urban Development will eventually reach the cities, but will be directed to the policy areas decided mostly by the regional authority. Municipalities for many years "are expressing their disappointment that they have been turned into implementers of orders and that decisions are being made far away from

local administration" (Famellos, October 2021). These findings showcase that the Partnership Principle is still not applied properly in Greece. There is still a deficit in the coordination between national, regional and local authorities in terms of MLG (Vlachos & Goumas, October 2021).

6.3) Circular Cities?

Not only is there little local participation in terms of MLG in the design of Cohesion Policy, but there is also a difficulty for municipalities to access the Cohesion funds. Due to the capacity deficit described earlier, many municipalities are not able to conduct the appropriate preparation and technical studies to compose applications for the open calls for Cohesion funding (Vlachos & Goumas, October 2021. "(Cohesion) calls are published and they go to waste. Municipalities are not applying because they have not prepared what they have to do...The Cohesion programme is waiting for you to submit a proposal, after finding the space, conducting the technical analysis....The call remains up hanging, then expires, bye, and then the Cohesion programme ends and (we are complaining that) fund absorption was low. When I was young, I did not understand that, how come they are giving us money from the EU and we are not taking it? How can there be low absorption? Now I understand very well" (Homatidis, November 2021). This is particularly important because it hinders the ability of municipalities to take up projects, especially sustainability related projects that can be mostly funded by Cohesion funds. Indeed, Cohesion Policy 2021-2027 includes the Circular Economy as an eligible field for funding. However, the difficulty of many cities to access funding will most likely slow down the process of circularising Greek cities.

Most importantly, when asked about the prospects of Greek cities to drive circular transitions in their areas, all the interviewees pointed out that there are other more pressing issues to be dealt with first, that are prerequisites for moving towards the circular economy. There are several systemic problems that do not allow most of Greek cities to take up a leading role in this transition. These need to be solved at the national level to provide an enabling environment for cities to take action. For example, land use and urban planning regulation needs to be simplified and local land use plans need to be drafted (Birmpas, October 2021). These are very important for waste management and circularity. Moreover, basic recycling infrastructure is almost absent in the country (Homatidis, November 2021) and this creates massive problems with waste management, "we have not even solved the problem with the two waste streams, when we should have already moved to four, and the European plan is featuring seven" (Birmpas, October 2021). "with a few exceptions, the majority of municipalities can not play this (leading) role in the conditions present today" (Vlachos & Goumas, October 2021). Other pressing issues include the decentralisation of funds and competences towards local authorities, changes in the hiring process in the public sector, the digitalisation of public administration and more.

Last but not least, when discussing about the european expectation for the role of cities in circularity transitions, it was noted by several interviewees that, for now, Greece is moving away from the EU vision of the CE. Specifically, the CE as depicted in the New Circular Economy Action Plan is not supported by the latest national plans for waste management (Νόμος 4819/2021), which focus significantly on waste incineration rather than the "reduce, reuse and recyce" approach of the EU. "the national waste management planning at the moment has renamed the destruction of resources through incineration as 'circular economy', which is irrational. It is a good thing that the EU Taxonomy exists, banning European

funding from going to such projects...funds now will not be going towards an investment that is antithetical to the pronciples you are trying to instill in people." (Homatidis, November 2021).

Overall, the influence of the EU Urban Agenda and the urban-centric provisions of Cohesion Policy have not influenced the governance practices in the country towards MLG and decentralisation. The Partnership Principle for the design of the Cohesion programme 2021-2027 was not implemented sufficiently, indicating that old practices still hold. It is confirmed that the greater the "misfit" between European expectations and domestic realities, the more resistance to change can be expected (Knill, 2009, p.201). Moreover, all the respondents recognised the importance of the European Union as an external pressure towards sustainability transitions in the long run. However, they all agreed that progress is slow and focused primarily on the current situation that needs to be addressed within the national context, emphasising the political nature of these issues. It seems that the vision of the Circular Economy agenda for active local authorities is not yet close to the Greek reality, as political choices were made at the national level to approach the circular economy in a different way. Cities themselves also do not prioritise the Circular Economy yet, in light of other more pressing matters that need to be solved first. Finally, Cities interact with the EU level (access programmes, funding, information and networking platforms for the CE) when they already have capacities to do so. In the case that their circumstances are not as favourable, cities seem unable to take full advantage of the opportunities and support that the EU provides for sustainability transitions. This leads to the conclusion that despite the increase of European programmes, frameworks and support mechanisms available to cities, only significant domestic change will truly enable them to broadly take up a leading role in sustainability transitions and circularity.

Chapter 7) Conclusion

The EU promotes the local level of governance as a central actor for sustainability transitions. It does so primarily through the conditionalities of its funding mechanism, Cohesion Policy, as well as through sectoral policies, in this case the Circular Economy agenda. However, these policies have not resulted in administrative reform and the empowerment of Greek local authorities in recent years. Rather, it seems that domestic institutional and political factors as well as the effects of the economic crisis are the primary determinants of the power balance between cities and state. The establishment of Circular Cities is an ambitious vision for the future, but currently far from the Greek reality and capacity on the ground.

Specifically, Cohesion Policy from its inception promoted the role of local governments within their national public administration systems, through its requirements for Multi-Level Governance and the implementation of the Partnership Principle. It seems that in Greece the Partnership Principle was not followed sufficiently throughout the years, including the latest Cohesion Policy 2021-2027. Minimal consultation opportunities were given to local authorities to participate in the design of the programme. Within the centralised administrative system of Greece, cities are mainly seen as loci of implementation for policies and decisions made far from them, for them. These findings confirm prior literature that describes the implementation of the Partnership Principle as reflective of the already existing distribution of powers between levels of government and not necessarily as able to exert influence on the national administrative structures.

At the same time, the EU Circular Economy policy is indeed setting administrative expectations for its localisation and has some influence on framing the mindset of decision

makers as they become more and more familiar with the policy. However, at the moment, the Circular Economy does not seem to be a real priority for Greek politics, despite the longwinded discourse around it. The most recent plans for waste management consist of the investment in incineration facilities, something that is outside the scope of the CE and labelled by the EU as the worst waste management method after landfill disposal. In this context, the role of cities and local governments as enablers, facilitators and promoters of the Circular Economy is not being considered as an area of attention. These plans may change in the future, but for now progress is slow.

Considering the weakening effects of the economic crisis on Greek local governments and the lack of a supportive political and regulatory environment, moving towards the circularisation of cities is currently very slow. It seems that there are other important reforms that need to take place at the national level in order to enable and empower cities to become drivers of their local circular transitions, Despite the existence of a few pioneering cities that progress considerably with Circular projects and programmes, major reforms need to take place to allow for the majority of local authorities to fulfill their potential as developmental agents for their areas. The abovementioned reforms require political will at the national level and a common vision for sustainable development in the country.

To conclude, despite the opportunities for subnational involvement provided by the Cohesion Policy framework, the encouragement for the empowerment of cities provided by the Circular Economy agenda and overall by the accompanying EU programmes, the mediating effect of the centralised state in Greece is significant and has not currently allowed for major changes in the balance of powers between levels of government.

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Appendices

Appendix 1) Example of Interview Guide provided to interviewees in advance

European Influences and Domestic Adaptations:
The prospects of strong Circular Cities in Greece

MA Thesis
Eirini Margetousaki- Governance and Development Policy Major
International Institute of Social Studies- Erasmus University Rotterdam
MA in Development Studies

Interview Guide

Introduction

The EU is increasingly viewing and promoting the City as one of the most prominent actors for driving sustainable transitions within our countries. This includes the establishment of circular sustainable economies on the ground. At the intersection of the EU Urban and Circular Agendas, we have the European vision of the Circular City.

Both policies are highly relevant to the Greek context as they speak directly to two major and chronic challenges within the field of public administration. The first one being the weak developmental role of Greek local governments within the national governance system and the second one is the inefficient local management of resources and waste, with immense health and environmental implications.

In this research I am investigating the potential influence of those two Agendas (Circular and Urban) on the Greek Local Administration, the pathways of policy transfer of those policies from the EU towards Greece, and the prospects of the establishment of Circular Cities in Greece in the Future.

Guiding Interview Questions

This will be a semi structured interview, where the following questions will guide the conversation without however limiting it.

General

1. How does the Committee of the Regions see the new Urban, Circular, Territorial Agendas and the Leipzig Charter?

2. Does the Committee of the Regions interact with/impact Greek Cities and Greek Public Administration?

3. What is the European vision for the role of Cities in Circularity?

Policy Transfer Mechanism from the EU to Greece

4. What are the main channels of policy transfer/ avenues of influence of these policies towards Greece? (political, economic etc.)

Circularity in Greek Cities

5. What are the main obstacles and opportunities for the establishment of Circular Cities in Greece currently (in comparison to EU expectations for the role of Cities)?

6. How do Greek Cities see their new role as "central players for Sustainable Development and Circularity"?

7. Is the new ESPA and RRF programs an opportunity for Circular Transitions in our Cities?

8. What is the participation of Cities in those programs in terms of first. planning them and second, claiming funding from them?

Impact on Public Administration

9. To what extent the EU Circular, Urban and Territorial Agendas are creating momentum/political pressure within Greece for the reform the structure of Public Administration? Will those policies help the empowerment of Greek Cities within the national administrational structure?

10. How do those dynamics look on the ground currently?