

**Lorenzo Silvestri**

Sciences Po



## **Cities and the European Union: Comparing urban Europeanisation in Kraków and Liepāja in the context of the Cities Mission**

### **Abstract**

This article compares urban Europeanisation processes in two Eastern European cities in the policy context of the EU's innovative Cities Mission. Using a novel analytical framework to distinguish vertical (city-to-EU and city-to-national-government) and horizontal (city-to-city and city-to-stakeholder) interactions, and a comparative qualitative case study approach, it is shown how the Cities Mission deepens urban Europeanization processes in Kraków (Poland) and Liepāja (Latvia). This enhances the local governance of the ecological transition through improved public sector coordination, stakeholder engagement and citizen involvement. However, structural barriers such as the limited administrative and financial capacity of cities, lack of ownership over the net-zero transition among municipal actors, and limited prior experience with EU projects, limit the mission's transformative impact. The article concludes that while the Cities Mission is a promising experiment in multilevel urban climate governance, its transformative potential remains constrained by the capacity of cities to translate enhanced urban Europeanisation into a stronger and more coordinated governance of the ecological transition.

*Keywords: Urban Europeanisation, Urban Climate Policy, Cities Mission*

---

**Cite this article:** Silvestri, Lorenzo (2025): Cities and the European Union: Comparing urban Europeanisation in Kraków and Liepāja in the context of the Cities Mission. In: Young Journal of European Affairs, Issue 5, 9-46, 10.5282/yjea/114

### **Corresponding author** ✉

Lorenzo Silvestri, MA Governing the Ecological Transition in European Cities, Sciences Po, Paris, France

E-Mail: [Lorenzo.silvestri@sciencespo.fr](mailto:Lorenzo.silvestri@sciencespo.fr)

## Introduction

In April 2022, the YouTube channel of the EU's *Horizon Europe* programme published a video announcing the *100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030* mission. Accompanied by an upbeat musical score, it showcases cities in 2022 characterized by air and sound pollution. A transformative shift occurs when one lone cyclist enters a tunnel adorned with flowers and lush greenery. The cyclist exits the tunnel in 2026, when urban streets have been redesigned to allocate more space to pedestrians. There are more bikes on the street, and the sole car appears to be electric, like the bus. In the background, between urban farms and wind turbines, a train glides through a transformed cityscape featuring green buildings reminiscent of the *Bosco Verticale*. The narrative climaxes at a public viewing in a park where a screen announces "100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030". The video ends with a call encouraging remaining European cities to follow suit by 2050 (*EU Cities Mission: Meet the Cities*, 2022), when the EU must be climate neutral according to international obligations.

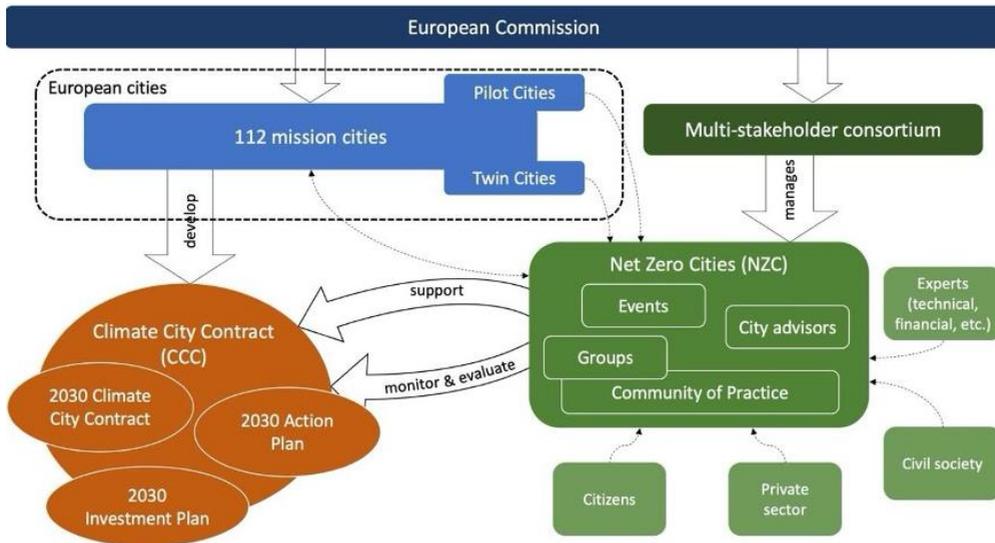
As over half of the world's population lives in cities, urban governance – defined as institutionalised political coordination in cities (Börzel, 2018) – has become vital to tackling global challenges like climate change (Bettencourt and West, 2010). The European Commission recognised cities as essential allies in the ecological transition (2016; 2020; 2022). Consequently, it launched the EU Mission *100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030* (hereafter Cities Mission), an ambitious policy to support pre-selected cities on their climate mitigation journey towards carbon neutrality in line with the European Green Deal. Since the mission centres around the "wicked" problem of climate change (Incropera, 2015), it needs an innovative governance approach that encourages cross-border multi-stakeholder collaboration to be successful. The Cities Mission is viewed as the "biggest climate neutrality experiment on earth" (Bresciani et al., 2024, 1), creating a set of pioneering cities that take up leadership in urban efforts to combat climate change in Europe. It aims to test different approaches to cut emissions by 2030, gathering experience and knowledge to achieve the European net-zero transition by 2050. Over 300 European municipalities voluntarily applied to partake, 112 were selected: 100 from the EU (at least one per member state) and twelve from the EU's neighbouring states, as illustrated in Figure 1 (see Appendix 1 for a list of mission cities).

**Figure 1.** Map of Europe showing the location and geographical scale of the Cities Mission. Cases Kraków and Liepāja in orange. Eilat outside map boundaries.



Although criticised as overly ambitious (Eurocities, 2022; Shabb et al., 2022), the EU seeks to enhance cooperation with its cities through “a co-creation process that involves local stakeholders and citizens” (Kern, 2023). The mission grants cities opportunities to pursue the ecological transition and to implement climate change mitigation policies. A mission city’s journey towards net-zero emissions is enshrined in the Climate City Contract (CCC), a political – not legal – commitment a mission city makes to the European Commission towards climate neutrality. To support cities with their CCC development, the Commission allocates two independent experts to each city (known as city advisors) and sets up the platform NetZeroCities. The platform is managed by a multi-stakeholder consortium spearheaded by the European Commission and creates a virtual forum for policy exchange, establishing itself as the central space for the exchange of mission-related ideas and best practices (NetZeroCities, 2024a; I6). Furthermore, it offers facilitated access to funding, as well as opportunities to exchange with other cities through the Pilot Cities Programme and the Twinning Learning Programme, creating a cross-border community through soft policy tools. Figure 2 below visualises its governance framework.

**Figure 2:** Organisational chart of the Cities Mission (created by author, inspired by and partially reproduced from Huttunen, 2022, 8).



This article examines how this proposed governance model of the urban ecological transition plays out in practice. Specifically, it analyses how participation in the Cities Mission affects urban Europeanisation processes, understood here as the ways in which cities develop policies, practices, and relationships influenced by their engagement with EU institutions and networks. It is argued that participation intensifies vertical exchanges with EU institutions and horizontal exchanges with peer cities and stakeholders. Yet, the extent and effectiveness of these interactions vary according to a city's administrative capacity and the national government's engagement, revealing both the integrative potential and the structural limits of this approach to urban climate governance. Thus, the article is guided by the following research question: *How does participation in the Cities Mission shape vertical and horizontal dimensions of urban Europeanisation in two Eastern European cities, and with what effects on the local governance of the ecological transition?*

To answer this question, the article is structured as follows. It begins by situating cities within the European multilevel governance arena, introducing key concepts, and reviewing relevant literature. This is followed by the development of a set of hypotheses and a description of the chosen method, a comparative qualitative case study. Next, the empirical findings are presented and discussed in relation to the hypotheses. A conclusion sums up the findings.

## The Role of Cities in Multilevel European Governance

The establishment of the EU changed power hierarchies. States began delegating authority to the supranational level, a process coined European integration (Weidenfeld, 2020, 55–57). This decentralisation of politico-administrative power away from the state generated opportunities for subnational actors. However, as no single actor holds complete knowledge across all governance levels, this shift produced complex vertical and horizontal relationships, which in turn created problems of policy coordination (Cairney, 2012, 170; Kübler and Pagano, 2012). For cities, this is exacerbated by their absence in the treaties of the EU, which has no formal competencies in urban policy (Field and Bakker, 2021). Nevertheless, to guide urban development in line with its policy interests, the EU developed soft policies – such as funding schemes, peer learning and networking initiatives, or capacity-building programmes – resulting in a Europe of variable geometry, where cities’ levels of European engagement differs greatly across the continent. Some cities have been more successful in exploiting the opportunities provided to them, largely due to their political and administrative capacity (Le Galès, 2002, 97; Hamedinger and Wolffhardt, 2011, 21). As international agendas evolved, urban climate policy became increasingly prominent in these soft policies, notably through *The Urban Agenda for the EU* in 2016 (also referred to as the *Pact of Amsterdam*) and *The New Leipzig Charter* with its implementation document on sustainable urban development in 2020. Transnational issues such as climate change cannot be addressed by states alone (Acuto, 2013a; 2013b; Kihlgren Grandi, 2020). Cities are seen as essential partners in achieving international targets such as the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the European Green Deal (Alvarez-Risco et al., 2020; Shabb et al., 2022; Kern, 2023). In this context, the Cities Mission reasserts the role of cities in the European governance arena by positioning them as hubs that bridge EU urban policy with international climate policy, translating international commitments into local action.

A useful concept to understand “the complexity of the interplay between cities and the EU and on the depth, breadth and logic of cities’ contemporary European engagement,” as well as “cities’ possibilities to influence EU policy-making”, is urban Europeanisation (Hamedinger and Wolffhardt, 2011, 9). Europeanisation is linked to European integration but is not restricted to continental convergence or harmonisation (Le Galès, 2002, 98). The concept of urban Europeanisation encompasses the multi-directional dynamics through which cities and the EU influence one another, ranging from the local implementation of EU legislation and urban impact of EU policy (top-down), to city influence on EU policy agendas (bottom-up), and horizontal exchanges among cities on policy and planning (Kern, 2007). For example, a city adapting its mobility plan to comply with EU emission targets represents a vertical top-down process, whereas the exchange of best practices on its implementation through a city network exemplifies a horizontal one. Thus, urban Europeanisation may be understood as the actions undertaken by cities *due to the EU*. Because the EU has no formal competence in urban policy, urban Europeanisation mainly takes shape through voluntary soft policy tools (Armondi, 2020). These soft policies affect urban governance capacity by strengthening

the ability of cities to collaborate across municipal departments, engage with relevant urban actors, and align policies with best practices. Urban Europeanisation therefore provides an appropriate theoretical lens to analyse vertical (top-down and bottom-up) and horizontal (city-to-city and city-to-stakeholder) interactions from the perspective of a European city, and to assess its effects on the governance of the urban ecological transition.

A full understanding of urban Europeanisation processes requires defining the European city as an actor. European cities are not monolithic and static entities, but complex arenas in which multiple actors interact, compete, and cooperate. As Patrick Le Galès explains, cities are “an aggregation of interests and culture, bringing together local social groups, associations, organized interests, private firms, and urban governments” (2002, 261). To analyse urban Europeanisation, it is important to examine the relationships between urban actors, since city politics, institutions, and interactions with supra-urban actors emerge from local actors influencing and pressuring one another according to their vested interests. Understanding cities as collective actors highlights how urban agency emerges from such interactions. The notion of collective actor empowers cities, yet also contains an illusion of unity: within cities, a variety of groups, individuals, and institutions claim to be actors, craving norms, models, and legitimacy for their actions (Le Galès, 2002, 266). Through negotiation, coordination, and mutual recognition, notably through mayoral leadership, a shared agenda is constructed. This internal mobilisation is reinforced by external actors, particularly from the EU, which pressures cities to develop coherent strategies and present themselves as unified entities (Le Galès, 2002, 267). The collective actor city thus emerges from the interplay of internal coordination and external expectations.

This theoretical understanding of the European city as a unified collective actor invites an analysis of how urban agency manifests in practice. Indeed, conceptual studies on European cities and their international relations are supplemented by a plethora of empirical work analysing the intricate relations between European cities. While large-N quantitative analyses exist (Cotella, 2020), the dominant methodological approach is qualitative, relying on case studies that examine urban governance in Europe across policy sectors, such as transport, sustainability, or urban development (Halpern, 2014; Field and Bakker, 2021; Masik et al., 2021; Kern, 2023). Scholars also discuss types of cooperation, including EU-funded projects, city networks, and paradiplomacy (Hamedinger and Wolffhardt, 2011; Acuto and Rayner, 2016; Herrschel and Newman, 2017; Kosovac et al., 2020). Others have more holistic approaches, analysing wider phenomena such as city branding or international visibility (Acuto, 2012; Bréville, 2020; Barbier, 2023).

A few trends emerge from this indicative sample of the impact of the EU on its cities. First, there is a tendency in English language literature to focus on large and Western European cities. Just as foundational texts by Peter John (2001) and Patrick Le Galès (2002) paid little attention to cities in Central and Eastern Europe, so too do many more recent empirical studies (Sobczak, 2010, 9; Pajvančić-Cizelj, 2024). However, Giancarlo Cotella observes variation in the impact of the EU on territorial governance across

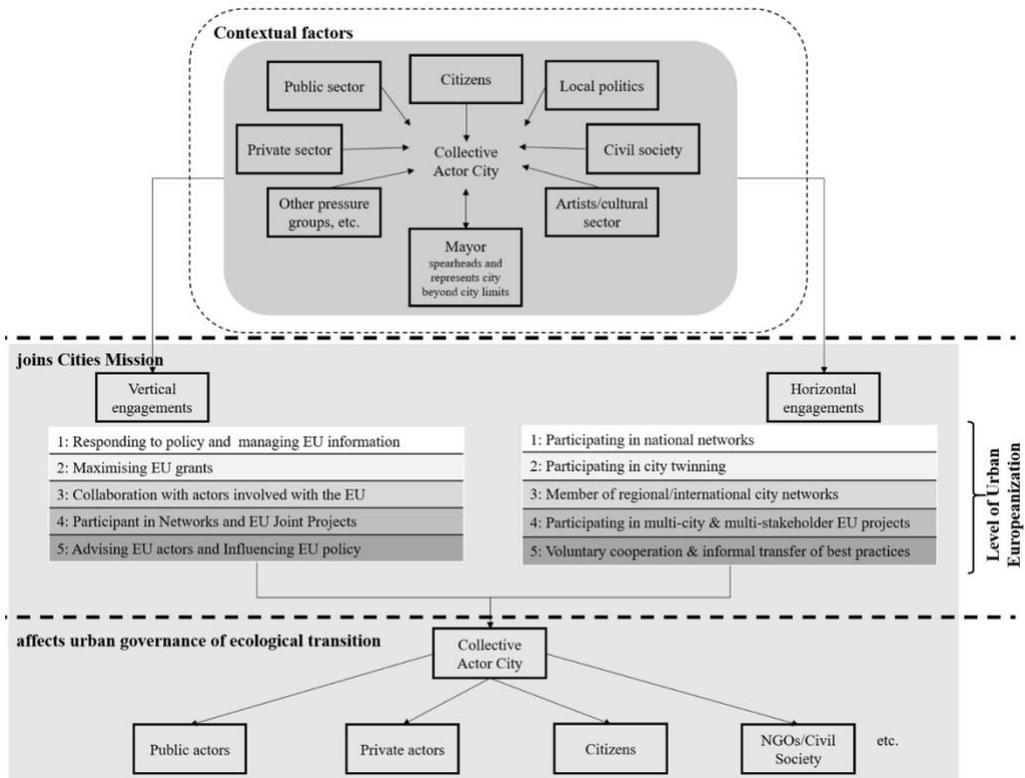
eastern, western, northern, and southern EU member states (2020). Second, scholars tend to focus on global cities, capitals, trendsetting cities, or atypical cases, whereas ordinary, medium, or smaller cities fall under the radar (Haupt et al., 2022; Kern, 2023). Of course, the existence of a research gap alone does not justify case selection (Gustafsson and Hagström, 2018), but this overview suggests inspecting Eastern European non-capital cities, which have so far been less dominant in the scholarly debate.

Therefore, this article examines cities in the Baltic states, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia: EU member states that acceded in or after 2004 and were formerly either behind the Iron Curtain or part of Yugoslavia. While heterogeneous and encompassing significant socio-political, historical, economic, and linguistic diversity, these countries share features that make them relevant cases for studying urban Europeanisation. Firstly, they joined the EU at a later stage, thus experienced institutional reforms and Europeanisation processes at a faster pace than their Western peers due to their obligatory policy adjustments to accede to the EU (Cotella, 2020; Bushweller, 2022). Second, most cities – especially small and medium-sized ones – have limited administrative capacity and financial autonomy (OECD/UCLG, 2016, 11; Kihlgren Grandi, 2020, 24–31; Sobczak, 2022; Ioannou, 2023). This challenge is particularly pronounced in Eastern Europe, where municipalities are more vulnerable to economic fluctuations and reliant on supranational actors (Dimitrova, 2019; European Investment Bank, 2021). This is further exacerbated in cities with shrinking populations, which reduce their tax revenue (Reinholde and Stučka, 2020, 82). Third, Eastern European government officials and planners also perceive a stronger EU influence in territorial governance compared to their Western and Northern European colleagues (Cotella, 2020). Finally, in terms of urban climate policy, Eastern European municipalities that signed the Covenant of Mayors have so far performed less monitoring of greenhouse gas reductions compared to their Western counterparts (Rivas et al., 2022), suggesting they may be lagging behind. Together, these observations suggest that Eastern European cities, while politically and financially dependent on other actors, are also key sites where the dynamics of urban Europeanisation and EU climate governance should be observed and evaluated as their efforts in climate action may be comparatively weaker. To understand how urban Europeanisation unfolds in these cities and affects the urban governance of the ecological transition, it is necessary to operationalise and measure it across its vertical and horizontal dimensions, motivating the following research design.

## Research design

Building on the introduction and acknowledging the frameworks of Europeanisation of cities by Juliet Carpenter et al. (2020), Anna Sobczak (2010, 7–19), and Tom Verhelst (2017), this article proposes a structured framework of urban Europeanisation processes (see Figure 3):

**Figure 3:** The collective actor city and its vertical and horizontal engagements across levels of urban Europeanisation following participation in the Cities Mission. The level in turn affects the collective actor city and its governance (institutional coordination) of the urban ecological transition.



This framework illustrates the evolution of the collective actor city embedded in the European multilevel governance arena. It visualises how vertical (city-to-EU and city-to-national government) and horizontal (city-to-city and city-to-stakeholder) relations developed in the context of the Cities Mission feed back into the actor city's governance capacity of the ecological transition. To operationalise the abstract processes of urban Europeanisation, the framework introduces a typology-based ordinal scale assigning values to levels of engagement. Based on the ladder of urban Europeanisation (John, 2001, 76) and the operationalisation by Tom Verhelst (2017), this framework enables a systematic comparison of cities' urban Europeanisation along five levels of vertical and horizontal interactions, each capturing a distinct qualitative shift in engagement. This approach helps understand how participation in the Cities Mission can strengthen a city's position within the EU climate governance arena. It also shows how the mission enhances a city's internal capacity to govern the ecological transition. By linking this framework with the mission's institutional design, this article hypothesises that the mission functions as a soft governance instrument – that is, a voluntary system of guidelines and incentives to achieve net zero emissions – which deepens urban Europeanisation processes by fostering vertical and horizontal relations in the form of coordination and learning. These changes in turn shape the capacity of cities as

collective actors to govern the ecological transition. A thorough comparative case study analysis, guided by the following three hypotheses, operationalises this framework:

**H<sub>1</sub>, vertical urban Europeanisation:** Participation in the Cities Mission increases a city's vertical urban Europeanisation by expanding collaboration with European institutions and the national level, for example to develop the Climate City Contract or access funding.

**H<sub>2</sub>, horizontal urban Europeanisation:** Participation in the Cities Mission increases horizontal urban Europeanisation by expanding collaboration with other cities and partners, for example through the Pilot Cities Programme or the Twinning Learning Programme.

**H<sub>3</sub>, urban ecological transition governance:** Higher levels of vertical and horizontal urban Europeanisation enhance the capacity of the collective actor city to coordinate urban climate policy more effectively and improve cooperation between stakeholders, strengthening the urban governance of the ecological transition.

### *Method*

The preliminary research phase included desk research, email correspondence, and semi-structured interviews with experts and civil servants from mission cities. The resulting database on mission cities (see Appendix 1) provided insights that guided case selection and confirmed the comparative case study analysis as the most appropriate research method.

The main research tools used for data collection were the analysis of documents, informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, and participant observations. Document analysis involved the examination of a range of policy documents: from contracts, legislation, declarations, and statements, to memorandums of understanding and other multi-actor agreements. Primary data on the Cities Mission and its implementation were also drawn from *NetZeroCities*, a limited-access Web 2.0 social networking platform set up to support the mission and facilitate knowledge exchange. Conversations and semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders – mainly municipal representatives and civil servants, but also actors from academia, the private sector, the European Commission and NetZeroCities partners – were most valuable for collecting and triangulating data, encompassing both inside and outside experts (see Soest, 2023). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed questions to be tailored to each context and interviewee, providing detailed insights into actors' perspectives, and enabling the reconstruction of urban Europeanisation processes (see Appendix 2 for the interview guide and Appendix 3 for the list of interviews). All collected data was coded systematically along four dimensions: (1) vertical and (2) horizontal urban Europeanisation, (3) effects on the city (sub-coded for effects on municipal administration, private actors, citizens, and NGOs) and (4) auxiliary

contextual information including data not strictly linked to the object of study but potentially relevant. Finally, participant observations at NetZeroCities seminars and field visits provided primary data complementing the interviews and document analysis.

Before proceeding to the case selection, some methodological limitations must be noted. Verification bias was mitigated through a transparent methodology, a structured interview guide, and data triangulation. Selection bias, which could have distorted findings, was minimized by applying clear, pre-defined case selection criteria. Language barriers, which limited access to cases and sources, were accepted as a constraint: interviews were conducted in English, while policy documents were translated using machine translation tools. Desirability bias, potentially skewing responses toward positive progress, was mitigated with an interview guideline, conducting interviews in private, and triangulating findings. Similarly, researcher bias arising from prior familiarity with the topic was minimised through systematic coding, and data triangulation. Finally, instrumental errors leading to incomplete or biased data were reduced by adapting the interview guide to respondents, sharing questions in advance, and carefully phrasing questions to avoid leading answers. Non-attitude problems were deemed not applicable due to the expert sample.

### *Case selection*

Preliminary research was particularly helpful for case selection, as it enabled the identification of similarities and differences among Eastern European mission cities. Case selection followed a conscious process of identifying different or deviant cases (see Seawright and Gerring, 2008, and Westle, 2018, 181). In line with the principle that a minimal number of cases suffices for in-depth qualitative comparison, two cases were considered adequate. The framework and hypotheses outlined above further guided the selection. Moreover, the year of EU accession served as a control variable: both cities joined the EU in 2004, ensuring that they were embedded within a comparable European politico-legal context for an equivalent period. Capital cities were deliberately excluded as they are typically more integrated with Western European networks and EU institutions. Furthermore, cases were required to have already begun engaging in mission-related activities.

Based on preliminary research, including email correspondence and semi-structured interviews with officials from Eastern European mission cities, two cases were selected: Kraków (Poland) and Liepāja (Latvia). The final selection was informed by a comparison of several descriptive variables such as population, GDP per capita, share of green areas, and digitalisation (using internet speed as a proxy) with those of other mission cities, ensuring that both cases do not represent outliers (see Appendix 1, Figures A1–A5). To introduce variation, the cities differ in size and degree of Europeanisation: Kraków (Poland) is a larger and more dynamic city with strong European linkages, while Liepāja (Latvia) faces demographic decline and is less integrated in transnational networks.

## Urban Europeanisation and its effects in Kraków and Liepāja

This section presents and discusses the findings in relation to the three hypotheses, drawing on fieldwork conducted in February and March 2024. The two cases are Kraków and Liepāja (see Figure 1 for their location). Kraków, with around 800,000 inhabitants, is the second-largest city in the Republic of Poland and is considered to be the national cultural capital. Liepāja, though significantly smaller, with a population of approximately 68,000 people, is the third-largest city in the Republic of Latvia, housing a comparable share of the national population to Kraków. Despite differences in scale and administrative capacity, both cities offer valuable insights into the dynamics of urban Europeanisation. The analysis begins with discussing vertical exchanges ( $H_1$ ), followed by horizontal exchanges ( $H_2$ ), illustrating how participation in the mission furthered urban Europeanisation processes. While the vertical and horizontal dimensions are inherently intertwined, they are separated for analytical purposes. Finally, the comparative analysis concludes with a discussion of how urban Europeanisation affects the governance of the ecological transition in each city ( $H_3$ ).

*H<sub>1</sub>: Participation in the Cities Mission increases vertical exchanges between cities and the European and national level*

*Historical engagements and institutional path dependencies in Kraków and Liepāja*

Before detailing vertical engagements in the context of the Cities Mission, it is important to compare cities' prior exchanges with the EU. The institutionalisation of EU relations varies between the cases, affecting their capacities and initial readiness to engage with the mission.

Kraków's vertical relations with the EU predate the mission. It hosted the first European Month of Culture in 1992 and in 2000 it was selected alongside other cities as European Capital of Culture four years before Poland's entry into the EU. Once in the EU, efforts to reinsert itself in EU networks after decades of Communist rule spilled over to various policy sectors (I15; Purchla and Bałuk-Ulewiczowa, 2016). Severe environmental challenges with air pollution further deepened this trend, with Kraków participating in *Healthy, Clean Cities*, the EU project that preceded the Cities Mission. This laid the foundations for the city's future engagement with the mission and the systemic transformation necessary to achieve climate neutrality: it led to a "changing of thinking through the idea of levers of change: that if you properly point to the most important parts of the process, quite small changes can give huge effects" (I11). Overall, Kraków's long-standing European engagement has made it a relatively mature actor within the mission, with symbolic capital and institutional experience on which it could rely. The city aims to further expand this, as its development strategy views deepening engagements with the EU (as well as other European cities) as a foundation of its future development (Krakow City Development Department, 2018).

In contrast, Liepāja does not share the same history as a European city, and evidence suggests that it is a much more peripheral city in the European climate policy network. Its development strategy – not available in English – offers a comparatively limited vision of the city’s role within Europe (City of Liepaja, 2017). Despite its experiences in the energy sector – it was the first city to participate in the World Bank’s *Prototype Carbon Fund* in 1999, making it one of the first cities active in the global carbon market (World Bank, 2003, 32–33) – the EU’s urban activities in Latvia concentrate on Riga, the capital city housing almost half of the country’s population: “The EU, the European Commission likes Riga much more because it’s bigger. So, when you do something, the figures are bigger. [The mission therefore provides] a new chance for smaller cities like Liepāja to benefit from EU know-how” and go beyond simply being a passive recipient of EU funds” (I21). Compared to Kraków, Liepāja entered the mission as a less embedded and more peripheral actor, not only geographically but also in terms of institutional experience within the European governance arena.

### *Vertical urban Europeanisation: European enables and national barriers*

Despite their similar politico-administrative environment, vertical mission-related engagements differ across the cases. The European Commission points to targets cities must achieve and provides the expertise, network, tools, and potential solutions to reach them through NetZeroCities. While participation in NetZeroCities is imposed to mission cities in a top-down manner, the platform effectively serves its clients by providing knowledge and expertise.

Kraków, building on its prior experience, acknowledges the potential of NetZeroCities and the opportunity to engage with European actors: “The advantage of the mission is the large infrastructure for cooperation and management it provides [...] It is like a Swedish table, with a lot of food on it and everyone can come and pick and choose what they want” (I13). Liepāja, however, entered the mission with less experience in European projects. The mission is the first time Liepāja directly interacts with the European level on climate policy (I18). Limited administrative capacity (I17; I18) and inexperience created early challenges, such as issues with communication, missing information, and general lack of support:

“It was hard in the beginning [...] We had all these questions and asked for expert consultations more than half of a year ago and there were none from NetZeroCities. Not advisors, but experts for developing the action plan, the investment plan. We didn’t have contact with any experts, even if we asked.” (I18).

“Of course, the mission is a new project not only for the cities, but also for all other involved actors who describe their work as a shared “learning process” (I6). And indeed, with time, collaboration significantly improved: “[Now] we had these expert meetings, we had the opportunity to get examples from other cities, NetZeroCities, checked our documents and now it’s ok.” (I18).

Furthermore, being a mission city allows for facilitated access to European funds (NetZeroCities, 2024b), enhances legitimacy to participate in climate projects, and increases cities' international visibility: "I hope that we can use this mission title to get more funding, to get more approved projects. For example, after we became a mission city, we went in the *TAIEX-EIR PEER 2 PEER*, also a European Commission programme [...] and we started this *Scalable Cities Action Grant* project," a municipal officer from Liepāja explained (I17). However, capacity limits were quickly reached:

"We want to do more and more. But there are some limits: capacity. NetZeroCities is pushing: "oh, there is this opportunity and this opportunity and why don't you participate in this webinar and in this project? And you must participate in pilot cities call!" But the answer is, we don't have capacity to do this [quotation marks added]." (I18).

It is evident that the national level remains essential. Smaller cities such as Liepāja depend on it for technical expertise and funding to build their capacity, yet its support is lacking:

"Ministries will not do anything by their own initiative. They will do something if there is some regulation or directive, but they won't do it automatically. [...] So, we are acting bottom-up. But we need someone from NetZeroCities, the European Commission [or the] Cities Mission board who tells ministers to please see this with more importance." (I18).

Similarly, Kraków also experienced challenges with national level engagement. Rather than reaching administrative limits, Kraków uses the opportunities provided by NetZeroCities to share its experiences with other cities (see below) and to engage vertically with the national government. Its climate department is actively drafting solutions for incorporation into national programmes and building a coalition with other Polish cities to attract ministerial attention:

"We want to influence many levels. At the basic level we want to share our experience with other cities, because they can use our work. But also on the highest level, government, we are doing whatever possible to cooperate with ministries because we feel that our work can support the creation of climate change policies in Poland. So, we want to give them ready solutions to introduce into national programmes. [...] And working together is better than each of our cities working alone. Even if we write official letters to the ministries and they are signed by five [mayors], it's better." (I11).

City officers acknowledge that genuine transition requires more robust national engagement. As many emission sources lie beyond municipal control, the need for greater support from the national level to advance the urban ecological transition is crucial:

“It’s about scaling up our developments. [...] We need to cooperate with and need the support of the national government. It is national policies that change things, and national policies can be developed based on Kraków’s experience. [...] There is a need of more government involvement and support to really achieve the transition and net zero, as a lot of the economy and emission sources are outside the city scope.” (I13).

“The absence of national support in both cases underscores issues in policy coordination across levels of governance. On the other hand, it must be noted that the mission is explicitly city-centred and not to be implemented by national governments. In Liepāja, a potential asset for exerting pressure at the national level could be the mayor who is European Climate Pact Ambassador and representative of the European Committee of the Regions in Latvia. However, while this position strengthens the city’s vertical ties with the European level, the mayor confirmed that the mission has had no impact on this largely diplomatic role.” (I19).

Findings show that the Cities Mission increased vertical interactions with the European level, confirming H<sub>1</sub>. The EU acts as an enabler by providing funding, tools, and expertise through NetZeroCities, while also setting pre-defined targets. Participation in the mission prompted Kraków and Liepāja to engage more actively with their national governments, illustrating how EU influence can catalyse bottom-up Europeanisation by encouraging cities to seek stronger national coordination and support. However, cities’ climate action is limited by their administrative and financial capacity and national actors remain crucial and cannot be bypassed, leading to persistent challenges in policy coordination across levels of governance. Although the EU has limited competences in urban policy, fieldwork findings indicate that both cities desire greater support from their respective national government, despite their differing degrees of experience with EU cooperation. Nevertheless, findings demonstrate that both cities increased their level of urban Europeanisation (see Figure 3). Kraków, already at level three, now “participates in networks and EU joint projects,” and is laying the foundations to be advising national policies, level five. Meanwhile, the mission was Liepāja’s first major European project. Liepāja also increased its vertical exchanges, but to a comparatively lesser extent by the time fieldwork was conducted. It moved from a passive recipient of EU funds, level two, to actively participating in EU projects, level four.

### *H<sub>2</sub>: Participation in the Cities Mission increases horizontal exchanges between cities and other actors across Europe*

This section examines horizontal engagements, focusing on how participation in the mission fostered exchanges with relevant stakeholders, leading to increased inter-city cooperation.

### *Engagements with non-city partners*

A major asset of the Cities Mission is the wider ecosystem that supports cities on their journey towards net zero emissions. Here NetZeroCities Consortium partners, such as research institutions, NGOs, public and private actors, provide mission cities with the necessary expertise to develop their CCCs. In Kraków, horizontal relations with *Bankers Without Boundaries* and *Dark Matter Labs* find their roots in *Healthy, Clean Cities* (Climate-KIC, 2019). Both stakeholders became Consortium partners and supported cities with key aspects of their CCC, such as the investment plan, nature-based solutions, and citizen engagement (I23). One official praised *Bankers Without Boundaries* as “the real specialist for the development of investment plans” (I11). Furthermore, the platform itself fostered ties between cities through various networking opportunities: “The events organised by NetZeroCities are encouraging because you see you are not alone, and everyone is facing similar challenges. It is great for knowledge exchange but also feelings, as you realise you are not alone” (I5).

Liepāja’s experience differs due to the city’s limited experience with EU projects. According to its city advisor, mission cities are encouraged to participate in all engagement and learning formats offered to them as part of the mission: “City advisors encourage cities to take part in all programmes, be they twinning, pilots, but also peer-learning sessions” (I9). In developing its CCC, Liepāja reached out to Scandinavian mission cities as well as private partners (I18). Notably, however, officials in Liepāja never mentioned any collaboration with non-city members of the NetZeroCities Consortium, suggesting a perceived sense of isolation. The city developed its CCC with support from Latvian consulting firm Ekodoma, which nevertheless emphasised that Liepāja needs to strengthen its collaboration with a broader range of partners:

“The mission is good for Liepāja, as it pushes them to set more ambitious targets. Since they joined the mission, they revised their SECAP and now have an 80% emission reduction target by 2030. Before they had 45%. The mission changed the thinking [...] Introducing new thinking is challenging, we [Latvians] have a closed mentality. There is no culture of cooperation. They still need to involve external stakeholders. And this must happen in all areas, not only energy and climate” (I21).

### *Expansion of city-to-city collaboration*

Kraków’s participation in the Cities Mission significantly expanded its horizontal collaboration on urban climate policy with other European cities, especially in Poland. Collaboration in this policy sector also finds its roots in *Healthy, Clean Cities* which involved 15 European cities (Climate-KIC, 2019). Due to Kraków’s forerunning national position, other Polish mission cities reached out to learn about its experience with the CCC development process (I11). This is especially important, considering that Polish cities generally have less experience with European climate projects (Plac, 2020). These exchanges led to Polish mission cities frequently discussing mission-related topics, prompting five cities to apply for a joint pilot city call:

“In the mission there are five Polish cities, and we cooperate quite tight. We see each other every few days, it’s more often than once a week. Before the mission we were not cooperating that strong [sic]. The idea of a pilot project came directly from being part of the mission. [...] It was quite natural in Poland that the Polish cities were contacting each other to discuss what should we do. And it appeared really helpful for everyone. It’s always better to feel that you are not alone in the face of something you don’t understand. And then it came to the Pilot Project *NEEST*. We share very similar problems, and we started working together, so it would be good to get some money for the work that we have to perform” (I11).

With *NEEST*, Kraków’s climate department collaborates with Polish cities on urban climate policy for the first time, embracing the tools and support provided by NetZeroCities and its partners. The Croatian city Slavonski Brod also joined the project as part of the Twinning Learning Programme (I14; Morgan, 2023).

Similarly, in Liepāja the mission also increased horizontal exchanges with other European cities. In the fall of 2023, Liepāja became the first Baltic city to submit its CCC (I18). Though initially rejected (it was approved in fall 2024), going through the submission process early made it a regional leader, prompting other cities to seek its guidance bilaterally or at events organised by the city network Union of Baltic Cities (UBC):

“UBC is a very old and very useful organisation. I have participated in webinars and conferences, and we have a good connection with these cities, it makes us closer to each other. Today there is a UBC webinar on sustainable cities. So, we have our experience, but other Baltic cities are behind us, and they are asking us what we are doing. For example, Taurage and Tartu are actively communicating with us” (I18).

However, not all collaborations succeed. A joint pilot city application with Riga was rejected, halting what could have been their first cooperation on climate policy. Despite initial enthusiasm and meetings with other Baltic cities, Riga then paused collaboration:

“We participated together with Riga on the first pilot cities call, but it was rejected. I thought it would be great to have a mission group together with all Baltic cities, not only Latvian with Riga, because we are like brothers and sisters. We had many meetings together. I initiated this activity and Vilnius [the capital of Lithuania] continued. But now we stopped because Riga said they are developing their CCC, and don’t have time. Let’s see what will happen in future” (I18).

Nevertheless, the Cities Mission increased Liepāja’s international visibility. It started a replication project with Valencia (Spain) as part of Energy Cities’ *Scalable Cities Action Grant* (Scalable Cities Secretariat, 2024). This lighthouse project aims to develop Liepāja’s Smart City Roadmap through “mentorship, knowledge sharing and collaboration” with Valencia by replicating and adapting the Spanish mission city’s

“smart solutions” (I18). Liepāja also participates in the already mentioned *Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument based on the EU’s Environmental Implementation Review* (TAIEX-EIR PEER 2 PEER) programme, which led to exchanges between municipal staff from Liepāja and Cascais (Portugal) (Directorate-General for Environment, 2024). This project “gives the opportunity to go to another municipality. We went to Cascais in Portugal and it was amazing. [...] Now they will come here and advise our Smart City Roadmap. And they want to help us with nature-based solutions,” a municipal officer explained (I17). In general, “since we are a mission city, other cities are willing to include us as the partners” (I18).

These findings demonstrate that participating in the mission increased horizontal relations between Kraków and Liepāja and other cities and stakeholders, especially NetZeroCities partners and mission cities, confirming H<sub>2</sub>. Due to Kraków’s participation in *Healthy, Clean Cities*, it entered the mission at level four on the horizontal dimension of the framework of urban Europeanisation shown in Figure 3: “participating in multi-city & multi-stakeholder EU projects”. Thanks to the mission, it moved to level five: “voluntary cooperation & informal transfer of best practices”. Liepāja went from being a member of regional networks (level three), to voluntarily cooperating with other cities and taking the initiative on exchanges on mission-related issues (level five). The increase in horizontal urban Europeanisation due to the Cities Mission is palpable in both Kraków and Liepāja. However, these developments must be assessed critically. While the framework suggests an increase in urban Europeanisation, the depth and institutionalisation of these horizontal relationships is uneven, particularly Liepāja’s engagement appears fragmented. Despite increased visibility, the city failed to establish lasting collaborations with its capital Riga or to develop substantial ties with NetZeroCities Consortium partners. This suggests that the historical institutionalisation of cooperation may shape a city’s ability to act as a project initiator rather than merely a participant. Unlike Kraków, which plays a leadership role in a pilot project, Liepāja’s involvement in European projects so far depends on external invitations. Still, this raises the question of what this increase in urban Europeanisation means for the cases’ governance of the ecological transition.

### *H<sub>3</sub>: Increased level of urban Europeanisation strengthens collective actor cities and the governance of the ecological transition*

Finally, it is important to assess the impact of the Cities Mission and the associated increase in urban Europeanisation on the cities as collective actors and their governance of the ecological transition. Evidence of such strengthening would be reflected in collaborations with relevant urban stakeholders. Below, the cases’ emergent patterns of internal public sector coordination, stakeholder involvement, and citizen engagement are discussed.

#### *Strengthening coordination between public actors*

In Kraków, evidence suggests that increased public sector coordination is beginning to materialise. The city consolidated its climate efforts under the *Zeroemissions Kraków*

portfolio which connects “all Kraków projects in the field of climate neutrality into one big system. Working with the portfolio is working with the most important city climate projects at the same time.” (City of Krakow, 2022). *Zeroemissions Kraków* is managed by the Department of Municipal Economy and Climate, the same department responsible for the Cities Mission. Given that municipalities are often criticised for working in silos, this reorganisation is an important step towards integrated urban climate governance:

“Several years ago, only one department worked on the energy transition. And now we are collaborating within the municipality: not only our department, but also other departments are involved” (I13).

However, this coordination does not yet extend to operational urban actors, revealing a gap between strategic planning and implementation. For example, the Director of the Kraków Transport Authority explained his organisation’s limited involvement with the mission:

“We are not involved much in the Cities Mission. I know that it happened. I know that Kraków wants to be net zero and wants to deal with climate changes reduction both on CO<sub>2</sub> and pollution. And on a strategic level, I think we have described what we want. But to go from the strategic to the operational level, I think is very difficult. And it’s not only the problem of Kraków, but in my opinion it is a global problem. On one hand, we would like to cut these emissions very highly. But on the other hand, you face economic, social, all these aspects, and you are not able to cut like in strategic documents” (I16).

Further north, Liepāja’s small size could facilitate collaboration between actors. However, even if the project manager responsible for the Cities Mission works in the Executive Director’s Office, meaning above municipal departments in the administration’s hierarchy, the intended cross-departmental collaboration within the municipal administration is not present yet. One reason is that the mission is not part of any regulatory framework or official development programme:

“The challenge is how to bring these mission questions into the development programme and make them a priority. Because this is something new and we don’t have it as a priority. Okay, the mayor says it is a priority, but in the development documents it is not. It is mostly my motivation and it is not so easy to involve my colleagues” (I18).

This lack of formal anchoring also leads to a weak sense of ownership over the mission across the administration:

“The ownership is not there across the public sector. The mission can create more synergies across public actors and at least motivate them. But in Liepāja they say: that’s his [referring to the mission project manager] plan, but actually it’s everyone’s plan. Everything is climate. Liepāja should change the rules of the departments. Legally. I

mentioned it to them during our last meeting. They should include climate in the department description, so they include the climate dimension in their day-to-day work” (I21).

“The mission must involve all municipal departments, as well as local businesses, business representatives, civil society, NGOs, academia, and research institutions, as well as citizen groups” (I10), but it seems that the depth of co-creation and collaboration in Liepāja is far from that envisaged by NetZeroCities. Furthermore, as in the Polish case, the mission has not yet had a tangible impact at the operational level of the public sector. A spokesperson from municipal transport operator *Liepājas Tramvajs* said that the company is aware of the mission (the spokesperson is both the Head of Public Relations at *Liepājas tramvajs* and the Head of the Mayor’s Office), but that participation in the mission does not impact the company’s work: “We are not directly involved with the mission, but since the owner of the tram company is the municipality, we are aware. But it doesn’t depend on us at all. We’re just providing a service” (I20).

### *Deepening collaboration between urban stakeholders*

As mentioned, effective climate action necessitates coordination between urban actors beyond the public sector:

“From estimations, it appears that only about 7% of the GHG emissions can be tackled by municipalities themselves, 93% are done by other partners. That’s why it’s so important to think about the city more broadly and to engage people, partners, stakeholders in the process, [and make them feel] responsible” (I23).

To better involve the private sector, Kraków launched the Climate Pact in 2023. Partners in this voluntary initiative declare to reduce emissions and limit global warming. As of March 2024, there were 12 partners, including British Petroleum, Shell, and BeijingWest Industries, and two universities (City of Krakow, 2023). However, they are not involved with the mission and are not co-signatories to the CCC. The Climate Pact provides a good starting point for private involvement in the mission, but deeper collaboration is still absent:

“In the CCC, the city has to prove that a co-creation process was done: that within the transition team there are not only city administrators, but also other stakeholders, partners from different sectors who were involved in the preparation of the CCC. So, this is another layer of this process that makes this a bit complicated. When we read CCCs, we look for this information about the broad ecosystem of the city. And even if cities have signatures of many signatories in the commitments, we look for their role in the CCC because it’s not enough to have just a signature and that’s all” (I23).

In Liepāja, stakeholder involvement is even less formalised. Municipally controlled utility company *Liepājas Enerģija*, environmental NGO *Radi Vidi pats*, and the *Liepāja Special Economic Zone Authority* were consulted in the CCC development process

(I18). However, they are not signatories, meaning that – on paper – they are not involved with the mission. A municipal official clarified that “they collaborate, but it is not the signature that makes it work” (I18), stressing that the lack of a signature does not mean a lack of involvement. However, formal involvement – and therefore ownership over the mission’s targets – is absent without a signature. Indeed, the European Commission has stressed the importance of better involving the private sector in mission-related activities (City of Krakow, 2025).

### *Expanding citizen engagement*

Citizen engagement is crucial, since “if you have citizens that do not care about climate change, then it is very hard to make public consultations and get projects approved. And it is a big risk for the council to approve projects, because citizens might be unhappy” (I22). While reaching interested citizens is relatively straightforward in Kraków, for example through citizens’ assemblies (City of Krakow, 2024) or its newly established Climate Education Centre, reaching those who are disengaged remains a challenge:

“[The] problem with public involvement is that people do not have time and do not have interest. If they are not somehow involved in some NGOs and have some specific business in that, they do not involve themselves in planning processes. [...] So, the problem is that you have a consultation process and when you start implementation, they show up saying “oh, no, no”. But when you ask them where you were two years ago when we talked about it, they say “we didn’t know, you didn’t give us information” [quotation marks added]” (I16).

Moreover, resistance grows when policies negatively impact certain groups, as seen with the failed Low Emission Zone, which was blocked by the Kraków Administrative Court in early 2024 (green-zones.eu, 2024). In fact, one expert defined Kraków as a politically “very polarised city” with regards to climate issues (I22).

Citizens must be informed and supportive of policies for them to be successful. Therefore, it is crucial that the mission is coupled with educational projects. According to its city advisor, this is Liepāja’s second-largest challenge after the lack of ownership across public actors (I9). Citizens must learn and understand the risks related to climate change. However, with few exceptions, most are not engaged in climate-related activities organized by the city and, as in Kraków, are difficult to reach:

“Last year we had this annual energy efficiency week, and there were not so many participants, only 20. It’s interesting only for those who are already interested in this topic” (I18).

On the other hand, one expert argues that European cities do not put sufficient efforts in citizen engagement in the context of climate change:

“Cities need to change their communication, especially with citizens. And the municipalities don’t know how to do this: how to involve citizens and the private sector. Liepāja got feedback from NetZeroCities

on their CCC that they should do more on citizen engagement [...] Municipalities must start asking what people want. But municipalities are scared to ask people” (I21).

In sum, with regard to H<sub>3</sub>, both cases show signs of institutional change and greater stakeholder involvement driven by urban Europeanisation processes. The Cities Mission has initiated a transformation in which municipal actors increasingly align with EU climate goals and collaborate across sectors. However, involvement beyond strategic public actors remains limited. Thus, the emergence of a cohesive collective actor city is still uneven, as policy coordination and the involvement of urban stakeholders and citizens continue to pose challenges. Urban climate governance remains an ongoing, fragmented, and contested process shaped by diverse interests and capacities. While some stakeholders choose to formally participate in municipal efforts, others prefer to remain flexible and participate informally, while still others do not engage at all. The groundwork for improved coordination has been laid by the mission, but urban actors must now collaborate more closely to further the urban ecological transition towards net zero emissions.

## Conclusion

Urban Europeanisation and its effects in the context of the EU’s Cities Mission are currently unexplored in Eastern European cities. This article examined two cities during their early stages of participation in the Cities Mission, constituting the first study of urban Europeanisation in Liepāja and the first in Kraków in this policy context. Furthermore, Appendix 1 offers the first elementary database on mission cities. Based on the concept of the city as a collective actor and a novel two-dimensional framework of urban Europeanisation (vertical and horizontal, see Figure 3), the article analysed how the mission shapes cities’ external relations and how these in turn affect the local governance of the ecological transition. Rather than evaluating the policy itself, the article addressed the question *how does participation in the Cities Mission shape vertical and horizontal dimensions of urban Europeanisation in two Eastern European cities, and with what effects on the local governance of the ecological transition?*

Findings show that participation in the mission deepens both vertical and horizontal urban Europeanisation processes. Vertically, Kraków evolved from moderate top-down engagement with EU institutions toward a more co-productive role engaging with the national level. Liepāja shifted from a passive fund recipient to an active partner in EU projects, gaining visibility on the European stage. Horizontally, both cities deepened networking, peer learning, and best-practice exchanges with European cities, and Kraków particularly intensified cooperation with NetZeroCities Consortium partners. Kraków, a larger city with more experience in European projects, was able to reach a higher level of urban Europeanisation compared to the smaller and more peripheral

Baltic city. These findings show that Europeanisation processes in urban climate policy may be observed beyond capital or trendsetting cities.

With regards to changes at the local level as a result of participation in the mission, findings demonstrate that the increased vertical and horizontal exchanges have begun to strengthen the urban governance of the ecological transition. Municipal departments in both cases started coordinating their climate efforts and developed projects to expand stakeholder and citizen participation. Kraków's stronger administrative capacity and familiarity with European projects positioned it to act more proactively than Liepāja. However, structural limits constrain the mission's transformative potential. Limited administrative capacity, cities' lack of formal status in EU treaties, weak national-level support, and limited co-ownership among municipal actors expose coordination problems in the European multilevel governance arena and within the collective actor city itself. Contrary to arguments suggesting a declining role of the nation state in European urban politics, findings demonstrate that both cities, though empowered by European actors, remain dependent on national governments. Their power is not intrinsic. Treating cities as unitary actors misses this observation, as the construction of the collective actor city is an ongoing, contested process shaped by institutional opportunities and structural constraints.

In sum, the Cities Mission represents a promising experiment in the European multilevel urban climate governance arena. But to fully realise its transformative potential, cities must bridge capacity gaps, institutionalise learning processes, and embed co-creation practices across municipal ecosystems involving as many actors as possible, particularly the private sector. The mission functions as an enabler: it increases urban Europeanisation by creating opportunities for vertical and horizontal exchanges, providing expertise, offering a space to exchange knowledge and best practices, and enhancing cities' international visibility, thereby creating incentives for European urban climate policy coordination. Early effects strengthening urban climate governance of the ecological transition at the local level were observed. However, these opportunities are transformative only when cities can mobilise sufficient capacity and create large enough local coalitions to turn knowledge into policy implementations. While first steps have been taken, results demonstrate that a transformative shift has not occurred yet. Furthermore, findings indicate that integrating smaller cities into the EU climate governance arena is crucial for advancing urban climate policies and achieving international climate targets. Particularly smaller cities in Eastern Europe, where public finances are more constrained, require stronger and more targeted support. Expanding climate education and projects involving citizens and the private sector beyond established stakeholders can also foster greater co-ownership of the Cities Mission and its goals.

As the study was undertaken very early in the mission's implementation process, all findings are preliminary. Further research is needed to confirm the effect of the Cities Mission on urban Europeanisation processes and extend the observed trends to other Eastern European cities, as policy implementation advances. Moreover, due to the restricted scope and limited generalisability of the findings, future research should

compare cities from old and new member states, track long-term effects of the Cities Mission, and investigate how intra-city relations shape the collective actor city. Particular attention should be given to the international networks of urban actors such as private firms or NGOs and how they influence urban climate governance capacity from below.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Elementary data on cities involved with the EU's Cities Mission

Table A1 and Table A2 below display some elementary data of mission cities and all cities involved with the mission through Pilot City and Twin City Programmes as of Spring 2024.<sup>1</sup>

*Table A1: Population, GDP/capita, percentage of green areas, internet speed, mayor's party, and party's European Parliament group affiliation of the 112 mission cities (non-EU cities after separation):*

City	Population	GDP/capita of urban area in USD <sup>2</sup>	Green areas (as share of urban center)	Internet speed (as % deviation from national average)	Mayor's party on 1 January 2023	EP <sup>3</sup> group affiliation of mayor's party
Aachen	248.878	44497	52,8	5	Independent	NA
Aarhus	361.544	46354	49,1	1	S	PES
Amsterdam	1.020.998	67167	42,4	6	GroenLinks	Greens/EFA
Angers Loire Métropole	271.405	33434	39,4	3	MoDem	Renew
Antwerp	532.255	54497	42,9	12	N-VA	Greens/EFA
Athens	3.524.904	35192	29,1	21	PASOK	PES
Barcelona	3.720.333	39459	41,2	18	Barcelona en Comú	NA
Bergamo	119.476	40254	42,6	18	PD	PES
Bologna	387.842	49609	44	42	PD	PES
Bordeaux Métropole	749.595	42454	35,7	6	EELV	Greens/EFA
Bratislava	475.577	74562	47,3	38	Team Bratislava	NA
Brussels-Capital Region	1.228.655	57258	44,7	1	PS	PES
Bucharest	2.131.034	61718	33,4	20	Independent	NA
Budapest	1.706.851	46774	47,1	15	Greens	Greens/EFA
Cluj-Napoca	324.960	37231	40,4	17	PNL	EPP
Copenhagen	653.664	62132	47,5	10	S	PES
Cork	125.622	157903	53,1	-8	Independent	NA
Differdange	29.000	107261	46	0	PS	PES
Dijon Métropole	256.758	41995	29,7	-3	PS	PES
Dortmund	587.696	39176	58,4	12	SPD	PES
Dresden	556.227	41743	54,3	-17	FDP	Renew
Dublin	592.713	121388	48,4	20	Fianna Fáil	Renew
Dunkerque	139.991	36546	34,1	13	FP	PES
Eindhoven	284.148	61061	45,1	0	PvdA	PES
Espoo	297.132	56831	54,9	15	NCP	EPP
Florence	361.619	44186	40,1	18	PD	PES
Frankfurt/M.	764.104	65198	48,1	17	SPD	PES
Gabrovo	62.763	9071	–	–	GERB	EPP

<sup>1</sup> Tables intended as general illustrations. Comparisons between cities constrained due to variations in methods of data collection (see list of sources after Table A2 and footnote 24).

<sup>2</sup> When FUA-specific data was not available, missing data was supplemented from NUTS3 level data. While they are not perfectly comparable, this is still useful to provide a broad contextual understanding.

<sup>3</sup> EP = European Parliament. This column allows to compare the ruling parties in mission cities.

Gävle	103.493	41779	–	–	S/SAP	PES
Gothenburg	596.841	46808	57,5	9	S/SAP	PES
Gozo	31.200	39510	26,6	2	Independent	NA
Grenoble-A. Métropole	433.000	40660	42,2	6	EELV	Greens/EFA
Groningen	234.950	46560	49,5	-8	VVD	Renew
Guimaraes	156.348	18203	–	–	PS	PES
Heidelberg	158.741	54748	40,1	11	Independent	NA
Helmond	93.476	61061	45,1	0	CDA	EPP
Helsingborg	150.975	48248	–	–	Moderates	EPP
Helsinki	658.457	56831	54,9	15	NCP	EPP
Ioannina	113.978	12062	38,4	-15	PASOK	PES
Kalamata	69.849	12939	–	-12	ND	EPP
Klagenfurt	104.333	45035	34,4	-12	TK	ECR
Kosice	227.458	26561	48,7	43	SASKA	ECR
Kozani	81.000	14365	–	–	PASOK	PES
Kraków	771.069	39379	52,5	12	Independent	NA
Kranj	56.784	20462	34,2	6	SD	PES
La Louvière	104.891	22479	–	–	PS	PES
Lahti	120.027	36515	–	–	Independent	NA
Lappeenranta	72.288	41230	–	–	Centre Party	Renew
Leipzig	597.493	40862	54,1	-1	SPD	PES
Leuven	101.612	57258	44,7	1	Vooruit	PES
Liberec	104.802	19425	56,2	-11	SLK	NA
Liepāja	67.360	15197	41,1	-8	United list	NA
Limassol	176.700	–	–	–	Independent	NA
Lisbon	1.875.108	38343	44,9	18	PSD	EPP
Ljubljana	293.822	50190	49,7	5	Independent	NA
Lodz	685.285	37441	54,9	9	Civic Platform	EPP
Lund	128.384	54295	–	10	S/SAP	PES
Lyon	522.228	54225	37,6	16	EELV	Greens/EFA
Madrid	5.030.132	45013	37,2	33	People's Party	EPP
Malmö	357.377	43563	40	13	S/SAP	PES
Mannheim	309.721	52739	35,6	20	SPD	PES
Marseille	968.466	43399	43,4	9	Independent/ left	NA
Milan	3.565.691	56822	41,3	42	Independent/ center left	NA
Miskolc	147.480	21565	52,5	9	Independent	NA
Munich	1.488.202	79635	49,1	2	SPD	PES
Münster	316.403	52358	53,5	10	CDU	EPP
Nantes Métropole	672.420	44586	42,6	4	PS	PES
Padova	206.651	41271	34,9	8	Independent/ center left	NA
Paris	10.277.625	71346	43,6	20	PS	PES
Parma	195.436	46453	35,3	40	IiC/+Europa	Renew
Pecs	138.420	20183	51,7	-5	Independent	NA
Porto	969.686	28897	43,9	18	Independent/ liberal	Renew
Prato	195.213	36696	33,7	30	PD	PES
Riga	605.802	38701	47,6	16	AP!	Renew
Rome	2.749.031	45343	42,4	23	PD	PES
Rotterdam	1.249.955	52518	49,1	1	PvdA	PES

Rzeszow	191.564	26040	48,8	-21	SLD	PES
Sevilla	876.754	26681	35,4	17	PSOE	PES
Sofia	1.221.172	41749	39,7	28	GERB	EPP
Sonderborg	74.380	55156	–	–	S	PES
Stockholm	984.748	68720	60,5	18	S/SAP	PES
Suceava	124.589	12160	38	-9	PNL	EPP
Tampere	244.223	41513	42	-2	NCP	EPP
Tartu	95.090	18612	47,4	-10	Reform Party	Renew
Taurage	21.520	14437	–	-37	LS	Renew
The Hague	685.000	42395	49,5	3	VVD	Renew
Thessaloniki	319.045	21619	25,6	20	ND	EPP
Trikala	81.355	11623	–	-13	ND	EPP
Turin	848.748	39178	34,7	73	PD	PES
Turku	195.137	41044	51,5	2	NCP	EPP
Umea	132.235	58446	–	–	S/SAP	PES
Utrecht	459.682	65233	45,7	4	Labour Party	PES
Valencia	1.414.213	30241	37,5	13	Coalició Compromís	Greens/EFA
Valladolid	295.639	35951	30,1	19	PSOE	PES
Velenje	33.558	22014	44,9	4	SD	PES
Vilnius	563.012	50541	51,4	16	Freedom Party	Renew
Vitoria-Gasteiz	253.672	48766	27,5	14	EAJ-PNV	Renew
Warsaw	1.777.972	66746	52,1	31	PO	EPP
Wroclaw	640.648	48450	52,7	16	Independent	NA
Zagreb	764.286	36008	50,3	46	We Can	Greens/EFA
Zaragoza	673.010	37358	37	17	People's Party	EPP
<b> </b>						
Bristol	461.329	42935	47,3	6	Labour	PES
Eilat	68.724	–	–	–	New Hope	NA
Elbasan	78.703	–	–	–	Socialist Party	PES
Glasgow	623.715	34758	53	16	SNP	Greens/EFA
Istanbul	14.025.646	46104	33,8	26	CHP	PES
Izmir	4.320.519	33150	37,6	28	CHP	PES
Oslo	1.064.235	87011	53,1	12	The Right	EPP
Podgorica	150.977	–	–	–	Europe Now!	NA
Reykjavik	120.000	–	53,5	13	Social Democratic Alliance	PES
Sarajevo	275.524	–	–	–	SDP	PES
Stavanger	231.693	55384	54,1	3	The Right	EPP
Trondheim	194.860	51109	52	5	The Right	EPP

*Table A2: Population, GDP/capita, percentage of green areas, internet speed, mayor's party, and party's European Parliament group affiliation of the two external pilot cities and twin cities (twin cities after separation):*

City	Population	GDP/capita of urban area in USD <sup>4</sup>	Green areas (as share of urban center)	Internet speed (as % deviation from national average)	Mayor's party on 1 January 2023	EP <sup>5</sup> group affiliation of mayor's party
Drammen	104.100	22135	–	10	The Right	EPP
Rivne	243.870	–	–	-8	European Solidarity	EPP
Križevci	18.949	10200	–	-45	Independent	NA
Slavonski Brod	64.612	7790	46,7	-8	Independent	NA
Tallinn	607.640	27857	50	15	Centre Party	Renew
Jyväskylä	145.887	38928	41,6	-3	SDP	PES
Oulu	267.267	9616	52,9	17	Centre Party	Renew
Issy-les-Moulineaux	67.937	71346	43,6	20	UDI	Renew
Cologne	2.210.891	54138	50,7	3	Independent	NA
Wiesbaden	447.700	61296	50	14	SPD	PES
Würzburg	381.401	50988	47,3	-11	SPD	PES
Penteli	35.610	35192	29,1	21	CDU	EPP
Palaio Faliro	64.863	35192	29,1	21	ND	EPP
Mytilene	59.034	11185	–	2	ND	EPP
Vari-Voula-Vouliagmeni	48.399	17545	–	67	Vari Voula Vouliagmeni–City to Live	NA
Waterford	127.363	50550	–	16	Fine Gael	EPP
Or Yehuda	36.815	–	–	22	Likud	ECR
Jerusalem	951.100	–	–	-36	Independent	
L'Aquila	69.558	26280	–	22	FdI	ECR
Genova	680.677	28405	51,2	72	Independent/center right	NA
Fundão	26.503	15352	–	-4	PSD	EPP
Torres Vedras	83.072	17764	–	-1	PS	PES
Matosinhos	172.557	28897	43,9	31	PS	PES
Braga	247.786	–	39,1	15	PSD	EPP
Alba Iulia	64.227	8970	–	-14	USR PLUS	Renew
Lorquí	7.706	–	–	-24	PSOE	PES
Soria	39.739	–	–	–	PSOE	PES
Viladecans	66.810	39459	41,2	36	PSC	PES
Luleå	79.244	54300	–	-25	S/SAP	PES
Eskisehir	906.617	–	–	-1	CHP	PES
Konya	1.147.656	31375	19,7	-25	AKP	ECR
Kharkiv	1.443.207	–	–	6	Kernes Bloc–Successful Kharkiv	NA

<sup>4</sup> When FUA-specific data was not available, missing data was supplemented using NUTS3 statistics. While they are not perfectly comparable, it is still useful for providing a broader contextual understanding.

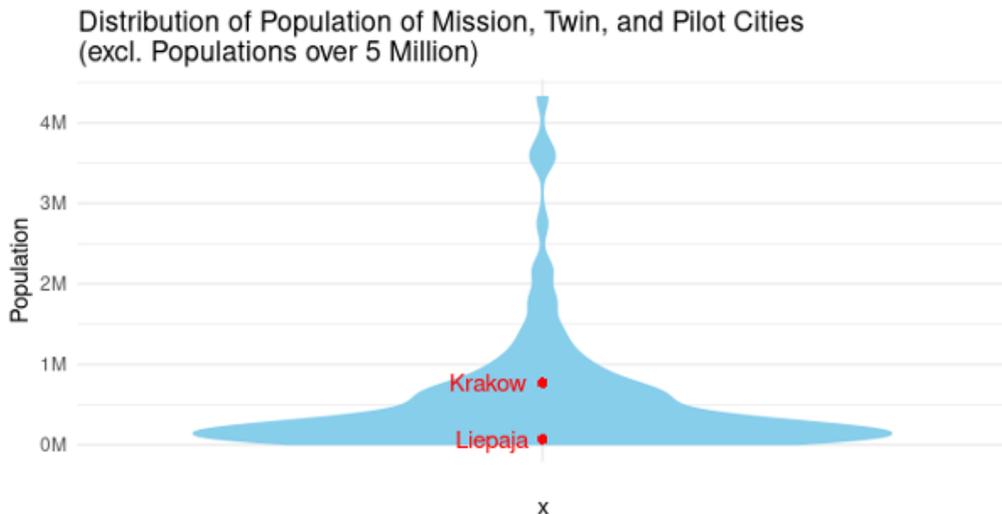
<sup>5</sup> EP = European Parliament.

Belfast	794.824	30246	50,8	13	Sinn Féin	GUE/NGL
City of Westminster	204.236	–	–	11	Labour	PES

Sources of Table A1 and Table A2: Eurostat, statbank.dk, stat.si, scb.se, cso.ie, citypopulation.de, Council of Europe, statistics.gr, ssb.no, iclei.org, insee.fr, stats.oecd.org, worldbank.org, regionalprofiles.bg, stat.gov.lv, ookla.com, Hostnik (2013), and respective municipal websites.<sup>6</sup>

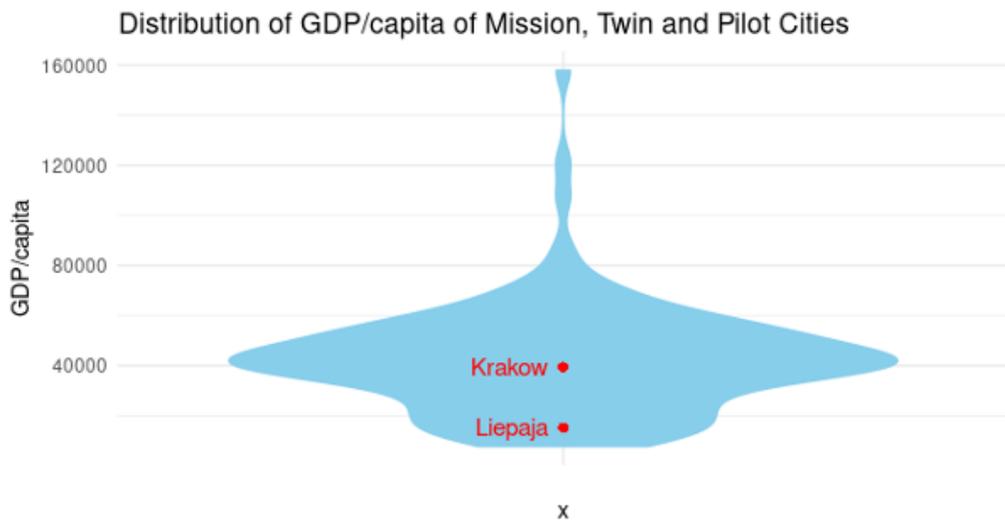
Using the data displayed in Table A1 and Table A2, the following graphs were created. These illustrate how the cases of Kraków and Liepāja compare to other cities involved in the mission.

**Figure A1:** Density plot showing the population distribution of cities directly or indirectly involved in the mission, highlighting the position of Kraków and Liepāja. (To enhance graph clarity, cities with more than 5 million inhabitants were omitted).



<sup>6</sup> Data on Ukrainian cities is highly volatile. Data for smaller cities in some cases was only available at county or regional level. Where possible and appropriate, data reflects the Functional Urban Area (FUA) or local administrative units. When such data was not available, data was taken from the NUTS3 level. This is the case for GDP data, which was collected at NUTS3 level. However, FUAs usually have higher GDPs/capita than the lowest non-local administrative or statistical unit, which is why comparisons between larger and smaller cities must be made with care. Names of parties were shortened using their common abbreviations.

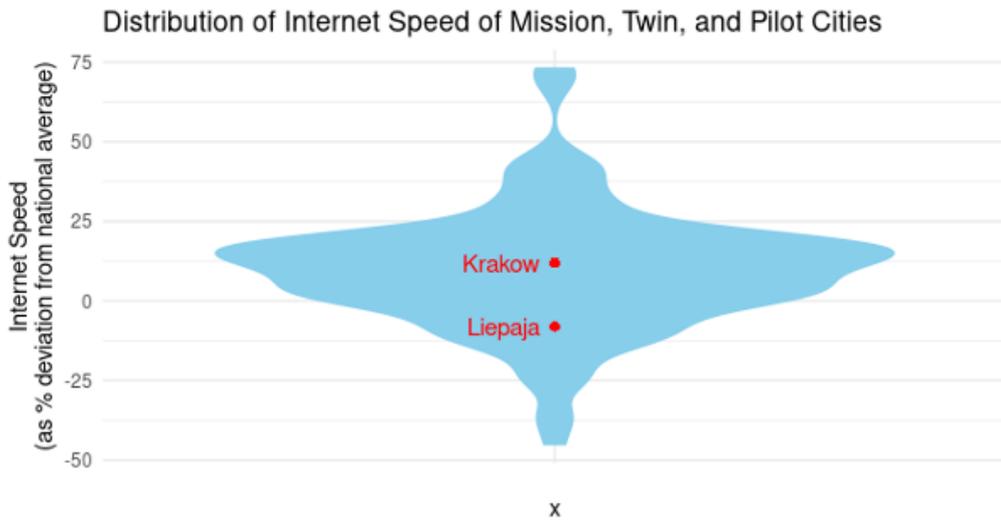
**Figure A2:** Density plot showing the GDP/capita distribution of cities directly or indirectly involved in the mission, highlighting the position of Kraków and Liepāja.



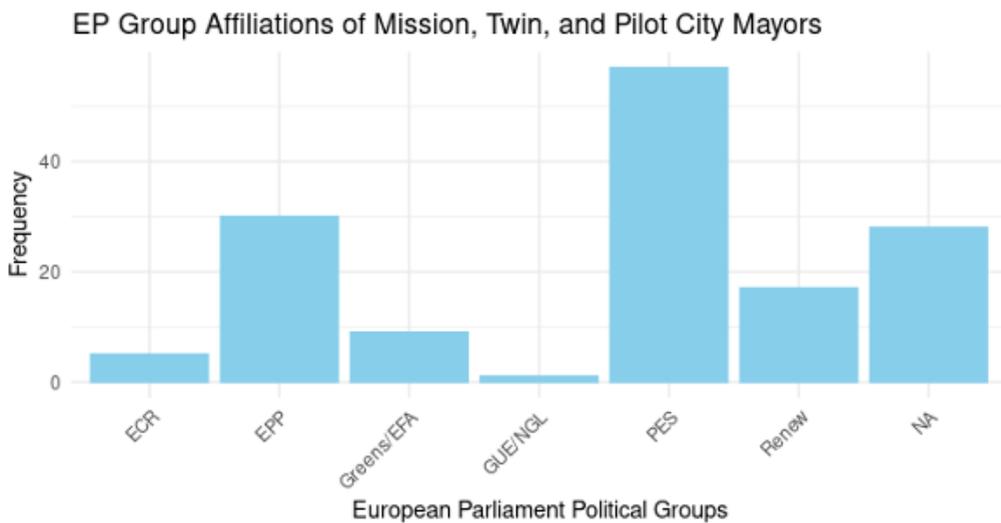
**Figure A3:** Density plot showing the distribution of the share of green areas of cities directly or indirectly involved in the mission, highlighting the position of Kraków and Liepāja.



**Figure A4:** Density plot showing the distribution of internet speed (as a deviation from the respective national average) of cities directly or indirectly involved in the mission, highlighting the position of Kraków and Liepāja.



**Figure A5:** Bar chart showing the European Parliament group affiliation of cities directly or indirectly involved in the mission. Note that neither case appears in Figure A5, as Kraków's mayor has no party affiliation and Liepāja's mayor belongs to a local civic list.



**Appendix 2: Interview guide***Table A3: Guide of questions, prompts and goals of interviews*

Structure	Guiding question(s) and discussion prompts	Objective
Introduction/ start	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduction</li> <li>▪ Role/tasks within city administration/organisation</li> <li>▪ How they first got in touch with the mission/narrative of the mission</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduce and understand <u>work/role</u> of interviewee and organisation</li> <li>▪ Understand their work for/on the mission</li> </ul>
Vertical relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Collaboration with the EU: in what areas do you collaborate with the EU?</li> <li>▪ How does collaboration take place?</li> <li>▪ Is the mission the first time you are directly collaborating with the EU?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understand <u>direction</u> and <u>extent</u> of vertical urban Europeanisation</li> <li>▪ Focus: <u>EU relations</u> of interviewee's organization</li> <li>▪ Motivation/reason? Tools?</li> <li>▪ Understand vertical dimension of mission implementation</li> </ul>
Horizontal relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How and in what areas does the city collaborate with other cities? Any peer learning/joined capacity building projects? In the context of the mission?</li> <li>▪ Do you collaborate with other cities in CCC development? Joint pilot city projects?</li> <li>▪ Did the mission create new collaboration channels with other cities? New transboundary workflows?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Understand <u>direction</u> and <u>extent</u> of horizontal urban Europeanisation</li> <li>▪ Focus: <u>city-to-city relations and NZC partners</u></li> <li>▪ Motivation/reason? Tools?</li> <li>▪ Understand horizontal dimension of mission implementation</li> </ul>
Internal effects/ city context	<p>Focus area depends on interviewee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mayoral endorsement?</li> <li>▪ Administrative capacity?</li> <li>▪ Stakeholders?</li> <li>▪ CCC partners?</li> <li>▪ NZC platform or city advisors internalised?</li> <li>▪ Target audience for mission related communication?</li> <li>▪ Changes observed since start of mission?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus depends on organisation</li> <li>▪ Understand role/meaning of Europe for the actors composing the city as a collective actor</li> <li>▪ <u>Effects/transformations/changes due to mission</u> on actor/its work/approach</li> <li>▪ Understand effects of mission on city/the actors that compose it</li> </ul>
General remarks and conclusion	<p>Major challenges? Mission as unique opportunity? Net zero target realistic? Discuss presence/usage/utility of NZC platform General outlook on/evaluation of mission</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reflection/general outlook on mission</li> <li>▪ Anything missing? Anything unclear?</li> <li>▪ Thank interviewee and conclude</li> <li>▪ AoB?</li> </ul>

**Appendix 3: List of interviews***Table A4: Details of interviewees (anonymised) and time and place of interviews, in chronological order*

Interview code	Function	Time and place
<b>I1</b>	Project Manager Climate Change & Energy Efficiency, Office of the Executive Director, City of Liepāja	Online, 27 November 2023
<b>I2</b>	Project Manager, Smart Climate Lab, City of Klagenfurt	Online, 27 November 2023
<b>I3</b>	Manager, Strategic Development Department, City of Liberec	Online, 5 December 2023
<b>I4</b>	Project Manager, Strategic Development Department, City of Liberec	Online, 5 December 2023
<b>I5</b>	Zeroemissions Portfolio Manager, Department of Municipal Economy and Climate, City of Kraków	Online, 12 December 2023
<b>I6</b>	Online Community Coordinator, NetZeroCities	Online, 10 January 2024

<b>I7</b>	Head of Secretariat, Sustainable Cities Commission, Union of the Baltic Cities	Online, 17 January 2024
<b>I8</b>	Mobility Expert and Consultant involved in Elbasan's submission to the Cities Mission	Online, 29 January 2024
<b>I9</b>	City advisor of Liepāja, ERRIN, NetZeroCities	Online, 9 February 2024
<b>I10</b>	Architect and Designer, Dark Matters Lab	Online, 13 February 2024
<b>I11</b>	Zeroemissions Portfolio Manager, Department of Municipal Economy and Climate, City of Kraków	Kraków, 19 February 2024
<b>I12</b>	Project Manager, Department of Municipal Economy and Climate, City of Kraków	Kraków, 19 February 2024
<b>I13</b>	Project Manager, Department of Municipal Economy and Climate, City of Kraków	Kraków, 19 February 2024
<b>I14</b>	Director, Department of Municipal Economy and Climate, City of Kraków	Kraków, 19 February 2024
<b>I15</b>	Deputy Head of Mayor's Office, Head of International Relations, City of Kraków	Kraków, 20 February 2024
<b>I16</b>	Director, Kraków Transport Authority, City of Kraków	Kraków, 21 February 2024
<b>I17</b>	IT Service Management Process Manager, IT Department, City of Liepāja	Liepāja, 26 February 2024
<b>I18</b>	Project Manager Climate Change & Energy Efficiency, Office of the Executive Director, City of Liepāja	Liepāja, 27 February 2024
<b>I19</b>	Gunārs Anšņš, Mayor, City of Liepāja	Liepāja, 29 February 2024
<b>I20</b>	Head of Public Relations, Liepājas tramvajs; Head of Mayor's Office, City of Liepāja	Liepāja, 29 February 2024
<b>I21</b>	Consultant, Energy Management, Ekodoma; Professor, Riga Technical University	Riga, 1 March 2024
<b>I22</b>	City advisor of Kraków, Eurocities, NetZeroCities	Online, 5 March 2024
<b>I23</b>	City advisor of Kraków, Climate-KIC, NetZeroCities	Online, 5 March 2024
<b>I24</b>	Associate, Bankers Without Boundaries	Online, 8 March 2024
<b>I25</b>	Senior Policy Officer, Cities Mission, ICLEI	Online, 22 March 2024

Table A5: Additional field visits and relevant sources of data, in chronological order

<b>Visit or event</b>	<b>Time and place</b>
NetZeroCities Platform	Online, October 2023 – March 2024
NetZeroCities Webinar: Pilot Cities Programme Info Session 2	Online, 6 February 2024
Krakowskie Centrum Edukacji Klimatycznej (Kraków Climate Education Center)	Kraków, 19 February 2024
International Cultural Center	Kraków, 23 February 2024
Liepāja University	Liepāja, 28 February 2024

**Appendix 4: Acknowledgements**

Data collection for this article was conducted as part of a master's thesis. It was made possible by the financial assistance granted by the *Urban School of Sciences Po Mobility Grant for Urban Research for Master's Students* supported by *Nexity*.

## Literature

- Acuto, M. (2012). 'World Politics by Other Means? London, City Diplomacy and the Olympics', *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, 8(3–4), pp. 287–311.
- Acuto, M. (2013a). 'City Leadership in Global Governance', *Global Governance*, 19(3), pp. 481–498.
- Acuto, M. (2013b). *Global Cities, Governance and Diplomacy: The Urban Link*. London: Routledge.
- Acuto, M. and Rayner, S. (2016). 'City networks: breaking gridlocks or forging (new) lock-ins?', *International Affairs*, 92(5), pp. 1147–1166.
- Alvarez-Risco, A., Del-Aguila-Arcentales, S. and Rosen, M.A. (2020). 'Sustainable Development Goals and Cities', in A. Alvarez-Risco *et al.* (eds) *Building Sustainable Cities: Social, Economic and Environmental Factors*. Cham: Springer Nature, pp. 313–330.
- Armondi, S. (2020). 'The Urban Agenda for the European Union: EU Governmentality and Urban Sovereignty in New EU-City Relations?', in Armondi, S. and De Gregorio Hurtado, S. (eds) *Foregrounding Urban Agendas: The New Urban Issue in European Experiences of Policy-Making*. Cham: Springer Nature, pp. 3–20.
- Barbier, C. (2023). 'In the Name of Metropolitan Attractiveness', *Metropolitics*. Translated by O. Waine. Retrieved from <https://metropolitics.org/In-the-Name-of-Metropolitan-Attractiveness.html> (Accessed: 31 January 2024).
- Bettencourt, L. and West, G. (2010). 'A unified theory of urban living', *Nature*, 467(7318), pp. 912–913.
- Börzel, T.A. (2018). 'Governance Approaches to European Integration', in Wiener, A., and Diez, T. (eds), *European Integration Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 87–107.
- Bresciani, S., Rizzo, F. and Mureddu, F. (2024). *Assessment Framework for People-Centred Solutions to Carbon Neutrality: A Comprehensive List of Case Studies and Social Innovation Indicators at Urban Level*. Milan: Springer Nature.
- Bréville, B. (2020). 'Quand les grandes villes font sécession', *Le Monde diplomatique*, 1 March. Retrieved from <https://metropolitics.org/In-the-Name-of-Metropolitan-Attractiveness.html>.
- Bushweller, C. (2022). 'Becoming European: EU Identity Formation in Latvia from 2004 to 2019', *Towson University Journal of International Affairs*, 55(2), pp. 1–33.
- Cairney, P. (2012). *Understanding public policy: theories and issues*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Carpenter, J. *et al.* (2020). 'Variegated Europeanization and urban policy: Dynamics of policy transfer in France, Italy, Spain and the UK', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 27(3), pp. 227–245.
- City of Liepāja. (2017). Liepāja stratēģija. Liepāja. Retrieved from <https://www.liepaja.lv/dokumenti/liepajas-pilsetas-ilgtspejiga-attistibas-strategija-lidz-2030-gadam/>

- City of Krakow. (2022). 'Zeroemissions Kraków'. Retrieved from [https://www.krakow.pl/krakow\\_open\\_city/247661,artykul.zeroemisssions\\_krakow.html](https://www.krakow.pl/krakow_open_city/247661,artykul.zeroemisssions_krakow.html)
- City of Krakow. (2023). 'Pact for the Climate'. Retrieved from [https://www.krakow.pl/klimat/269973,artykul.pakt\\_dla\\_klimatu.html](https://www.krakow.pl/klimat/269973,artykul.pakt_dla_klimatu.html)
- City of Krakow. (2024). *Krakowski Panel Klimatyczny*. Retrieved from <https://www.krakow.pl/klimat/269482,artykul.krakowski-panel-klimatyczny.html> (Accessed: 6 August 2025).
- City of Krakow (2025) 'Kraków's Climate City Contract from a European Perspective'. Retrieved from [https://krakow.pl/krakow\\_open\\_city/mayor\\_s\\_guests/296023,287,komunikat.krakow\\_s\\_climate\\_city\\_contract\\_from\\_a\\_european\\_perspective.html](https://krakow.pl/krakow_open_city/mayor_s_guests/296023,287,komunikat.krakow_s_climate_city_contract_from_a_european_perspective.html).
- Climate-KIC (2019) 'Healthy, Clean Cities: Deep Demonstrations of Radical Climate Action'. Retrieved from <https://www.climate-kic.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Healthy-Clean-Cities.pdf>
- Cotella, G. (2020). 'How Europe hits home? The impact of European Union policies on territorial governance and spatial planning', *Géocarrefour*, 94(3).
- Dimitrova, M. (2019). 'With EU funding, Gabrovo found the solutions to problems that were impossible to be solved on a municipal budget', *The Mayor.eu*, 15 April. Retrieved from <https://www.themayor.eu/en/a/view/with-eu-funding-gabrovo-found-the-solutions-to-problems-that-were-impossible-to-be-solved-on-a-municipal-budget-2547> (Accessed: 9 November 2023).
- Directorate-General for Environment. (2024). *TAIEX-EIR PEER 2 PEER tool, European Commission*. Retrieved from [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/law-and-governance/environmental-implementation-review/peer-2-peer\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/law-and-governance/environmental-implementation-review/peer-2-peer_en)
- EU Cities Mission: Meet the Cities* (2022). EU Science & Innovation. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MbzPpUnzLzo> (Accessed: 20 December 2023).
- Eurocities (2022). 'The 100 Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities by 2030', 29 April. Retrieved from <https://eurocities.eu/latest/the-100-climate-neutral-and-smart-cities-by-2030/> (Accessed: 15 October 2023).
- European Commission (2016). *Urban Agenda for the EU: Pact of Amsterdam*. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/policy/themes/urban-development/agenda/pact-of-amsterdam.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/policy/themes/urban-development/agenda/pact-of-amsterdam.pdf).
- European Commission (2020). *Proposed Mission: 100 Climate-neutral Cities by 2030 – by and for the Citizens*. European Commission.
- European Commission (2022). *Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022: EU Missions*. Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2021-2022/wp-12-missions\\_horizon-2021-2022\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/horizon/wp-call/2021-2022/wp-12-missions_horizon-2021-2022_en.pdf)
- European Investment Bank (2021). *The state of local infrastructure investment in Europe: EIB Municipalities Survey 2020*. Luxembourg: European Investment Bank, p. 70. Retrieved from [https://www.eib.org/attachments/efs/eibis\\_2020\\_municipality\\_en.pdf](https://www.eib.org/attachments/efs/eibis_2020_municipality_en.pdf).
- Field, B.G. and Bakker, J.P.R. (2021). 'The evolution of the European Union's Urban Agenda and the morphology of the Pact of Amsterdam', *Journal of Urban Regeneration & Renewal*, 15(1), pp. 24–70.

- green-zones.eu (2024). 'Low emission zone in Krakow stopped for the time being!', 11 March. Retrieved from <https://www.green-zones.eu/en/blog-news/low-emission-zone-in-krakow-stopped-for-the-time-being> (Accessed: 19 March 2024).
- Gustafsson, K. and Hagström, L. (2018). 'What is the point? Teaching graduate students how to construct political science research puzzles', *European Political Science*, 17(4), pp. 634–648.
- Halpern, C. (2014). 'Urban Mobility: What Role for the European Union? Explaining Dynamics of European Union Policy Design Since 1995', *European Planning Studies*, 22(12), pp. 2526–2541.
- Hamedinger, A. and Wolffhardt, A. (eds) (2011). *The Europeanisation of Cities Policies, Urban Change, & Urban Networks*. Amsterdam: Techne Press.
- Haupt, W., Eckersley, P. and Kern, K. (2022). 'How Can "Ordinary" Cities Become Climate Pioneers?', in C. Howarth, M. Lane, and A. Slevin (eds) *Addressing the Climate Crisis: Local action in theory and practice*. Cham: Springer Nature, pp. 83–92.
- Herschel, T. and Newman, P. (2017). *Cities as International Actors*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Huttunen, A. (2022). 'UBC TALKS about EU Mission: climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030'. Webinar, 25 October. Retrieved from <https://www.ubc-sustainable.net/events/ubc-talks-about-eu-mission-climate-neutral-and-smart-cities-2030>
- Ioannou, S. (2023). 'Regional and municipal debt in the Eurozone: a cross-country analysis', *Regional Studies*, 57(1), pp. 97–111.
- Incropera, Frank P. (2015). *Climate Change: A Wicked Problem: Complexity and Uncertainty at the Intersection of Science, Economics, Politics, and Human Behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- John, P. (2001). *Local Governance in Western Europe*. 1st edn. London: SAGE.
- Kern, K. (2007). 'When Europe Hits City Hall: The Europeanization of Cities in the EU Multi-level System'. Retrieved from <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:150979038>.
- Kern, K. (2023). 'Cities in EU multilevel climate policy: governance capacities, spatial approaches and upscaling of local experiments', in Rayner, T., Szulecki, K., Jordan, A. J., and Oberthür, S., *Handbook on European Union Climate Change Policy and Politics*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 113–128.
- Kihlgren Grandi, L. (2020). *City Diplomacy*. Cham: Springer Nature.
- Kosovac, A. et al. (2020). 'Conducting City Diplomacy: A Survey of International Engagement in 47 Cities'.
- Krakow City Development Department. (2018). *This is where I want to live. Krakow 2030*. Krakow. Retrieved from [https://strategia.krakow.pl/o\\_strategii/255162,2214,komunikat\\_krakow\\_development\\_strategy\\_-\\_this\\_is\\_where\\_i\\_want\\_to\\_live\\_krakow\\_2030.html](https://strategia.krakow.pl/o_strategii/255162,2214,komunikat_krakow_development_strategy_-_this_is_where_i_want_to_live_krakow_2030.html)
- Kübler, D. and Pagano, M.A. (2012). 'Urban Politics as Multilevel Analysis', in P. John, K. Mossberger, and Clarke, S.E. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Urban Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 114–130.

- Le Galès, P. (2002). *European cities: social conflicts and governance*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Masik, G., Sagan, I. and Scott, J.W. (2021). 'Smart City strategies and new urban development policies in the Polish context', *Cities*, 108, p. 102970.
- Morgan, E. (2023). 'Poland's Pilot Activity: NEEST – NetZero Emission and Environmentally Sustainable Territories', *NetZeroCities*. Retrieved from <https://netzerocities.eu/polands-pilot-activity-neest-netzero-emission-and-environmentally-sustainable-territories/> (Accessed: 19 March 2024).
- NetZeroCities (2024a). *NetZeroCities*, *NetZeroCities*. Retrieved from <https://netzerocities.eu/> (Accessed: 10 November 2023).
- NetZeroCities (2024b). 'The Mission Label – information for cities participating in the Mission'. Retrieved from [https://denhaag.raadsinformatie.nl/document/14082816/1/RIS318384\\_bijlage\\_Mission-Label-Information-note-for-cities-participating-in-the-Mission?connection\\_type=16&connection\\_id=929107](https://denhaag.raadsinformatie.nl/document/14082816/1/RIS318384_bijlage_Mission-Label-Information-note-for-cities-participating-in-the-Mission?connection_type=16&connection_id=929107)
- OECD/UCLG (2016). *Subnational Governments around the world: Structure and finance*, p. 69. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy/Subnational-Government-Around-the-World-%20Part-I.pdf>.
- Pajvančić-Cizelj, A. (2025). 'European urban networks as aspirational horizon of Europeanization in the Balkans', *Urban Research & Practice*, 18(4), pp. 513–534.
- Plac, K. (2020). 'Climate as an area of strategic intervention in urban development', *Biblioteka Regionalisty*, (20), pp. 109–123.
- Purchla, J. (2016). *Cracow in the European Core*. 2nd ed. Cracow: International Cultural Centre.
- Reinholde, I. and Stučka, M. (2020). 'Urban Governance in Latvia: Feeling Urban and Thinking Rural', in Armondi, S. and De Gregorio Hurtado, S. (eds) *Foregrounding Urban Agendas: The New Urban Issue in European Experiences of Policy-Making*. Cham: Springer Nature, pp. 75–94.
- Rivas, S., Urraca, R., Palermo, V., and Bertoldi, P. (2022). 'Covenant of Mayors 2020: Drivers and barriers for monitoring climate action plans', *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 332, p. 130029.
- Scalable Cities Secretariat. (2024). *Projects funded under the Scalable Cities Action Grant*. Scalable Cities, p. 6. Available at: <https://smart-cities-marketplace.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-07/Projects%20funded%20under%20the%20Scalable%20Cities%20Action%20Grant.pdf>
- Seawright, J. and Gerring, J. (2008). 'Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options', *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(2), pp. 294–308.
- Shabb, K. et al. (2022). 'Launching the Mission for 100 Climate Neutral Cities in Europe: Characteristics, Critiques, and Challenges', *Frontiers in Sustainable Cities*, 3.
- Sobczak, A. (2010). *Europeanization and urban policy networks: the impact of EU programmes on cooperation around economic development in Kraków and Glasgow*. Thesis. European University Institute. Retrieved from

[https://www.academia.edu/93769652/Europeanization and urban policy networks the impact of EU programmes on cooperation around economic development in Krak%C3%B3w and Glasgow](https://www.academia.edu/93769652/Europeanization_and_urban_policy_networks_the_impact_of_EU_programmes_on_cooperation_around_economic_development_in_Krak%C3%B3w_and_Glasgow).

- Sobczak, A. (2022) 'Why does the Stability and Growth Pact not promote stability or growth?', *Euractiv*, 20 October 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.euractiv.com/section/economic-governance/opinion/why-does-the-stability-and-growth-pact-not-promote-stability-or-growth/> (Accessed: 14 October 2023).
- Soest, C. (2023). 'Why Do We Speak to Experts? Reviving the Strength of the Expert Interview Method', *Perspectives on Politics*, 21(1), pp. 277–287.
- Verhelst, T. (2017). 'Processes and patterns of urban Europeanisation: evidence from the EUROCIITIES network', *TRIA (Territorio della Ricerca su Insediamenti e Ambiente)*, 10(1), pp. 75–96.
- Weidenfeld, W. (2020) *Die Europäische Union*. 5., aktualisierte Auflage. Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink (UTB Grundzüge der Politikwissenschaft, 3347).
- Westle, B. (2018) *Methoden der Politikwissenschaft*. 2nd Edition. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG.
- World Bank (2003). *Prototype carbon fund: a public-private partnership: annual report 2002*. Report Number 27468. Washington, D.C: World Bank Group. Retrieved from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/747291468315298683/Prototype-carbon-fund-a-public-private-partnership-annual-report-2002>.