



## INTERNATIONAL CITY ORGANIZATIONS: MIDDLEMAN IN POLICY TRANSFER OR INDEPENDENT POLICY ACTOR?

MIĘDZYNARODOWE SIECI MIAST:  
KREATOR CZY POŚREDNIK  
W TRANSFERZE POLITYK PUBLICZNYCH?

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### — ABSTRACT —

During the last decades, mankind has experienced unprecedented expansion of globalization. In this respect, the process of policy transfer has emerged as a tool of exchanging ideas, policies and administrative arrangements mostly among states and intergovernmental organizations. The aim of this article is to examine policy transfer in terms of city networks. In doing so, the authors have found and researched almost 70 existing city networks in the world. Using Dolowitz and Marsh's 2000 framework, the authors have researched the areas in which cities co-operate and the subject matters of such cooperation.

**Keywords:** policy transfer; multi-level governance; international city networks

### — ABSTRAKT —

W ciągu ostatnich dziesięcioleci ludzkość doświadczyła bezprecedensowej ekspansji globalizacji. Pod tym względem proces transferu polityki stał się narzędziem wymiany pomysłów, polityk i rozwiązań administracyjnych, głównie między państwami i organizacjami międzyrządowymi. Celem tego artykułu jest zbadanie transferu polityki pod kątem sieci miast. W ramach tegoż transferu autorzy zidentyfikowali i zbadali prawie 70 istniejących na świecie sieci miast. Wykorzystując ramy teoretyczne wypracowane przez Dolowitza i Marsha (2000), autorzy zbadali obszary współpracy miast oraz tematykę tej współpracy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** transfer polityki; wielopoziomowe zarządzanie; międzynarodowe sieci miast

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## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever imagined that, for instance, social policy in your country could be a carbon copy of one from another country? It is possible, and moreover, in many corners of the world very likely. Problems that cities/regions/states face are not unique, so they can learn from each other how to deal with them, or even more, they can work together and create new, improved solutions. During the last decades, policy transfer has become a very common subject of research in many different areas. There are at least several reasons: firstly, globalization and, in consequence, growing importance of international organizations has facilitated mutual learning concerning public policies. Secondly, there is a growing number of problems which are impossible to solve unless mutual cooperation is implemented on the global scale. Thirdly, smooth and fast communication allows researchers and practitioners to monitor public policies around the world, which leads to the conclusion that public administration issues are not only internal matters but also very often a subject of international discussion. Last but not least, the challenges which most civil servants and politicians face each day are by no means unique or incomparable with any national or international equivalents.

What is noteworthy, policy transfer was designed as a concept that helped to explore and describe relations between states or between intergovernmental organizations and states. However, for the last decades the situation on international level has changed due to the growing importance of city networks. It would not be an exaggeration to say that sub-state actors turned out to be a new agent on international stage – one that frequently bypasses the states. The aim of this article is to examine policy transfer among city networks. Using Dolowitz and Marsh's 2000 framework, the authors have researched the issue of international cities' cooperation and the subject of public policy transfer.

In order to pursue this goal, the authors divided this article into three parts. The first one is devoted to the theoretical framework of policy transfer; the authors not only present the way this category has been used so far but also point to new fields they would like to cover in order to introduce new perspective on policy transfer. In the second section, the authors show the results of the studies that were conducted by using qualitative and quantitative research methods. In the last section of the article, the authors discuss the final outcome, showing sub-states actors' perspective on policy transfer.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As Mark Evans pointed out, the world of public policy is becoming increasingly small due to dramatic changes in global communication, political and economic institutional structures, and to nation states themselves (Evans, 2010, p. 6, 2009). Therefore, it is not surprising that the process of policy transfer among actors on international stage has become a common place. As Kevin Ward noted, the current global urban system has generated capacity of city-to-city collaboration, comparison, exchange, and learning (Ward, 2019). One of the most popular ways to define this process was developed by Dolowitz and Marsh, who stated that a policy transfer is “the process by which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political system is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political system” (Dolowitz & Marsh, 2000, p. 5). However, it is also possible to see the policy transfer as a process or a set of processes in which knowledge about institutions, policies or delivery systems at one sector or level of government is used in the development of institutions, policies or delivery systems at another sector or level of governance. Different forms of policy transfer can be distinguished, such as bandwagoning, convergence, diffusion, emulation, policy learning, social learning, and lesson-drawing (Evans, 2010; Davies & Evans, 1998). Much research has been conducted about policy transfer since Dolowitz and Marsh prepared their theoretical framework. Early works were focused on such topics as Europeanization of public policy among EU member states (Marshall, 2005), harmonization of public management in relations with a new public management paradigm (Westphal, Gulati, & Shortell, 1997), or policy transfer based on strong cultural and legal similarities among Anglo-Saxon countries (Levi-Faur & Vigoda-Gadot, 2006; Legrand, 2012). In all the above-mentioned examples, it seems to be obvious that on international and state level, neither central nor local government have enough expertise to deal with such issues on their own. Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the issues taken into consideration are drivers and factors that make policy transfer process more smooth and easy. In this context, some explanations are important, such as that of Stephen V. Ward who identified the potential influence of strong ‘philosophical neighbours’, example of which are the traditional ties between the UK and the US in the planning sphere despite the UK being closer to many important and potentially competing European approaches (Ward, 2007, p. 221). The extent to which policies can successfully transfer across socio-political

boundaries is of key interest. Wolman and Page identified a strong national influence on the extent to which environmental policies transfer. Scholars also support the notion that policy transfer is more prevalent across close geographic and cultural neighbours (Wolman & Page, 2002).

The concept of policy transfer is not without its critics. Evans outlines three main points. First, that it is not possible to fully separate policy learning from normal policy making processes. Second, insufficient attention is given to whether policy transfer has occurred or not. Third, policy transfer is descriptive in nature and fails to identify explanatory theories for movement (Evans, 2010). Moreover, how to treat policy transfer has also been discussed. It is possible to perceive the literature on policy learning over the past 20 years or so as engaged in a debate that, at its core, contains two different sets of assumptions – one that understands policy transfer as an essentially rational process that is itself open to rational enquiry, and one that believes it to be inherently messy, incremental and potentially ‘irrational’. For those who perceive policy transfer as a rational process, policy transfer becomes a dependent variable, for others – an independent variable (Ellison, 2017). Other feature was stressed by Stone, Porto de Oliveira and Pal (2020) who stated that much of the literature to date has focused on western, or developed world, organisations and fairly conventional forms of knowledge (policy paradigms, technical policy models in terms of problem-objective-instruments). Among such kinds of policy transfer the following might be listed: OECD, World Bank, or G20 (Clifton & Díaz-Fuentes, 2014).

In literature devoted to policy transfer, seven actors have been pinpointed: politicians, bureaucrats, policy entrepreneurs, pressure groups, global financial institutions, international institutions, and supra-international institutions (Stone, 2000; Dunlop, 2009). However, Dolowitz and Marsh (1996) mentioned elected officials, political parties, bureaucrats and civil servants, pressure groups, policy entrepreneurs and experts, and, last but not least, supra-national institutions. As can be seen, sub-state actors are not present on this list. So far, policy transfer has been rooted in state-centric approach (Benson & Jordan, 2011) or tendency towards methodological nationalism (Stone, 2004). The shift from industrial-welfare state to a competition state reflects political elites’ perceptions of global realities and informs state strategies for navigating globalization (Evans, 2010). In the light of state-driven international cooperation, the present authors have witnessed a proliferation of policy transfer between many countries, such as Britain and the United States or the Commonwealth states (Legrand, 2012). The failure of this kind of thinking leads us to the next stage of governance era in

which basic assumption is the “hollowed-out” state. Cities may, as an alternative, perform the same functions as the state, which means that cities are capable of bypassing states. This bypass sometimes takes a form of complementing states’ activities. One can identify many cases of cities cooperation and participation in international relations and consequent enforcement of international law in these spheres. Examples include the *Global Cities Covenant on Climate – the Mexico City Pact*, adopted at the World Mayors Summit on Climate in Mexico (2010), or an enterprise initiated autonomously and irrespective of state commitments comprising an appeal to other cities made in 2005 by Greg Nickels, the Mayor of Seattle, who called on them to implement the Kyoto protocol (that the US did not ratify) at the local level by reducing the amounts of greenhouse gases’ emission.

The above instances demonstrate that the phenomenon of cities bypassing States is already a reality, specifically in the area of implementation of human rights, environmental law and the fight against climate change. As a result, one may argue that states are no longer the sole problem-solving actor present in the international relations. These characteristics of the cities are very often used as a prerequisite for the assumption of what if cities ruled the world, as Benjamin Barber (2014) said in his famous book. In contrast to the well-known statements positioning cities as ‘voracious’ entities threatening the hegemony of ‘obstructing states’ just a decade or two ago (Tilly & Blockmans, 1994), nowadays they are seen rather as proper autonomous actors on a transnational scene (Pinson, 2019). Barber’s questions concerning growing influence of cities have been sharpened by neoliberal economy critics. As Neil Brenner, Jamie Peck and Nik Theodore pointed out, ‘neoliberalism’ appears to have become a rascal concept – promiscuously pervasive, yet inconsistently defined, empirically imprecise and frequently contested. Moreover, after 2008 financial crisis it seems to be obvious that contradictions within this economical concept remain unsolved. Therefore, radical cities decentralization is not only a way to provide urban reconstruction but also a vivid political laboratory proving necessary change (Brenner, Peck, & Theodore, 2010; Peck & Theodore, 2010). Such a changed mindset resulted in a changed approach to cities and let them gradually gain more and more power. This great inversion allowed the cities to reach for new tools and play an important role on the international stage. However, such attitude do not change the fact that while cities have emerged as a prominent alternative to international processes, at the same time they cannot be seen as a substitute or replacement for ongoing activities conducted by states. The urban renaissance observed in recent years not only contributed to the increase in interest in cities as such, but

also directed interest of researchers towards the use of policy transfer category as a tool to learn something new about cooperation on sub-state level. More recently, scholars have been turning their attention to the role of cities as agents of change capable of exerting influence across a range of administrative governance from regional to supranational (Marsden et al., 2011). In this respect, there are some examples of policy transfer research about revitalization (Bulkeley & Betsill, 2013), network comparison in terms of climate change (Lee, 2019; Heikkinen, Ylä-Anttila, & Juhola, 2019; Beermann, 2017; Betsill & Bulkeley, 2004), CO<sub>2</sub> reduction (Takao, 2014), as well as transport policy (Marsden et al., 2011; Timms, 2011) and planning policy (Mutuku, Boerboom, & Madureira, 2019). Nevertheless, it is almost impossible to show a study focused on city networks in terms of policy transfer. As D. Stone already noticed, issues related to policy diffusion and policy transfer are complexed and require a multidisciplinary approach (Stone, 2012; McCann & Ward, 2013).

Although the discussion on policy diffusion and policy transfer has been going on for many years, there are still many aspects to be explored. One of such undiscovered areas, showing the multifaceted nature of policy diffusion and policy transfer, is cooperation at the level of international city networks (Marsh & Evans, 2012; Minkman, van Buuren, & Bekkers, 2018; Hambleton & Taylor, 1994). The authors of this article would like to cover this field and check if traditional theoretical framework is suitable to the cities. In this context, it seems to be interesting to learn about the issues of policy transfer in international city organisations. Given the different scales at which states and cities work as well as their respective approaches to policy, the authors suspect that international city networks might be a new policy actor in international relations – this is the research hypothesis of this article. In order to verify this hypothesis, the authors sought to answer the following questions: (1) What is the subject of policy transfer among cities grouped in the international city networks? (2) Why do cities start transferring policies by international cities' cooperation? and last but not least (3) Can there be found any dynamics and differences in policies transfer of city networks in terms of geography? After finding the answers, the researchers will be able to figure out whether the international city networks are a middleman in policy transfer or an independent policy actor.

## METHODOLOGY

The literature on policy transfer analysis is mostly divided into three main aspects: process-oriented approaches, ideational approaches and, last but not least, diffusion approaches. The authors put special attention to the first of aforementioned ways of analysing policy transfer. The next preoccupation is the fact that transfer policy is usually divided into two main blocks: coercive and voluntary, which determine the way how policy transfer is developed. As Stone (2003) observed, when policy transfer is coercive, we focus on what enforces the transfer; but when it is voluntary, we tend to reflect more on the characteristics of the policy itself that facilitates its transfer. The authors focus entirely on voluntary policy transfer among the international city networks. Although researchers often focus on global competition in which cities compete to attract capital investments, create eye-catching images, build tourist attractions or become a successful leader in urban management and policy innovation (Robinson, 2019), the authors have devoted their research to the opposite side of cities' presence and activities on the international stage. The article is focused on cities' cooperation through their membership in international city networks. The article analyses transfer of knowledge and experience between cities using international networks as a platform of exchanging their practices and experiences in the best possible way. Given the policy transfer perspective, it is very common to conduct research in respect to the framework of Dolowitz and Marsh's questions: What is transferred?; Why do actors engage in policy transfer?; Who are the key actors involved in the policy transfer process?; From where are lessons drawn?; What are the different degrees of transfer?; What restricts or facilitates the policy transfer process?; How is the process of policy transfer related to the policy 'success' or policy 'failure'? Here the authors would like to introduce two important assumptions. The first one is that the authors chose only those currently active organisations that were set up as a bottom-up initiatives, so all kinds of networks that are affiliated to the international organisations such as the United Nations or the European Union were summarily rejected. The reason for doing so is the fact that those networks that are a part of international organizations' family in fact implement agendas that are not originally set by them. Only bottom-up created networks are eligible. In this respect, our preliminary pool of more than 140 networks found was reduced to fewer than 70 after a thorough scrutiny. The second assumption was that the authors focus their research on two questions: What are the areas in which cities cooperate? And what does policy

transfer mean in terms of international city networks? Therefore, our research has exploratory, descriptive and explanatory goals that leads us to examine the research problem of whether city networks are more likely to be a middleman in policy transfer or an independent policy actor. In order to solve this issue, several specific questions had to be asked: Who are members of these networks? What are the most frequent policy areas that are chosen by the cities? What kind of actions have been taken in order to implement city networks goals? The analysis was carried out by using comparative method of study as well as desk research that allowed the authors to learn different kinds of actions taken by aforementioned cities.

In order to pursuit the project, the authors set out the following research strategy: (1) a preliminary search in open sources for as many international city networks as possible that fit the adopted criteria. Ultimately, 69 networks were found eligible for further research; (2) the analysis of internal documents that covered the following issues: who can become a member of the network; what are the network's main points of interest and organizational structure; (3) analysis of annual reports and publications that depict cities' joint activities as well as tangible effects achieved by the networks of interest; (4) comparison of the gathered information in terms of specific categories of policy transfer (synthesis, copying, emulation, hybridization), geographical context and areas of activity; (5) search for the dependencies between categories mentioned in (4). It is worth emphasizing that reasons why cities start cooperation is not the focus of the study. Given the exploratory justification of the current research, this topic might be an interesting research proposal for further consideration. At the time being, it is important to map categories of policy transfer and present a broader view of intercity cooperation.

## STUDY RESULTS

Preparing a database of networks that could be researched thoroughly during the study of currently existing city networks gathering cities, the authors began their work by using Internet search engines. In the first phase, keywords (cities, networks, international organizations, etc.) and their various combinations were used. Thereby a database of 145 cities was created. The next stage of building the city networks base was devoted to verification of the collected networks – any networks gathering cities in only one country, organizations formed as part of



or on the initiative of other international organizations, e.g., the UN or the EU, were rejected as the authors wanted to examine only city networks resulting from grassroots initiatives and being independent organizations. The revised list also omitted networks dealing with broadly understood city-related issues, but associating only private individuals, non-profit organizations, etc. At this stage, 90 networks gathering at least a few cities, and only cities, remained. The final stage of verification was related to obtaining actual data. Accordingly, networks that terminated their operations or were unable to collect sufficient data to examine the organization were rejected. Ultimately, 69 city networks were subjected to a detailed study.

According to Dolowitz and Marsh (1996), policy transfer: “refer[s] to a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, and institutions in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, and institutions in another time and/or place”. By now, many policy transfer studies have been conducted in the European countries, and they mainly focus upon convergence of policies among nations (Bennett, 1991a; Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Dolowitz, 1997, 1998). In the light of the previous studies, it is also necessary to study this phenomenon in the context of the activities carried out by city networks, on which this article is focused.

Many researchers indicate different types of agents facilitating and enabling policy transfer. The most frequently mentioned include elected officials, professionals, entrepreneurs, administrators, bureaucrats, political parties, think tanks, pressure groups, academics, international organizations, and experts; they are discussed at length in both diffusion and policy transfer literatures (Dolowitz, 1998; Newmark, 2002). Many of these agents are members of international organizations, which are platforms for exchanging information on policies and programmes, and which are the subjects of the research carried out for the purpose of the article.

The world literature identifies and describes a number of terms related to policy transfer, including (1) lesson drawing (Rose, 1991), (2) policy convergence (Bennett, 1991b; Dolowitz, 1998), (3) emulation (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996), and (4) systematically pinching, borrowing and copying ideas (Schneider & Ingram, 1988). Already identified terms regarding policy transfer have different meanings. For the purposes of this article, the authors examined different ways and methods of lesson drawing according to Rose (1991) and Page (2000). After the policy transfer varieties are ordered, one extreme is direct copying, where the programme or policy is transferred from one country to another, and the

other extreme is ‘inspiration’ – transfer of an idea, on which new solutions can be based. In between these two extremes there are three others: ‘adaptation’, ‘creating a hybrid’, and ‘synthesis’, which are used to transfer mixed sets of ideas, institutions and practices. Therefore city networks were examined for their participation and mediation in the following processes:

1. copying: adoption of a (more or less intact) programme already in effect in another jurisdiction;
2. emulation: adoption, with adjustment for different circumstances, of a programme already in effect in another jurisdiction;
3. hybridization: combining elements of programmes from two different places;
4. synthesis: combining familiar elements from programmes in effect in three or more different places;
5. inspiration: programmes from other places used as intellectual stimulus for developing a novel programme without an analogue elsewhere.

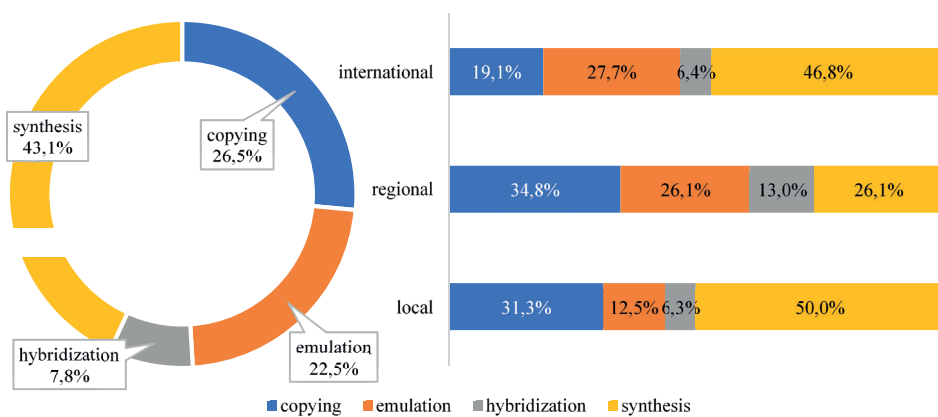
Out of those five ways the last one – inspiration – was omitted due to difficulties in investigating, determining and proving to what extent pre-existing solutions and documents could have been a measurable basis for taking a specific action. Wherever it was possible, methods of policy transfer were also considered in the context of the geographical coverage of a given cities’ network, according to the following parameters:

1. local networks – covering cities from countries on one continent only;
2. regional networks – covering countries on two continents;
3. international networks – covering countries on three or more continents.

City networks, and hence the cities that are their members, focus mainly on enabling the creation of conditions for exchange of experiences between them. Hence the noticeable popularity of synthesis, which results in building solutions based on both their own experiences and solutions functioning in other cities. It proves that city networks largely focus their activities on sharing their own experiences and creating conditions enabling the use of the best and most effective solutions tested by member cities in a given situation. City networks enable networking and therefore favour exchange of experience that leads to creating optimal solutions in a wider group. Emulating and copying solutions are less popular ways of sharing and exploiting experiences – in both cases they account for just over 20% of the cases of transfer in the studied city networks. One main reason for that should be emphasized – cities representing different countries

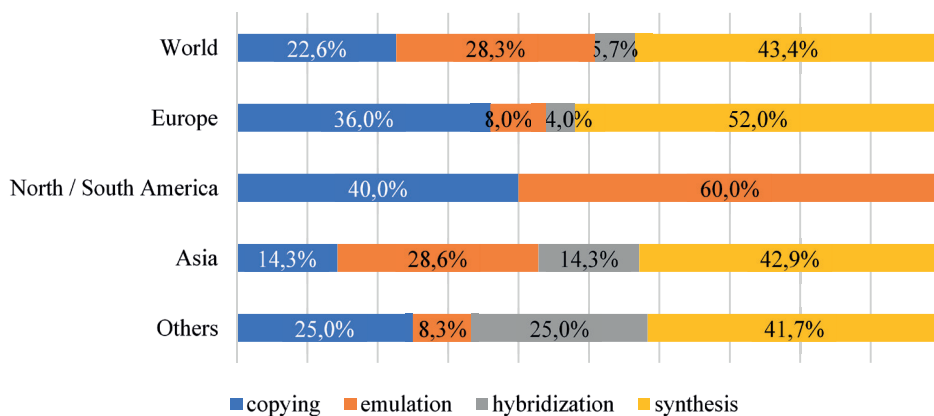
clustered in a given cities' network, even if they have common characteristics or goals, differ from each other by legal regulations or system requirements, so copying or emulation is in many cases difficult and sometimes even impossible. It can be also seen that city networks are acting on different levels and are using different tools. Nevertheless, they are of the greatest importance when transferring public policies as an intermediary in transferring solutions from one city to another or by acting as a platform through which the knowledge of its members is synthesized. Without this role, the knowledge and experience of cities would be dispersed or transferred on a much smaller scale.

Interestingly, in cities that create local (primarily in Europe) and international networks of connections, the most common tool for implementing experiences is synthesis, while this type of solution is not very common in North and South America, which are more likely to use adaptation and emulation. At the same time, among local and regional networks copying is also popular – cities within geographical proximity in many cases have similar legal systems (for cities from one country that belong to the same city networks it is not even an issue), which undoubtedly facilitates the direct transfer of developed solutions. On the other hand, close geographical proximity is the main cause for commonality of challenges, especially in the area of environmental protection and prevention of common problems such as surface and air pollution or acid rains, i.e., phenomena that do not take into account existing borders (Figures 1 and 2).



**Figure 1.** Policies Transfer – Lesson Drawing (What) in International City Networks. General Statement and According to the Criterion of Territorial Activity

Source: Authors' own study based on conducted research.



**Figure 2.** Transfer of Policies by International Networks. Geographic Criterion

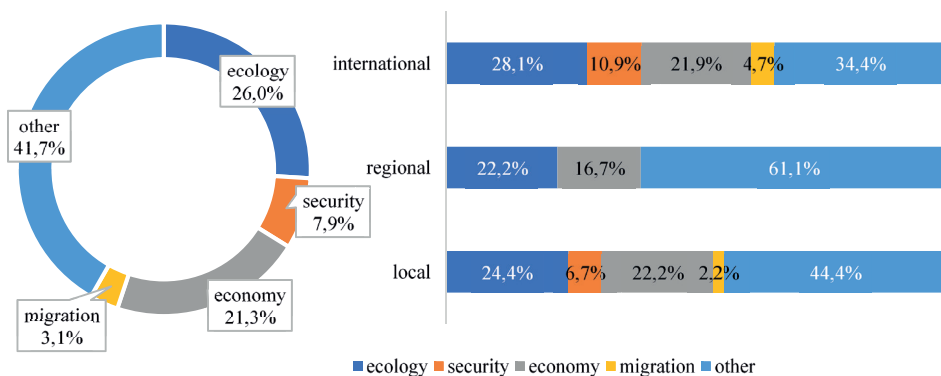
**Source:** Authors' own study based on conducted research.

According to Newmark (2002), city networks cooperate not only because of the problems they have in common but also – which has to be emphasized – because they have solutions that can serve common well-being, regardless of partisan values or political cultures.

City networks researched for the purpose of the article were established for various reasons. The most common reasons are: geographical location, a common feature (e.g., cities with walls or dealing with ceramics), or a common problem that can be more easily solved through group cooperation. Although it is difficult to indicate the sphere in which public policies are transferred most often, it can be noticed that ecology and economic issues are the main areas of activity of the researched city networks. The role of economic affairs increases slightly in networks operating only in the local area, such as in Asian countries, but also in networks of cities with international reach. The local aspect may be associated with an attempt to solve common economic problems, characteristic for the particular part of the world and often occurring locally, i.e. in several neighbouring countries. In the case of city networks that cooperate on international level, the importance of migration problems is increasing. Moreover, migration and ecology matters indicate the most universal and hence global challenges that have common urban character and are most effectively solved by synthesis. Both areas are subject to transfer, in particular at the level of local and international city networks.

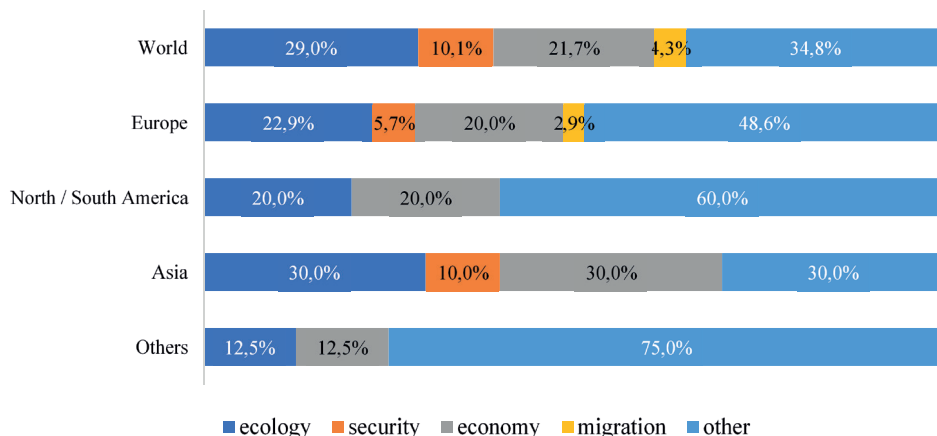
In each criterion (e.g. geographical) analysed, there is also a significant number of other fields of interest that do not fit into ecology, security, economy and migration issues. Very often city networks go beyond one particular field of interest or focus their activities on different areas. The imagination of cities in terms of reasons for creating networks knows almost no boundaries – from cities with historic, defensive walls or thermal springs, through cities with airports, to organizations of mayors or cooperation in the use of renewable energy sources. What is also reflected in the activities undertaken by city networks are the events of the last decades which have had direct or indirect implications for socio-political and economic situations not only locally or regionally but also worldwide, as evidenced by the increase in interest and range of networks' activities. Therefore the growing interest in security issues is noticeable (figure 3 and 4).

There are more interesting issues regarding cities' cooperation that can be found while combining two questions – what is the subject of policy transfer and why cities decide and are willing to participate in this particular process. According to the research, the most important reason for engaging in widely understood international cooperation seems to be the willingness to promote their own policies and learn from others at the same time. What does it mean in practice? Presumably, public services that predominantly are the subject of policy transfer are those which have very local character, but simultaneously are very typical for cities governance in global context.



**Figure 3.** Areas of Activity (Issues) of International Networks. General Approach and According to the Criterion of Territorial Activity

Source: Authors' own study based on conducted research.



**Figure 4.** Areas of Activity (Issues) of International Networks. Geographic Criterion

Source: Authors' own study based on conducted research.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis of the collected data, it can be seen that international city organisations are not equal in their nature. They cover different fields of public policies, choose different subjects of policy transfer (meaning what and why is transferred) and – last but not least – differ in geographical terms. However, it should be emphasized that in geographical terms the investigated cities have most frequently decided to join an international network (32 of the networks surveyed), whereas local are the second most popular choice (24 of the networks surveyed). Regional city networks are the rarest ones (13 of the networks surveyed). Despite these differences, the authors were able to distinguish a kind of logic in a way how they are operating. Given the question of policy transfer, there is no doubt that producing synthesis of policies and copying the experiences of other cities are the most frequent subjects of transfer that occur in international city organisations and networks. Interestingly, this kind of policy transfer is dominant especially at the local and international level. Therefore, for cities that are looking for innovation in public policies, the best kind of organisations are those which operate at the regional level (according to the classification accepted at the beginning of the research). At this level of cities' cooperation one can find the highest percentage of adaptation. Presumably, at the local level there are too many similarities between members of organisations while at the international

level there are too many differences in terms of political and legal systems to implement successfully political transfer in a way that involves creating adaptive and/or innovative strategies.

In order to summarize and answer the questions asked at the beginning of the article – what is the subject of policy transfer among cities grouped in city networks? – it should be emphasized that no matter what type of a network is taken into account (considering size, geographical range, nature of activity, etc.), city networks focus primarily on synthesis, which allows sharing their experiences and developing new solutions that draw lessons from many and varied experiences. Among the main subjects of policy transfer among cities belonging to city networks are ecology and economy issues although, due to the diverse nature of the networks and cities researched, the subject of activity very often does not fall into the basic categories designated at the beginning of the study (ecology, economy, security, migration) – hence the relatively large share of the ‘other’ category.

Answering the question *why* cities start transferring policies using city networks, it has to be stressed that what is crucial is experience sharing, promotion of own previously gained experience and learning from others. By comparing solutions used in different cities and the effects of their application it is possible to look from a new perspective at common problems that cities face and to apply a solution that has already worked out somewhere, and thus has a chance to prove itself in another city dealing with the same challenge. Hence, it is not surprising that synthesis is the way most often reflecting the nature of cooperation occurring in city networks.

And last but not least – answering the question regarding the geographical component to dynamics and differences in policy transfers within city networks, it should be noted that cities prefer either to participate in initiatives associating members from different parts of the world or take part in a local forum. There can be at least several reasons for this situation: local city networks may be more tempting, if only because cities from neighbouring countries may have similar issues, or the method of solving these problems may be the same due to political, geographical or cultural conditions the cities have in common. In turn, membership in an organization associating cities from several continents can be an excellent opportunity to establish new and unobvious relationships. Paradoxically, it is both the differences and similarities with regard to a variety of political, geographical or cultural issues that can be the driving force behind the actions taken and contribute to encouraging cities to membership in city

networks of varying geographical coverage. In this situation, it is not surprising that regional city networks are the least represented group. The presence of cities from two different continents on the one hand does not give as wide perspective as it is in the case of international networks, and on the other hand – all above mentioned aspects connecting cities might be not as common as it is in the case of local networks.

In the light of the research, there are some theoretical implications that can be drawn in the context of policy transfer among international city organisations. In the vast majority of cases, policy transfer has been implemented to check how political subjects, except sub-national bodies, draw a lesson and use the experience of comparable entities regarding policy issues. Looking at the policy transfer through this lens, the researchers focused mostly on general principles regarding policies. There are no doubts that this kind of research has shown what international and transferable public policy is. However, in terms of searching policy transfer among sub-national level, there are some recommendations that can be made in order to hone this research tool. Firstly, public policies introduced by self-government entities are much more detail-oriented than those prepared by national states or international organisations. Therefore, a set of questions proposed by Dolowitz and Marsh (2012) might be focused on different aspects of public policy in order to find out more details regarding policy transfer among cities. Secondly, given the fact that sub-national actors are mostly responsible for implementation of public policies rather than planning and introducing legal framework, it would be very interesting to use service design approach in order to check policy transfer at this level. In this context, wh-questions prepared by Dolowitz and Marsh might be extended to or even exchanged for those checking how services are commissioned, designed, delivered and, last but not least, assessed. This perspective will reveal what cities are really interested in when they decide to start cooperation with other cities.

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