



**'TRANS-EUROPEAN ACCESS'**  
**The Value of Eurocities to Gateshead Council**

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the context of the 'European Turn' in British and European urban politics this paper sets out to determine the value of the Eurocities network to Gateshead Council, demonstrating why and how it is useful and advocating the Council's further involvement in it. Qualitative research methods have been employed, and the paper is intended to give further impetus and encouragement to the Council's International agenda as set out in its International Strategy.

The research has shown that the main costs of involvement, particularly that of concerns over the legitimacy of working internationally, are non-specific to the Eurocities network. Gateshead Officers identified the main benefits of the network as being policy learning, accessing funding and raising the Borough's profile. However, the research also demonstrates a lack of awareness of the way in which Eurocities can be used as a lobbying body and as a unique platform from which the Council can seek to influence the key policy-making institution of the European Union. Recommendations are therefore made as to how Gateshead can capitalize on this aspect of Eurocities, for example by involving elected representatives more in their networking activities and improving the working relationship with Newcastle City Council.

This paper concludes that Eurocities is hugely valuable to any small or medium sized authority looking to become an established international player. It is particularly useful given its specific orientation on urban areas, its close ties to both the citizen and the European institutions, and the fact that it is well respected in its attempts to bridge the divide between the two.

## **2. INTRODUCTION**

### **2.1 LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

The evolution of the European Union has changed the various patterns of constraints and opportunities that impact on local authorities. International engagements that began with the post-World War II ‘town twinning’ movement have continued throughout a period of globalisation, and on-going integration on the European continent has boosted the international activities of cities and urban polities throughout the EU. Local councils that have long looked to each other for advice are now able to look beyond the confines of their national territory and, though the idea of cities and urban regions as international actors is somewhat unconventional, they have become increasingly important ‘nodal points’ for societal exchange at the European and global level.

In light of these developments, whereby the local and the global have become entangled and where the EU – though it seems remote – has come to have a huge impact on our lives, local authorities must keep competitive by sharpening up their international activities and adapting to the new spaces in which they now operate. To this end, and within Europe particularly, cross-regional and cross-national networking has developed as a primary means for negotiating the pitfalls of globalisation and for responding to the various structural peculiarities of EU governance.

This research assesses both the perceived and actual value to Gateshead Council of their involvement in one such network: Eurocities<sup>1</sup>.

### **2.2 EUROCIITIES: AN INTRODUCTION**

Orientated specifically around the needs of urban communities throughout Europe, Eurocities has its origins in a coalition established in 1986 and today is a lateral networking association of more than 130 cities in over 30

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<sup>1</sup> Gateshead Council enjoys joint membership of Eurocities with Newcastle City Council, though there is scope for the two to act independently within the network

European countries. The cornerstone of its manifesto is that life is ‘distinctly urban’, and it therefore insists on the prominent role of the city in tackling major challenges and in delivering a sustainable future in which people can enjoy a good quality of life.

Eurocities’ activities are conducted through a series of thematic forums. Within each forum working groups focus on specific policy issues. The working

**Eurocities’ Thematic Forums**

- Culture
- Economic Development
- Environment
- Knowledge Society
- Mobility
- Social Affairs

groups consist of representatives from cities considered to have relevant expertise and knowledge, and report back to the forum on the results achieved. The role of these forums is three fold: to disseminate information to member cities; to coordinate responses from members; to facilitate or lead on

specific *projects* undertaken by partnerships between members (Griffiths, 1995: 218). Eurocities is involved in a number of European projects – either as a coordinator or a partner – on issues relevant to exchanging enterprise between cities, for example the Covenant of Mayors. Beyond these structures, the member authority’s level of participation is decided independently.

The underlying purpose of Eurocities is foster greater coordination, integration and coherence between members and along various policy-related and thematic lines. Its ideal city is: “inclusive, prosperous, creative and sustainable, with democratic and effective governance” (Eurocities, 2003). To this end, it treats its members as more than simply implementing bodies, but as valuable sources of expertise, leadership, and knowledge.

### 3. TRANS-EUROPEAN ACCESS

Gateshead Council has seen a steady increase in the degree to which it has acted on the European (and international) stage. The dimensions of its international activity are shifting in response to the changing demands and opportunities presented by twenty-first century style governance and there has been a move from traditional activities like town-twinning towards: “a new approach to international working based on strategic, creative and dynamic relationships with partners” (Gateshead Council, 2006: 5). With a focus on such relationships, the Council’s International Strategy pays particular attention to Europe as providing various opportunities for trade, cultural interchange and investment in people, and membership of Eurocities is cited as being a key element in the development of partnerships and learning across Europe.

Gateshead’s involvement in Eurocities to date has sought to capitalise on the region’s strengths and, as such, has been concentrated around issues of culture, sport, design and building sustainable communities. Currently there is attendance in the Culture Forum and the Environment Forum, with commitment to participation in forums covering the economy and mobility (GC, 2006: 11-12). However, Gateshead’s activity in Eurocities has been described as ‘sporadic’ (Interview 9) and ‘unpopular’ (Interview 1), and people remain confused or sceptical about what Eurocities is and/or does (Interview 5). Questions are thus raised over the rationale for being involved in it.

#### 3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

What follows, then, is a qualitative ‘cost-benefit’ analysis of Gateshead Council’s involvement in the Eurocities network. The questions guiding the research have been:

- **Should Gateshead engage with Eurocities at all?** What are the relevant costs and benefits?

- **If Gateshead wants to deepen involvement in Eurocities, what strategy should it adopt?** How can it engage effectively?

In answering these questions the research aims to: clarify the purpose of the Eurocities network, looking at what it does and what it can provide as well as what the positives and negatives of involvement are; compare Gateshead's use of it to that of other member cities to determine the best ways of engaging with it. As a subset of the project, research has been undertaken into the working partnership between Newcastle City Council and Gateshead Council and how this can be optimised in the context of Eurocities.

On attainment of the research objectives the significance of the research will have been to provide renewed focus for the Council's international agenda and justification for the necessary diversion of resources away from the local level that working at a trans-European level entails, and which often invites criticism from local populations. Furthermore, it is hoped that the research will demonstrate not only *why* Eurocities is beneficial to a council like Gateshead, but also *how* Gateshead Council can maximise the return on the various temporal, financial and physical investments it makes as an active member of Eurocities.

## **3.2 RESEARCH METHODS**

This research project has employed an exploratory, inductive, qualitative approach. The rationale for such a grounded approach has been to allow for flexibility in research, and to prevent the direction of the investigation being too rigidly predetermined. Consequently, the data collected demonstrates a degree of reflexivity and responsiveness. The majority of this data has been collected through desk-based document analysis and policy research, in conjunction with semi-structured interview sessions.

The analysis of documents, press releases and policies has concentrated on material from Gateshead Council and the Eurocities network. Gateshead Council's International Strategy 2006-2009 has served as the primary document of reference in terms of policy orientation. Interviewees<sup>2</sup> consisted of Gateshead Council Officers with an interest and/or history of involvement in working internationally - both within and beyond Eurocities - and of Officers with a similar background at Gateshead's partner authority in Eurocities, Newcastle City Council. These Officers represent both current and past employees. In addition, contact was made and interviews held with the International Offices of Sunderland and Manchester City Councils. In terms of Eurocities, information was gathered via their website and various reports and publications from the network, as well as a question and answer session with a Eurocities employee.

In the semi-structured interview format all candidates were asked certain pre-defined questions as a means to gathering a body of solid, comparable information. Each interview contained an element of unstructured questioning, allowing the researcher to respond to points being raised at the time, as well as a period of questioning more relevant to the specific role of the interviewee.

Having employed such qualitative research methods the research has sought to build up a detailed picture of the costs and benefits of Gateshead Council's involvement in Eurocities. It was recognised from the outset that such costs and benefits can be both perceived and actual, and both have been considered important in the context of this project. Furthermore, the possibility of succinctly quantifying the costs or benefits shown up by the research has proved difficult, particularly given that some of these factors and outcomes are

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<sup>2</sup> Interviewees have been granted anonymity for the purposes of this report, and their responses should not be considered as the official opinion of their relevant employer. However, in the interests of rigour, a list of interviewees identified only by their job area is provided in Appendix 1. Transcripts of interviews are available on request. Correspondence to e.k.charlton@alumni2009.newcastle.ac.uk



secondary or tertiary to the immediate impacts of engagements. Quantitative analysis has thus been deemed largely inappropriate for this piece of work.

### 3.3 POLICY AND THEORETICAL CONTEXT

On the policy side, the research is informed predominantly by Gateshead Council's International Strategy. The Strategy's vision is of a Gateshead borough that is: "economically active and prosperous, connected across the world's networks, and recognised globally for its contributions to art, culture, business and learning" (GC, 2009: 21), and the Strategy is intended to bring coherence to the Council's various overseas links. It stipulates that: "whatever the label or nature of the Council's international relationships, they must demonstrate clear benefits" (GC, 2006: 5). This, along with the fact that the International Strategy Refresh document calls for a 'robust engagement' with Eurocities (GC, 2009: 12), makes the project a very timely piece of research. In addition to the International Strategy the research takes place in the context of Gateshead Council's Sustainable Community Strategy: 'Vision 2030'. In this document the 'big ideas' of 'Gateshead Goes Global' and the 'City of Gateshead'<sup>3</sup> are outlined, and posited as contributing to the realisation of the potential for growth and prosperity that exists in the local community.

On the academic and theoretical side, the research is chiefly situated in terms of the linked debates surrounding 'Europeanization' and the twenty-first century 'networked city'. Associated with the emergence of EU competencies and the pooling of power, 'Europeanization' is: "a process whereby European ideas and practices transfer to the core of local decision-making as well as from local policy-making arenas to the supranational level" (John, 2001 in Marshall, 2004: 6), and is a reflection of the need for local authorities to adapt to the increasing power of the EU in domestic affairs and the concomitant 'upgrading' of the horizon of local politics from the domestic to the international. It is not

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<sup>3</sup> The author acknowledges the fact that Gateshead is currently *not* a city. However, the NewcastleGateshead partnership meets Eurocities' criteria for membership, and so is treated as a single urban unit – in effect a city - for official purposes.

necessarily involuntary, however, and Gateshead Council's possession of an international strategy is an indication of their early and wise appreciation of the need to be both flexible and outward looking as EU integration deepens.

## 4. RESULTS PART 1: “COSTS OF INVOLVEMENT IN EUROCITIES”

### 4.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Interview feedback from Gateshead Officers with experience of working internationally and within Eurocities agreed on four main problems ('costs') that were commonly encountered:

- **Cost and Expense** – The financial implications of international work, particularly finding funding for travel and accommodation and arguments over who pays for what, and where this money comes from.
- **Environmental Costs** – In light of one of Gateshead's 'Big Ideas' in its Vision 2030 document being of a green, sustainable and environmentally responsive Gateshead, the effect of international travel in adding to the Council's carbon footprint was seen as a point of contention.
- **The Infamous 'Jolly'** - Officers referred to the idea that travelling internationally was widely seen as a bonus (Interview 3), and unless funding was secured from undertaking such trips, people were unclear about what was really being achieved.
- **Legitimacy Concerns** – Underlying feedback about the negative sides of involvement in international activities was the question of whether it was legitimate and justifiable to divert the Council's resources away from the local and towards the international, and whether this really benefits the local community that the Council serves.

### 4.2 ANALYSIS

The data collected revealed that the drawbacks, challenges and costs associated with the Council's international activity were well understood and broadly shared amongst the members of the International Officer's Group. All interviewees highlighted similar issues along the lines of the categories listed above. In addition, these findings were corroborated by feedback from

Newcastle, Sunderland and Manchester City Councils, who echoed the same concerns of the Gateshead staff.

However, the respondents not affiliated to Gateshead Council placed a greater emphasis on the idea that the costs involved, particularly financial ones,

*“...We get a lot of policy briefings, partner searches, briefings on funding programmes... So we get a lot of information from [Eurocities]... I would say it’s a positive thing to be involved in, and not being part of it would be a shame, I think, and lower our profile generally”*

Interview 10

were not seen as an issue but as simply necessary if this kind of work was to be undertaken - and argued that such costs were offset by the benefits gained, primarily in terms of intelligence and information which could then be used to save money by delivering services more effectively (Interview 10; Interview 12). It

was thus suggested that *not* working internationally as a result of excessive concerns over the diversion of resources involved would actually be more problematic in the sense that the Council’s profile would suffer and it would lose out on valuable information, along with the ability to build bridges and share practice.

An important finding was that when asked about the negative side of being a part of the Eurocities network, all the information received referred to international work generally, rather than membership of Eurocities specifically. Therefore, aside from an annual membership fee for full members in 2009 of €15,820 (Eurocities, 2005: 9) – which Gateshead and Newcastle tender jointly – Eurocities can be seen to generate no extraordinary or particular costs to Gateshead Council. The main challenges to overcome thus centre around removing the suspicion that is often associated with international work, and so generating a better understanding of what work is being done as well as why Eurocities membership is justified, valuable, and ultimately of benefit to the Council – which this report argues it is.

## 5. RESULTS PART 2: “BENEFITS OF INVOLVEMENT IN EUROCITIES”

### 5.1 RESEARCH FINDINGS: INTERVIEWEES’ PERCEPTIONS

Again, respondents from within Gateshead Council shared broadly similar opinions as to what they gained from their interactions with the Eurocities network. Consensus focused on three main benefits:

- **Using the Network to Improve Knowledge** – Eurocities was cited as an excellent platform by which Officers from the Council could exchange ideas and discover ‘best practice’ models from around Europe, as well as increase their understanding of what other cities were doing and collaborate on innovative solutions to common problems.
- **Using the Network for Funding Opportunities** – That Eurocities allowed Officers to find out about various projects and promotions that could secure funding was seen as an important benefit. The Eurocities ‘Flash’ newsletter provided advance warning of such opportunities and kept readers up to date with where money was heading.
- **Using the Network to Raise Gateshead’s Profile in Europe** – The chance to network with cities under the Eurocities umbrella and to subsequently raise the profile of the Borough was seen as valuable by most respondents – including those in departments not directly involved in Eurocities (Interview 4). Spill-over effects of this, such as attracting increasing numbers of tourists or large sporting and cultural events to Gateshead were regarded as very important by Officers.

However, feedback and information from the other councils spoken to brought some additional understandings of the Eurocities network to the table, so indicating various other benefits of involvement that were not explicitly acknowledged by Gateshead Officers. These were as follows:

- **Eurocities as a Prestigious Brand** – Newcastle and Manchester City Councils (Interview 11; Interview 15) made particular reference to the

status of Eurocities in the wider Brussels/EU set up, mentioning that it had a very good brand and identity in Europe and a very knowledgeable staff who were very good at what they were doing, thus making for the effective and distinctive representation of the city at the EU level.

- **Eurocities as an Exclusive ‘Club’** – Also the other councils drew attention to the fact that Eurocities actively restricts its membership and does enforce certain rules and restrictions on who can join (rejecting, for example, Leicester City Council’s bid for membership). This factor adds to the perception of the network as somewhat prestigious, giving it the appearance of an exclusive organization and allowing it to maintain focus.
- **Eurocities as a Lobbying Body** – As a result of the two factors above, Eurocities was seen to give its members a disproportionate voice in European policy/legislation making circles, ensuring that the needs of urban conurbations were heard at this important level of government.

## 5.2 ANALYSIS

The benefits perceived by interviewees from within Gateshead Council thus reveal a narrower focus than those of alternative contacts. The issues of improving knowledge or accessing funds (and to a lesser extent, raising the area’s profile) are cited as being very generic benefits of international work for local governments and part of a ‘common narrative’ of international cooperation (de Groot & Dibley, 2008: 29, 30). In this sense, the perceived benefits of membership of the Eurocities network for those within Gateshead Council fail to take into account some key aspects of the Eurocities set up that makes it particularly and uniquely valuable to local councils looking to make an impact at the European level.

Having said that, however, a key function of networks *is* to provide knowledge spill-overs and they *are* about developing cultures of cooperation and improving methods of working (Phelps, McNeill & Parsons, 2002: 211,

214). The data thus shows that Gateshead is achieving some of the key benefits directly associated with networking. According to the benefits outlined by Gateshead Officers, the Council's International Strategy apparently concentrates on using Eurocities as a mechanism of 'horizontal Europeanization', that is, supporting the systematic exchange of experience, learning from peers, and best practice transfer - which are important at the local level (Kern, 2007: 5). Such an approach is not 'wrong', therefore – and the analysis is not intended to portray it as such. What the additional data reveals though is that Gateshead does not achieve the full spectrum of advantages proffered by the Eurocities network specifically.

Where the two sets of interviewees (i.e. those in/outside of Gateshead Council) diverged particularly was in relation to the focus on using the network as a source of funding. Whereas Gateshead Officers indicated that their international work was easier to justify if they returned with funding secured, people responding from other authorities explicitly referred to the fact that money should not be a motivating factor, at least in relation to activities undertaken within the umbrella of Eurocities (see quotes, right). Comments from Sunderland,

*“...If you don't come back with a bag of money, there is a suspicion that maybe you're not being very effective”*

Interview 5

*“Money shouldn't be a motivating factor... Knowledge is as important as money”*

Interview 16

*“Good service delivery is more important than money, and doesn't necessarily come from having more cash”*

Interview 9

*“Policy learning and other indirect or non-financial gains from the Eurocities network are definitely as important as the financial ones”*

Interview 15

Newcastle and Manchester City Councils show that they considered non-financial gains as often more important than financial ones, and that although less obvious and sometimes less tangible (for example Officer development and policy learning), they should not be discounted. One respondent from Newcastle was particularly adamant that although money could be regarded as a legitimate goal of participating in Eurocities, what should be more vigorously

pursued was the outcome that the Council ultimately sought – notably improved service delivery (the example used was of a Council looking abroad to find out if there were better, more efficient ways to empty residents' bins) (Interview 11).

In addition, concentrating on using Eurocities as a funding body is unlikely to be especially fruitful. Though it is logical and rational for a council to be seeking a financial return on their international networking activities, in light

*“... The rules of engagement and the degree of difficulty to secure some funding is significant. It is not easy to access European money. It's very bureaucratic”*

Interview 13

of the recent expansion of the EU and the increasing tendency to allocate Structural Funds to these new member states in Eastern Europe, it has become very difficult for local authorities to access EU funding (see

quote) – even with the help of Eurocities. The expectation of doing so is perhaps therefore somewhat unrealistic, and blocks out the wider, non-financial benefits and values specific to the Eurocities network. This is a point reiterated in information provided by Eurocities itself, and to which the report will now turn.

### 5.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS: EUROCITIES - IN ITS OWN WORDS

Building on the above comments, if we look at the way in which the Eurocities network markets itself and publicises itself then references to funding provisions are infrequent. It describes itself as: “a network for exchange, communication and influence, giving each city a chance to communicate with European institutions” (Eurocities, 2007c), and the Eurocities Mission Statement outlines a commitment to: “a common vision of a sustainable future” and for: “achieving a European context where cities can be inclusive prosperous, creative and sustainable” (Eurocities, 2003). What Eurocities is, then, is a *political* network specifically geared towards granting cities (or in Gateshead's case ‘urban localities’) a central role in not only the EU's development, but also their own. It is not especially inspired by economics, but aims to promote European integration and cohesion, and seeks to forge a



strong common identity among cities (Phelps, McNeill & Parsons, 2002: 213). This is where its specific values lie.

As a means to achieving its grand vision of a sustainable future, Eurocities specifies in four complementary activities:

- **Campaigning: Raising Public Awareness** – developing Europe-wide campaigns on issues of common concern to members and citizens.
- **Services: Providing Services to Members** – keeping members up to date about projects and exchange activities.
- **Networking: Sharing and Improving Knowledge** – exchanging experiences between cities, comparing different approaches, testing innovative solutions and analysing best practices.
- **Lobbying: Developing and Influencing Policies** – providing a strong voice for cities in the EU, actively contributing to the development and implementation of relevant European policies, legislation and programmes. (see Eurocities, 2007a)

Eurocities can therefore be seen to offer a sort of 'holistic' approach to the development of cities (Eurocities, 2009) in which interactions are multi-directional. Its stable and interdependent structure reflects this and consequently, as a network, it is able to produce collectively relevant outcomes *despite* the diverging interests of members (Börzel, 1998: 262, 266).

## 5.4 ANALYSIS

In comparing the research data provided by interviews within and outside of Gateshead Council and the data from Eurocities personnel and publications – and linking this into academic research - several findings about the realised and potential value of Eurocities come to light.

Firstly, Gateshead Officers primarily use the network to 'download' information. They make use of the services and networking aspects of the network to strengthen their institutional capacity and improve the delivery of various activities. For example, one Gateshead Officer stated that working in Eurocities granted them: "a greater awareness of how our European neighbours are engaging young people, older people, people with disabilities... in cultural activities. How do we actually engage them? And we can find out about a lot of practical stuff – about promotions and specific activities... Because it's a forum where we share lots of information, you do come away with ideas to try within the council" (Interview 2). The same person also later summed up involvement in Eurocities as about: "promoting Gateshead as a European city... it's the learning and promoting, and looking for opportunities to consolidate existing partnerships but also establish new partnerships where we might pull resources to deliver an activity. We might secure funding because we're working with partners to deliver various cultural activities" (Interview 2).

Gateshead Officers therefore use Eurocities to keep up to date with EU related activities and to build up horizontal relations of trust and familiarity - with the associated benefit of bettering their chances of accessing discretionary structural funds or moneys allocated for specific projects. This fits well with one of Eurocities' key aims, that of promoting and fostering transnational cooperation and encouraging members to develop the capacity to think and act internationally (Griffiths, 1995: 215). In engaging with the network, Gateshead Council has responded to European integration and the need to be open to other areas with similar characteristics in order to optimize the ways in which they serve the local community.

Secondly, though - and partly as a result of the first point - Gateshead Officers made no reference to the value of Eurocities as a lobbying mechanism or as an exclusive kind of club. Their 'top-down' focus, in which it the Council is concerned to absorb information rather than give it therefore limits the benefits they currently enjoy and indicates a missed opportunity to take into account the specific holistic nature of the network. The second of Eurocities' key aims – of

equal weight to the first – is that of a wider lobbying agenda. As Ewen and Hebbert discuss: “the expansion of the network in the 1990s and the gradual shifting of funding eastwards towards accession countries caused Eurocities to evolve from simply a cooperative network to one enjoying a wider paradiplomatic role by which it seeks to defend the strategic position of the old cities of Europe” (Ewen & Hebbert, 2007: 336). To this end, and aided by its strong forum orientated organization, the network does have (as it claims and as other Council’s perceived), a: “formidable reputation for technically competent lobbying on behalf of urban Europe” (Gachelin, 1998 in Ewen & Hebbert, 2007: 336).

This lobbying and campaigning side of Eurocities therefore provides a valuable opportunity for member authorities to engage in the ‘uploading’, or ‘bottom up’ side of Europeanization, whereby the urban region’s interests are represented at the level of the EU institutions (see Diagram 1).

### Top-down and bottom-up Europeanisation

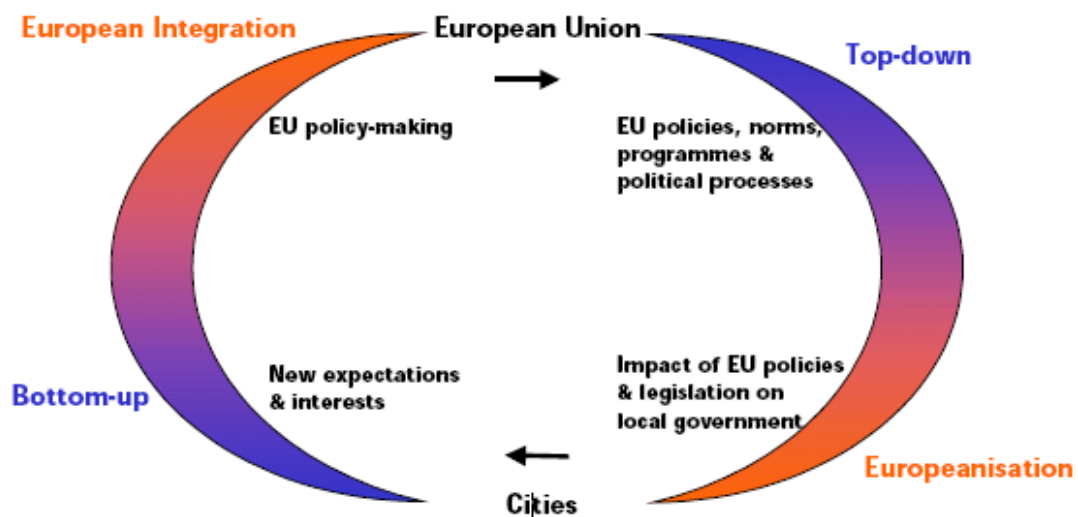


Diagram 1 (Wolffhardt et al, 2005: 7)

Through this ‘bottom-up’ process actors seek to feed their experiences back to supra-national bodies in order to lobby the relevant institutions and fine-tune the resulting European projects and programmes, making them more

relevant to the needs of the city or urban region (Marshall, 2004: 17). Whilst it can be exceedingly difficult to lobby on an individual basis, particularly for small or second cities, the Eurocities umbrella is specifically geared to this type of interaction, providing insight and administrative support for authorities seeking to take their issues to the highest level of EU government. In this way it is possible for local councils who perhaps are initially forced into cooperation with other cities (through, in this case, national decisions to allow for deeper European influence) to take control of this process and learn to respond to the various and not always welcome pressures of globalisation and regionalisation, turning these into forces for progress.

Furthermore, in Gateshead Council's International Strategy Refresh Document it is declared that: "it is critical to ensure that we have our voice heard through engaging with European institutions such as the European Parliament, European Commission and the Committee of the Regions" (GC, 2009: 23). So there *is* a stated commitment to the 'uploading' side of Europeanization and proactively seeking to have its interests heard at the EU level. What is it, though, that makes Eurocities particularly good for this kind of work? What makes it better than any other network or informal partnership that Gateshead could be involved in? It is to these issues that the report now turns.

## **5.5 WHY EUROCITIES?**

Eurocities is described by its Secretary General as: "a unique collective platform for influencing policies" (Bevan, 2009). In addition, it is otherwise described as "something of a unique set up and provides an easily accessible network of contacts and experts on various policy areas" (Interview 15); and as a: "successful and influential European network" (Baycan-Levent, Kundak & Gülümser, 2008: 85). Why is this so? Three key reasons are suggested by the research:

- **The Quality of Delegates** - it is common for senior EU officials to attend Eurocities meetings, thus giving other attendees a rare chance to network and build up relationships with key personnel
- **Links Between the Eurocities Brussels Secretariat and the EU Commission** – not only does Eurocities have a permanent base in Brussels, but it has an active, two-way dialogue with the institution with the most control over drafting European Union legislation: the EU Commission.
- **Eurocities' Homogenous Membership Base** – the similar characteristics of all members of Eurocities facilitates the formulation of a shared, mutually relevant 'urban point of view' specifically focused on the interests of small-medium sized urban areas, so it *will* represent Gateshead despite it's current non-city status.

The first point is supported by academic research and interview feedback. Griffiths writes that it would be otherwise impossible to meet such senior personnel and that these people bring with them advance warning of policy initiatives (Griffiths, 1995: 220). Staff at Eurocities described how though the Local Government Association and the North East England in Europe organization could potentially introduce Gateshead Officers to contacts in the EU, that these would not be of a similar quality or significance than those involved in Eurocities (Interview 9). In addition, Gateshead Officers with experience of involvement in Eurocities corroborated such observations, mentioning that the staff that did attend were perhaps too junior, and thus were unable to effectively interact with senior officials (Interview 6).

With regards to Gateshead Council's ambitions to have their voice heard at the European level, Eurocities has well-established links with the European Commission. That the Commission suffers a democratic deficit is a much-maligned point, and as such it engages in a reciprocal dialogue with Eurocities as a means to reach the citizens of Europe. For the Commission: "cities and local government associations can be important as knowledge holders and for legitimating their proposals" (Heinelt & Niederharter, 2008: 183). Eurocities and

the European Commission are accredited participants in a 'structured dialogue'. This is particularly important given the European Commission's central role in the policy making process. Currently Eurocities is successfully lobbying for the Commission to push a new urban mobility plan into action, and in the past has called on the Commission to provide more targeted support for sustainable urban development. As such, the relevance of cities – and of Eurocities – vis-à-vis other actors and lobby groups at the EU level is increased.

The last point links back to earlier observations that Eurocities functions as something resembling an exclusive 'club' and which are supported in the literature by, for example, Stone's categorization of public policy networks in which he describes these 'clubs' as representative of: "new forms of authority and global policy-making" (Stone, 2004: 555). That Eurocities is specifically orientated to cities and urban areas makes it more useful and relevant to the Council than, for example, the LGA, which is very general in its outlook. Therefore if Gateshead were able to capitalise on Eurocities' weight as a lobbying body, and get its voice heard as part of an aggregated and influential grouping, it is likely to be more successful in effecting relevant policy change and reaping the rewards offered from working internationally.

## **5.6 SUMMARY**

Based on the research findings Eurocities can be seen to present the Council with more potential benefits than costs, and as such offers very good value for money. It offers a lot of scope for policy learning, for profile raising, making contact with the right people and bodies in Europe, and it grants an unparalleled degree of agency to members. This lobbying aspect is particularly important given not only the stated intentions of the International Strategy with regards to increasing the presence of Gateshead internationally, but also in the context of national governments having less of a role as exclusive 'gatekeepers' between foreign affairs and domestic affairs as processes of globalization and Europeanization continue.

Where the Council is currently strongest in its use of the Eurocities network is in its downloading aspects, where it uses it for policy learning and

*Reasons to be involved in Eurocities:*

- *'Horizontal' best practice sharing and networking among member cities*
- *Direct involvement in projects either via the network or bilaterally with other cities*
- *'Vertical' networking direct with the institutions of the European Union*

Interview 14

keeping up to date with information. However, the dynamics of Europeanization are more complex than this, and are underpinned by reciprocal interactions both horizontally and vertically: both between urban areas across Europe and between the various levels of governance that exist between the

local and the supranational. That Eurocities facilitates both of these makes it particularly valuable, as does the fact that: "the status, links and leverage of Eurocities is unparalleled in Europe" (Interview 9).

What effective engagement with Eurocities does is allow member Cities and Councils to gain some control over the increasing and unavoidable impact of the EU and to move from a state of inertia in response to these changes through to one of accommodation and proactive engagement with this level of government. Currently, evidence points to Gateshead absorbing information from Eurocities but failing to maximise its engagement and lacking the capacity or willingness to fully participate in those forums and working groups it is involved in (Interview 3; Interview 1). It is, therefore, primarily a policy-taker. However, Budapest is widely cited as an example of a city in Eurocities that has progressed from such a position to one of a proactive policy-maker in less than a decade (Martins & Álvarez, 2007: 404), and the next section deals with how Gateshead Council could emulate such an achievement.

## 6. GETTING THE MOST OUT OF EUROCITIES

As a precursor to the following recommendations, it seems appropriate to point out that Gateshead Council is currently in a fairly advantageous position in terms of the potential for it to capitalise on the full spectrum of benefits available through the Eurocities set-up. Most obviously, it is an existing member of the network despite it not being a recognised city. Its partnership with Newcastle City Council demonstrates an already present capacity to form relationships with other cities with shared interests, and work as part of a team – qualities which will serve Officers well in Eurocities. Furthermore, the fact that Gateshead Council has an approved and endorsed International Strategy and a long term vision underpinning this puts it ahead of the game in relation to many of its urban competitors. Not all cities have an international strategy, but doing so indicates an appreciation of a growing interconnectivity in Europe and beyond, as well as an alertness to the notion that trends and developments abroad affect local practice.

*“...This International Strategy will provide a platform for further developing our international partnerships. This is of great importance for the Council and our partners. Not only does international activity help build confidence, develop our economy and our learning – it also helps deliver a more outward looking borough and region”*

Foreword to the Gateshead Council's International Strategy, 2006-2009

So, much of the groundwork has already been done at the Council, and there is a clear framework in place and a stated aspiration to be outward looking and to be an international player. Based on interview feedback and supported by policy research, this section addresses the various strategies Gateshead Council should adopt in order to achieve a more robust engagement with Eurocities – and so realise their international potential.



## 6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS: EUROCITIES

Recommendations for a more effective use of the Eurocities network are as follows:

- **Have a Definite and Constant Focus** – Respondents highlighted the need for a distinction between ‘best practice’ and ‘relevant practice’ (Interview 11), and the need to be selective with regards to the areas in which the Council involves itself (Interview 6). It should, therefore, play to its strengths and aim for a narrow but deep involvement in the network.
- **Tell Your Own Stories** – Gateshead has a brilliant story to tell about culturally led regeneration, for example. Though Eurocities members may not know where it is geographically, if Gateshead can sell this story about itself then it can generate an identity that other cities can relate to. If the Council attends Eurocities meetings without offering reciprocal or useful information in exchange for that which it gathers itself, the Council risks generating feelings of mistrust, alienating itself, or simply not being visible enough to be approached for collaboration on projects that may bring financial rewards to the area.
- **Involve Elected Representatives in the Network** – Eurocities staff

*“Councillors have been elected to serve the community and decide on the way in which a local authority operates. They therefore have a vital role in guiding and supporting international work... In addition to adding political legitimacy to international work, the support of elected members is also important on a practical level in implementing partnerships. The leaders of overseas communities will almost certainly expect to meet their counterparts in a UK local authority”*

Handley, 2006: 13

highlighted the fact that in Britain generally, high-level support at Eurocities meetings was lacking, and that delegates from other member states tended to outrank those from the UK (Interview 9). Gateshead Officers – particularly those with experience of the network - felt that if they were accompanied on their trips by Politicians that this would add legitimacy and authority to the

feedback and recommendations that were suggested by returning Officers, as well as help raise the profile of Gateshead in the network.

- **Make Decisive Moves to Incorporate Eurocities Work into the ‘Day Job’** – Although perhaps an obvious recommendation, if Gateshead sees the value in the international opportunities provided by Eurocities then the work being done needs to be well resourced and objectives clearly defined. Furthermore, the work should be rational and have clear objectives and though costs should be contained, corners should not be cut.

In considering these recommendations the Council will be adopting a more confident and proactive approach to its Eurocities engagement, similar to that of much larger and influential cities. In terms of ‘telling stories’ Eurocities is particularly keen to support the cultural sector of cities (Eurocities 2007b) and there is potential for Gateshead Council to tap into the demand for expertise here. Another possible future area of involvement is in ‘Green Infrastructure’ (Interview 5), in which the Council has a growing interest.

## **6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS: “NEWCASTLEGATESHEAD”**

In spite of their joint membership of the Eurocities network, both Newcastle and Gateshead Officers acknowledged a lack of communication and alignment on their international work. Though this joint membership does not exclude the right for autonomous or independent activity in the network, the two authorities appear to have broadly similar aims in their international strategies – notably pertaining to enhancing their economic and cultural sectors (McCarthy, 1999: 225), and so a better relationship could be mutually beneficial. Furthermore, the status of city regions in global affairs is steadily increasing and, where (in European terms) authorities are small but geographically close, through collaboration they can ‘punch above their weight’ and more effectively compete for bigger prizes.

Having won the 2008 Eurocities Award for Participation for their 'Udecide' project, Newcastle's profile in the network has been raised and more interest generated in their activities (Interview 10; Interview 13). The brand of Newcastle is therefore arguably better known than the Gateshead brand and - with greater collaboration - this could be used as a stepping-stone for Gateshead to launch its own agenda within the network.

The main barriers to city collaboration include issues of time, trust and bureaucracy (Clark, 2007: 2). Officers at both councils were keen to stress the absence of any institutional obstacles to strengthening the NewcastleGateshead partnership but did recognise involvement in Eurocities to be 'uneven' and 'uncoordinated' (Interview 12). However, the NewcastleGateshead area has various qualities that could be harnessed for use in Eurocities: Firstly, it is often portrayed as an exemplar of: "the revitalising benefits of culture-led regeneration" (Miles, 2005: 913; Bailey, Miles & Stark, 2004: 51) – with the Quayside as a focal point. As such the region has been described as one of the world's top creative cities (Ward, 2002). Secondly, the region is seen as being 'in transition' – gradually developing from an industrial area to a knowledge-based society, and the City Development Company pointed to an emerging opportunity for NewcastleGateshead as a 'science city' (Interview 17). In this, it could act as a good example or figurehead for similar, post-industrial areas of Europe. Thirdly, NewcastleGateshead is regarded as being: "noisy and confident" (Miles, 2005: 920), with a very strong sense of regional identity. However, this identity was described by the OECD as 'under-utilised' in relation to political objectives (OECD, 2006: 11). Given Eurocities' political orientation, potential exists for joint use of the network as a means to realise such objectives.

Though the marriage is artificially constructed, there *is* cause for it to become more than symbolic, and Eurocities would appear to be an easily accessible mechanism to facilitate such a shift and to capitalise on the qualities of the region– and one that offers generous benefits for doing so.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In seeking to answer the key research questions outlined at the beginning of this paper, several key points have been made:

- Involvement in Eurocities cannot be seen to generate any extra costs or problems for Gateshead Council than the other types of international work they undertake. In addition, many of these problems are manageable and outweighed by the advantages that come from membership of the network
- Currently Gateshead makes good use of the 'downloading' aspects of Eurocities. To realise the full potential of the network, and to maximize the returns on the costs of membership, the Council needs to move away from emphasising the potential to use Eurocities as a money-spinner, and make space to capitalise on its significant weight as a lobbying body by which Gateshead (independently and in conjunction with Newcastle) can 'upload' issues of local importance and have its voice heard by the right people in the right institutions and policy-making circles.
- The most important recommendations as to how to get the most out of Eurocities are to streamline involvement and really try to sell its unique stories and experiences at Eurocities forums so that people begin to have a sense of what the Council can offer. Also if Elected Members – particularly the Leader of the Council, who has a specific symbolic function as the embodiment of the Borough – were to accompany Officers to Eurocities events, this would improve the confidence and ability of Officers to communicate with other delegates as well as make serious recommendations and aid an understanding of why international work is necessary for Gateshead as a small, local authority – thus spreading an international ethos throughout the Council.

To conclude, it has been the intention of the report to highlight the fact that Europe (and the European Union) is not something 'out there' that

Gateshead as a local authority can choose to drop in or out of – we *are* a part of it and it affects our lives both personally and professionally. This ‘European turn’ has brought with it an expansion of the governance paradigm espoused by the EU and resulted in the proliferation of networking. As Marshall states: “the Europeanized city is, invariably, also a networked city” (Marshall, 2004: 9). In this governance paradigm (as opposed to ‘government’) cities and regions are granted greater autonomy and a greater capacity to act on the international stage.

In this situation, where smaller authorities and cities can face being ‘drowned out’ by their larger, more influential counterparts, the Eurocities network (of which Gateshead Council is *already* a member) makes light of both the real and imagined distance between urban communities and is an incredibly valuable and effective tool which will aid the realization of the Council’s international aims, help it raise its profile and offer it representation at the level of EU institutions. For all such reasons, the report recommends that Gateshead Council’s international work is necessary in order for it to avoid getting lost in a period of globalisation and transnationalism - and that where Europe is important, Eurocities is essential.

## 8. APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: List of Interviewees Identified by Department and/or Organization

Interviewee 1: International Team, Gateshead Council

Interviewee 2: Cultural Services, Gateshead Council

Interviewee 3: Communities and Neighbourhoods, Gateshead Council

Interviewee 4: Sports and Leisure Events, Gateshead Council

Interviewee 5: Environmental Strategy, Gateshead Council

Interviewee 6: Local Agenda 21, Gateshead Council,

Interviewee 7: Economic Development, Gateshead Council

Interviewee 8: Economic Development, Gateshead Council

Interviewee 9: Economic Development, Eurocities

Interviewee 10: Transnational Policies and Resources, Newcastle City Council

Interviewee 11: Economic Strategy and Partnerships, Newcastle City Council

Interviewee 12: Social Inclusion, Newcastle City Council

Interviewee 13: Social Policy, Newcastle City Council

Interviewee 14: International Team, Newcastle Council

Interviewee 15: International Team, Manchester City Council

Interviewee 16: International Team, Sunderland City Council

Interviewee 17: City Development Company

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