

Lund University
The Department of Political Science

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Supervisor: Maria Strömvik



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“According to EU directives...”

An analysis of Europeanization of Swedish local level
governments

Maria Post

Abstract

Scholars on Europeanization generally agree that local level governments are somewhat Europeanized since they are affected by EU legislation. The debate between scholars rather revolves around *how* local level governments are Europeanized. This study finds itself at the centre of the debate and studies what aspects of Europeanization that are present in the local level governments in Sweden. The research question posed was: How Europeanized are local level governments in Sweden? The theoretical framework of the study was based on Europeanization theory and identified five different types of Europeanization: compulsory Europeanization, financial mobilization, lobbying, horizontal networking and dissemination. Using a content analytical framework, the available 279 municipal budgets in Sweden from the year 2023 were analysed and categorised according to the five types of Europeanization. The results indicated that the local level governments in Sweden were primarily Europeanized through compulsory Europeanization and somewhat Europeanized through financial mobilization. However, the results also concluded that Europeanization varies extensively across the different local level governments, with some local level governments not showing evidence of any type of Europeanization and some being intensely Europeanized.

Key words: Europeanization, local level governments, Sweden, multi-level governance, the EU

Word count: 19241

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1. Introduction

Does the European Union (hereafter the EU) only influence local level governments through legislation, or does it also provide an arena where local level governments can pose as active policy makers?

This question has kept scholars busy for decades and constantly causes new standpoints. From the glory days of the nation-state to the development of the idea of a Europe of the Regions and of a multi-level governance system in the 1990s, the regional and the local level governments have been the focus of a new field of research where researchers have gone beyond the nation-state: namely the study of Europeanization. Researchers discovered that not only does a membership in the EU affect the nation-state, but it also affects the subnational governments since they are often the institutions implementing EU regulations. While regions have been overly represented in the studies on Europeanization, local level governments have gained increased attention over the last 20 years (Fleurke & Willemse, 2007).

Today, it is estimated that approximately 60% of the decisions made by regions and local level governments in the EU are influenced by European legislation (CEMR, 2016: 3; Montin, 2015: 39). It would, however, appear that the EU membership not only came with responsibilities but also with opportunities for local level governments. The EU membership opened for a new arena, and regions and local level governments started setting up offices in Brussels – often as an attempt to influence the politics at the European level (Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013: 2).

While researchers generally agree that local level governments *are* affected by the EU, researchers are curious to study whether the EU provides more restrictions or more opportunities for local level governments. Some researchers focus on the effects of EU legislation on local level governments and claim that the EU hinders the local level governments through extensive legislation (Fleurke & Willemse, 2007). Other scholars instead argue that the EU enables the local level governments and that funding is the key aspect of the EU which local level governments are concerned with (John, 2001). A third group of scholars argue that local level

governments have become active policy makers, attempting to influence the legislation that they will later have to implement (Schultze, 2003).

Since the birth of the field of Europeanization, an overwhelming majority of studies has put the spotlight on Western and Central European countries, missing out on the nations in the periphery (Stoustrup, 2022; De Rooij, 2002; Havlik, 2014; Gröbe et al, 2023).

While there are similarities between local level governments in different EU member states, there are also key differences. Some countries in southern Europe, like Cyprus, are more centralized than local level governments in other EU member states (Kirlappos, 2021). Other local level governments are instead very decentralized. The Nordic states, for example, consist of local level governments with a high degree of autonomy, where the municipalities have a great deal of responsibilities (Pettersson, 2006: 32). Some scholars go as far as argue that the Nordic member states should be regarded as special cases of local level governments. Researchers emphasize that they are unique concerning the responsibilities, the central-local government relations and considering the systems of finance (Lidström, 2016: 414). The Nordic member states are, however, understudied within the research of Europeanization.

Sweden's history with the EU goes back almost three decades and they are one of the Nordic member states which are understudied in the research. When Sweden first joined the EU in 1995, the general prediction was that an EU membership would only have a limited effect on the municipalities and regions in Sweden (Montin et al, 2018: 6). However, because of strong subnational governments, it was quickly discovered that the EU did have an extensive effect on these governments (Lidström, 2011: 138). Lidström (2011) claims that while the local level governments in Sweden are understudied, their strong position in Sweden indicate that they should also be able to have an active role vis-à-vis the EU (137).

In this thesis, I therefore examine how Europeanized Swedish local level governments are and contribute to the research on Europeanization through studying a country that has been understudied within the field.

I furthermore attempt to bridge gaps in the research through undertaking a methodology which is also understudied in the field of Europeanization. The most

common research methods in Europeanization studies are small- n studies with interviews and surveys being the preferred methods. However, there is a distinct lack of research which studies files and documents of the daily administrative practice at the subnational level (Fleurke & Willemse, 2007: 70; Gröbe et al, 2023: 1411).

Thus, where the literature has primarily focused on Western and Central local level governments, I research the local level governments in Sweden. Where the literature is primarily concerned with small-n qualitative case studies, I conduct a large-n mixed methods approach where all 290 local level governments in Sweden are included. I examine the annual budgets in these local level governments and research how Europeanized the local level governments in Sweden are, based on the findings in the budgets.

The aim of the research is to investigate the instances of Europeanization that can be found when studying strategic documents at the municipal level. I seek to analyse how Europeanization can come to be expressed in Swedish municipalities and answer the following research question:

How Europeanized are local level governments in Sweden?

The thesis will unfold as follows. First, a brief section explaining the differences between the different terms referring to subnational actors is presented. Thereafter, the literature on the topic of local level Europeanization is discussed and reflected upon. Then, Europeanization as the main theory and its relevance in this thesis is further operationalized and explained. Next, the design of the analysis is elaborated on, together with the case selection as well as the selection of data and other analytical choices. Thereafter, the results of the study are presented, and finally I discuss the findings with consideration to the research question.

1.1 Subnational level governments vs regional level governments vs local level governments

In the literature, local and regional governments are often both put under the common name of “subnational level actors” or “subnational level authorities”. It is, however, important to distinguish between the regional and local level governments since they are not the same. Every EU Member State comprises a large number of

local level governments. Regions, on the other hand, do not exist in every Member State and look very differently depending on the state. Some have a long history and have been authorised a great deal of autonomy, while others are very new, lack powers and competences and have, in some cases, only been established to qualify for EU funding (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 7-8).

Local level governments in the EU consist of over 90 000 European counties, cities and municipalities. The competences of local level governments often include implementation of administrative tasks and providing different types of local services, such as social services (education, and childcare for example) and economic services (e.g. waste management and water supply). When referring to local level governments throughout this thesis, if not specified otherwise, the term includes all different types of local authorities that operate closest to the citizens. That includes municipalities, cities and counties (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 9). In the Swedish context, however, “municipalities” and “local level governments” are used interchangeably, since municipalities are the only type of local level governments that exist in Sweden.

It is, however, not always easy to separate between local level governments and regional level governments. Much of the research in the field have been done using the collective term of subnational governments (see Fleurke & Willemse, 2007; Callanan & Tatham, 2014) and the regional and local level governments are sometimes considered a common third level instead of constituting a separate third and fourth level of governance (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 6). Thus, this thesis does, in some instances, refer to the subnational level as a whole and not separate between the regional level and the local level.

2. Situating the research – The relationship between local level governments and the EU

Studying the relationship between the local level governments and the EU is not a recent phenomenon in scholarly debate. Through the research, scholars have come to agree that the local level governments and the EU-level are interrelated. They tend to agree that the EU affects local level governments with EU legislation, but that they also provide local level governments with a new opportunity structure where local level governments have the possibility to interact with the EU (De Rooij, 2002: 449-450). Thus, the debate among scholars is not whether the EU and the local level governments are connected or not, but rather *how* they are connected and in *what ways* the EU and the local level governments affect each other.

There are no clearly distinct camps in this scholarly debate, instead scholars tend to focus on different aspects of local level responses to the EU. Some scholars focus on the effects of EU legislation on local level governments (Fleurke & Willemse, 2007; Kirlappos, 2021; Kettunen & Kungla, 2005 among others), while others focus on lobbying at the EU level (Havlik, 2014; Huggins, 2018; Donas & Beyers, 2012; Callanan & Tatham, 2014 among others) or the use of transnational networks (see Kern & Bulkeley, 2009; Kern, 2019; Huggins, 2018).

This chapter elaborates on the relationship between local level governments and the EU through first explaining the origins of the scholarly debate, the concept of multi-level governance and the formal arenas where the EU and the local level governments may interact. Thereafter it accounts for the literature surrounding the theory which serves as the heart of this thesis – Europeanization – and discusses how scholars have chosen to approach the complex debate on the relationship between the EU and local level governments.

2.1 Local level governments entering the international arena

As early as the 1960s, the idea of a Europe of the Regions came to exist, where actors saw the potential of creating a “third level” in European politics, where regions would be capable of, and have direct access to, the European policy-making process. The concept saw its glory days in the 1980s and early 1990s, but eventually fizzled out when it became apparent that there would be no institutional changes in the EU great enough to grant that sort of power to the regions (Elias, 2008: 483-484).

Multi-level governance

In 1993, Marks offered a more restrained and theorized version of the idea of a Europe of the Regions. He suggested that what the international community was witnessing was an emergence of a system of multi-level governance which he defined as: “a system of continuous negotiation among nested governments at several territorial tiers—supranational, national, regional and local—as a result of the broad process of institutional creation and decisional re-allocation that has pulled some previously centralized functions of the state up to the supranational level and some down to the local/regional level.” (Marks, 1993: 392). With that, he argued that the typical grand theories of European integration, such as inter-governmentalism and neo-functionalism, had put too much emphasis on actors at the national and supranational level, overlooking the progressive empowerment of the regional and local level. (Elias, 2008: 485). Through separating the regional and local level, he also introduced an idea of a Europe of four levels, strengthening the voice of the local level (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 1).

Marks (1993) argues that what is occurring is a decentralization where decision-making is pooled from the member states in the EU in two different directions: to the EU institutions and to the subnational governments, and where the subnational governments have increased opportunities to interact with the EU directly, without including the state level (402). According to Marks (1993), the rise of liaison offices in Brussels serves as evidence for the vertical linkages that the subnational governments have developed with the EU. In these offices, the subnational level governments can actively bypass the nation-state and interact directly with for

example the Commission (402). Furthermore, the multi-level governance system entails that decisions made by one tier of government will have effects for governments in the same territory at the higher or lower tier, since all levels are interconnected (Hooghe & Marks, 2021: 24).

It is, however, recognized by Marks (1993), that the patterns of multi-level governance are not homogenous across the EU. Some countries are more decentralized than others and have strong regional and local governments whereas other countries are more centralized, resulting in less opportunities for the subnational governments to interact with the EU level (404). This claim has been confirmed by later research on multi-level governance (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 47).

Although most scholars do agree that there are multiple levels of governance (Gröbe et al, 2023; Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021 among others), multi-level governance has faced some criticism. Critics like Fairbrass and Jordan (2004) argue that multi-level governance overstates the autonomy of subnational and supranational actors, undermining the power that the states still possess. The conceptualization of multi-level governance has also been criticized, with Fairbrass & Jordan arguing that multi-level governance scholars present a description of contemporary changes in European governance rather than a new theory (152). However, regardless of whether multi-level governance can be considered a theory, a concept or merely a description, it provides a framework for understanding the interactions between different levels of governance which other theories can develop from.

Increased attention on local level governments

Around the same time as Marks introduced the concept of multi-level governance, the EU saw the creation of the, to this day, only formal institution where subnational level governments have the possibility to influence new EU legislation – the European Committee of the Regions. The Committee of the Regions did, however, never gain access to any formal legislative power. It serves as an advisory body to the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Parliament and its role is to provide opinions on legislative and policy proposals. Regions are not the only subnational level represented in the Committee of the

Regions, but they do have a stronger position in the Committee. The local level is represented through municipalities, however not nearly to the same extent as regions. The representatives from the municipal level are primarily from countries where there is no level between the municipal level and the national level (Heinelt, 2017: 16-17).

Local governments have, however, gained increased attention and relevance in the EU throughout the years. In 2007, the principle of subsidiarity was strengthened through the Lisbon treaty, when it was explicitly extended to the regional and the local level (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 4). A more recent example where the local level has gained attention is through the “Urban Agenda for the EU” which was formulated by the Pact of Amsterdam in 2016. It strived to involve Urban Authorities in both the design of policies that affect cities as well as mobilise Urban Authorities for the implementation of EU policies (Heinelt, 2017: 13-14).

Despite the increased focus in the EU regarding local level governments, the reality is that they still lack any formal decision-making power, while they at the same time are forced to implement more and more EU legislation. Scholars have not agreed on the exact level of influence that legislation from the EU level has on local level governments, but different authors, like Callanan (2012) and Schultze (2003) have agreed that almost all competences at the local level are partly regulated at the European level. That includes competences on water and waste management, agriculture, housing, social policy etcetera (754; 123). The European section of the United Cities and Local Governments (CEMR), estimates that approximately 60% of the decisions that are taken at the local and at the regional level are influenced by EU legislation (CEMR, 2016). Both the Committee of the Regions and scholars, such as La Porte and Pavón-Guinea, estimate that 70% of all EU legislation is implemented by local and regional authorities (Committee of the Regions, 2010: 8; La Porte & Pavón-Guinea, 2018: 50).

Based on the research of multi-level governance as well as the consensus that EU legislation does affect local level governments to a high extent, much research on the topic has surrounded the theory of Europeanization. The following section introduces the theory as well as the scholarly debate.

2.2 Europeanization: scholars theorizing the relationship between local level governments and the EU

Defining Europeanization

Europeanization is a broad theory used in academic research to discuss a wide range of phenomena. It has primarily gained attention for studying the Europeanization of national political systems and the Europeanization of regional authorities, whereas the Europeanization of local level governments have received comparatively little attention (Gröbe et al, 2023: 1411; Fleurke & Willemsse, 2007: 73). Essentially, the Europeanization literature concerning local level governments focus on the effects of the EU on the local level. It discusses the broad spectrum of activities enacted by local level governments, which are related to the EU (Gröbe et al, 2023: 1411).

While scholars use varying definitions for Europeanization, a common definition is presented by Radaelli (2003) as:

“Processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies” (Radaelli, 2003: 30).

Europeanization theory should not be confused with European integration. The latter studies why and how states voluntarily give up parts of their sovereignty to the EU, whereas Europeanization is the study of how member states and subnational actors adjust to the consequences of European integration. Therefore, European integration could be considered necessary in order to distinguish examples of Europeanization (Lindh, 2016: 78-79).

The literature on Europeanization and multi-level governance is very interconnected. When applying the theory of Europeanization, scholars often refer to multi-level governance as the context in which Europeanization analysis is situated (Kern & Bulkeley, 2009: 310). The theory of Europeanization builds on the premise that multi-level governance establishes, which is that there are multiple

levels of governance all of which are interconnected. A prerequisite for Europeanization theory is furthermore the claim by multi-level governance that national governments no longer are the only decision-makers in European politics and that the decision-making that is being made at the European level also influence the local level (De Rooij, 2002: 448).

Dimensions of Europeanization

The Europeanization literature can be divided into a vertical and a horizontal dimension, with the vertical dimension having gained the most attention among scholars. The vertical dimension studies the direct relationship between the local level and the EU level (Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013: 4). It can in turn be divided into two categories, top-down and bottom-up Europeanization. Top-down Europeanization comprises legislative and policy impact from the EU on local level governments. This includes both different aspects of compulsory adaptations, such as implementation of European legislation, but also opportunities that arise from funding schemes and programmes at the EU level. That is for example the introduction of EU funds, from which the local level governments can apply for money to realize projects (Lindh, 2018: 67; Gröbe et al, 2023: 1411).

Bottom-up Europeanization on the other hand refers to the attempts by local level governments to influence the decision-making at the European level to affect which legislation will come from the EU level and which funding the local level will have access to (Gröbe et al, 2023: 1411).

The horizontal aspect of Europeanization studies the cooperation and collaboration among local level actors. Local level governments can for example take part in networks where they have the possibility to learn from each other, share experiences and jointly come up with solutions to problems which they are confronted with (Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013: 4).

John (2000) chooses to compare the different aspects of Europeanization to a ladder and argues that Europeanization is a step-by-step process. He places the compulsory top-down aspects of Europeanization, such as implementing EU regulations, at the bottom of the ladder. Utilising EU funding, he argues, is the second step of the ladder, since it is a voluntary activity, unlike implementing EU regulations. Engaging in networks is the third step of the ladder, but local level governments

finally climb to the top of the ladder and become fully Europeanized once they fully incorporate European ideas and policies in their internal agendas as well have the possibility to enter the EU decision-making process (881-882; Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 31).

Scholars use different terminology for the different categories of vertical and horizontal Europeanization, however, very few use the ladder metaphor introduced by John (2000). While many use the terms top-down, bottom-up and horizontal Europeanization (see Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021; Kirlappos, 2021), it is almost equally as common to refer to the former categories as downloading, uploading and crossloading Europeanization (see Marshall, 2005; Gröbe et al, 2023). Since both sets of terminology can be used as synonyms, I, in this thesis, only use the former terminology to avoid confusion, and the different aspects of Europeanization are therefore referred to as top-down, bottom-up and horizontal Europeanization.

The following paragraphs provide a general overview of the literature on vertical and horizontal Europeanization, starting with top-down Europeanization.

Top-down Europeanization

There are several examples in the literature of when scholars have studied top-down Europeanization in the setting of local level governments. Since it has already been established by scholars and organizations that a majority of the decisions that are taken at the local and at the regional level are influenced by EU legislation, scholars researching top-down Europeanization are primarily interested in studying whether the EU provides more restrictions (compulsory Europeanization) or whether they provide more opportunities (funding) for the local level governments (CEMR, 2016; Fleurke & Willemse, 2007).

Studies of this type include for example a study by Fleurke and Willemse on Dutch municipalities and provinces (2007). They reach the conclusion that the EU influence sub-national decision making to a fairly large extent and that the EU both constrains and enhances subnational decision-making. The EU contributes with funding, which enhances subnational decision making, as well as legislation, which constrains the decision-making abilities of the subnational actors (85).

John (2001) argues that “the main aspect of the EU that preoccupies local and regional governments is the disbursement of funds” (John, 2001: 67), which would indicate that the opportunities are more important to the local level governments than the restrictions. In the study by Van Bever and Verhelst (2013) on local level governments and European funding, they find support for the claim presented by John. Van Bever and Verhelst find funding to be the area which local level governments consider the most important in relation to the EU. However, their study also shows that few Flemish local governments have a strategy in obtaining money from the structural funds offered by the EU. According to their findings, only the largest cities, population wise, have a proper strategy for acquiring money from the EU structural funds (Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013: 10).

De Rooij (2002) uses local level governments in the Netherlands as his case study when analysing the impact of the EU on the local level governments. Through interviews with officials in Dutch municipalities, he researches whether the opportunities through funding are used or not, or whether the Dutch municipalities contact with the EU is merely to implement policy. He argues that whether the opportunities that are provided by the EU are taken or not, depends on the nation state. This regardless of, whether competences are centralized or not and the size of the local level governments (449). He reaches the conclusion that small and middle-sized villages only passively dealt with EU affairs, through the implementation of policies or receiving funding which they did not actively have to apply for. Some even claimed that they did not interact with the EU whatsoever, not even through compulsory Europeanization. Big municipalities, on the other hand, actively made use of the opportunities provided by the EU (De Rooij, 2002: 462-463).

Other examples of research on top-down Europeanization include Stoustrup (2022), who researched how aligned local level rural policies are with EU rural policy. He concludes that there appears to be a clear alignment between the rural policies at the local level governments and the EU level, despite the rural policies at the EU level not being legally binding. He, however, argues that a key reason for that is that the European rural approach is being implemented through the EU programme LEADER where local authorities can apply for funding for local projects (2485-2487).

A final example on top-down Europeanization research is by Kirlappos (2021), who took on a different approach, studying the case of Cyprus. The country is one of the few EU member states that is witnessing increased centralism, according to Kirlappos (651). The local governments in Cyprus have a low level of autonomy and Kirlappos (2021) concludes in his research that top-down Europeanization therefore is limited in Cyprus (651). These results correspond with the earlier described claim by Marks (1993), that centralized states with weak local level governments would provide fewer opportunities for the local level governments to interact with the EU (404).

Bottom-up Europeanization

An extensive part of the Europeanization research is concerned with bottom-up Europeanization, and primarily attempts of bottom-up Europeanization by cities. Cities are the most common type of local government studied in the research on bottom-up Europeanization. They are commonly the largest type of local level government and are thus assumed to have the most interest in influencing the EU and to have the most resources to do so (Havlik, 2014: 95). Havlik (2014), for example conducted a study on bottom-up Europeanization in Czech and German cities, where he chose to only include cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (95). Van Bever & Verhelst (2013) studied different types of Europeanization in Flemish local level governments, and they also concluded that the size of the local government matters when determining the success of bottom-up attempts of Europeanization (17).

The bottom-up Europeanization research is also commonly put in relation to top-down Europeanization. Researchers are interested in if, why and how local level governments interact and try to influence the EU (Marshall, 2005; Schultze, 2003 among others). Marshall (2005) for instance studied both top-down and bottom-up Europeanization in Glasgow and Birmingham and argues that clear top-down and bottom-up processes were visible in both cities (681). Schultze (2003) takes it one step further and argues that cities have gone from passive policy takers to active policy makers, attempting to influence the legislation that they later will have to implement (123). One example that strengthens the argument by Schultze is that some cities have their own liaison offices in Brussels, which they use to lobby and

to represent themselves. The city of Gothenburg, located in Sweden, is one of those cities, according to Lindh (2018). Lindh concludes that the liaison office has been an important investment for Gothenburg to improve its bottom-up Europeanization (74). However, Schultze points out that local level governments rarely have the money and capacity to become actively involved at the EU-level on their own, especially not smaller local governments, but that it has become increasingly common for cities to collectively lobby at the EU level through for example shared liaison offices or through networks (Schultze, 2003: 123).

Networks as facilitators for active bottom-up Europeanization, have not only been studied by Schultze, but have also been researched among several scholars. Callanan (2012) for example studied local government associations in England, Denmark and Ireland and their attempt to influence EU environmental directives, while Heinelt and Niederhafer (2008) researched the pan-European cities' organizations of Eurocities and CEMR and concluded that they both have certain access points to the EU institutions (183).

A certain part of Europeanization literature is interested in the networks themselves and why local level governments are members. Kern and Bulkeley (2009) established that the motivations for memberships in networks are connected to both the dimension of bottom-up Europeanization, as has been exemplified by the previous paragraphs, but also to horizontal Europeanization (328). Kern and Bulkeley (2009) specifically study transnational municipal networks and identify that transnational networks both work as representatives of their members in Brussels (bottom-up Europeanization) and serves as a platform for citizens to learn from each other and find mutual solutions for shared problems (horizontal Europeanization) (328).

Huggins (2018) further builds on the conclusions by Kern and Bulkeley that influencing EU policy and the sharing of best practices are two key reasons for local level governments to engage in networks, but he also adds a third reason. The third reason he identifies is to obtain funding, which fits into the top-down aspect of Europeanization. He claims that a membership in a transnational network can function as a platform for local level governments to find out about available funding opportunities and, in some cases, ease the administrative burden (1267).

Horizontal Europeanization

The literature on horizontal Europeanization does partly consist of literature on local level governments using networks to learn from each other, as exemplified by Kern and Bulkeley, as well as Huggins, but it also includes other examples. Falkenhain et al (2012) analysed town twinning as a form of horizontal Europeanization. They argue that the purpose of town twinning is to develop a sense of European identity as foster a sense of ownership of the EU. In their results, they found that town twinning is most common in small and medium sized EU countries, like Estonia and Finland as well as in EU candidate countries (233, 238).

Gröbe et al (2023) also introduced another aspect and definition of horizontal Europeanization which they refer to as dissemination. It is oriented on the horizontal spectrum, but instead of referring to relations between different local governments and networks at the same level, it refers to the relationship between the local governments and their citizens. It includes different types of European activities by the local government that is aimed at the citizens. This includes European school exchanges, organisations of events with European issues and other ways of spreading information about the EU to the population (1415).

This chapter has presented an overview of the literature on the relationship between local level governments and the EU through the frameworks on multi-level governance and Europeanization. The following chapter further delves into what aspects of Europeanization that are being used in this thesis, how Europeanization is practically utilized when realizing the study and what the expectations for the analysis are.

3. Recognising types of Europeanization

As is evident from the previous chapter, Europeanization is a broad theory consisting of several different dimensions. Scholars use different definitions, ranging from very narrow to very broad. Definitions can for example in some cases only recognize aspects of top-down Europeanization, but in some cases be as broad as to expand beyond the EU and include Europe as a whole (Radaelli, 2003: 31).

For the theoretical framework constructed in this thesis, Radaelli's definition of Europeanization is used. This definition was referenced to in chapter 2.2 and reads as follows:

“Processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies” (Radaelli, 2003: 30).

It thus takes somewhat of a middle ground. It is broad in the sense where it includes top-down, bottom-up as well as horizontal Europeanization, but it limits itself through not reaching beyond the borders of the EU.

In line with previous research, this thesis situates itself within the realm of multi-level governance. In practice, meaning that it is to be assumed in this thesis that actors at the supranational, national and subnational levels are interconnected horizontally as well as vertically (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 32). Europeanization theory is used to study this relationship in order to discover how much of the EU is present in the budget documents at the local level.

The following sections further explain the Europeanization aspects of interest. That is the two vertical Europeanization aspects, top-down and bottom-up, as well as horizontal Europeanization. The purpose is to connect the theory to the material and clarify how evidence for each type of Europeanization is recognised in the material. The last section in the chapter presents the expected findings of each type of Europeanization.

3.1 Top-down

The top-down Europeanization dimension is distinguished into two separate categories. The first one is hereafter referred to as “compulsory Europeanization” and the second to “financial mobilisation”.

All mandatory responsibilities that local level governments have which stems from the EU are considered compulsory Europeanization. There are two key types of compulsory Europeanization mentioned in the literature, which can be assumed will be found in the material.

The first type of compulsory Europeanization that the local level governments must take into consideration is new EU legislation. Actors at the local level need to be constantly updated on new legislation and new responsibilities which may fall on their table and how that affects their everyday politics (Lindh, 2016: 82-83; Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013: 9). The legislation which the local level must implement derives from different policy areas, with environment and agriculture being the two policy areas where the European impact is the most prevalent (Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013: 9). This type of compulsory Europeanization is recognized in the material through explicit references to new EU legislation or case law by the Court of Justice, since that also serves as legislation (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 47).

The second type of compulsory Europeanization is broader and includes the core principles of the EU which the local level governments also must take into consideration. Since the local level governments of interest exist in a country that is a member of the EU, they are required to follow all requirements that comes with an EU membership, including the EU treaties. The local governments must for example consider the basic freedoms upon which the internal market is built: the basic freedoms of persons, services, goods and capital (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 47).

Following through with the EU elections is another example of compulsory Europeanization stemming from the treaties. Article 22.1 and 22.2 TFEU requires that citizens in the EU have the right to vote for local and European elections in the Member State where they reside. To follow through with that demand requires resources and personnel from the local level governments which affects their

budgets (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 47). The second type of compulsory Europeanization is also recognized through explicit references to either the treaties or to measures taken by the local level governments that stems from the treaties, for example references to the EU election held in 2024.

Financial mobilization is the voluntary aspect of top-down Europeanization, where local level governments have the opportunity to apply for EU funding for projects which have a direct correlation with EU cohesion policy (Lindh, 2016: 82). These opportunities arise in areas where the EU has limited legal competences and administrative capacity and where it then uses policy programmes to realise its objectives (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 54). Financial mobilization is recognized in the material through explicit references to EU funds, or other EU programmes or projects where the local level governments have the possibility to retrieve funding.

3.2 Bottom-up

Bottom-up Europeanization comprises activities by local level governments with the incentive to influence EU legislation, so that EU law corresponds to the interests of the local level governments. The legislation that the local level governments want to influence could range from cohesion policy to energy policy. One of the most common ways in which local level governments practice bottom-up Europeanization is for example through feedback to the European Commission on how future Structural Fund programmes should be structured (Marshall, 2005: 680). Although the goal with bottom-up Europeanization could be to influence future funding programmes, it should not be confused with the financial mobilization aspect of top-down Europeanization. Callanan and Tatham explain the difference between the two through *when* the local level governments interact with the EU. Bottom-up Europeanization, they explain, is proactive and seeks to influence future EU policy and legislative outcomes. Financial mobilization top-down Europeanization, on the other hand, is reactive and is characterized by local level governments trying to obtain funding from EU programmes or funds which are already in place (Callanan & Tatham, 2014: 191-192).

Attempting to influence EU legislation, bottom-up Europeanization, is for simplification purposes hereafter referred to as “lobbying”. These lobbying attempts can be done either through the national governments or through networks and associations which can represent their interests. Some local level governments may also have their own office in Brussels, from which they can practice lobbying (Gröbe et al, 2023: 1413).

Lobbying is recognized through explicit references to wishes to influence EU legislation. This can manifest itself through for example explanations on how the local level government works with networks to influence the EU. It can also be visible through references to liaison offices in Brussels or simply through mentioning a local strategy for influencing the EU.

3.3 Horizontal

The horizontal Europeanization aspect is, in similarity with top-down Europeanization, divided into two sections for the remainder of this study. The reason for that is to be able to incorporate the dissemination aspects of horizontal Europeanization, that was introduced by Gröbe et al (2023). I thus distinguish between the aspects of horizontal Europeanization through referring to them as “horizontal networking” and “dissemination” (Gröbe et al, 2023).

Horizontal networking constitutes of references to cooperation between local level governments beyond the national borders. This includes for example participation in transnational networks and cooperation with local level governments in other European countries where the intention is to share experiences, exchange ideas or come up with solutions to mutual problems (Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013: 4; Gröbe et al, 2023: 1415).

It can potentially be difficult, however, to distinguish whether a membership in a network is an example of horizontal networking or if it is an example of lobbying or financial mobilization. As Huggins (2018) explained in the previous chapter, reasons for being involved in transnational networks could be to obtain information regarding funding (financial mobilization), to influence EU policy (lobbying) or to learn from one another and share information on best practices (horizontal networking) (1267).

To properly distinguish horizontal networking from instances of financial mobilization and lobbying, horizontal networking is recognized through explicit statements in the municipal budgets that a membership in a network, or a collaboration with a local level government in another EU member state, has policy transfer or best practices purposes (Gröbe et al, 2023: 1415).

Dissemination, which Gröbe et al (2023) describes as “the horizontal relationship between the local governments and its citizenry” (1415), includes European activities by the local governments that targets the citizen. It is measured and recognized through references to different Europe-related events, school exchanges, spreading of information on the EU or other similar activities that includes or target the citizens (1415). Gröbe et al (2023) researched dissemination in German local level governments and concluded that dissemination was the most common type of activity carried out at the local level (1426).

3.4 Expected findings

All aspects of Europeanization presented in this chapter are expected to be found in the material, but to a varying degree.

Compulsory Europeanization

As a result of the many ways in which the EU affects local level governments through top-down Europeanization, it can also be argued that EU legislation has a significant effect on public budgets at the local level (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 50). Environmental and energy legislation for example, have been argued to have had a considerable financial effect on municipalities. Legislation such as the Water Framework Directive led to the undertaking of major costly investments for municipalities. Not to mention the effects of the General Data Protection Regulation (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 51). Thus, it is to be expected from the annual budgets studied in this thesis, that top-down compulsory legislation is present.

Financial mobilization

There are a wide range of funding opportunities available for local level governments which scholars in European theory have argued are important to local level governments (Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013; De Rooij, 2002: Fleurke &

Willemse, 2007). Since the Swedish municipalities are examples of local level governments with a high level of autonomy, it is thus expected that there are instances of financial mobilization in the budgets. However, research on Europeanization through financial mobilization has indicated that it is primarily larger local level governments which have a proper strategy for obtaining funding from the EU (Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013; De Rooij, 2002). Thus, instances of financial mobilization are primarily expected to be found in budgets belonging to bigger municipalities.

Lobbying

Since scholars have primarily witnessed lobbying in cities, it is therefore not expected that many examples of lobbying will be detectable in this study that includes all 290 municipalities in Sweden (Schultze, 2003: 123; Havlik, 2014: 95). Only approximately 20 municipalities in Sweden have over 100 000 citizens and some are as small as having only 2500 inhabitants. However, it is expected that the larger municipalities will include references to lobbying.

When lobbying attempts are detected, it is expected to be primarily found through references to networks. Networks are what the previous literature has found to be the most common method, especially for smaller local level governments (Schultze, 2003: 123).

Horizontal networking

Horizontal networking is expected to be present to some extent. Memberships in transnational networks often cost money, while collaborations between local level governments in Sweden and local level governments in other EU member states can occur without any explicit costs. When studying budget documents, it is therefore expected that more references to transnational networks are to be found, rather than references to collaborations between local level governments in Sweden and in other EU member (Grønnestad & Bach Nielsen, 2022: 2954).

The evidence from the 2013 study on Flemish local level governments by Van Bever and Verhelst, however, diminishes the expectations to find many references to horizontal networking in the budgets. In their study, they found that only 26,4% of the Flemish local governments had twinning arrangements with local

governments in other EU member states and that only 17,3% of the local governments participated in transnational network arrangements (16).

Dissemination

Since dissemination has been found to be a common type of Europeanization in local level governments in previous research, it is expected to be found in the material. However, many of the European activities that are included in the dissemination spectrum are voluntary for the municipalities, which could potentially mean that they are not always prioritized (Gröbe et al, 2023: 1427). Gröbe et al (2023) has investigated whether financially challenging times could have an impact on these activities. They, nevertheless, concluded that financial restrictions through for example budget consolidation programmes did not affect the European engagement of municipalities (1427). Thus, aspects of dissemination are expected to be found in the municipal budgets.

4. Designing the research

The previous chapter defined Europeanization, explained how instances of Europeanization are recognized in the material of this study as well as presented what the expectations for each type of Europeanization are. In this chapter, the analytical choices for the analysis are outlined. Firstly, the decision to study the local level governments in Sweden is accounted for. Then the analytical framework of content analysis is explained and the analytical decisions are clarified.

4.1 Case selection: Swedish municipalities

The Swedish local level governments, the municipalities, were chosen for this study for two main reasons. First, the local level governments in Sweden, as well as the local level governments in the other Nordic EU member states, are understudied within the research field of Europeanization. Therefore, I have chosen to apply Europeanization theory on the Swedish municipalities as an attempt to bridge a gap in the research.

Previous literature on Europeanization in local level governments have primarily focused on Western and Central European countries. Germany and The Netherlands for example appear in much of the research (Stoustrup, 2022; De Rooij, 2002; Havlik, 2014; Gröbe et al, 2023 among others).

The literature on the Nordic countries have primarily been concerned with Europeanization on the regional level (Lindh, 2016). One of the few studies on Europeanization of local level governments in Sweden is the study on bottom-up Europeanization in Gothenburg, which was mentioned briefly in chapter 2.2. In that study, Lindh (2018) stated that bottom-up Europeanization was practiced by the city of Gothenburg and that it had been improved over the past ten years. Lindh also concluded that more research needed to be conducted on the Europeanization process in Swedish municipalities (78-79).

Second, the Swedish municipalities provide for interesting cases since they possess a high level of autonomy and exist in a rather decentralised context, in relation to local level governments in other EU member states (Lidström, 2016: 414). This

would indicate, according to scholars such as Marks (1993) and Guderjan & Verhelst (2021), that the Swedish local level governments would both be more affected by EU legislation and also have more opportunities to interact with the EU level than local level governments in other, more centralized, EU member states.

All municipalities in Sweden have been chosen for this study to include a wide range of local level governments of varying sizes and geographical positions. In Sweden, the government structure is divided into three levels: the national, the regional and the local, or municipal level. Sweden is composed of 290 municipalities, and they are all included in this study. The municipalities compose both the smallest rural villages and the largest cities and thus vary in size from the smallest, Dorotea¹, with approximately 2460 inhabitants, to Stockholm with approximately 990 000 inhabitants (SCB 2023a; SCB 2023b).

The Swedish municipalities possess a considerable extent of autonomy and exist in a balance between central control and local autonomy. The municipalities have a great deal of responsibilities and oversee an extensive amount of the welfare state. Similarly to other European local governments, they handle elderly care, schools, preschool, culture and social services. They also have an overarching responsibility to provide housing, which is often done through companies, and to handle the infrastructure and water system within the municipality (Bäck et al, 2015: 206; Petersson, 2006: 37). Although the responsibilities of local governments are regulated by the parliament, the municipalities carry a considerable number of powers, for example the right of taxation. They also carry a planning monopoly, which give them an extensive authority of the land allocation (Sellers & Lidström, 2020: 78; Lidström, 2011).

When compared to local level governments in other European countries, most similarities are to be found within other Nordic states. Within the Nordic states, the autonomy of the local governments is regulated by the state, as opposed to the federal states of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, where the states have laws that differ between each other (Strandberg, 2022: 249). The Nordic countries all share that they have local level governments that are relatively autonomous and that they

¹ The competition for smallest municipality is between Dorotea and Bjurholm, with Dorotea being, at the time of writing, slightly smaller.

have an internal organization that emphasizes collective responsibility (Lidström, 2016: 414).

However, the Swedish municipalities also have similarities with other local level governments in other European countries. They share, like the other Nordic countries, but also Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, responsibility for the welfare state. The responsibility is carried out through professionalized and large local authorities. This can be put in contrast to the so-called clientilistic/patronage model, which can instead be found in countries in southern Europe (Goldsmith, 1992).

In similarity with the more general research on the influence of EU legislation on local level governments in the EU, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions has found that approximately 60% of all matters at the municipal and regional level in Sweden were affected by EU legislation. Legal consequences substituted approximately half of the matters whereas matters of the cultural or political kind, as in exchanges of ideas, took up the other half (Montin, 2015: 39). All Swedish municipalities were also affected by at least one transnational program within the Cohesion policy framework during the period between 2007 and 2013 (Montin, 2015: 40).

4.1.1 Reflections on the large-n approach

Although the study will only consider the local level governments in one of the 27 member states of the EU, it is a large-n study since the case selection consists of all 290 municipalities in Sweden. Large-n studies are comprehensive in their nature and allow for a greater selection of cases than small-n studies. By including all municipalities in Sweden in the selection of cases, the potential risk of a selection bias is also limited, if not eliminated (Halperin & Heath, 2017: 231- 235).

A large-n approach was chosen for two reasons. First, much of the research on Europeanization on local level governments has been done using small-n approaches (Gröbe et al, 2023: 1411). Thus, I attempt to bridge the gap in the research through conducting a more comprehensive large-n study.

Second, choosing a large-n approach allows for a greater level of generalization of the results, since more cases are investigated. The obvious flaw with a large-n study is, however, that each case cannot be studied as thoroughly. That requires that the data collected is both valid and reliable. The validity and reliability of the study is ensured through the material selection as well as through the explanation of the design of the study, which both are discussed in the following sections (Halperin & Heath, 2017: 231-235).

4.2 Content analysis

This study conducts a mixed methods content analysis. That is, it pursues a systematic analysis of textual information using both quantitative and qualitative elements. It is quantitative in the sense where each reference to Europeanization is counted manually and added together. However, it is also qualitative as it requires me, the author, to analyse each instance of Europeanization and determine how they should be categorized (Halperin & Heath, 2017: 346).

Interpreting the texts and categorizing them qualitatively ultimately also has its limitations. There is a possibility that I am biased when reading the material (Boréus & Bergström, 2017: 47-48). I have done my best to overcome this limitation through providing clear instructions on how the content analysis was conducted and which analytical steps that were taken, leaving as little room as possible for interpretations beyond the very clearly defined.

As opposed to discourse analyses, content analyses are interested in the study of a body of text in itself, rather than the context in which the text has been produced (Halperin & Heath, 2017: 336). Content analysis is a suitable method when analysing patterns in larger bodies of text, for example party election material or newspapers and is an appropriate method when the author aims to uncover the attention paid to a particular topic or theme (Boréus & Bergström, 2017: 25).

Content analysis is thus an appropriate method for the study conducted in this thesis for two reasons. First, I analyse patterns in larger bodies of text, namely the strategic

documents in 290 cases. Second, I attempt to uncover the *explicit* attention paid to Europeanization in local level government budgets.

The following sections provide the analytical steps of the content analysis and explain the studied material, the ontological and epistemological considerations and the analytical instrument that was created to conduct the study.

4.2.1 Material selection: Municipal budgets

The material that has been selected as the data for this study is the municipal budgets for the year 2023 in Swedish municipalities. 279 municipalities were examined out of the total 290 municipalities. The excluded municipalities did not have their budgets for the years 2023 available on their websites, and they failed to provide the budgets when requested over e-mail. The missing municipalities are all rather small and situated in different parts of Sweden. They do therefore not diminish the validity of the research since there are over 200 other municipalities of similar sizes which are geographically distributed across the country. The largest municipality that is excluded is Trollhättan, with roughly 59 000 inhabitants.²

Since much of the previous studies on the Europeanization of local level governments have been conducted using interviews or surveys, I attempt to contribute to the field through studying strategic documents (Fleurke & Willemse, 2007: 70). Interviews or surveys allow representatives for the local level governments to explain how involved their local level government is with the EU, or how aware they are of the implications of the EU on the local level governments. However, interviewing comes with its limitations. Interviews may not fully account for the everyday practices of a local level government since the interviewee may be biased or not know of all practices. This is especially a risk if the EU is not an active subject in the local level government. It could also be the other way around, that the interviewee exaggerates their government's activity with the EU, since they want their local government to appear a certain way in the eyes of the interviewer (Halperin & Heath, 2017: 290). Through studying the budgets of each municipality, I will therefore contribute to the research through analysing actual strategic

² The municipalities that are excluded are Bengtsfors, Gällivare, Karlskoga, Kiruna, Nordanmaling, Skara, Torsby, Trollhättan, Töreboda, Åmål and Älvsbyn.

documents that have been decided on politically in each local level government and that the local governments must base their daily operations on.

The reason for selecting municipal budgets as the material for the study is twofold. First, they have been chosen since budgets are the documents which ensure the highest level of equivalence of meaning between the municipalities. The budget documents have legal requirements which the municipalities must consider when they create them. The budgets must for example be provided annually. By choosing documents for which there are legal requirements, I strengthen the comparability of the material. (Petersson, 2006: 189-190). To find other strategic documents which exist in every municipality in Sweden would require extensive research and possibly result in a set of data which is less comparable.

The second reason for selecting municipal budgets is to ensure the validity of the research, that is that the data measures what it is supposed to measure. The annual municipal budgets need to include a plan for the economy and municipal operations for the upcoming year (Petersson, 2006: 189-190). The budget is created according to the calendar year and decided upon by the City Council. Aside from showing the plan for the operations and economy for the upcoming year, the budget also needs to include a general plan for the economy for the upcoming three years. The aim with this three-year plan is to provide general thoughts for developments in the municipality and how to handle structural problems (Petersson, 2006: 189). Many municipalities themselves explain the strategic purpose of the budgets in the initial parts of it. Höör's municipality for example explains in their budget the general purpose of a municipal budget. They write that it is an important document, accounting for the goals that a municipality and its operations have. They further argue that it is a key strategic document for officials in the municipality (Höör kommun, 2022: 2).

The budget process is not generally considered to be the most important process determining important economic decisions; however, it has a strong symbolic meaning to the direction in which the municipality is heading and presents the matters which are considered to be of greatest importance to the municipality, as was exemplified by the municipality of Höör (Petersson, 2006: 189-190; Höör kommun, 2022: 2). Users of the municipal budget usually include not only internal

staff and local politicians, but also a diverse group of external users ranging from the media, suppliers, investors, citizens in various roles and auditing institutions (Jethon & Reichard, 2022: 153).

Since the municipal budgets provide a strategic plan for both the operations and the economy for the upcoming years, I draw the conclusion that the most important targets and strategies are mentioned in these documents and I thus consider it to be a valid material to study how Europeanized the local level governments are.

It is a possibility that not all Europeanization aspects are captured through studying the budgets. There could for example be instances of memberships in transnational organizations or liaison offices that are not mentioned in the budgets and therefore does not appear in this study. However, I argue, that the budget documents provide an overview of the most important practices and goals *according to* the municipalities. Thus, if a membership in an organization is not mentioned, I contend that that membership is not considered that important to the municipality. Then, it is not very important whether the municipality is a member or not, since the municipality could be a highly inactive member. I contend that the definition of Europeanization used in this thesis requires notions of the EU to be present in documents that are as important as the annual budgets are, to indicate whether a municipality is Europeanized or not and how it is Europeanized.

The research does not entail a specific time frame or a comparison between years, thus I have chosen the most recent year available, the year of 2023. The budgets for 2024 are even more recent, however, many budgets for 2024 were not published at the municipal websites during the start of this research. Therefore, for accessibility purposes, the year 2023 was chosen, and all municipal budgets available for the year of 2023 were to be the set of documents for this thesis.

There are, however, limitations with restricting the study to only one year. The most apparent being that the results could be skewed due to extraordinary circumstances in that particular year. Since the year of 2023 was the year following the invasion of Ukraine, it could potentially mean that the EU, or Europe, is particularly present in the budgets of 2023. It is important to take into consideration, leading into the analysis, but it is not considered to diminish the validity of the results since the same problem could be argued to arise studying other recent years as well. Europe

could for example be extra present in the budgets for the year 2021, because of the pandemic, or in 2024 because of the European parliament election. Thus, I consider it impossible to find a “normal” recent year to study. Instead, the presence of the war in Ukraine is further discussed in chapter 5 where the results of this study are presented and analysed.

The budgets have been retrieved from the websites of the municipalities and in some instances, where the budgets were not available on the websites, they have been retrieved through e-mail from the municipalities. Some budgets have appendixes attached to the official budget documents, while others have appendixes on their website which may be downloaded by themselves. I have used all documents that the municipalities have explicitly stated as part of the budgets as my data, including appendixes. No data has been collected beyond the official municipal budgets.

There are some differences between the budgets. The first difference is the length of the budgets. Bigger municipalities tend to have longer budgets, whereas smaller municipalities tend to have shorter ones (see Stockholms stad, 2022; Gullspångs kommun, 2022). However, this is not always true in the material, some big municipalities have comparatively short budgets, while some smaller have extensive budgets (see Malmö stad, 2022; Osby kommun, 2022). Some budgets, simply elaborate further than others, while some for example include budgets for each specific municipal committee while others do not. There is no clear way for me to combat this specific limitation since the reasons for the varying lengths differ between the budgets.

The second difference between the budgets are the years which they choose to include in their general plan for the economy. The municipalities are required to provide a three-year plan. Most of the municipalities do so through stating that their budgets include the budget for 2023 as well as a strategic plan for the years 2024 and 2025. Some go even further and include the year of 2026. However, some municipalities have chosen to consider 2023 as the last year in this strategic plan of three years. Meaning, some municipalities cover the years 2021-2023.

Although these differences in the budgets are to be regarded as potential shortcomings, none are considered major enough to threaten the validity of the

research. Since the municipalities are written by officials in each municipality, it is impossible to retrieve documents that look exactly alike. They still all contain the information on the economy and the plan for the upcoming years, which the municipalities have deemed the most important and that cover roughly the same time frame.

4.2.2 Ontological and epistemological consideration

Before moving into the description of the study itself, there are some important remarks that should be made considering the ontological and epistemological nature of the study. I do not expect to find any “objective truth” stemming from the budgets. The municipal budgets do include some parts that could be studied using only quantitative methods, which would entail “objective” results, including the pure numbers on the municipal spendings. However, I am concerned with the parts of the municipal budgets that consist of text, which require interpretation and do not by themselves contain any inherent meaning. Since that interpretation is based on the selected theoretical framework as well as analysed by me, it is interpreted from a particular context and there is no way to ensure an objective reading of the texts (Halperin & Heath, 2017: 356).

Instead, I have done my best to ensure the reliability of the study by providing a thorough description of how the study is conducted, since it is important that the method is plausible to others and can be replicated as closely as possible by another researcher (Halperin & Heath, 2017: 356).

4.2.3 Realizing the study

Having established the material for the content analysis, as well as the ontological and epistemological continuum in which the research is situated, this section explains how I conducted the coding and which analytical steps that were taken.

Identifying a recording unit

To measure Europeanization, a recording unit for the study was constructed. That is, *what* is counted as instances of Europeanization. Boréus and Bergström (2017)

explain that recording units can be references to words, metaphors or themes that are detectable in the studied material (28). The purpose is to visualize the number of references that can be accounted as Europeanization. In this study, the references to the Swedish equivalent of the phrase “the EU” (*EU*) are counted as Europeanization. “The EU” is thus the recording unit of the study. The phrase “the EU” was chosen since the definition of Europeanization used in this study does not reach beyond the EU (Radaelli, 2003: 30). When reading through the texts, every instance of “the EU” was thus recorded.

To ensure that the recording unit properly measured Europeanization, I conducted a pilot study and searched for “the EU” in 15 random municipal budgets of varying sizes. Then, I noted that the EU was not always referred to by using the specific term “the EU”. Sometimes the EU was referred to through the mention of EU policies as “European policies” or by references to specific EU institutions. Thus, I expanded the recording unit to not only include instances where the EU is referred to exactly as “the EU”, but also to instances where they are referred to through synonyms.

Consequently, the words “Europe” or “European” (*europa* and *europeisk* in Swedish) were also coded. However, these instances were only included as evidence of Europeanization when they explicitly referred to the EU. Such examples include references to the “European Parliament”, “European climate goals” or the “Eurozone”, where the references are to something that is part of, or connected to, the EU. References to Europe which cannot be strongly argued to have a connection to the EU were not considered as examples of Europeanization since Europe as a whole is not included in the definition for Europeanization. This for example included references to the level of security in Europe in relation to the war in Ukraine or references to the “European economy”. I, thus, carefully went through each instance of a reference to “European” and “Europe” to ensure which words that referred to the EU and which words that referred to something generally European. When necessary, municipal websites or the EU website were used to understand whether a reference to Europe was a reference to “the EU”.

A potential shortcoming when selecting to only record words referring to the EU is that there is a possibility that certain aspects of Europeanization are missed in the

material. The definition of Europeanization is, as a reminder: “Processes of (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies” (Radaelli, 2003: 30).

By only recording explicit references to the EU, it is possible that some implicit “domestic discourses, identities, political structures, and public policies” (Radaelli, 2003: 30) stemming from the EU are lost. There are for example a broad number of different transnational organizations of which municipalities in Sweden could potentially be members. By excluding references to these networks, I could have missed references which would for example point towards horizontal Europeanization. Mentions of specific networks of collaborating municipalities or of specific EU funds might therefore fail to be shown through this analysis.

However, the number of funds, programmes, and networks that exist, that the local level governments could be a part of, is extensive. There are also an extensive amount of EU legislation and norms that can be argued to stem from the EU, which could be referred to in the texts without the municipalities explicitly stating that these derive from the EU. To catch all these aspects would be very difficult and thus, to limit the research and ensure reliability, I opted for only including explicit references to the EU (or synonyms). The networks and EU funds, and all other possible aspects that could be found in the definition of Europeanization, were thus only visible when they were stated in relation to explicit references to the EU.

Identifying a context unit

Simply recording every instance of “the EU” does, however, not help to measure how Europeanized the local level governments are, since the phrase by itself says nothing about what *type* of Europeanization that we are witnessing. Thus, a context unit was needed to properly catch the context of where the EU is mentioned. The context unit sets a limitation on the amount of information that can be considered when analysing the recording unit (Boréus & Bergström, 2017: 28; Krippendorff, 2019: 105).

To distinguish between the different references to the EU, I chose sentences and paragraphs as my context unit. In practice, this means that every reference to the EU found in the material was recorded together with the sentence or paragraph in which it was found. Whether only a sentence, a couple of sentences or a whole paragraph was recorded depended on how much information was provided in the sentence where the word was found and how much information was needed to categorize the word.

Categorization

The coding was done using a mix between a deductive and inductive approach. I used a predetermined categorization based on the theoretical framework of this thesis, but I remained flexible regarding possible references to the EU that did not entirely fit for the presented framework. Or rather, I used a mix between a closed and open coding framework, which in practice means that I was open to the possibility of adding new categories during the coding process in the instances where particular coding did not fit into the current framework (Halperin & Heath, 2017: 349).

The predetermined framework consists of five separate categories. The categories are based on the previous research on the topic and are made up of the same five categories that were identified in chapter 3. Thus, the categories consist of two categories within the top-down dimension of Europeanization, one in the bottom-up dimension of Europeanization and two in the horizontal dimension of Europeanization (Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013: 4; Gröbe et al, 2023: 1415).

The categories are:

- “Compulsory Europeanization” (top-down)
- “Financial mobilization” (top-down)
- “Lobbying” (bottom-up)
- “Horizontal networking” (horizontal)
- “Dissemination” (horizontal)

When conducting the study, each reference to the EU was recorded and placed in the predetermined categories. If a sentence stating that the municipality will apply for money from the EU was found, it was categorized according to the “financial

mobilization” category. One sentence sometimes included references to more than one category and was in that occasion counted towards them both. The same logic was applied for unclear cases where a sentence could be interpreted as both “horizontal networking” and “lobbying” for example. Every mention of the EU was recorded as a separate unit. Even if “the EU” appeared three times in one sentence, each instance was recorded (Halperin & Heath, 2017: 347).

When I found instances that did not fit into the predetermined categories, I placed them in a separate category. Once all instances were recorded, a final check was performed where I reviewed all references to the EU again to ensure that I had placed them in the appropriate category according to the operationalization of the categories presented in chapter 3. Finally, I reviewed the category of references to the EU that did not fit into the predetermined categories and categorized them into new categories. These categories were labelled as “external analysis”, “EU-citizens” and “other findings”.

To ensure that no instances of references to the EU were missed, and that they had been categorized accordingly, I searched through the budgets where I found more than five references to the EU a second time and confirmed that the categorization remained as originally intended.

The findings of the coding process will be presented in the following chapter.

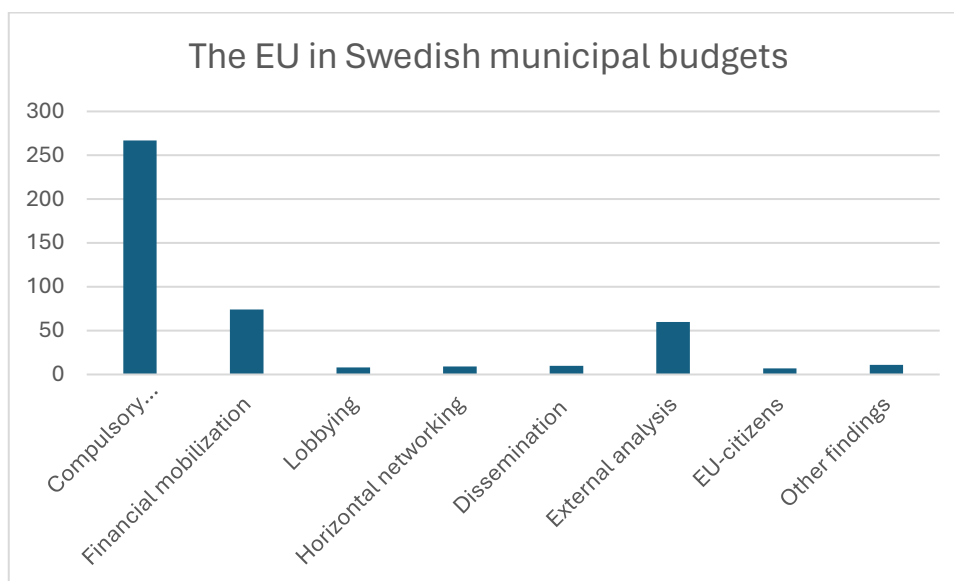
5. The findings: Europeanization in Swedish municipalities

When going through the 279 municipal budgets, the EU, or references to the EU, were mentioned a total of 446 times in 134 of the municipalities. The distribution of these references is visible in table 1. Thus, the EU was not mentioned whatsoever in 145 of the municipalities. These results indicate a great variety of Europeanization between the local level governments in Sweden. This corresponds with findings presented by Gröbe et al (2023) as well as Verhelst (2017), who both claim that Europeanization varies, even in areas that are relatively homogenous (1426; 92).

The most prevalent type of Europeanization found was examples of compulsory Europeanization, followed by financial mobilization and then examples of external analysis. The categorization of external analysis included when the municipalities referred to the EU in the context of discussing the current situation in the world and how it influences the municipalities. The different categories are discussed in the subchapters that follow.

To exemplify the different cases of Europeanization, quotes are provided from the municipalities. However, since the municipal budgets are all in Swedish, the quotes are translated from Swedish to English. Thus, all quotes provided in this chapter are translated by me.

Table 1. References to the EU in Swedish municipal budgets



5.1. Top-down Europeanization

5.1.1 Compulsory Europeanization

Examples of compulsory Europeanization was the most frequent type of Europeanization that was seen in the material. There was a total of 267 references to different types of compulsory Europeanization. The compulsory Europeanization identified can be divided into three different subcategories.

Type 1: New EU legislation

The first type of compulsory Europeanization identified was new EU legislation. This type occurred the most and was mentioned a total of 142 times. References were made to a wide range of legislation – directives, regulations as well as judgments by the European Court of Justice.

Some municipalities referred to specific pieces of EU legislation in their budgets. For instance, the municipality of Lund writes in their budget that “the EU’s new Data Governance Act came into force in June of 2022 and will be applied starting from September of 2023” (Lunds kommun, 2022: 40). Another example is by the municipality of Heby who writes that it “must prioritize the strategic work on water

in order to fulfil the demands posed by the EU water directive and to reach the environmental quality standards as well as other laws” (Heby kommun, 2022: 33).

Other municipalities write more generally about the effect of EU legislation on the municipality. The municipality of Eksjö writes that “legislation from the national level and from the EU level have increased. The legislation often comes with detailed demands when it concerns the supply, extent and design of services. It is noticeable in the municipality since the legal requirements from the EU level results in detailed rules coming from the national level” (Eksjö kommun, 2022: 32). The municipality of Tierp agrees with Eksjö and writes that “The detailed demands from the national level have increased for many years. Meanwhile, the national room for action has decreased, due to international law, the EU and financial systems. It generates even less space for local and regional mandates. The extensive ruling from the national level aggravates the possibility for municipalities and regions to see the bigger picture and to make priorities based on that” (Tierps kommun, 2022: 9). The municipality of Lund even states “approximately 60% of the political decisions in the municipality of Lund are affected either directly or indirectly by decisions made by the EU” (Lund kommun, 2022: 18), which corresponds to the claim by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions who also states that 60 % of the matters at the municipal and regional level are affected by the EU (Montin, 2015: 39).

References were also made to case law by the EU Court of Justice, which also serves as pieces of legislation (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 47). The municipality of Kungsbacka for example writes, in the context of an agreement between the EU and the US, that “In 2020, the EU Court of Justice settled that the agreement that was in place did not sufficiently protect the personal data that was transferred to the US. Since then, it has not been clear in what way we may use American cloud services without breaking the data protection rules. In March of 2022, the EU and the US reached a preliminary agreement” (Kungsbacka kommun, 2022: 27).

In the budgets, references were made to legislation in several different policy areas, ranging from competition law to migration. The municipality of Aneby for example writes about a new EU-directive that aims to “fight improper trading methods” (Aneby kommun, 2022: 8), while Jönköping municipality mentions the temporary

protection directive and states that refugees from Ukraine will not be included in their population forecast, since many of the refugees will not register themselves in the municipality (Jönköpings kommun, 2022: 35). The most prevalent areas of legislation noticed were, however, regarding the environment or climate as well as digitalisation or data protection. This goes in line with the expected findings proposed in 3.4, where Guderjan and Verhelst made the argument that the areas where EU legislation have the most financial effect, are environmental and energy legislation as well as effects stemming from the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 54). Although, the GDPR was only mentioned in 4 different budgets, there was a number of references to other types of laws regarding data, for example the Data Governance Act which started having an effect on the municipalities in 2023 (Sveriges kommuner och regioner, 2023).

In almost all instances where EU legislation is mentioned, the municipality does not pose itself as an active policy maker, but rather a passive policy receiver. The EU is posed as an entity, where the regulations that are decided must be upheld by the municipalities. The regulations are typically named and then the municipality explains that it needs to act in accordance with the laws. The municipality of Botkyrka for example writes that “According to EU directives, the environmental quality standards for water must be fulfilled (Botkyrka kommun, 2022: 52).

Ödeshög municipality is, however, an exception. The municipality has just over 5000 inhabitants, but takes on another approach to the EU legislation where it presents itself as an active actor in the policy context. They write that “Our strategic documents shall be placed in the chain of strategic documents that includes the municipality, the regional level, the national level, the EU level and the international level. We shall see beyond the municipal borders and become an actor in, particularly, the regional context but also in the levels above the regional level. The diagram below describes the different arenas in which the municipality must situate itself when we want to develop our municipality in accordance with our surroundings.” (Ödeshög kommun, 2022: 14).

They then proceed by providing a diagram of the cycle in which their strategic documents situate themselves. One level represents the municipality, another represents the regional level, a third represents the national level, a fourth represents

the EU level and the fifth and final represents the international level outside of the EU (exemplified by Agenda 2030 and The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) (Ödeshög kommun, 2022: 14). Ödeshög does not state that they will attempt to lobby for their interests in the EU or the state, they merely acknowledge that they are a part of a chain of levels which all have effects on one another.

The approach by the municipality of Ödeshög can be connected the argument by Vink and Graziano, who question the categorization of Europeanization as top-down, bottom-up or horizontal. They claim that the European multi-level system constantly requires an exchange of ideas between actors at different levels and that there is necessarily nothing top-down with domestic adaptation of EU legislation. Even though the local level governments lack formal decision-making power, the EU is still interested in opinions from the actors who will implement their decisions (Lindh, 2018: 68).

Type 2: EU elections

The second type of compulsory Europeanization that was present in the annual budgets were references to the elections for the European Parliament that will take place in June 2024. This manifestation of compulsory Europeanization stems from the treaties and was coded a total of 119 times in the budgets. Thus, yet again corresponding with the claims by Guderjan and Verhelst, that local level governments are not only affected by new legislation, but also by the core principles of the EU (2021: 47).

Although the budgets studied are for the year of 2023, most of the budgets included a strategic plan that covered the years following 2023 and some included in the budget that there would be costs related to the EU election already in 2023 (see for example Stockholms stad, 2022; Höganäs kommun, 2022; Borås kommun, 2022).

Some municipalities provide information of the work surrounding the upcoming election. Sävsjö for example states that “The Election Committee is responsible for the national election that occur every fourth year as well as the election for the European parliament which occurs every fifth year. They are also responsible for potential referendums” (Sävsjö kommun, 2022: 128). They continue that ”There are currently investigations regarding the possibility to digitalize the election process further, the election to the European parliament in 2024 will for example include

digital poll cards as well as digital reporting of the preliminary counting of the votes” (Sävsjö kommun, 2022: 129). Other municipalities simply state the cost for the municipality for the election. Botkyrka writes that “To carry through with the election to the European Parliament in 2024, 3 million Swedish crowns will be assigned to the Election Committee. Another 1,4 million Swedish crowns will be reserved for the work related to democracy connected to the election” (Botkyrka kommun, 2022: 47).

Type 3: The Swedish Council Presidency

The third and final type of compulsory Europeanization that was identified in the municipal budgets was related to Sweden’s Presidency of the Council of the EU. This aspect is also related to the core principles of the EU, since it was introduced through the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 (Council of the European Union, 2024).

There was a total of six references to the Swedish Presidency, however, these references were only by Stockholm and Sigtuna, a municipality close to Stockholm. Stockholm writes in their budget that “Throughout the spring of 2023, Sweden holds the Presidency of the Council of the EU. The City Executive Board is responsible for the overall coordination and communication regarding the activities organized by the City of Stockholm while Sweden holds the Presidency.” (Stockholms stad, 2022: 63). The municipality of Sigtuna writes “From January 1st of 2023, Sweden will for the duration of six months, hold the Presidency of the EU. [...] The majority of the EU-meetings that will take place during the Swedish Presidency will be held here” (Sigtuna kommun, 2022: 33).

5.1.2 Financial mobilization

A total of 74 instances can be placed in the category of financial mobilization. Thus, the claim by John (2001) that “the main aspect of the EU that preoccupies local and regional governments is the disbursement of funds” (67) appears not to be true, in the case of Swedish municipal budgets since the compulsory aspects of Europeanization are more prevalent.

The remarks found in the budgets to financial mobilization included two different types of references that could be connected to financial mobilization.

Type 1: Direct references to funding opportunities

The first type includes direct references to funding from the EU. This is the most prevalent type of financial mobilization found in the budget documents and can be exemplified by the municipality of Östra Göinge who writes that “the municipality also has other sources of income, for example through state aid, EU funding and other applications for projects” (Östra Göinge kommun, 2022: 25). Another example is by the municipality of Lomma who states that “the LIFE-project that was granted funding from the EU in 2018, will continue in 2023” (Lomma kommun, 2022: 15).

Only six budgets implied that the municipality *shall* apply for support from the EU funds, these six municipalities are Aneby, Stockholm, Uppsala, Vaggeryd, Älmhult and Oxelösund. The other municipalities instead wrote that the municipality “can” apply for support from the EU funds, or other similar phrasings.

Stockholm refers to the possibility to apply for EU funding several times in their budget, but for instance also writes that “the city shall actively apply for external financing from the Swedish state as well as the EU” (Stockholms stad, 2022, 30). Oxelösund states that “the operations in the municipality shall work for increased external financing. For example through using the possibilities for financing from the EU” (Oxelösunds kommun, 2022: 40) and Uppsala describes the process even more closely. They write “to handle financially challenging times while the need for development remains, Uppsala municipality shall build the strategic capacity to use the opportunities that have been offered to apply for external financing through the funds and programs provided by the EU” (Uppsala kommun, 2022: 17).

Based on these results, the expected findings are somewhat aligned with the result of the study. Scholars propose that funding opportunities are important to local level governments (Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013; De Rooij, 2002; Fleurke & Willemse, 2007). The results showed that while they were important to some, a large majority of the municipalities did not consider EU funding important, which goes against the expected findings. The expectations were furthermore that primarily the largest municipalities would have proper strategies in place to acquire EU funding. These

expectations are somewhat supported with Uppsala being the fourth largest city in Sweden, population wise, and Stockholm being the largest (Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013: 10; De Rooij, 2002: 462-463). However, neither Gothenburg nor Malmö have written anything about acquiring EU funding in their annual budgets, while four smaller municipalities, all with under 12 000 inhabitants each, have pushed for the importance to apply for external funding in theirs. This weakens the argument that mainly larger cities have strategies to obtain funding (Van Bever and Verhelst, 2013: 10).

While it could still be true that Malmö and Gothenburg have strategies for acquiring funding, it was not deemed important enough by Malmö and Gothenburg to be mentioned in their budgets. Malmö writes in their budget that “The budget is the annual overarching and superior steering document for the Committees in the city and the companies fully owned by the city. It includes the political vision, a short description of the basic mission of the municipality, the goals by the City Council for the term of office, specific missions for the year as well as the financial framework. It also includes guidelines for well managed economic administration” (Malmö stad, 2022: 5). However, it still does not mention a strategy for EU funding in its budget.

Type 2: Indirect references to opportunities for funding

The second type of references that were categorized according to financial mobilization was more indirect, and that was references to programmes or projects in which the municipalities take part, where the municipality could be granted funding. In most of these cases the municipality highlights itself and its work.

While Malmö and Gothenburg do not provide examples of strategies for acquiring funding or any other direct references to funding, they do both mention being part of the “Climate Neutral Cities 2030”, which are programmes that could lead to funding opportunities. (Malmö stad, 2022; Göteborgs stad, 2022).

Another example is by the city of Kalmar who writes that “Kalmar is one of the 23 municipalities that have been chosen to lead the transition towards “Climate Neutral Cities 2030” within the strategic innovation programme “Viable cities”, which will in turn be connected with the EU project towards climate-friendly cities.” (Kalmar kommun, 2022: 18). Upon further investigation, the “Viable cities” project can

grant the cities funding to achieve their climate goals, and thus the references to these types of programmes were assigned the financial mobilization category (Viable cities, 2024).

Six mentions of projects that the municipalities took part in were references to the LEADER-projects. Stoustrup (2022) claims that implementation of LEADER-projects, and other similar projects, help shape the local governments to align further with the EU policy discourses since these projects must be in accordance with the rural policy objectives set by the EU. Thus, it could be argued that partaking in these projects, are not only opportunities for local level governments to acquire funding, but they are also a method for the EU to spread their norms and objectives (2477-2478).

5.2 Bottom-up Europeanization

5.2.1 Lobbying

Merely eight instances of explicit references to lobbying in the EU were identified in the budgets. None of these were related to transnational networks, instead the recorded instances referred to lobbying in three different ways. None of the municipalities that, in 5.1.1 addressed the diminished power at the local level, such as Eksjö and Tierp, write anything about trying to influence the EU (Eksjö kommun, 2022; Tierps kommun, 2022).

Type 1: No cooperation with other actors

Five of the recorded references to lobbying were connected only to the city itself or the region in which the city is located. Nacka municipality for example states that “we will work towards increased municipal autonomy and act against greedy³ micromanaging at the EU and national level” (Nacka kommun, 2022: 131). Stockholm does not use the same level of strong words as Nacka, but states that “The City Executive Board shall, in cooperation with the Environment and Health Committee and the Transport Committee, work towards increased opportunities

³ The Swedish term ”klåfingrigt” has no direct translation and thus the term “greedy” has been used which is the closest translation.

from the EU, the government and the parliament to achieve the ambitious climate goals through new legislation and increased financing” (Stockholms stad, 2022: 63). The municipality of Arvika writes about the strategy for the entire region of Värmland, which they claim is for everyone who lives in the region. They say that “On the regional level, the strategy poses as a basis for decisions, to regulate investments and for the distribution of funding for projects and distribution of funding for companies. When negotiating with the government, state agencies and the EU, it serves as the support for how the resources should be distributed” (Arvika kommun, 2022: 8). Thus, they do not explicitly state that they themselves will lobby or “negotiate” with the EU, but merely describe how the strategy of the region would help in those instances.

Type 2: Liaison offices in Brussels

The other type of reference that was included in the lobbying dimension of Europeanization is to liaison offices in Brussels. However, there was only one instance recorded of this type of reference, and that was by Stockholm, who accounted for the fee for their office (shared with the Stockholm Region as well as a few other regional and local governments) in their budget (Stockholms stad, 2022: 58).

Type 3: Cooperation with other European cities

The third and final type of reference to lobbying was through cooperation with other European cities. This was mentioned two times by Uppsala, who, however, did not clarify whether the cooperation with other European cities to influence the EU is through a network of cities or through some other type of cooperation. They write that “Together with other European cities, the municipality works towards influencing the agenda in the EU” (Uppsala kommun, 2022: 20).

It was expected that the references to lobbying in the municipal budgets would be limited since Sweden only has 20 municipalities with more than 100 000 citizens. However, it was not expected that there would simply be eight instances recorded. The lobbying descriptions that were found in the budgets were however from municipalities with over 100 000 inhabitants, which aligns with the expectations that lobbying is primarily witnessed in cities. There was, nevertheless, one exception. That exception is the municipality of Arvika, which has a population of

approximately 25 000 (Karlsson, 2024). They, however, refer to lobbying together with or by the region of Värmland and do not state that they themselves will lobby to the EU (Arvika kommun, 2022: 8). Thus, these results are somewhat in line with Havlik, who argues that bottom-up Europeanization is a marginal phenomenon by smaller municipalities and that it is primarily cities of at least 100 000 citizens that pursue bottom-up Europeanization (Havlik, 2014 :95).

The literature, however, also claims that lobbying is primarily done through networks of cities, which was not supported by the results of this thesis whatsoever. A few transnational networks were mentioned, as is discussed in the following section, however, none of these references said anything about lobbying (Schultze, 2003: 123).

The literature further indicated that the municipality of Gothenburg is actively partaking in lobbying aspects, through their liaison office in Brussels, no evidence of those lobbying attempts were prevalent in their budget for the year 2023 (Lindh, 2018: 74).

5.3 Horizontal Europeanization

5.3.1 Horizontal networking

Nine instances were documented that show evidence of horizontal networking. Four references were made to networks, three to cooperation with cities in other European countries and two references where it was not entirely certain who the collaborator would be.

Type 1: References to networks

The references to networks were done through references to specific networks, but also to networks in general. The municipality of Borlänge writes in their budget that “the orientation during this term of office is to have less collaborations and projects in general, but to focus more on the collaborations in Europe. One step in that direction is that the municipality of Borlänge, since 2018, is a member of the EU-

network Eurocities, where the primary focuses are social and cultural matters” (Borlänge kommun, 2022: 24). Thus, they are referencing explicitly to the network Eurocities. In the example of Borlänge, it is a bit unclear what the exact purpose of the membership in Eurocities is, however, since they state that the focus is on “collaborations in Europe” as well as “social and cultural matters” I assume that the main purpose of this exchange is best practices and policy transfers (Borlänge kommun, 2022: 24). “Social and cultural matters” are areas where the EU competences are limited, which limits the likeliness that a focus on these areas would have lobbying purposes (European Commission, n.d.).

Another example of a more general statement regarding networks I argue, is an example of horizontal networking is from the municipality of Älmhult. They say in their budget that “The municipality of Älmhult shall actively work with external monitoring within the area of digitalisation and make use of knowledge and opportunities of further development that are offered by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, Vinnova, Tillväxtverket and other national and European organizations that want to develop public services” (Älmhults kommun, 2022: 2).

The importance and relevance of transnational networks, which has been posed by some scholars was thus not confirmed by the research since very few municipalities even mentioned transnational networks in their budgets (Kern & Bulkeley, 2009).

Type 2: Cooperation with other cities

The city of Stockholm explicitly states that they will collaborate with other capitals but does not state whether this will be through a transnational network or in some other form. They write that “We shall strengthen the international work and protect the reputation of Stockholm in the world. The collaboration with other capitals as well as with the institutions of the EU and other organizations shall be promoted” (Stockholms stad, 2022: 21). It is not explicitly stated whether these organizations are organizations for the capitals or some other type of organization.

Type 3: Collaborator not specified

The municipality of Uppsala does not specify exactly if they are collaborating with other cities or within networks, since they write that “The role of the municipality

in a regional context is to strengthen the connections with surrounding municipalities, the business sector, academia, authorities and the region of Uppsala to find smart and efficient solutions to mutual challenges. It is central for the municipality of Uppsala to cooperate and collaborate internationally, with a special focus on collaborations in the nearby regions and within the EU” (Uppsala kommun, 2022: 16).

The limited number of references to horizontal networking goes against the expected findings. Horizontal networking was expected to be present to some extent, which is not the case when there were only nine recorded instances. Transnational networks were also expected to occur more than they did (Grønnestad & Bach Nielsen).

The results are somewhat supported by Van Bever and Verhelst (2013), who found in their study that it was uncommon for Flemish local authorities to participate in transnational network arrangements. They concluded that only 17,3 % of the Flemish local governments were involved in transnational network arrangements (16). However, the findings in this study include evidence of participation in transnational networks that go well below the findings by Van Bever and Verhelst (2013: 16). There could, of course, be more municipalities that are members of transnational networks (a quick search shows that for example 11 Swedish municipalities are members of the transnational network Eurocities) (Eurocities, n.d.). However, no more than one municipality seems to have considered the membership important enough to be considered in their annual budget.

5.3.2 Dissemination

There was a total of ten findings that could be allocated to the category dissemination, according to the definitions of dissemination provided by Gröbe et al (2023). The instances are quite different, but can be grouped in subcategories of democratization enhancement, local forums, the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU, school exchanges, and collaboration with the civil society.

Type 1: Democracy enhancement

Three examples of democracy enhancement were found in the budgets. The municipality of Malmö writes that “The City of Malmö shall work with contributions to strengthen the democracy and the trust to the political institutions, with the goal of increasing the voter turnout in the elections for the European Parliament in 2024 as well as the general election in 2026” (Malmö stad, 2022: 16). The other two findings were presented by the municipality of Botkyrka who emphasizes that they will work towards strengthened democracy before the election (Botkyrka kommun, 2022).

Type 2: Local forums

Three examples of the findings were presented by the municipality of Hässleholm and were related to the liquidation of local forums for information on the EU. The municipality of Hässleholm writes that “The Europe Forum will be shut down already in 2023, since our goal is to prioritize the key operations in these challenging times” (Hässleholms kommun, 2022: 3). This does not go in line with the expected findings, where Gröbe et al (2023) claimed that restrictions in the budgets does not have an effect on the European engagement of municipalities (1427).

Type 3: The Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU

The next two examples of dissemination covered examples from Stockholm saying that the City of Stockholm would work towards demonstrating the relevance of the EU throughout the Swedish Presidency (Stockholms stad, 2022: 34).

Type 4: School exchanges

The municipality of Finspång highlights the importance of international programmes, saying that three international projects have been conducted for pupils in classes 7-9 and high school (Finspångs kommun, 2022: 47).

Type 5: Collaboration with civil society

The final example of dissemination was provided by the city of Malmö who writes in their budget that “Malmö will lead the way within the climate transition and climate adaptation together with the business sector, local associations, the citizens of Malmö and other cities – in Sweden and in the EU” (Malmö stad, 2022: 12)

5.4 Other findings: examples of Europeanization?

78 of the references to the EU do not fit into the already established categories. They can be categorized into three different subcategories. The first one I refer to as external analysis, the second one includes references to so called “EU-citizens” and the third is simply the references that I have been unable to categorize.

Type 1: External analysis

Most of these references, 60 to be precise, fit into the external analysis-type. Within the category of external analysis, I have collected all instances where the municipality discusses the current events in their surroundings and where they explicitly refer to the EU or the Eurozone. Kungsbacka municipality for example writes that “We can expect closer bonds between the European countries when the EU readjusts to become independent from Russia” (Kungsbacka kommun, 2022: 23). The municipality of Piteå states that “So far, the European Central Bank has chosen a careful approach regarding increased interest rates and it is likely that the interest rates will be increased in the near future” (Piteå kommun, 2022: 12).

These analyses of the current events affecting the EU, I argue are examples of Europeanization. While these aspects of Europeanization are not commonly referred to as examples of Europeanization in the literature, I argue that they are examples of how the local level governments are affected by the increased European integration (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 22). They are further examples of the “making of EU public policy and politics” that are then “incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, [...] political structures, and public policies (Radaelli, 2003: 30) since the municipalities seem to consider these actions taken by the EU, or its institutions, important enough to refer to in their own documents. These instances of Europeanization could even be placed in the top-down compulsory Europeanization category since the local level governments are involuntarily affected by these decisions by the EU and its institutions.

Type 2: “EU-citizens”

Of the other references to the EU, seven are regarding as so called “EU-citizens”, that is migrants who were born in the European Union, but reside outside their country of birth, but still in the EU. The City of Stockholm for example writes that “The support to vulnerable EU-citizens will continue through offering support as well as accommodation at shelters, among other things” (Stockholms stad, 2022: 212). These remarks about “EU-citizens”, are examples of Europeanization with same reasoning as with the external analysis, that is they are examples of how municipalities are affected by increased European integration. While the term is simply referring to citizens from other countries in the EU who are residing in Sweden, they would not be categorized as “vulnerable EU-citizens” (Stockholms stad, 2022: 212) were it not for the EU. This category can also be argued to be an aspect of compulsory Europeanization, since it is not something that the municipalities can avoid.

Type 3: Other findings

The final 11 remarks on the EU found in the budgets are regarding references to the EU, which lack a context where they could be appropriately categorised. This can be exemplified through the municipality of Bräcke who simply write “EU matters⁴” or “matters related to the EU” and then the sum that has been allocated regarding “EU matters” (Bräcke kommun, 2022: 49). It is very difficult to argue what these “EU matters” refer to and thus they are simply not categorized.

5.5 The EU vs Europe: reliability of the results

I now for a moment circle back to the discussion on which references to “Europe” that can be categorized as Europeanization. The only references to “Europe” or “European” that have been included as examples of Europeanization in this chapter have been those that very clearly allude to the EU. However, there were over 200 references to “Europe” which I have not counted as Europeanization since they were not referencing to the EU explicitly enough. However, they *could* still be aspects of Europeanization. It is not uncommon that notions of the EU can be referred to as “European” or “Europe”.

⁴ EU-frågor

To exemplify, I present some instances where references to “Europe” or “European” were counted as references to the EU. The municipality of Flen for example wrote that “In March 2022, the EU member states signed the Temporary Protection Directive, which means that people who are escaping the war in Ukraine has the right to temporary protection in European countries” (Flens kommun, 2022: 14). Since the municipality of Flen wrote that the member states in the EU signed the Temporary Protection Directive, it is implied that “European countries” in this case refers to the countries in the EU. This reference was therefore counted as an instance of Europeanization and counted as examples of both “compulsory Europeanization” as well as examples of “external analysis”.

The example from Flen can be compared to an example from the municipality of Munkedal which was not included as a reference to Europeanization. The municipality of Munkedal wrote that “Russia’s war in Ukraine has resulted in a large number of refugees in Europe” (Munkedals kommun, 2022: 12). Thus, “Europe” in this example could refer to the EU, but it could also refer to the geographic area of Europe. To avoid confusion and strengthen the reliability of the research, examples of this sort were not counted as examples of Europeanization.

While there is a possibility that instances of Europeanization are not being accounted for in the results because of this delimitation, my definition of Europeanization entails specific references to the EU, which the excluded references to “Europe” have not provided. Thus, most references that could be argued to be specific for the year of 2023, such as the war in Ukraine, are also excluded since they in most cases generally refer to “Europe”.

6. How Europeanized are local level governments in Sweden?

At the beginning of this thesis, I set out to research how Europeanized the local level governments in Sweden are and how Europeanization can come to be expressed in Swedish municipalities. By analysing municipal budgets and posing a theoretical framework enabling five categories of Europeanization, an operationalization of these questions has been concluded. This chapter connects the findings from chapter 5 with the initial questions posed in the introductory chapter.

Distinguishing Europeanization from municipal budgets

Since it was possible to observe Europeanization in 134 budgets out of 279, it can be concluded that it is possible to distinguish Europeanization from municipal budgets. It was, however, an interesting finding that the references to the EU varied so extensively between the different municipalities. The municipality of Lund, for instance, included over 20 different references to the EU (Lunds kommun, 2022), while 145 budgets did not mention the EU at all. Thus, not all municipalities recognised even that the EU affects the daily practices of the municipalities. Hence, the findings were of great variety between the municipalities, which has been supported in earlier research by Gröbe et al (2023) and Verhelst (2017).

There could be several reasons as to why these results vary, reasons which will not be discussed in this thesis since that is beyond the scope. However, studying each municipality further to investigate *why* some local level governments are more Europeanized than others, is highly encouraged for future research.

Local level governments in Sweden: forced to be Europeanized?

The results of this thesis on the Europeanization on local level governments in Sweden indicate that the studied local level governments are primarily concerned with the EU when they are obliged to. Aspects of compulsory Europeanization was, without a doubt, the most prevalent type of Europeanization found in the material with a total of 267 references. Adding the references of “External analysis” and the references to “EU-citizens”, the number is as high as 334 instances.

Out of the references to compulsory Europeanization, the most prevalent type was references to new EU legislation. The results thus indicate that the Swedish municipalities are primarily concerned with EU legislation and how it affects their municipality. The upcoming EU election was the second most prevalent type of compulsory Europeanization that concerned the municipalities. It is natural, figuring that an EU election is coming up in 2024, but it was not expected to be that apparent in budgets concerning the year 2023.

Given that more than half of the matters at the municipal level in Sweden are affected by EU legislation, it was expected that compulsory Europeanization would be very present in the budgets (Montin, 2015: 39). Thus, it is a key finding that most of the municipalities did not even refer to the EU regarding policies that they are legally bound to implement, not indicating any level of Europeanization. In the instances where the municipalities did refer to compulsory Europeanization, they posed themselves as passive, forced to implement laws that have been decided on by a government at a higher level.

In only one instance, in the budget from the municipality of Ödeshög, a municipality challenged the passiveness of the municipalities and suggested that they are a part of the chain of strategic documents which entails other levels of government. The finding from Ödeshög consequently paves the way for further discussions on the nature of Europeanization.

It is not certain that categorizing compulsory aspects of Europeanization as “top-down” Europeanization is necessarily the correct way of identifying these aspects of Europeanization. As was proposed by Vink and Graziano and exemplified by the municipality of Ödeshög, it can be argued that a system which is inherently multi-level is not constituted of a “top” and a “bottom”. An increased level of legislation which the local level governments must implement requires an increased interest from the European Commission to receive feedback and ideas for new types of legislation, which is evident from for example the “Urban Agenda for the EU”, where the EU strives to include Urban Authorities in the design of policies (Heinelt, 2017: 13-14).

While the findings from the municipality of Ödeshög challenges the identification of compulsory Europeanization as top-down, I argue that there is overwhelming

evidence that there is a “top” and “bottom” based on the results from budgets of the Swedish municipalities. Since the other municipalities, where compulsory Europeanization is identified, for example writes that they must “fulfil the demands posed by the EU” (Heby kommun, 2022: 33), they inherently position the EU above themselves. These results, I argue, do not question the existence of a multi-level system since the local level and the supranational level is still interconnected (Guderjan & Verhelst, 2021: 32), however it weakens the evidence that the multi-level governance system provides opportunities for the local level governments to interact with the EU level (Marks, 1993: 404).

Local level governments in Sweden: using the opportunities provided by the EU?

Financial mobilization was the second most prevalent type of Europeanization. There was a total of 74 instances referring to funding either directly or indirectly. It can, again, be concluded that the results varied extensively between the different municipalities and while financial mobilization was an important aspect for some of the municipalities, it was not mentioned at all by most of the municipalities. These findings do not correspond with the expected findings from much of previous research, which claim that financial mobilization should be very important to the local level governments (John, 2001; De Rooij, 2002; Fleurke & Willemse, 2007).

Van Bever & Verhelst (2013) claim that mainly the largest cities have the means to have a strategy to acquire EU funding, which is not entirely evident in the results of this thesis either. While Stockholm and Uppsala did have strategies to acquire funding, Malmö and Gothenburg did not provide evidence for such strategies. Furthermore, instances of financial mobilization were mentioned by municipalities of varying sizes, not only the larger municipalities. These results entail for further research on why some municipalities prioritize financial mobilization, while other do not, and whether there are other explanations beyond the size of the municipalities.

Moreover, it can also be discussed whether the funding “opportunities” provided by the EU are really opportunities, or whether they are rather an exchange or even a compulsory form of Europeanization. While it is voluntary to contribute in projects funded by the EU or to even apply for funding, the extensive legislation by the EU requires local level governments to carry out extensive transformations in their

municipalities. These transformations require finances. Thus, it can be argued that it, as some point, becomes compulsory for the local level governments to apply for funding to accomplish the transformations required from them by the EU. Further research on financial mobilization could consequently focus on *why* local level governments apply for funding, and whether the reasons stem from EU legislation.

Local level governments in Sweden: active policy makers and cooperators?

Generally, a more active Europeanization approach, including lobbying, horizontal networking and dissemination, was not very apparent in the findings. Only eight instances of lobbying, nine instances of horizontal networking and ten instances of dissemination were found. Thus, the claim by Schultze (2003) that local level governments have gone from passive policy takers to active policy makers cannot be confirmed by the findings of this thesis.

Given that the Swedish municipalities possess a great level of autonomy, it would be assumed that a study on the Swedish municipalities would see the same results as studies on local level governments in other EU member states where the local level governments have a certain level of autonomy (Pettersson, 2006: 37; Marks, 1993: 404). However, this was not the case. The findings did not correspond with the previous literature, which suggested that the active approaches would be more prevalent (Schultze, 2003; Havlik, 2014; Gröbe et al, 2023).

Although some instances of the above-mentioned categories occurred, it can be generally concluded that bottom-up and horizontal Europeanization were not found to be as important to the municipalities as the different instances of top-down Europeanization. Thus, since I aim to explain how Europeanized local level governments in Sweden are, these few instances are not considered as very important or representative for local level governments in Sweden. Why the few notions of bottom-up Europeanization and horizontal Europeanization did occur in some municipalities, while they were completely absent in a large majority of the budgets, is beyond the scope of this thesis but a very interesting question for future research.

Considering the very few notions of lobbying, horizontal networking and dissemination, it is in order to provide a short discussion on whether these instances are more difficult to distinguish in budget documents than instances of compulsory

Europeanization and financial mobilization. As it was discussed in chapter 4.2.1, the budgets provide a strategic plan for the operations and the economy for the upcoming years, which should entail references that can be connected to the above-mentioned aspects of Europeanization, as long as they are considered important to the municipality. The instances that were recorded prove that it is possible to distinguish these aspects of Europeanization in the budgets as well.

However, besides municipal budgets, other methods and material could be used in future research to further test whether these aspects of Europeanization are prevalent in Swedish municipalities. Dissemination could for example be further studied through studying schools and other associations that practice the dissemination aspects of Europeanization.

7. Final remarks

In this thesis, I have examined how Europeanized the local level governments in Sweden are by studying the annual budgets of 279 Swedish municipalities. I emphasized that the debate between scholars has not been whether local level governments are Europeanized or not, but rather *how* Europeanized they are and in *what ways*.

Through the scholarly debate, I identified that three overarching dimensions of Europeanization were repeated – top-down Europeanization, bottom-up Europeanization, and horizontal Europeanization. A framework dividing the three aspects into five subcategories were posed and operationalized through a content analytical approach on the annual budgets of Swedish municipalities.

Out of the references to the EU, an overwhelming amount of the references could be categorized as compulsory Europeanization, that is Europeanization that the local level governments are forced to take part in. The second most apparent type of Europeanization was financial mobilization, namely opportunities provided by the EU in terms of funding. The active aspects of Europeanization: lobbying, horizontal networking and dissemination were very uncommon in the budgets.

The findings that the compulsory aspects of Europeanization are the most prevalent is supported by the previous research. However, it is contrasting regarding financial mobilization, lobbying, horizontal networking and dissemination, as those aspects were underrepresented in the budgets of the municipalities. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Europeanization of local level governments in Sweden differ from much of the previous conducted studies regarding Europeanization.

Identifying that the local level governments in Sweden primarily interact with the EU when they are forced to, poses questions for future research. If the municipalities do not voluntarily interact with the EU, does that create a top-down relationship which results in frustration at the local level? Why do local level governments not interact more with the EU? Why is Europeanization much more prevalent in some local level governments and not others?

Regardless, what can be stated for certain, is that the local level governments in Sweden have several steps to climb before they reach the top of the Europeanization ladder and become fully Europeanized.

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9. Appendix

Since the researched material and the list with coded references are very long, it is not feasible to include them in this thesis. However, for those interested, the material as well as all recorded instances of Europeanization are available upon request.