



Legitimising identity discourses and metropolitan networks: urban competitiveness versus territorial protection

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Abstract The growing economic importance of urban networks transforms the political relations in metropolitan regions. New forms of regional cooperation emerge, but many municipalities outside the cities which have become a vital part of metropolitan networks resist this urban led development. This paper analyses why while the importance of areas outside the cities for metropolitan regions has increased, many oppose this and regard this as an unwanted urban incursion threatening the interests and identities of their communities in well-established territories. This paper analyses the backgrounds of these political conflicts by looking at the different perspectives on identity and legitimacy. It develops a typology of the different legitimising identity discourses used by urban and non-urban administrations to promote or resist cooperation in metropolitan regions. There is a clear and coherent contrast between backward and inward looking ‘thicker’, and forward and outward looking ‘thinner’ legitimising identity discourses. These are based on opposing views on nine related aspects which help to better understand the deep roots of the opposition between urban competitiveness and territorial protection. The typology of different legitimising identity discourses is a useful tool to analyse

the growing resistance in more peripheral regions to the further strengthen the global competitiveness of metropolitan regions. The examples in this paper of how legitimising identity discourses are used in the Netherlands—where economic policies like in many other countries focus on the strengthen of metropolitan regions—showed not only how these divisions fuel conflicts, but also how these are sometimes bridged through cooperation legitimised by a partially shared identity discourse.

Keywords Metropolitan regions · Legitimacy · Identity discourses · Populism · Cosmopolitanism

Introduction

The importance of cities and their metropolitan networks to create conditions for economic growth is generally accepted. While urban economies grow and urban networks expand, there is growing realisation that these lack adequate coordination. For instance the European Union links the realisation of further economic growth in Europe with the effective governance of metropolitan regions (EC 2017). New forms of administrative cooperation which try to strengthen these metropolitan networks are however difficult to realise. Many local and regional administrations outside the cities hesitate to be further incorporated

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into networks focussed on nearby or distant cities (Harrison and Hoyler 2014). While some embrace the expected opportunities, others fear unwanted changes. Opponents frequently question the legitimacy of these urban incursions and claim that this threatens their sub-urban or more traditional rural identity (Boudreau and Keil 2001; Tomàs 2012; Fortin and Bédard 2003).

Most academics and policy makers focus on the economic necessity and the organisational problems of metropolitan regions. This paper focusses instead on how the growing importance of metropolitan networks pulls urban and non-urban administrations in different political directions. Not only do their interests diverge, but they frequently use very different types of identity discourses, which are linked to opposing perspectives on the legitimacy of the formation of metropolitan regions. This paper develops a typology of the different legitimising identity discourses used by urban and non-urban administrations to strengthen or resist cooperation in metropolitan regions. This is used to analyse some examples of how in the Netherlands, where economic policies like in many other countries focus on the strengthen of metropolitan regions, these divisions not only fuel conflicts, but are sometimes bridged through cooperation legitimised by a partially shared identity discourse. Before we do that we first discuss the growing importance of regional cooperation for urban and non-urban areas.

State rescaling: urban economic opportunities and threats to local services

The growing cooperation in metropolitan networks is linked to wider changes in the position of the nation-state. After centuries of sustained strengthening, the nation-state appears to lose power to the local, regional and international level in the last decades. This process of state rescaling affects all Western states although the specific form it takes is linked to the specific national context (Brenner 2004; Keating 2013; Jessop 2016). We therefore use examples from one country to clarify the general problems of legitimation this transformation of statehood encounters and how these are linked to different spatial identities. The Netherlands were chosen for several reasons. Not only the familiarity of the author with this case, but also while the Netherlands is not very

different from other Western states and while the process of state rescaling has accelerated in the Netherlands over the last years, this paper uses Dutch examples to get a better grip on how state rescaling is linked to legitimacy and identity. In the Netherlands, the focus of many policies has shifted away from the national level. Not only has the European level become more important, but the Dutch state has also decentralised many economic, social and spatial policies to the local and regional level (BZK 2013; RvS 2016). This does not necessarily result in more powers for the local and regional level. Although in Western states the central government is less in control, or less attempting to control its regions directly, it is still the dominant, if not sovereign power (Jessop 2016; Bailey and Wood 2017; Brenner 2004). Although the hierarchical control from the central government has weakened and central administrations now cooperate more with local and regional administration on specific projects, it is not a cooperation between equals. Central government not only coaches local and regional administrations, it also sets the boundaries of the playing field and determines the rules of the game.

As in other Western states, Dutch economic policies have over the last decades shifted from centralised distributive and stabilising Keynesian policies, towards stimulating the competitiveness of the perceived motors of the economy in cities (BZK 2013; REOS 2016; SOB 2016). Before, in the period after the Second World War, the policies on the Dutch urban core focused on regulating the housing markets in the Randstad, the ring of cities in the Western part of the Netherlands. After first re-conceptualising it as a competitive world city at the end of the twentieth century, it has in the last decade been re-conceptualised again, but now as two distinct, but related metropolitan regions. The Amsterdam metropolitan region is the first cooperation between municipalities in the Netherlands which identified themselves as a metropolitan region in 2007. It is not a unified formal organisation, but is based on many partially overlapping and changing forms of cooperation on urban issues, which are crucial for Amsterdam, but from which other municipalities can also sometimes profit. In the southern part of the Randstad, the cooperation in the metropolitan region Rotterdam-The Hague started in 2008, but was only formalised in 2014 when they became an official administrative entity with a clearly

demarcated territory and a distinct set of responsibilities. The metropolitan region Eindhoven was established in 2015. This third metropolitan region is located outside the Randstad in the south of the Netherlands. These three metropolitan regions increasingly present themselves collectively as the Delta Metropolis (Deltametropool 2018). This helps them to attract support from the central government (REOS 2016). Funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the main business association, they also promote themselves as the core of an even bigger TristateCity extending from Amsterdam all the way to Cologne in Germany and Brussels in Belgium. This enables them to boast a population of 30 million, which makes them bigger than London or Paris and is assumed to make them more attractive for foreign and especially Asian companies (Tristatecity 2018). This fits the international trend of conceptualising ever larger urban regions which cross the boundaries of nation-states and operate on a continental scale (Maier 2016; Wachsmuth 2016).

Not only cities, but also non-urban municipalities increasingly cooperate at the regional level. While economic decentralisations give new opportunities to urban regions, non-urban regions are struggling to provide adequate services to their population. The decentralisations of public services overstretches the capacities of smaller non-urban municipalities all over the world (Baldersheim and Rose 2010; Hanes 2015; De Peuter et al. 2011; Aulich et al. 2014). In the Netherlands decentralisations have speeded up in the 2010s through a wide-ranging decentralisation of social services and an upcoming fundamental reform of spatial planning. The concern of central government over the capacity of smaller municipalities to effectively administer these decentralisations is the driving force behind regional cooperation and amalgamations in the more rural areas of the Netherlands (RvS 2016; BZK 2013).

All municipalities are thus subjected to new forms of regionalisation. These different decentralisations not only affect urban and non-urban municipalities in different ways, they also reinforce the differences between them. While cities profit from the decentralisation of economic policies, many non-urban municipalities struggle to provide their inhabitants with basic services. Thus whereas metropolitan regions focus on an anticipated growth in wealth, non-urban municipalities are more absorbed to prevent a decline

in welfare. This tends to make metropolitan regions more outward and forward looking, while in more rural regions the focus is more inward and the future is more feared. These differences become more manifest through the increased interaction between urban and non-urban areas in metropolitan networks. This paper analyses how this divide is articulated and sustained through the use of different discourses in which spatial identities are linked to opposite perspectives on the legitimacy of cooperation in metropolitan regions.

The next section starts with an overview of the general causes of the growing importance of urban networks. It ends with a discussion on the increased significance of non-urban areas for the success of metropolitan networks and the different interests this generates. The last section of this paper analyses the different ways in which identity discourses are used to construct or contradict the legitimacy of cooperating in metropolitan regions. This results in a typology of different legitimising identity discourses, which are illustrated by some further examples from the Netherlands.

Metropolitan networks: going beyond the urban core

The growing economic and political importance of cities and regions is an important doctrine in academic and policy circles. After many centuries in which conditions for economic growth were linked to the national level, these are now increasingly attached to the local and regional level. Especially cities are assumed to be better suited to provide the conditions for economic development than large bureaucratic nation-states with very diverse territories (OECD 2015; EC 2017; SOB 2016; REOS 2016; Kitson et al. 2004). The size of the relevant urban business environment has increased over time from individual cities, to ever larger metropolitan areas (Brenner 2004; Legendijk and Cornford 2000; Healy 2013; Paasi et al. 2018: 70–71). The physical growth of cities into their environment, the growing interconnectedness of cities, the reappraisal of what local conditions are necessary for businesses to flourish, and the new forms of cooperation needed to stimulate competitiveness, have all contributed to the growing importance of metropolitan networks and are discussed below.

The development of metropolitan networks

Cities increasingly transform their surrounding countryside. The trend towards metropolitanisation is partly an acceleration of the much older trend of the expansion of the urban force field. For more than a century, academics have tried to make sense of these expanding urban spaces. At least since Patrick Geddes introduced the concept conurbation in 1905, numerous academics have linked their analysis of these new forms of urbanisation with their own new concepts (Harrison and Hoyler 2017). Taylor and Lang (2004) identified 50 different names given to this new urban form. Their list is far from exhaustive. Especially some recent urban concepts like the metropolitan region, which became a popular concept only after 2004, were not included in this list.

Metropolitanisation entails not only the urbanisation of the areas surrounding individual cities, it also involves the growing importance of networks between cities. Cities are being interconnected through multiple networks, which become faster, stronger and denser. Again Taylor and Lang (2004) identified 50 different names academics have used to describe these strengthening intercity relations. These concepts are based on metaphors like archipelago, chain, matrix, web, grid, and nodes. But systems and networks were by far the most popular concepts used to describe these inter urban relations.

The growth of these physical networks between cities is intertwined with the growing importance of company networks. Production is no longer concentrated in one place, but is now usually dispersed over many companies and locations. These extended supply chains form the basis of complex regional manufacturing networks. The increased incorporation of services in the production process and the growth of after sale services, further extends the span and importance of networks for companies. The focus of a favourable business climate shifts from individual cities to urban networks. Through a process of ‘borrowed size’ the agglomeration benefits of a large city can be substituted in an urban network. This not only involves the sharing of similar resources—like market size—to accumulate critical urban mass, but also the exploitation of differences. The wide range of specialised services very large cities have within their borders can also be provided in urban networks when cities offer different complementary services.

Metropolitan networks can thus acquire functions and levels of performance similar to very large cities (Meijers and Burger 2017; Matthiesen 2000; Harrison and Hoyler 2014).

The extent to which these economic potential benefits of complementarity in a metropolitan network materialise, depends on the political cooperation of local administrations. This is quite complicated, as metropolitan networks cut across and fragment existing administrative territories. The metropolitan regional organisations in which local administrations cooperate also often lack clear and stable borders (Harrison and Hoyler 2014; Wachsmuth 2016). Also the shared interests on which cooperation in metropolitan networks is based are not so obvious to all stakeholders. These shared regional interests in business climate, leisure facilities, living environment, innovation and business networks, have to compete with a multitude of well-established and often conflicting local interests. Interests are much stronger and more visibly intertwined in a place than in a region. Within a city, local stakeholders share the same urban space which make them directly and manifestly dependent on each other. They thus frequently form a growth coalition of local political and economic elites which powers the urban growth machine (Wachsmuth 2016: 644). Shared interest in land prices and local factor costs thus motivates entrepreneurs to cooperate with other local stakeholders and the local administration. These urban administrations are well-established and supported by their population. A strong sense of local community based on shared values and interests, in combination with an emphasis on the differences with nearby cities and villages, strengthens local identification. Local growth coalitions thrive on these interurban rivalries and reinforce them. This hinders cooperation in metropolitan regions.

Outside the cities, but inside metropolitan networks

The zones outside the cities—the suburban, non-urban or rural areas—become more important for metropolitan networks. Cities increasingly depend on the active cooperation of non-urban municipalities to strengthen the complementarity in metropolitan networks and further increase their attractiveness and competitiveness. The areas outside the cities can provide the

metropolitan region with room for urban functions to ease pressures on the urban areas. They can for instance accommodate distribution centres, new housing estates and renewable energy landscapes. Not only the quantity of space available, but also the quality of areas outside cities can strengthen metropolitan regions. They can provide cities and their inhabitants with very different, but complementary amenities and utilities, like residential and recreational facilities, but also with high-quality business services and manufacturing. Non-urban areas can also accommodate many different lifestyles, ranging from the exuberant to the ecological. Non-urban areas not only quantitatively add volume to metropolitan networks. They can also make a significant qualitative contribution to metropolitan networks. Through their complementarity to cities they can further strengthen the borrowed size effect (Hesse 2014; Phelps et al. 2001; Matthiesen 2000; Harrison and Hoyler 2014).

The growing importance of non-urban areas for the economic competitiveness of metropolitan networks challenges the traditional economic and political dominance of cities over their surrounding areas. The urban periphery has a more central position in metropolitan networks. This gives non-urban administrations a strong bargaining position in the cooperation in metropolitan regions. For instance the expansion of the infrastructure between cities is frequently hindered because the dominant stakeholders in local communities fear more the suffering from negative externalities, like pollution or unwanted migration, than that they hope to profit from new opportunities, like the increased accessibility of urban markets. The development of metropolitan networks depends not only on preventing this kind of passive blocking of concrete infrastructure. It also depends on persuading non-urban administrations to actively participate in the formulation and implementation of more intricate policies and projects to increase their attractiveness to become more complementary to urban areas (Harrison and Hoyler 2014; Harrison and Heley 2015; Bailey and Woods 2017).

These differences in interests are frequently reinforced by the lack of a clear overarching metropolitan identity and the opposition between well-established local identities within a metropolitan region. The urban rivalry between cities and the antagonism between cities and the countryside are partly based on differences between local identities. However the

character of these differences in identities is very different. The rivalries between cities are based on broadly similar identity discourses, which all celebrate urban development and competitiveness towards comparable rivals. The conflicts between cities and their non-urban neighbours go much deeper, while these are rooted in a fundamental dissimilarity between urban and more traditional non-urban identities. The threat posed by urbanisation to their distinctive local identity is even an important theme in local identity discourses outside the cities (Terlouw 2017: 63–68).

A clear and shared identity discourse is important for the mobilisation of support for cooperation in metropolitan regions and the legitimisation of their policies. This is according to the European Economic and Social Committee a key factor for their success:

The lack of identity and inadequate governance stand in the way of balanced development in metropolitan areas. Existing administrative bodies often go back a very long time. They prevent flexible adjustment. The involvement of several levels of authority—national, regional and urban—is indispensable if metropolitan areas are to succeed. This means that decentralised authorities must have legitimacy, which would also facilitate private sector and non-governmental initiatives (EESC 2007: 1).

A shared identity discourse is especially important while cooperation in metropolitan regions involves not only administrations, but also depends on motivating other economic and social stakeholders to become actively involved in the strengthening of the metropolitan region (Harrison and Hoyler 2014: 2259; Van Houtum and Lagendijk 2001; Goess et al. 2016). The importance of identity is also stressed by Cardoso and Meijers (2017: 717): “*Metropolitan regions often lack a widely endorsed sense of identity, which affects their political legitimacy and economic development*”.

The growing economic importance of metropolitan networks does not automatically generate a sense of community, especially outside the circle of directly involved economic administrators and businesspeople. This lack of a shared identity undermines the legitimacy of policies to strengthen metropolitan networks, particularly when they threaten the interests, identities and territories of established local and regional communities and their administrations. The

last two sections of this paper analyse how different perspectives on identity and legitimacy affect the cooperation in metropolitan regions. They analyse how different perspectives on identity are intertwined with different perspectives on legitimacy. The answers spatial identity discourses provide on what is the character of a place, are intertwined with the legitimisation of what is and is not appropriate in a place.

Identity discourses: thick and thin

Identity discourses are according to Torfing (2009: 108): “*the more or less sedimented systems of rules, norms and meaning that condition the construction of social, political and cultural identity and action*” which help us to “*make sense of the world and act appropriately*”. Collective identity discourses make sense of what characterise a community in relation to others. Some characteristics are valued and proudly presented, while characteristics which embarrass, are neglected or envisaged to change. Some relations are valued and based on feelings of friendship, while others are seen as a threat (Verhaeghe 2014; Ricoeur 1991; Bauman 2004; Terlouw 2018). Spatial identity discourses are not fixed facts, but are the changeable outcome of political struggles over what is appropriate in a place. “*Discourse is both constructed: people talk by deploying the resources (words, categories, common-sense ideas) available to them; and constructive: people build social worlds through descriptions and accounts*” (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 40). Different spatial identity discourses are used to legitimate different forms of sociospatial organisation (Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 228; Levelt and Metze 2014).

There are a wide variety of spatial identity discourses, ranging from very traditionalist discourses on the preservation of fixed territories, to outward and forward looking developmentalist discourses embracing change. Diminishing identity and the fear of its further decline constitute a widespread narrative in the identity discourses of the population in well-established territories (Terlouw 2017). These discourses of fear and decline contrast with those focussed on improving economic performance, like those used by many urban regions. These administrations use future and outward oriented identity discourses to legitimise new policies. These are thin identity discourses which contrast with thicker traditional spatial identity

discourses which have been institutionalised and thickened over generations in a territory. Thicker spatial identity discourses tend to be backward-looking, bonding a local community. Thinner spatial identity discourses focus more on bridging local differences. Thin spatial identities are more forward-looking and value the effectiveness of specific, mostly economic policies. Thin spatial identity discourses are more instrumental and linked to sectoral policies, special interests and stakeholders, while thick spatial identity discourses focus also on non-economic aspects like community values. Thin spatial identity discourses are more changeable. Their spatial form and meaning can be adapted to changing circumstances. They focus less on static territories but more on expanding networks (Terlouw 2012; Bauman 2004: 13–46; Antonsich 2011; Sack 1997; Jones and MacLeod 2004; MacLeod and Jones 2007). Table 1 gives an overview of these different elements which are used by thicker and thinner spatial identity discourses.

This ideal typical contrast between thicker and thinner spatial identity discourses is comparable to recent analyses of the growing divisions in the value orientation of different groups in the population. Reckwitz (2017) analyses the growing differences between the new cultural middle classes, which are successful in the highly competitive but fragmenting society of singularities, and the rest of the population. Goodhart (2017) focusses on the growing divide between the more urban ‘anywheres’ and the more provincial ‘somewheres’ to explain the political conflicts over Brexit. These distinctions in these recent studies are however much less detailed and they focus more on the causes of this division.

Constructing different legitimising identity discourses

These different perspectives on spatial identity are linked to different perspectives on legitimacy. Communities evaluate the legitimacy of the use of power based on a normative framework (Beetham 2013: xiii). These ideas about the legitimacy of how authorities exercise power in a spatial community are linked to ideas about the identity of that community.

Legitimacy is, like identity, based on the coherent combination of many different features. All forms of

Table 1 Contrasting thick and thin spatial identity discourses. Source: Terlouw (2012: 711)

Aspect	Ranging from traditional <i>thick</i> :	To future-oriented <i>thin</i> :
Spatial form	Closed	Open
	Territorial	Networked
Organisation	Institutionalized	Project based
Participants	General population	Administrators and specific stakeholders
Purpose	Broad and plural	Single
	Culture	Economy
Time	Defensive	Offensive
	Historically oriented	Future-oriented
	Stable	Change
	Old	New
Scale focus	Local and national	Global

legitimacy are according to the social theorist and political philosopher Beetham (1991) based on the coherent combination of three key aspects or dimensions: legality, consent and justifiability. Legality refers to adherence to the established rules of acquiring and exercising power. Consent is based on public expressions of acknowledgment of the rule by the authorities. Justifiability is based on the source of political authority and how the administration serves the needs of the population. “*All these are cumulative and complementary, rather than alternative, requirements for legitimacy (...) Although I have presented the different components of legitimacy as separable elements for purposes of analysis, for any given structure of power it is the ensemble that is important, and the internal connections between them*” (Beetham 1991: 98). In the next sections the thicker and thinner perspectives on these three aspects are discussed. This results in an ideal typological contrast of the key aspects and elements of thick and thin legitimising identity discourses. How this affects the legitimacy of cooperation in metropolitan regions is illustrated by some examples from the Dutch context.

Legality: spatial form, organisation and coordination

Legality is the first aspect of legitimation Beetham (1991: 64) distinguishes: “*power should be acquired and exercised in accordance with established rules*”. These established rules are not only laid down in formal laws, but are also based on conventions. Established rules are normative expectations of how power can be exercised. These normative expectations

have over time emerged in a community, but these are frequently contested by other interpretations of what the communal norms are (Beetham 1991: 64–69, 206–207, 212). Also the spatial scale and the borders defining what the relevant community is are regularly disputed.

Territories are important for the regulation of power. Many laws and regulations are bound to a specific territory. A nation-state has sovereignty over its territory, which it controls through a hierarchy of administrative territories with distinct regulatory responsibilities. Distinct and unchanging borders are important elements in thick spatial identity discourses and strengthen the legitimacy of territorial administrations (Paasi 1996). Changes in territory are frequently perceived as a “*break with an established constitutional order*” (Beetham 1991: 206). These changes of the “*monopoly of law-making and adjudication over a given territory*” (Beetham 1991: 121), are a threat to the fundamental rules of the acquisition of power. Disputes over the loss of territorial autonomy pose a bigger threat to legitimacy than disputes over policies within a territory.

Cooperation in metropolitan networks is directly and indirectly affected by the legitimacy of different territorial reorganisations. Cooperation in metropolitan networks is frequently complicated by amalgamations of non-urban municipalities, which gives their political agenda an inward focus. This further complicates cooperation across administrative borders in metropolitan regions. This lack of support by especially non-urban administrations sometimes results in attempts to transform metropolitan regions from a voluntary cooperation to a territorial administration.

The different perspectives on the legitimacy of these three re-territorialisations are discussed in the paragraphs below.

Territorial amalgamation delegitimised by thickening resistance identities

Small municipalities outside the big cities are pushed to cooperate or amalgamate, but not to improve the governance of metropolitan networks, but to strengthen their capacity to provide public services to their population (Terlouw 2016). Especially amalgamations are frequently resisted and regarded as an illegal infringement on the territorial autonomy of the affected local communities. This gives local politics an inward focus which concentrates on the differences with neighbouring municipalities and which hinders cooperation with more distant and different cities in metropolitan regions.

Especially those who strongly identify with an established local community regard the loss of local autonomy caused by the amalgamation into larger municipality as an illegitimate infringement of the right to self-determination of the local community. They feel particularly aggrieved when the majority of the community is against amalgamation as expressed through for instance a public referendum or a vote in their municipal council. They frequently regard amalgamation as undemocratic and a threat to their familiar local community. For instance those resisting the amalgamation of the sub-urban municipality of Haren with the city of Groningen in the north of the Netherlands used slogans like “*Hands off Haren*” and claimed that the provincial government did not follow the right rules and procedures. They also claimed that they have a different and incompatible identity: “*Haren is not urban*” (Haren 2018). Also in the debate in the national parliament, the political parties who opposed this and other amalgamations, focussed their criticism on the right of local communities to decide themselves on whether to amalgamate (Handelingen 2018). There are many more examples where amalgamations are seen as violating the conventions on local autonomy.

Opponents to amalgamations further legitimise their resistance by using an identity discourse which focusses on their distinctive character. Amalgamation is frequently seen as an external threat to well-established local identities. This can lead to the

development of a resistance identity discourse focussed on the continued relevance of the old municipal territory, its historic roots and its difference from others and the strong bonds within the local community (Castells 2010; Zimmerbauer et al. 2012; Zimmerbauer and Paasi 2013; Terlouw 2017). The resistance to amalgamation changes the character of local identity discourses; the focus shifts from the outside to the inside and from the future to the past. This ‘thickening’ of local identity discourses hinders the cooperation within metropolitan regions with their very different ‘thinner’ identity discourses focussed on strengthening metropolitan competitiveness and development.

Opponents to amalgamations use a wide variety of characteristics which are summarised in the keywords on the left hand side of presented below in Table 2. These are not the only arguments used by opponents to amalgamation. Their objections are also linked to other thick aspects and elements of legitimacy discussed below and presented in Tables 3 and 4.

The legitimisation of amalgamations by thicker anti-urban rural identity discourses

Thicker anti-urban rural identity discourses are also used to legitimise municipal amalgamations. Local politicians and administrators in more rural municipalities frequently use the threat of amalgamation with a more urban municipality to legitimate the amalgamation of non-urban municipalities. The creation of a larger territory and administration are legitimised as a strengthening of their capacity to resist outside urban influences. This external isolationism goes hand in hand with conflict ridden internal policies focussing on the equal distribution of public goods and services over the different local communities (Leitner et al. 2008; Terlouw 2016). For instance in the West Betuwe, the improvements of public services to the 26 incorporated villages and the strengthening of their identities in distinction to nearby urban municipalities were used to legitimise the creation of this amalgamated municipality in between the three metropolitan networks in the Netherlands (West Betuwe 2017). The vision document on the future of another amalgamated municipality even reads like a declaration of independence: “*The amalgamation of Katwijk, Rijnsburg and Valkenburg in the unitary municipality Katwijk is a step towards independence*” (Terlouw 2017: 103).

Table 2 Legality and thick and thin legitimising identity discourses

	Elements	Thick	Thin
Legality	Spatial form	Single, bounded stable territory	Multiple, open flexible overlapping temporary economic networks
	Organisation	Institutionalised authority and regulation	Specific projects
	Coordination	Hierarchy delegates fixed competences	Cooperation constructed and based on commitment

Table 3 Consent and thick and thin legitimising identity discourses

	Elements	Thick	Thin
Consent	Agreement	Contract, past elections, long term, input	Expression, constant consultations negotiation, output
	Participants	General population, public debate	Specific stakeholders, administrators, technocrats, elite expert debate
	Choice	Established preferences population	Adaptation to changing external circumstances

Table 4 Justifiability and thick and thin legitimising identity discourses

	Elements	Thick	Thin
Justifiability	Sources of knowledge	Internal, specific rights	External, universal doctrine
	Changes	Protection of tradition, past achievements, established rights, fear for future	Innovation, solving problems from the past, hope for better future
	Communal interests	Whole population, (re-)distribution, welfare	Successful Stakeholders, indirect trickle down to population, wealth

This new municipality stresses the individuality of the three old municipalities and their will for local self-determination. Amalgamation made Katwijk a stronger player on a regional playing field dominated by mounting external pressures from urbanisation and regional cooperation. The local politics in Katwijk after amalgamation is characterised by an inhabitant as based on an ‘own village first’ mentality. In Katwijk local politics focus on the equal distribution of investments and services over the different local communities. A local administrator says: “*What we very often hear is that when the municipality has a project, it must be divided among the different places. People keep arguing that they also want what others have, and that they don’t want to be disadvantaged*” (Terlouw 2017: 106).

Resistance to cooperation and the legitimisation of regional territorialisation

The creation of these new large non-urban administrative territories with more inward looking distributive policies and legitimising identity discourses hinders the cooperation across these new borders in metropolitan regions. Territorial borders are not only challenged through amalgamations, but also through cooperation. Borders don’t disappear through regional cooperation, but they become less important. The strengthening of metropolitan regions challenges the regulatory powers of local administrations. In metropolitan areas, non-urban municipalities are sometimes coerced to build new neighbourhoods to reduce the housing problems in cities, or to accommodate large business estates which are important for the economic development of metropolitan region as a whole. Resistance to this perceived incursion on local

autonomy can, in the same way as with forced amalgamations, also stimulate the thickening of local or regional identities into resistance identity discourses. This happened for instance in the 1990s in the Hoeksche Waard, where the plans to develop a large business park to alleviate the pressures on the Rotterdam harbour area, were successfully resisted by the local administrations which used a legitimising identity discourse which focussed on thick elements like the protection of the traditional agricultural landscape (HWL 2018). These forms of urbanisations do not always result in thickened resistance identities. In the 1990s the Dutch central government planned to build a new town to the south of Amsterdam to alleviate the pressures on the metropolitan housing market. The local administrations in that region joined forces to resist this unwanted urbanisation. They mobilised support through a regional identity discourse, which combined traditional “thick” aspects of a rural region with a “thinner” legitimising identity discourse, which focussed on the strengthening the competitiveness of their agribusiness complex (Terlouw 2016).

Many proponents of the strengthening of metropolitan networks regards this kind of local resistance as based on traditionalists sentiments which only hinders their legitimate rational economic policies. They regard the focus on separate bounded territories as an unwanted relic from the past and thus as illegitimate. Local resistance to new development are branded as based on a dysfunctional NIMBY mentality and rooted in local egoism. While this hinders what they regard as their legitimate cooperation on projects in networks—which is further discussed in the next section—they sometimes use themselves a territorial strategy to protect their interests of the further expansion and integration of metropolitan networks. The general interest of the whole metropolitan area is used to legitimise the strengthening of the hierarchical control over these unwilling local administrations. This frequently results in the transformation of the voluntary cooperation in a metropolitan regions into a more formal and obligatory territorial administration (Harrison and Hoyerl 2014; Terlouw and Weststrate 2013). This metropolitan territorialisation to overcome local resistance strengthens the formation of local resistance identities. Its legitimacy is also challenged while its fixed territory, hierarchically and uniformly controlled

from a dominant centre, also does not fit the dynamism and diversity which characterise successful metropolitan regions (Reckwitz 2017; Tomàs 2012).

The legitimacy of project based network cooperation

The legitimising identity discourses of metropolitan regions focus on the flexible and voluntary character of their cooperation as the most effective way to organise the coordination at the appropriate scale to cope with the challenges of the rapidly changing globalising economy (Terlouw and van Gorp 2014; Bailey and Wood 2017; Wachsmuth 2016; Brenner 2004; Jessop et al. 2008). Coordination in these networks is not based on hierarchy, but on a shared devotion to the same goals and their commitment to specific projects. For instance the metropolitan region Rotterdam-The Hague claims on its website that:

The local authorities in the MRDH are very ambitious. The ambition they have can only be realised if they work together in a different way where all of the parties involved contribute from their own roles. Only the bundled strengths of the metropolitan local authorities provide enough mass to effectively anticipate and respond to the leading global economic trends and to shape the further integration of the region. The Metropolitan region begins by creating the conditions and with them a healthy climate for public business development. Working together in the Metropolitan region—voluntarily and without a hierarchical structure—demands a mind-set from the administrators and government officials that is based on the conviction that the value contributed by everyone in the process will be recognised and acknowledged, and that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (MRDH 2018).

These flexible forms of cooperation are seen by their opponents as an unwanted “regional mess” which undermines the legitimacy of the current political order (Olsson and Åström 2003: 79). Inefficiencies through their overlapping activities and responsibilities, together with the lack of transparency and democratic control undermine the legitimacy of these flexible administrative networks (BZK 2013; Taylor 2012: 515).

The instable patchwork of partially overlapping new regions undermines viewed from the national perspective the ordered structure of the nation-state based on a clear hierarchy of nested territories which are coordinated and controlled from the national level. Not only a fixed territory, but also a distinct position in an institutionalised hierarchy is important for traditional forms of legitimacy and the corresponding thicker spatial identity discourses. According to this type of legitimation, cross-border coordination is not realised through ad hoc cooperation—like in metropolitan networks and regions—but through institutionalised hierarchical supervision. This centralisation gives distinct regulatory powers to local administrations and guarantees regulatory uniformity for all local administrations and citizens in a nation-state (Cidell 2006; Brenner 2004; Maier 2016).

Consent

Public expressions of consent is another aspect of the legitimation of power (Beetham 1991: 90–98, 150–158, 208).

(W)hat is important about consent is not the condition of voluntary agreement, but the specific actions that publicly express it; and that these are important because they confer legitimacy on the powerful, not because they provide evidence about people’s beliefs. They confer legitimacy because they constitute public expressions by the subordinate of their consent to the power relationship and their subordinate position within it; of their voluntary agreement to the limitation of their freedom by the requirements of a superior (Beetham 1991: 91).

These expressions of consent must be voluntary, have an element of choice and must take place in public (Beetham 1991: 91, 150).

Legitimation through elections

Beetham distinguishes between a contractual and expressional mode of consent to legitimate political systems. The first is linked to a thick legitimising identity discourse, while the expressional mode can be characterised as thin. Both of them have a different set of characteristics (See also Table 3). The elections of representatives form a kind of contract between the

elected and the electorate. “*The convention within contemporary liberal democracies is that it is the act of taking part in elections that legitimates government and secures the obligation of citizens in principle to obey it. Here again, it is the existence of choice that is crucial—between candidates, programmes and parties*” (Beetham 1991: 92). The established preferences of the population are the basis on which the population within a territory vote for their representatives. Elections gives legitimacy to those elected and their policies, as they have persuaded in a public debate the population to vote for them in the past (Beetham 1991: 94–95, 151–152).

Legitimation through consultations and negotiations

Besides this well-established thick form of consent, based on an electoral contracts with the population, consent can also be based on consultation and negotiation with important stakeholders. In the expressional mode of consent, the dedication of a substantial minority compensates the lack of involvement of the majority. Legitimacy is strengthened when the consultations with important stake holders result in some sort of agreement. Whereas the democratic form of consent is based on a long term contract between population and administration, the legitimacy created by consultations and negotiations is a continuous process which has to be constantly reinforced (Beetham 1991: 93, 155).

Contrary to most territorial administrations, metropolitan organisations generally lack direct democratic control. The role of the elected councils of the participating municipalities in formulating and controlling metropolitan policies is also very limited. Metropolitan policies are the result of negotiations and consultations between different administrations and unelected specialists, which mostly take place outside the scrutiny of public opinion. The democratic deficit is one of the problems which undermine the legitimacy of this kind of cooperation (Brenner 2004). A council member of the municipality of the Hague complains: “*In local democracy the administration is controlled by council, but this is not yet the case for the metropolitan region. We notice that the metropolitan region has the intention to scrap tram and bus services in The Hague. They cannot do that just like that. It is time that municipal councils get adequate powers to prevent this*” (CDA 2018).

On the other hand, the metropolitan region Amsterdam legitimises their cooperation using the expressional mode of consent. They claim on their website that they “*belong to the five strongest economic regions in Europe. In order to maintain and strengthen that position the 33 municipalities, two provinces and the transport authority Amsterdam cooperate informally—on the basis of a voluntary agreement—to promote the economic development in the region*” (MRA 2018).

One can thus contrast thick legitimising identity discourses focussing on the established preferences of the majority of the population, with thinner ones based on the consultation of, and negotiation with, important stakeholders inside and outside public administration, which results in the successful adaptation to changing external circumstances. While the electoral mode of consent focusses on the choice between different ideas and parties, the expressional mode of consent depends on the mobilising power of a dominant belief system and their experts (Beetham 1991: 157). Many of the elements of these opposite ways to generate consent are linked to the already discussed elements of legality and the elements of justification discussed in the next section.

Justifiability

How policies can be justified is the third different, but related, aspect of the legitimisation of power. Policies are justified when these are seen to serve the interests of the community. These communal interests can be based on the established preferences of the population or the skilful adaptation to changing external circumstances. To accomplish this, the right kind of knowledge must be applied by the right kind of specialists and their policies must effectively produce results which are in the interest of the community. These are the “*two normative criteria required to justify state power: it must derive from a source that is acknowledged as authoritative within the society: it must serve ends that are recognised as socially necessary, and interests that are general*” (Beetham 1991: 149). What the right source of knowledge is and what the interests of the community are, can change over time and differ between places and groups (Beetham 1991: 69–90, 121–142, 207–208). This section discusses first the characteristics of different forms of appropriate knowledge, then attention shifts to the different ways

in which communities and their general interest can be defined. The basic differences between thick and thin legitimising identity discourses are depicted in Table 4.

Each community has its own authoritative source of justifying knowledge. “*Whether it be tradition, divine command, scientific doctrine, popular will, or whatever, this constitutes the ultimate source which validates society’s rules and system of law*” (Beetham 1991: 70). These sources of the right kind of knowledge which is accepted by the community must form the basis of the decision making process and thus legitimise the resulting policies. The legitimacy of knowledge is a combination of the knowledge source and its legitimate interpreters: “*the underlying principle of authority entails that some people are entitled to take public decisions on behalf of others by virtue of some special knowledge they have acquired about the public good, and which others do not have*” (Beetham 1991: 89).

This source can be external to the community, like religious, ideological or scientific doctrines, whose visions of a better future claim to have universal validity (Beetham 1991: 71–75). These are predominantly used in thin legitimising identity discourses. The thicker ones use more internal sources of justifying knowledge, which focus on traditions from the past and the current conditions in a specific community. Tradition can justify rules through their perpetuity and through the idea that customs are tried and tested and reflect accumulated wisdom. These external and internal sources of knowledge are discussed subsequently below.

Universal external sources of knowledge

There are many different sources of universal knowledge used by different communities at different times. World religions, like Christianity and Islam, were until the nineteenth century the dominant sources of knowledge to justify power. Since the nineteenth century, secular ideologies and science have become the dominant sources of knowledge to justify policies (Maier 2016). After the Second World War, the interventions in national societies and economies by welfare states were justified through a combination of social-democratic and social-Christian ideology and new scientific doctrines on social engineering and economic regulation. After decades of successfully

improving the well-being of their population, the legitimacy of these Western welfare states was challenged by the failure to resolve the economic stagnation of the 1970s and 1980s. This paved the way for a doctrinal change from Keynesian interventionism to neo-liberal policies to strengthen the competitiveness of companies through for instance the formation of metropolitan regions. Whereas welfare state policies focussed on redistribution and the homogenisation of the territory of the nation state, neoliberal policies concentrate on the most competitive industries in prospering urban areas (Brenner 2004; OECD 2015; Maier 2016). Serving the interests of successful urban entrepreneurs is justified in these thin neoliberal legitimising identity discourses as necessary in order to survive in the global competition. Their wealth is assumed to trickle-down over time to the community as a whole (SOB 2016; EC 2017; REOS 2016; OECD 2015; EESC 2007).

The strengthening of urban regions is legitimised by the Dutch government as crucial for the current and future prosperity of the nation as a whole. Key ministries, provinces, big cities and the metropolitan regions have in 2016 agreed upon a spatial economic development perspective. They justify this while:

all around the world urban agglomerations are the motors of national economies. This is also true for the large Dutch cities and urban regions to which they belong. They exhibit the socio-economic dynamics and agglomeration strength which is so necessary for our position in the world economy. To protect and promote competitiveness it is necessary to bolster without delay the economic position of the big cities, the three urban regions and the (physical and non-physical) networks through which they are connected with each other and abroad (REOS 2016: 1).

Internal sources of knowledge

These universal external sources of knowledge justified the modernisation and globalisation of our world. But internal sources can also be used to justify policies. Although rooted in tradition and specific for individual communities, these have not disappeared (Beetham 1991: 71–75). Rational and universally applicable arguments do not always dominate in political debates. Emotional attachment to established

situations, rights and identities are also a potent source of knowledge which can justify protectionist policies. These internal sources of knowledge focus on the roots of the present in the past. Tradition is based on the accumulation of specific knowledge. The durability of a tried and tested way to govern a well-established community is a powerful source of localised knowledge. This can be effectively used to justify the resistance against policies based on external sources of knowledge. The protection of specific backward-looking rights justifies very different policies than those which look forward to improve economic performance (Beetham 1991: 137).

Special knowledge of the preferences of a community can be used by political parties to justify their policies towards other political actors, “*those who are popularly elected claim access to a privileged source of truth that others do not have*” (Beetham 1991: 90). Local political parties in non-urban municipalities in the Netherlands focus on the protection of their local way of life and local identity. They usually explicitly reject ideologies as a guideline for their policies. They focus instead on protection of the daily life of the inhabitants of local communities, which is threatened by national policies on topics like amalgamation, decentralisation and sustainability (Gelderland 2018). These local political parties renounce ideologies, national political parties and the handing down of national policies. The source of knowledge they use to justify their policies are not these external sources of knowledge, but internal sources, based on their local knowledge on traditions and the preferences of the local community.

The communal interest

Serving the interests of the community is another important element of the justification of power. Like the sources of knowledge used to justify policies, the definition of what constitutes the appropriate community is also frequently disputed (Beetham 1991: 132). State rescaling involves more than applying new form of justifying knowledge, it also challenges the definition of what constitutes communities. This also affects legitimacy while “*the spatial distribution of power must correspond to people’s self-definition of themselves as a distinctive people*” (Beetham 1991: 159).

Until some decades ago, the nation state was justified through its welfare arrangements for the

whole population. The focus of these dominant rationalist universal policies on the welfare of the national community, successfully delegitimised protests focussed on the interests of specific local communities. The shift from general socio-economic policies aimed at homogenisation, to specific policies to promote the competitiveness of companies in cities undermines the idea of a national community (Maier 2016; Brenner 2004; Keating 2013; Castells 2010; Reckwitz 2017). The focus of the communal interest thus slides from the general national community, to the particular local community. This gives room to alternative conceptualisations of what constitutes a community and how its interests can be served. It gives on the one hand room to neoliberal policies focussed on further increasing the wealth in cities. It also enables traditional localists sentiments using thick resistance identity discourses to effectively question the justification of nationally dominant policies on metropolitan networks. Neo-liberal policies focussed on urban competitiveness are now challenged by many different local and regional communities, who focus instead on the importance of established rights. This has boosted both traditional localisms and more neo-nationalist populisms (Maier 2016; Kaufmann 2008; Castells 2010).

“(T)he legitimation of power rules is not only the development and dissemination of an appropriate body of ideas, or ideology, but the construction of a social identity by a complex set of often unconscious processes, which make that identity seem ‘natural’, and give the justifying ideas their plausibility” (Beetham 1991: 78).

What the accepted identity of a community is, what their communal interests are and how these can be effectively served is subject to debate and changes. As the examples discussed above have made clear, these can differ considerably between the administrators of metropolitan regions and local politician in non-urban municipalities.

Conclusion

The economic and spatial bonds between metropolitan networks and their neighbouring non-urban regions intensify. These growing physical and economic relations are not automatically matched by an increase

in political coordination. The complexities of cooperation in metropolitan regions have been the subject of many studies (Wachsmuth 2016; Harrison and Heley 2015; Brenner 2004). These studies focus on the different material interests of the different groups and administrations affected by cooperation in metropolitan regions. Others also acknowledge the importance of identity in cooperation, but limit the role of identity to an obstacle to cooperation by contrasting well-established mostly rural identities with the lack of identity of metropolitan regions (Cardoso and Meijers 2017; EESC 2007). But cooperation is not only based on material interests and identity is more than just an obstacle. This paper used a different perspective to better understand the different perspectives used by different groups and administrations affected by cooperation in metropolitan regions. It analysed the relation between metropolitan and non-urban regions from the perspective of how different views on spatial identity are linked with different perspectives on legitimacy. The typology of different legitimising identity discourses developed in the last section of this paper and summarised in Tables 2, 3 and 4 enabled us to disentangle how different perspectives on metropolitan cooperation are rooted in different perspectives on legitimacy and perceptions of the character of their spatial identity. There was a clear and consistent differentiation between thicker and thinner elements which were used in the different legitimising identity discourses used by opponents and proponents of metropolitan cooperation. In this paper there was only room to illustrate this by some examples from the Dutch context. Despite its obvious limitations, it showed the usefulness of this approach on legitimacy and identity. It showed that there are general differences between the thinner metropolitan and thicker non-urban legitimising identity discourses. However, it also indicated that there are significant differences between individual metropolitan and non-urban administrations. It also shows that although urban administrations tend to use thinner relational and non-urban administrations tend to use thicker territorial legitimising identity discourses, administrations use these to different degrees and even frequently combine elements of these contrasting legitimising identity discourses.

Much more case studies are needed to get a better and more nuanced understanding of the difference between the legitimising identity discourses which are

used, the conditions under which these emerge, and, last not but least, how these affect cooperation in metropolitan networks. These case studies should focus not only on individual cases on local administrations opposing or supporting cooperation, but should also analyse how different metropolitan regions have over time managed these different perspectives through for instance marketing and branding policies. The role of different national contexts also warrants further investigation.

This paper has at least made clear that there are fundamental differences in legitimising identity discourses which need to be addressed by proponents of metropolitan cooperation. The repetition of the mantra of urban economic competitiveness is a strategy with many pitfalls. Dismissing local oppositions as driven by narrow self-interest (NIMBY), or as traditionalist, or as ‘populist’ is not very helpful either. A better understanding of the different competing, but coherent legitimising identity discourses is a first step to improve not only the relations in metropolitan networks, but can also help to better understand the growing gap in Western societies between the cosmopolitan urban winners and the more parochial losers of globalisation. This ‘populism’ debate focusses now too much on national societies and individual preferences. Studying the intermediate scale of metropolitan regions where these general differences are linked to contested projects in specific locations, can also help to better analyse and manage the growing divide in Western societies between urban elites and the ‘populist’ periphery. Applying and refining the typology of different legitimising identity discourses developed in this paper can contribute also to this wider debate.

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