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# Attitudes in the City: Assessing the Influence of Local Conditions on Support for the European Union in Poland

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## Abstract

*The future of the European Union increasingly depends on the attitudes and opinions of its citizens. An important role is ascribed to the young well-educated residents, as this social group is highly mobile and in the best position to benefit from European integration. Work conducted by researchers in the field of European studies, explaining attitudes towards the EU, shows that utilitarian approaches, national attachment and the opinions about the state's institutional performance influence the attitudes towards the EU. If this is accurate, does this suggest that these relationships can also be found at the local level? I assessed the influence of the residents' opinion about cities' performance and place attachment on support for the EU, by conducting semi-structured interviews with 24 MA students living and studying in one of three Polish cities. These personal statements and invaluable experiences provide a more nuanced approach to compare individual choices and considerations among the young well-educated urban residents. The results support the contention that a positively perceived 'quality of life' increases personal feelings of local attachment. At the same time, economic and political conditions influence attitudes towards EU integration among the urban youth, depending on the cities' individually perceived performances.*

## Introduction

Researchers in the field of European studies have developed a number of theories in their attempt to explain attitudes towards the EU. One of the most dominant approaches has been based on individual economic explanations. Scholars argued that support for EU integration depends on citizens' cost-benefit calculations whereby citizens who are in the position to benefit from integration have positive attitudes towards the EU (Gabel, 1998a, b; McLaren, 2002). This also coined the term of the European integration's 'winners and losers' (Tucker et al., 2002; Kriesi et al., 2008). Not surprisingly, young, well-educated citizens are more supportive of European integration as they are the ones most likely to benefit (Szczerbiak, 2007). Other analyses have focused on the important role of national institutions in shaping place attachment and attitudes towards the EU. They have argued that systems on a national level are important, and they also obscure the individual level variation (Deflem and Pampel,

1996; Kritzinger, 2003). Several authors have presented evidence that popular perceptions of the EU are conditioned because people use assessments of the national political and economic institutional factors as a proxy (Anderson, 1998; Rohrscheider and Loveless, 2010). Thus, people rely on domestic politics to evaluate the performance of the EU.

A further body of research has found that feelings of national attachment have an important influence on the evaluation of European integration (Carey and Lebo 2000). Vázquez García and Sojka (2010) also state that territorial attachment and representation are important dimensions of attitudes towards the EU. Carey argues that stronger feelings of national identity and attachment are likely to decrease support for the European project because of potential conflicts over sovereignty and independence of the state (2002: 388). However, he also suggests that a “strong national identity is not necessarily a negative predictor of support for the EU if the individual also has a strong attachment to Europe” (Carey 2002: 402). This leads to the notion of exclusive and inclusive national identities (Hooghe and Marks 2004). Exclusive national identity is strongly related to Euroscepticism but Hooghe and Marks found that attachments are or often “mutually inclusive” (2001: 55). This means that an individual with high attachment to one territorial entity is also more likely to feel highly attached to other territorial levels, although associations across subnational territorial entities are stronger than across national and European levels (Hooghe and Marks 2001: 56). In other words, there is no fixed amount of attachment across territories in which “an increase at one level is compensated by loss of attachment at other levels” (Hooghe and Marks 2001: 55). Similarly, Diez Medrano (2003) argues that citizens may feel attached to several entities and therefore hold multiple identities. They could, for example, equally feel Varsovian, Polish, and European (Diez Medrano 2003).

Within the plethora of literature about institutional and economy-based spatial influences and attitudes towards the EU, the role of cities has, however, been relatively under-researched. This is rather surprising, given their potential to structure social and political behaviour. Despite the lack of a clear definition as to what the term ‘city’ entails, it is considered to be a center of knowledge, innovation, resources and influences the social, economic, political and cultural life of its residents (Clark, 2009). If cities play a key role in the lives of European urban residents (European Commission, 2011), could they also influence attitudes towards the EU? Looking at MA students living and studying in Polish cities, I investigated the possible causes for attachment to territory and attitudes towards the EU. My main research question was as followed:

*To what extent do perceived conditions in Polish cities and local place attachment influence attitudes towards the European Union?*

This paper is structured as follows. First, I review some of the relevant theories and literature discussing the influence of utilitarian approaches on attachment and attitudes towards the EU. I locate these approaches in the local dimension, focusing on cities as a communal arena with specific conditions that influence the citizens' evaluation of the EU. I then analyse interviews conducted in three Polish cities to evaluate the perceptions of urban conditions, place attachment and attitudes towards the EU. I conclude by discussing the implication of these findings and by suggesting options for further research.

## **Attitudes towards the European Union and the urban dimension**

Historically, modern Europe has largely emerged from a developing network of cities, followed by the emergence of nation-states (Andreotti et al., 2015). Clark (2009) describes this process as uneven and complex. Nevertheless, cities served as 'pillars of European continuity and stability' (Clark, 2009, p. 1) by reacting innovatively to political and economic challenges. More importantly, cities were also able to maintain a certain political and economic autonomy from nation-states. This feature might become increasingly important in an Europeanized world where national boundaries are, at least, partially eroding. (Andreotti et al., 2015). In *European Cities* (2002), Le Galès describes local entities as political, economic and social constructs, which are likely to determine the influence of European integration and globalization. European cities are not organized solely by the state but, increasingly, in relation to regions and cities in other countries – the horizontal dimension of European integration – and in relation to Brussels – the vertical dimension (Le Galès 2002, p. 75). Cities have become involved in the European institutionalization dynamic through funds, the proliferation of new actors and transnational flows of goods and people.

Notwithstanding the increasing autonomy of cities, social science inseparably links cities to nation-states. Le Galès (2002) also emphasizes the embeddedness of Western European cities within national societies. The nation he argues maintains its importance as an institutional actor and any assertion of the demise of the state in times of further European integration and redistribution of authorities is premature (Le Galès, 2002). This indicates that the state is still important in providing the institutional and legal context in which cities operate in regards to European integration (Kazepov, 2000, p. 32). In the last 30 years since the fall of the communist system, however, a major redistribution of authority has altered the position of European cities

(Le Galès, 2002, p. 84, Kazepov, 2005, p. 19). With the further increase of globalization and European integration, newly emerging intergovernmental networks, economic globalization and the erosion of national borders allowed local authorities to bypass the state. Europeanization processes ‘provide a new structure of opportunities’ (Le Galès, 2002, p. 96) for cities and citizens and allow them to engage with other actors on a European or global scale. These new opportunities and chances have changed the way in which cities have to be defined. The traditional conditions of local authorities, economic institutions and urban societies are shifting. As Smith notes, ‘any given city, receiving particular transnational economic, political or cultural flows provides a specific configuration of potential opportunities’ (2001, p. 168). Cities constitute social structures and sets of institutions that guide citizens’ opportunities and influence their view of the world (Le Galès, 2002; Andreotti et al., 2015). In the design of future integration scenarios, it will be increasingly important to examine urban structures. According to Eurostat statistics, 72% of the EU population lived in cities by 2014. More and more people live in urban areas, influenced by local political, cultural and economic structures offered by urban areas.

Moreover, for young, well-educated citizens - the assumed winners of Europeanization - their frame of reference for evaluation of European integration might increasingly change. This group is in a stronger position to benefit from European networks and increasing horizontal contacts. Are they, as Lyons argues, ‘less interested in, and feel less connected with, their immediate community’ (2007, p. 55) because they have the skills and the capacities to work and live everywhere? Groups with better educational qualifications and cultural resources are more likely to benefit from transnational interactions. These social classes are highly mobile and are able to change city or country and thus avoid constraints of local economic and political conditions. The opportunity for involvement in these networks for highly educated urban residents is an indicator of the link between spatial and social mobility.

## **Dynamic changes in Polish cities**

A wide range of scholars has written about Western European cities as political, economic and cultural framework within the processes of European integration (Dickinson, 1962; McKay, 1982; Cheshire and Hay, 1989), treating Central Europe as some kind of ‘terra incognita’. Initially, political processes in Europe after the Second World War and the associated restricted access to data constituted the main reason why authors directed their focus towards Western Europe. However, even contemporary scholars often refer almost exclusively

to Western Europe (Le Galès, 2002; Favell, 2008). Nevertheless, in CEE, as elsewhere in the EU, one can notice the accelerated concentration of production and consumption in urban areas. Veltz (2000) states that horizontal, transnational relations increasingly outpace traditional vertical relations with the state. Many cities strive to distinguish themselves from other cities as urban authorities quickly realized that the uniqueness of their city is what gives them an advantage in the global competition (Nedović-Budić and Tsenkova, 2006). Additionally, the ability to develop entrepreneurial urban governance strategies (Young and Kaczmarek, 2008) has shaped the extent to which the cities become attractive to their residents. According to the Polish Ministry of Regional Development (2010), the most competitive cities after 1990 were the metropolitan areas of Warsaw, Poznań, Wrocław, Kraków and Gdańsk. Based on historical legacies and individual economic and political performance, these cities developed different strategies towards improving the conditions for urban residents after the collapse of the Soviet Union and during the European integration process. In this sense Polish urban centres are going through a dynamic process of social and political change. Urban settlements in Poland, have specifically taken more responsibility for their own strategic decision-making and for inclusion into the European framework. While they participate and extend their influence within the EU, they equally necessitate an influx of new business sectors into their city, for the improvement of infrastructure and cultural aesthetics. Most Polish cities have made significant investments in their infrastructure and transport systems since 1990. New local government regulations stipulate that the task of the communes is to improve the conditions for urban residents. City councils increasingly aim to stimulate entrepreneurship and to enhance the attractiveness of their city for its urban population.

## **Hypotheses: Attachment, urban performance and EU attitudes**

Focusing on attachment to the nation-state, Hooghe and Marks argue that ‘it is not unusual for an individual to have a strong national attachment and yet be positively oriented to European integration’ (2008: 13). Garry and Tilley, also focusing on national identities, state that place attachment is able to predict attitudes towards the EU but the picture is quite nuanced (2009: 362). While some scholars argue that a strong national identity is negatively correlated with support for EU integration (Carey, 2002), other authors find these variables positively correlated (Diez Medrano, 2003). Looking at local entities, this leads to the following question: What is the connection between urban place attachment and attitudes towards the EU? If cities, provide a frame of reference and thereby potentially increase a form of exclusive attachment, I

assume that the more citizens are attached to their respective city, the less favourable are the attitudes towards the EU. This does not mean that identities are necessarily exclusive, but that stronger feelings of attachment for the local entity correlate negatively with attitudes towards the EU.

*H1: The more attached the MA students are to their respective city, the more unfavourable their attitudes towards European integration are.*

Yet, the city as a place does not categorically determine the citizens' way of life. While the feeling of attachment might be grounded in a territorial area, individual utilitarian interests can take many forms, such as religion, culture or profession. Many people in cities live and work in relatively small defined areas. The services they receive as residents of a particular spatial area also have to be of local character. In this setting, the local government has been the leading actor, as administrative, economic and political structures develop significant meaning for citizens (Hill, 1994). By analysing the city as an urban area that influences its residents, it is crucial to consider its position within the European integration and globalization processes. For cities, the twofold task to provide beneficial services for residents while at the same time responding to the pressure of globalized capitalism, Europeanization, and the network society is crucial but also difficult. If cities want to attract and retain highly qualified people, they have to provide creative strategies and good governance. A favourable performance potentially instils a particular type of bond between the residents and the city, while still serving as means of economic competition. Good governance may serve as reference point for the urban residents when they assess EU policies EU (Anderson, 1998). I assume that a favourable political performance is strengthening the urban authorities' position and reduce the appeal of more EU integration.

*H2: The more satisfied the MA students are with the local government in their city, the more unfavourable their attitudes towards European integration are.*

A more tangible and visible outcome of 'good governance' is the provision of beneficial economic, political and cultural conditions for the local population. Culture has been widely viewed as being an important feature to rescue European cities (Le Galès, 2002). Urban entities have always exhibited a capacity both to generate culture and to induce levels of economic innovation (Scott, 2000). The redistribution of authority towards local governments favours further these attempts to mobilize local urban culture in order to establish attachment to the local space and to make the city more attractive to international companies. Culture is, in this

context, made instrumental by urban authorities for the purposes of creating a sense of solidarity and of interdependence with the city (Le Galès, 2002, p. 221).

Many authors share a focus on economic factors when describing the decisive factors of urban competitiveness (Sassen, 1999; Stanilov, 2007; Szczech-Pietkiewicz, 2013). Sassen (2006: 31). Sassen (2006: 31) states that today we recognize a ‘growing number of cities emerging as strategic territories that contribute to articulate a new global political economy’. In light of the dominant impact of economic forces, Nijkamp and Kourtit (2013) ask how these trends can be applied on a European level. In their view, European cities have to respond ‘properly and urgently to avoid a declining attractiveness for creative [and well-educated] talents and firms’ (Nijkamp and Kourtit, 2013, p. 301). ). In contrast, despite the need for innovation and creativity in developing economic strategies and the existing competitiveness between European cities, many urban areas become alike due to the same globalization processes they are exposed to. Local authorities focus on similar strategies and economic trends which undermines the exclusiveness of their respective city and prevents them from creating more competitive positions (Bruneckiene et al., 2012, p. 256).

While cultural and economic conditions are relatively easy to explain, political conditions are more difficult to assess. In this paper, I focus on services and infrastructure delivered by political institutions for the shared benefit of residents. Local governments should promote the quality of their urban places through place visions, innovation and strategic developments. This form of local governance is described as place-focused, ‘open-minded to new ideas, aware of its traditions and facilitative of the opportunities and ambitions of residents with a stake in the urban place’ (Healy et al., 2003, p. 61). It further refers to the local management of residents’ affairs, which incorporates the challenges of shared spaces while also including the traditional delivery of political services such as welfare and security. Healy (2002) further explains that politics and local administrations carry out projects and programmes to shape and improve the image of the urban space. The city as a social and spatial entity has to be brought to life through public policies implemented by urban administrations.

Local governments are physically closer to the urban residents and are therefore in a position to offer favourable conditions and exercise choices on behalf of their communities. How well these specific conditions are experienced by the urban community and how satisfied they are with the services provided by the local governments may have a decisive influence on their attitudes towards the EU. Related to H2, I hypothesize the following:

*H3: The more satisfied the MA students are with the economic and cultural conditions, and public services in their city, the more unfavourable their attitudes towards European integration are.*

In sum, Polish cities are increasingly integrated within the framework of the EU. Local governments in Poland play a central role in promoting their cities' economic and cultural attractiveness while at the same time portraying the city as a space that provides a location of attachment for urban citizens by offering favourable economic and cultural conditions and public services.

## **Data and method**

Data to examine these hypotheses come from interviews I conducted with MA students in the Tricity area, Warsaw, and Kraków in April and May 2016. I focused on larger metropolitan areas, which were geographically dispersed and provided a different economic, and cultural background. The semi-structured interviews were held with 24 MA students who fulfilled certain stipulated requirements: Polish citizenship, living in one of the three selected cities for at least five years, and speaking a second European language. To assess satisfaction with local conditions and attitudes towards EU integration, I asked the students if they could explain in detail their perceptions of their local and the European political environment.

Unfortunately, conducting a probability sample was not possible due to legal restrictions. This means that no randomization was possible and generalizations for Polish cities cannot be drawn from the conducted sample. The sampling technique used in this study might therefore be best described as opportunity sampling (Schofield, 1996). Focusing on young, well-educated urban citizens, on the one hand, offers a possibility to examine these European integration's winners' perceptions of local conditions and their attitudes towards the EU. This contributes to a better understanding of complex transitions within post-communist European societies in relation to their own perceptions of their lived social and political environment. On the other hand, their identical level of educational qualification and the demographic requirements allow to control for interfering socio-political variables and a class-related bias that potentially have an influence on their view on EU integration. The only intervening variable I included in the equation is gender. Unfortunately, more women than men allowed me to conduct an interview, which may have an influence on the results. Table 1 shows the distribution of the interviews according to gender and city they live in.

Table 1: Distribution of interviewees by city of origin and gender

<i>City</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
Tricity	1	6	7
Warsaw	5	5	10
Kraków	2	5	7
Total	8	16	24

Source: Author's own data

In addition, by collecting data from cities within the same country, I restrict other national influences such as different economic and welfare systems, or the structure of national political systems. The focus of attention shall be on the city as a case and not on the nation-state. But looking at spatial entities as explanatory factor can be problematic if the units of analysis and the variables in question are not defined carefully. Thus, the cities used as cases in this study serve as a summary term for specific factors, which might influence the view of young well-educated urban residents on the EU.

From the three selected cities, Warsaw seems an obvious choice as it has been the capital of Poland since the end of the 16th century. After being almost completely destroyed at the end of the Second World War, Warsaw has witnessed profound transitions from a centralized political and economic system towards a democratically elected government and a market economy. At present, it is not only the dominant political and economic centre of Poland but also the country's biggest city. Kraków, the former capital of Poland and current capital of the Lesser Poland Voivodship, is the second largest and also one of the oldest cities in Poland. The city has traditionally been one of the leading academic, religious and cultural centres in Poland. Kraków is also one of the most visited tourist destinations in Poland. The Tricity area is not a city itself but a conurbation consisting of the three closely cooperating cities: Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot. All three cities are located in the north of Poland at the Baltic Sea. Historically, the place is important in the minds of Polish people since it is where the fall of communism in Central Europe began with the Solidarity movement.

## **Analysis and results**

To analyse the transcribed interviews, I used the NVivo software. This software facilitated the organisation and categorisation of the students' statements. To further structure the data and to enable a comparison of the different answers I used a standardised set of

questions that I asked during the semi-structured interviews. For each question, I also explored differences or similarities occurring in the interviewees' reflections and descriptions according to the city in which they live.

### **Relationship between place attachment and attitudes towards the EU**

Some of the interviewed students indicated that they are more attached to the city than to the country, while others felt more attached to Poland than to their respective city. A third group said that they are equally attached to both territorial entities. I made two important observations during the interviews. First, attachment to the city does not influence the interviewees' opinion about the EU. The findings do not support H1. The view on EU integration seemed unconnected to attachment to the local place. This was exemplified by the second observation. Some students were critical when they assess the impact of EU membership on Poland as a country but generally, the supported for EU integration was still dominant among the interviews students. At the same time, the vast majority of them emphasised the personal advantages resulting from EU accession. This points towards the influence of national factors on general attitudes towards the EU and a rather utilitarian approach when assessing personal benefits resulting from Poland's EU membership. My findings also indicate that a stronger attachment to the city than to the nation-state does not necessarily mean that any territorial dimension above the local entity is met with skeptical views. This points towards Hooghe and Marks (2001) notion of inclusive attachments, where citizens do not trade off identification with one spatial entity with attachment to another. Two statements illustrate these differences between skeptical attitudes towards the EU and the favorable opinion about personal benefits resulting from EU membership:

(BC, M, Tricity)

I think, personally for me, it's better that we are in the European Union. But in ten years or twenty years more maybe there, if I say something about the general economic situation. For Poland, I am not so sure it will be better for Poland but for me personally, yes.

(MBi, F, Kraków)

From one side, it's good. We have lots of opportunities now. Especially when we are students. We can use lots of lots of programmes. Yeah, mainly Erasmus but also different ones. Now I would like to applicate for the Erasmus internship after studies. So yeah, from this side it's really really good but from the other, I, actually, I don't know because the political side is quite complicated. From my side, I can see some things from the EU that I don't like. For example, I am not really happy with the way of solving problems by the European Union government. When one of the countries has a different point of view. Sometimes I am feeling that even the European Union government says that it's a democratic group of countries. Sometimes they don't allow us to be as we want to be.

Another factor were the issues, which students attributed to EU membership. When asked about their opinion of the European Union, the most frequently mentioned benefits had no connection with the students' life in cities. It was the EU's security policy and being a part of a new political system after years of communist rule. In this context, the students referred not to attachment to their respective city but to the country.

(AM, F, Kraków)

For me, it's good to be an EU member. [...] If we wouldn't be a part of the EU we could have the same situation as in the Ukraine. [...] Yes, for Poland, it's a matter of security. Two years ago, I was really scared of an invasion. For the first time in my life, I was scared that Russia would attack Poland, not openly, but strategically. For the first time in my life.

These statements illustrate what the EU represents for the interviewed MA students and the perceived effects of European integration. In their minds, Poland's past still plays a role in the perception of current political events and in the unfolding of future events. These feelings were more influential than local place attachment.

Another clear relationship emerged between gender and attitudes towards the EU. Notwithstanding attachment to the city, among the surveyed students, women expressed more often positive attitudes towards EU integration than men. The role of gender in shaping attitudes towards the EU is a very interesting aspect. My findings contradict Nelsen and Guth, who argue "that a modest gender gap exists, with women being less enthusiastic about the EU than men" (2000: 267). Using data based on random samples collected in 1995 and 1998, Slomczynski and Shabad similarly argue that women "tended to be less favourable toward Poland joining the EU than their male counterparts" (2003:515).

### **Relationship between urban authorities and EU attitudes**

After the collapse of the communist system, which liberated cities from centralised Soviet control, local authorities gained more power and influence. Almost thirty years later, the roles and duties of local urban authorities are manifold and cover a range of political and social areas. They have to support policies that provide sustainable urban planning, promote the cities' competitiveness and develop strategies to make the urban environment attractive for their residents. To assess what the students think about their local government, I asked them: "Would you say, the City Council does a generally good job or not such a good job in running (your

city)?” This first was followed by additional questions on possible areas of improvement and on the individual impact of the councils’ decisions and policies on the lives of the students.

Generally, most interviewed students acknowledge the work of their respective local governments but, at the same time, are rather critical of the actual policies and their effect on the urban environment. This is what two students said, reflecting many other statements on the perceived work of local authorities.

(AP, F, Warsaw)

I guess, when I have to rate and the rate is up to ten, I could say four. They are not so good (laughs). They are good in some of the things but not so many.

(DA, F, Kraków)

I think that a good job, but there's always some space to perfection, so I guess there are some problems that have to be solved.

While most students had a similar approach to how they see their local governments, some of the urban residents took a more passionate and firm stand either for or against the government. Negative attitudes towards the City Hall often resulted from a lack of trust, in addition to assertions that the authorities only have their own interests in mind. This was expressed by the following two students when I asked about their satisfaction with the local authorities. Hardly surprising, this palpable frustration was often targeted at the politician that the students identified as the key culpable figure. This was typically the face of the local government, usually the president of the City Council. The statements also illustrate that some students are quite disillusioned about how much they can expect from their local governments.

(AM, F, Kraków)

I am getting back to local things. The president of the city, which is Jacek Majchrowski [in power since 2002, fourth term], he is like a president for 10 years. I am not sure if it is 10 years but he is here, like, for a long time and he is not improving, I don't know why he was chosen again. Pfffff, so, no. No! [...] You see the same faces all the time in the politics and this is getting a little bit frustrating.

(AP, F, Warsaw)

Yeah, I think that's on the City Hall, which is not the best one. The president is not the best one and they are concerned more about party, political party, and not about the city. So, they are not doing the best thing for Warsaw and they are destroying a lot of things.

In terms of positive reviews, one City Council received a lot of acclaim. MA students from the Tricity metropolitan region not only distinguished between issued policies of local governments in Gdynia, Sopot and Gdańsk. They also ranked their performances with the City Council. Gdynia received very favourable feedback for its urban planning, investment in public

participation activities, creating opportunities for young people, and, as one student put it, for its innovative approach.

(OM, F, Tricity)

They [the authorities in Gdynia] are really innovative and they are trying to help young people and to do, for example, some start up and new business. In Gdansk it's more difficult to introduce something new. We are more traditional.

Now the question is whether good governance on a local level has an influence on the perception of the European Union. When asked about the influence of local governance on their attitudes towards the EU, the answer was a clear 'None'. This candid statement was usually followed by a more nuanced explanation that often included personal reasons as a driver behind opinion about the EU. The most frequently mentioned benefits had no connection with local governance and the students' life in cities. Again, it was the security that the EU provided that had the most appeal. In this context, they mostly referred to the country. When they said "we" or "us" related to these security issues, they meant the Polish nation and not urban residents:

(WP, M, Kraków)

Without the EU we would be Ukraine. We would be alone in Europe and everyone would be able to do anything and other countries would say, ok it's not our business. If you are alone, you fight alone.

(AS, F, Tricity)

Our history is bloody as well because we are between Russia and Germany. So I think we need countries which will be, like, with us in one group to help in some cases.[...] And I think I feel more safe if I knew the EU than only here. Because even if it happens like in the past that maybe nobody will help us if somebody attacks us, I can have this little hope that something changed already and somebody helps us if someday attacks us. And yes, I am a stereotypical Polish girl who has some doubts about Russia. It's true, sorry (laughs)! Yes, I have doubts with Russia. I don't trust them and I am not any racist or anything but I have this in my blood. I inherited it.

These accounts simultaneously demonstrate a still vivid orientation to the past and a will to look forward, embracing European integration as a cornerstone of Polish security and protection against a perceived former aggressor whose influence still remains visible in neighboring countries. Concurrently, it shows that students ascribe different tasks to different political entities distinguish between local, national and the European policies.

These uneven results across the selected cities also point towards a lack of support for hypotheses that argue that attitudes towards the EU are conditioned by the evaluation of the local political authorities.

## **Relationship between urban conditions and EU attitudes**

Good local governance equally improves the competitiveness of the urban environment and the attractiveness of the urban space for city dwellers, which is, in turn, important for their well-being. In this context, most students mentioned that, generally, they expect the local governments to improve economic conditions and quality of life. As one students from Warsaw put it:

(AP, F, Warsaw)

I guess they should care for the well-being of people. And it's also connected with the economy of Warsaw. They should look for the needs of the simple habitants. [...] When the city is really good for living, it's also better for the economy. And when we have for example a better air, we have in the future (laughs) a better economy because we live longer and so on. And we want to live here and so on.

At the same time, urban planning and infrastructure were the areas most often criticised by students from every selected city, when I asked them about specific complaints. This included renovation of streets (AS, F, Tricity, DA, F, Kraków), public participation in urban planning (AP, F, Wrocław), a more extensive public transport network (KK, M, Tricity; MPo, F, Warsaw; PZ, F, Kraków), more green areas and parks (MPi, F, Warsaw). Looking at specific cities, local political issues such as a the rather chaotic and utterly expensive organisation of the World Youth Day 2016 in Kraków (PP, F, Kraków; PZ, F, Kraków; AM, F, Kraków), or the massive maintenance bills for the mostly empty stadium in Gdańsk (AS, F, Tricity).

Although many students appreciate the efforts being undertaken by the local governments, they were also convinced that the development of local conditions and the improvement of public infrastructure is connected to Poland's EU membership. In 2015, total EU spending in Poland reached € 13.358 billion, which is equal to 3.25% of Poland's gross national income (EU, 2017). In urban areas, the EU funds new roads and railway tracks, invests in renewable energy, revitalises deprived areas and helps to tackle unemployment (European Commission, 2017). In this sense, many of the interviewed students have favourable attitudes towards the EU because of the structural and cohesion funds which are available to local governments for urban projects and the improvement of urban conditions and quality of life.

(AK, F, Warsaw)

I think we are getting the most money in the EU. And I see how it is improving in every city in Poland.

(PZ, F, Kraków)

Generally speaking, if there wasn't money from the EU, and these European programmes, [...], Poland and Krakow would develop much more worse.

These statements illustrate the complex connection of local conditions and what the EU represents for the interviewed MA students. There is evidence that H3 is disproved and shall be rejected. Satisfaction with economic and cultural conditions, and especially with public services is connected to positive attitudes towards the EU, due to the MA students' awareness of funding that facilitate the improvement of urban infrastructure. Indeed, within the financial framework 2014 – 2020, Poland will be the “biggest EU funds beneficiary among all the member states” (MSP 2013).

## **Conclusion**

This study has examined correlations between satisfaction with local conditions in three Polish cities and public support for European integration. Although the concept of the city as a unit of analysis received, to date, relatively little attention, perception of urban conditions helps examine attitudes towards the EU among young well-educated citizens. Cities are important for the integration of horizontal and vertical networks and serve as opportunity-ridden locations and as frames of reference for their citizens. Thus, urban spaces are not merely physical entities but also function as independent platforms for the interaction of a multitude of local actors. In this article, I found that the relationship between local conditions, place attachment and attitudes towards the EU is quite nuanced and complex.

Attachment to the city hardly affects the surveyed MA students' attitudes towards the EU. Yet, the influence of strong feelings of place attachment is an often mentioned aspect in shaping world views and deserves further research. My findings further indicate that cities have a certain relevance in providing a frame for socialisation and help determine people's attitudes towards the EU. The performance of local governments and their promotion of economic and cultural conditions, as well as public services were critically evaluated by the interviewed students. A connection that was frequently mentioned was the positive influence of EU funds on development of urban conditions. In this context, the students were also concerned with the potential inability of urban authorities to handle these funds properly. Local governments were often described as ineffective and too bureaucratic (MW, M, Warsaw). Other students criticised the City Hall for its lack of planning and vision for the future of their city (JK, F, Kraków).

Nevertheless, the national frame and context is still more dominant in influencing support for EU integration. One of the most prominent benefits voiced by the interviewed students was the security aspect of EU membership. Many students referred to the country's history as a communist satellite state ruled by the Soviet Union and the resulting distrust they maintain against the current Russian state. Further research on satisfaction with local governments and place attachment would be necessary to investigate opinions among the well-educated youth about European integration. This could include gender-based attitudes towards the EU, as my findings contrast with previous research. Additionally, a longitudinal investigation that sheds further light on how satisfaction levels may vary, and whether the relationships found in Polish cities are similar in other European cities (Carey, 2002).

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