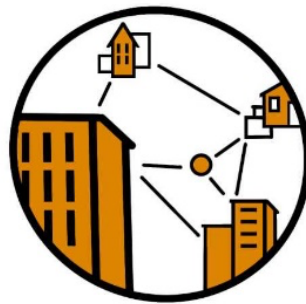




URBANORMS

Exploring International City Networks in
Global Norm Dynamics



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Comparing International City Networks – An Analytical
Framework

Working Paper

April 2024

About URBANORMS:

URBANORMS is a research project that studies the activities and structures of international city networks in global politics. Its mission is to understand how network structures influence the activities of international city networks in global norm dynamics and to explore the variance of these activities in reference to different institutional and political backgrounds.

URBANORMS was launched in Spring of 2022 at the Institute of International Relations of the TU Braunschweig. The research team consists of Prof. Dr. Anja P. Jakobi as Principal Investigator, as well as Ronja Haenschen, M.A., Dr. Bastian Loges and Dr. Katharina Mann.

Funding for this project is provided by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

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1. INTRODUCTION¹

Over the last two decades, urban perspectives have gained more attention in global governance, as local and regional authorities, especially cities and international city networks (ICNs), are increasingly engaged in global politics (Kihlgren Grandi 2020; Acuto et al. 2021; Kosovac et al. 2021). In this paper, we define ICNs as networks that consist of city members based in at least three countries, that may or may not include other types of actors, and whose focus can be on any given issue area of international relations (Jakobi et al. 2024). As political networks, ICNs have been established as means to generate agency for their members, both in local affairs and at the international level. Network structures facilitate opportunities to exchange knowledge, share resources, and build capacities for policy-making and the implementation of international agreements or norms (Ljungkvist 2014: 41; Bouteligier 2013: 58; Davidson et al. 2019: 3541). At the same time, such networks advocate for urban interests at the international level, adopt and promote norms, and generate governance frameworks or policy programs (Herrschel/Newman 2017; Kihlgren Grandi 2020; Acuto/Leffel 2021). Although cities and ICNs have no formal authority in global politics, public and private actors increasingly recognize them as important players. Therefore, their activities are promoted by international organizations, their responsibilities are defined in key normative frameworks, and they are supported by civil society and corporate entities (Davidson et al. 2019; Acuto et al. 2021; Kosovac et al. 2021). One effect of this engagement is not only their expanding relevance in global politics but the growing number and scope of ICNs as new political actors (Jakobi et al. 2024; Acuto/Rayner 2016). However, due to the variation in missions and activities, assessing their overall contribution to global governance requires a systematic analysis.

Due to the growing political engagement of ICNs, scientific interest in their role in global governance is expanding: Studies on cities and ICNs have analyzed their international activities and organizational structures in different issue areas coming from diverse disciplines, including Urban Studies, Political Science, International Law, and International Relations (IR). These disciplines use different conceptual perspectives to depict or explain the international activities of cities (Ljungkvist 2014; Curtis 2016; Rapoport et al. 2019), ICNs (Toly 2008; Bouteligier 2013; Durmus/Oomen 2022), or both (Gordon/Ljungkvist 2021). While there has been extensive research on the activities of cities and ICNs in specific policy fields, such as climate change mitigation (Betsill/Bulkeley 2006; Gordon 2020) or human rights advocacy (Nijman et al. 2022; Och 2022), other issue areas have been more neglected. Mostly analyzing environmental politics, scholars have produced single-case studies (Zeppel 2013; Zebrowski 2020) and conducted comparative research (Bansard et al. 2016; Haupt/Coppola 2019; Cortes et al.

¹ All authors contributed equally to the working paper. However, the case studies were written by individual authors: Ronja Haenschen is responsible for the case study on the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, Bastian Loges for the Fast-Track Cities Initiative and the Rainbow Cities Network, and Katharina Mann for the Strong Cities Network. We thank Anja P. Jakobi very much for her valuable comments on the manuscript.

2022). Also, they focused either on the internal processes of ICNs (Nielsen/Papin 2021; Heikkinen et al. 2020) or their external relations (Coppola/Haupt 2022; Fuentenebro/Acuto 2022).

From a comparative perspective, it thus remains unclear how active ICNs are, how they are organized, which norms they advocate, and what implications their activities have on global governance. Moreover, many aspects of the conceptualization, composition, and relevance of ICNs are still undertheorized (Davidson et al. 2019; Gordon/Ljungkvist 2021). Thus, to understand not only the role of ICNs in global governance but also their particularities, the need for further research is twofold: On the one hand, the conduction of more in-depth case studies is needed (Acuto/Leffel 2021: 1760) to enhance the knowledge on ICNs in their specific contexts and to reveal internal network dynamics in relation to its surroundings. On the other hand, developing conceptual tools is essential for enabling a systematic analysis of ICNs beyond particular institutional settings and policy fields. For the latter, research needs to identify relevant comparable components of the ICNs to evaluate existing patterns and differences between ICNs systematically. However, while structural variance is rarely examined in the literature, it is likely to influence the activities of ICNs on global governance.

This working paper advances the research agenda on ICN by combining activities, organizational features, and contextual aspects in one analytical framework that can be used to compare ICNs from various political, institutional, and organizational contexts. By highlighting the analytical benefits of a comparative perspective on empirical heterogeneity, our framework adds to a systematic assessment of similarities and differences, ultimately paving the way to understanding and explaining what different ICNs contribute to processes of global governance. The framework is based on a systematic integration of findings from different research strands that we condense in three dimensions: context, activities, and structures. To illustrate the benefits of a comparative perspective as well as enhance knowledge on ICN in a diversity of policy fields, for the study of ICN, we apply our analytical framework to four ICNs from policy fields that are usually not central to the study of ICN.

The paper is structured as follows: We first introduce our analytical framework, outlining the three dimensions of context, activities, and structures. In a second step, we apply the framework to four ICNs: The Fast-Track Cities Initiative, which engages with political responses to HIV/AIDS, the Strong Cities Network, which is active in the field of violence prevention, the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights which addresses digital rights governance, as well as the Rainbow Cities Network which is involved in human rights politics and the advocacy of LGBTI representation. Our data is gathered from public statements like the ICNs' webpages, reports, press releases, and operational documents. We compare the findings of each case, highlighting key similarities and variances regarding their organizational structures and contributions to global politics. We discuss our findings in the conclusions, evaluating our framework's

analytical potential and limits, and provide an outlook on future research, including methodological implications.

2. DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR THE COMPARISON OF ICNS

Research on ICNs is emerging with an interdisciplinary nature, signifying varying definitions and diverse perspectives on what aspects of ICNs are analytically relevant. While scholars have gained extensive insights into the scope, features, and activities of city networks in the context of environmental politics and climate mitigation (Cortes et al. 2022; Bansard et al. 2017; Boutelegier 2013), there is no conceptualization that can be used for a systematic comparison between ICNs from different political and institutional contexts (Acuto/Leffel 2021; Bassens et al. 2019). To address this gap, our analytical framework includes findings of recent studies from diverse fields, such as urban studies, environmental politics, international law, and global governance research. To systemize the characteristics of ICN and facilitate comparison across different issue areas and policy fields, our framework comprises three dimensions: context, activities, and structures. Table 1 presents an overview of the analytical dimensions and the corresponding indicators.

Table 1: Analytical Framework to Compare ICNs

Analytical Dimensions		Indicators
Context	Political Context	- Issue Area
	Institutional Context	- Existing Norms - International Treaties - International Organizations
Activities	Founding	- Year - Founders - Type of Initiation
	Self-Proclaimed Missions	- Exchange and Learning - Networking - Internationalized Orientation - Implementation - Leadership - Representation
	Contributions to Norm Dynamics	- Norm Initiation - Norm Adaptation - Norm Contestation
Structures	Funding	- Type of Funding - Budget
	Internal Structures	- Membership - Geographical Distribution - Internal Management Bodies
	External Relations	- External Partners - Links to International Organizations

Source: own account

2.1 Context

The first dimension, context, provides information on the political and institutional backgrounds of the networks at the international level, the issue areas the networks are involved in, and the relevant norms, treaties, and international organizations that impact the political discourse.

In general, context refers to broader assumptions about institutions, actors, their relations, and processes in global politics. Research on global governance has shown how international organizations and transnational actors contribute to international politics (Avant et al. 2010; Tallberg et al. 2013; Andonova 2017) and how global governance exceeds different political levels by linking the global with the national and the local (Levi-Faur 2012; Benz et al. 2021). Findings also refer to contextual factors from a historical perspective by investigating how institutional path dependencies affect future decisions (Mahoney/Thelen 2010; Rixen et al. 2016; Fioretos 2017) or by focusing on how governance varies between direct and indirect, formal and informal mechanisms (Abbott et al. 2015; Daase 2009; Westerwinter et al. 2021). However, research on ICNs refers to contextual factors rather strictly by highlighting aspects of formal institutionalization: For example, Lecavalier and Gordon (2020: 29) argue that the broad activities of ICNs in climate politics can be explained by the lack of a central environmental international organization and that, in turn, existent international organizations in a specific issue area may weaken attempts of ICNs' secretariats to develop authority on their own. Yet, the long-standing activism of the Mayors for Peace shows that ICNs can also develop influential activities and organizational structures in a highly legalized and organizationally dense international environment, like the nuclear order (Klockmann 2018).

To empirically capture the activities of ICNs in global politics, our framework addresses the political context in terms of its institutionalization within a specific policy field. Assessing these factors systematically, we examine the issue area in which the ICNs are active and the relevant institutions. Specifically, we identify existing norms, treaties, and organizations central to the institutional background of global governance within the respective area. Since norms can be emerging, accepted, contested, or even actively sabotaged, and their recognition changes over time or geographically, norms are constantly in flux (Finnemore/Sikkink 1998; Acharya 2004; Wiener 2018). Thus, we assess their form and robustness representing a specific institutional, not necessarily legalized, context. Yet, international norms can also translate into international treaties, turning informal norms into formalized ones, including important aspects like obligation or delegation to specific actors, including international organizations (Abbott et al. 2000, Abbott/Snidal 2000). Issue areas differ significantly regarding their formal institutionalization with relevant implications: Whether an international organization exists and which central compliance mechanisms in terms of enforcement, management, and adjudication (Chayes/Chayes 1995; Downs et al. 1996; Zangl 2008) it possesses, may influence the specific activities

of ICNs. In sum, the political and institutional context of norms, treaties, and organizations can represent opportunities and challenges for ICNs and how they engage in specific issue areas.

2.2 Activities

The second analytical dimension focuses on ICNs' activities to assess their founding history, self-proclaimed missions, and intended contributions to global norm dynamics.

The founding history includes rationales for the network's establishment and the actors involved in founding it, with bottom-up initiatives by cities themselves to be distinguished from the top-down establishment of ICNs by international or regional organizations (Haupt/Coppola 2019: 130). Multinational corporations, international foundations, or philanthropies may also initiate ICNs through financial, logistical, or knowledge support (Fuentenebro/Acuto 2022; Acuto et al. 2017: 16).

The mission of an ICN can refer to two aspects: By defining aims and aspirations, the mission of ICNs establishes their self-perception as an actor but also represents a rationale for action in their respective issue area. The means by which ICNs seek to adapt and operationalize their missions in their agendas and activities are of particular interest. For their analysis, we use six categories derived from an empirical analysis of ICNs' missions by Jakobi et al. (2024) that we supplement with broader assumptions from literature on ICNs: Since cities are confronted with complex problems in different issue areas, a central aim for networking is exchange and learning (Bouteligier 2014: 67). Cities use ICNs to share information and experiences as well as to build capacities (Andonova et al. 2009: 63; Bouteligier 2012: 21) and to advocate local needs of their members (Bouteligier 2013). Some networks focus on the provision of technical assistance, training programs, and access to funding (Fünfgeld 2015) or function as "knowledge brokers" (Acuto et al. 2017: 17), that strengthen urban innovation and experimentation. Networking enables member cities to "scale up" (Acuto/Leffel 2021: 13) and also refers to cooperation with other actors beyond the formal network members. Cities employ networks as institutional venues to foster coordination and secure cooperation with various actors at different levels. Those formal or informal partnerships are meant to strengthen the members' agency (Bassens et al. 2019: 12; Acuto 2018: 137). Also, cities increasingly strive for their international presence in issues "ranging from nuclear proliferation, human rights, climate change, mitigation, and counterterrorism" (Ljungkvist 2014: 32) and align themselves with international topics and debates. However, such an internationalized orientation does not determine whether ICNs exceed the network level and engage at the global level in practice. Furthermore, ICNs aim to connect the global to the local agenda by developing programs to support the implementation processes of international agreements and treaties (Frantzeskaki 2019: 714; Kosovac et al. 2021: 1; Gordon/Johnson 2019: 716; Nijman 2016: 231-232). Beyond this bridging role, leadership is a central category as cities may see themselves as "global leaders" in specific issue areas (Acuto 2013;

Rapoport et al. 2019) by setting up more ambitious targets than nation-states (Ljungkvist 2014: 48). Also, ICNs aim to give their local populations a voice on the international and national level (Zeppel 2013; Bouteligier 2012: 21). They claim a representation of urban perspectives through communicating challenges that cities are confronted with, but also demanding the inclusion of multi-stakeholder approaches in decision-making processes.

Utilizing norm research as a conceptual lens to account for different forms of international activities, this paper clusters the activities of ICNs as contributions to global norm dynamics that encompass different reactions and strategies in relation to norms as standards of appropriateness in international politics (Finnemore/Sikkink 1998; Rosert 2023). The identification of normative contributions serves as a conceptual language for comparisons that can analytically be distinguished as either activities of norm initiation, norm adoption, or norm contestation. In norm initiation, norm entrepreneurs aim to change the normative status quo (Finnemore/Sikkink 1998). Accordingly, ICNs may propose new norms rhetorically and through their programmatic activities to initiate norm-generation, using different strategies at different levels, from local declarations to international law-making arenas. In contrast to initiation, ICNs adopt global norms usually by acknowledging them rhetorically and through implementation (Betts/Orchard 2014). In this case, they develop proposals for institutional routines at the network and/or city levels. Norm adoption may also include a gradual norm localization by incorporating local values (Acharya 2004) or by translating them into normative and political contexts on the ground (Zimmermann 2017). However, the actual performance of ICNs may vary between simple norm following and more ambitious norm amplification (Jakobi/Loges 2022). With regard to norm contestation (Wiener 2014, 2018), ICNs can provide a potential forum for critique and open a new way for stakeholders to bring their normative claims to international negotiations. ICNs may contest, once a norm is created, by questioning the validity or the application of global norms (Deitelhoff/Zimmermann 2019, 2020). The framework dimension of activities thus can assess how ICNs act in relation to the current political and institutional background by providing three different forms of normative activities as a basis for comparison.

2.3 Structures

The third dimension, structures, is subdivided into funding, internal structures, and the external relations of ICNs. It illustrates the organizational constitution of the networks and allows research to systematically map the membership composition, the geographical distribution, the internal governance, and the connection to other actors. Studies on formal and social structures of political networks have highlighted how they enable and constrain activities (Börzel 1998; Hafner-Burton et al. 2009; Victor et al. 2017), but

also research on networks in global governance indicates that network structures and internal processes generate specific outcomes for global governance (Stone/Maxwell 2005; Avant/Westerwinter 2016).

Funding is a relevant analytical dimension as it sheds light on the financial potential and available resources of ICNs and the cash flows of particular actors inside and outside the network (Haupt/Coppola 2019: 127). To pursue and implement their agendas, ICNs depend on a robust budget. One way to fund a basic network budget is through membership fees that may follow a different logic. Either all members must make the same financial contribution, or fees are calculated concerning the diverging financial opportunities of member cities. However, ICNs often lack the necessary resources for policy-making or knowledge protection. In these cases, the networks' activities may depend on external funding opportunities, such as collaboration with private sector entities or International Organizations. Empirically, city networks tend to lobby private actors for funding rather than approach national governments (Smeds 2019: 721). Also, since scholars found that technical programs and projects receive more financial support than more diplomatic activities (Pinault 2019: 718; Smeds 2019: 721), it must be assessed what is specifically funded and whether this adds to the general budget or specific programs.

Focusing on the internal structures of ICNs, the diversity of ICNs can be analyzed via their members and network internal bodies. It is of interest to know which types of actors are members, what criteria are defined for their membership, and from which parts of the globe cities join the network. While some ICNs only accept cities, defined as political-administrative entities represented by mayors, others allow the membership of individual departments or even other urban entities, such as municipalities, federal states, or regions. Moreover, some ICNs allow membership of non-public actors, such as civil society organizations or corporations (Nielsen/Papin 2021: 671). In some ICNs, potential members (Haupt/Coppola 2019: 233) must meet a specific threshold in the respective issue area (leaders in specific metrics), in size (megacities or small cities), as well as in political or spatial position (capitols or centers in a regional context).

Although all ICNs are international by definition, they demonstrate a diversity in their geographical scope. While some ICNs have members in every region of the world, others are marked by a clear geographical focus. This distribution can shed light on the representation of different interests and their political mediation within the networks and can reveal asymmetries between the Global North and the Global South (Acuto/Leffel 2021: 1767; Acuto/Rayner 2016: 1164; Bansard et al. 2017; Davidson et al. 2019: 3544; Rapoport et al. 2019: 42), potentially conserving problematic international hierarchies (Bouteligier 2013; Acuto 2018). However, ICNs can be more than mere connections of different members depending on aspects of internal administrative organization, such as the existence of steering committees, secretariats, or diverse regional offices (Acuto/Leffel 2021: 1764, Lecavalier/Gordon 2020). These internal management bodies can intensify internal exchange and facilitate effective governance

within the network. Specific decision-making processes inside the networks and the potential for dominant roles of several members matter for external activities (Khan 2013). They also depend on specific organizational features of ICNs: Centralization or decentralization, single or two-tiered structures, and committees or sub-networks (Acuto/Rayner 2016: 1160). Secretariats of ICNs may hold "considerable material, bureaucratic, and knowledge resources" (Lecavalier/Gordon 2020: 20), which makes them central in managing relations within as well as beyond their networks and gives them authority and thus agency (Lecavalier/Gordon 2020: 22). In order to exchange best practices and learn from each other, internal structures must support such a "scaling out" of experiences within the network. However, structures can also enable a "scaling up" from the network to the international level (Smeds/Acuto 2018: 553).

Concerning the external organizational aspects of ICNs, comparing their external relations to other actors and their potential linkage to international organizations provides valuable insights into their contribution to global governance. Considering the close cooperation with private actors such as companies or foundations, it also needs to be critically examined which interests are represented in the network's activities (Gordon/Johnson 2019: 716). Therefore, comparing ICNs' external relations outlines two types of collaboration: external partnerships with private actors (like companies, NGOs, and other ICNs) and institutionalized relations with international organizations (Haupt/Coppola 2019: 129). Generally, "external actors help to implement concrete projects by providing knowledge, services, or financial support" (Bouteligier 2012: 21). Irrespective of the benefits, external collaborations impact the ICNs' scope and means of action in their governance contribution as they might create dependencies or shifts on the agenda setting (Gordon/Johnson 2019: 716).

Many city networks have ties or are structurally embedded in or aligned to global, multilateral bodies. Linkages to international organizations like the United Nations or regional organizations like the European Union can be created through their founding history or result from a (successful) bottom-up process (see Acuto/Leffel 2020: 12-13; Acuto/Leffel 2021: 1759/62/70). Those relations can strengthen the ICNs' legitimacy. International organizations can recognize them as governance actors by granting them a seat at the table of international negotiations. At the same time, the institutional attachment could reduce the role of the ICNs to mere addressees of global politics, reducing them to implementers of international decisions.

Taken together, our framework focuses on three key dimensions when comparing ICNs: the political and institutional context in which the ICNs act, the range of activities they show within the network and beyond, as well as their structures. In the following, we apply it to four case studies of ICNs selected to explore variance against the background of this common analytical framework.

3. CONTEXT, ACTIVITIES AND STRUCTURES OF ICN: A FIRST ANALYSIS

Our four case studies are embedded in different policy contexts less frequently analyzed in research on ICNs compared to, e.g., environmental networks. The paper examines the Fast-Track Cities Initiative (FTCI) in global health politics, which focuses on the global fight against HIV/AIDS. The Strong Cities Network (SCN) contributes to global security politics by aiming at problems of radicalization and extremism. The Cities Coalition for Digital Rights (CC4DR) advocates for digital human rights in urban environments within the emerging and intersectional policy field of digital governance. Finally, the Rainbow Cities Network acts in global human rights, advocating LGBTI rights. These single-issue ICNs were formed in the last ten years, placing them among the more recent wave of emerging ICNs. They exhibit different characteristics regarding size and their relations to international organizations.

For our case studies, we relied on a literature review and a qualitative document analysis (Halperin/Heath 2017: 98-99; Prior 2014: 360). First, we assessed the political and institutional context of the four policy fields to which the ICNs seek to contribute. By reviewing IR literature, we identified the important international organizations, existing treaties, and normative discourses that ICNs explicitly and implicitly refer to. Next, we collected data on the ICNs' activities and structures. We focused on the material provided by the ICNs themselves for two reasons: Scholarly publications that elaborate aspects of the structures and activities on these four networks barely exist², and we were primarily interested in the network's representation of their aims and activities. Therefore, we conducted a qualitative document analysis based on program reports, newsletters, and different working documents like mission statements, strategic guidelines, memoranda of understanding, membership declarations, and their web pages. We also integrated insights from personal communication via email or video calls with network representatives to complement our desk research. All relevant documents that included information on the structures and activities of the networks were transferred to a MAXQDA dataset for coding and analysis in accordance with our framework. The dataset includes information up until the end of March 2024. Our analysis revealed an asymmetry between information on structural aspects and insights into the ICN's activities. All networks elaborate comprehensively on their mission statements, explaining their political aims and objectives. In contrast, aspects of the formal organizational structure and membership, insights on internal structures, funding, or external relations are rather sparse for some networks because information is inaccessible from the outside.

In sum, our dataset of material from webpages and official reports of ICNs provides relevant information on different aspects that enable a first analysis of our four case studies. By examining their missions, we systemize whether ICNs primarily engage inside their networks or beyond, whether they

² We nonetheless could include Corbisiero/Monaco 2020, da Silva 2018, Duplan 2023, and Monaco/Corbisiero 2022 for RCN with a focus on specific cities; Jakobi/Loges 2022 for FTCl; Calzada et al. 2021 for CC4DR and Barzegar et al. 2016 for SCN.

assist their members in learning or help to generate collective agency for activities at different levels. In addition, we assess whether they aim to support international treaties and norms or actively try to change them. At the same time, our initial analysis shows that generating in-depth knowledge for a more comprehensive analysis requires additional empirical information, for example via interviews. However, the following case studies and a comparison of their findings illustrate the analytical potential of our framework.

3.1 Fast-Track Cities Initiative

The FTCl is embedded within the context of global health politics, especially HIV/AIDS. Global health is a normatively contested field linked to moral, economic, and human rights reasoning, and it has an essential impact on individuals and communities (Harman 2012). Central to global health politics is the "right to health" as a norm incorporated in different international treaties and documents. First, it was introduced by the constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1946; similar formulations were included in the diverse International Human Rights Conventions. Also, regional human rights systems included a right to health in various treaties, underlining the importance of the norm (Forman 2019: 493-494). However, while international treaties acknowledge 'the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health' (ICESCR, 1966), the extent of this standard and how to reach it are subject to political considerations. At the national level, the right to health is questioned in different ways, including debates on what it means in practice, which organizational consequences it would have, how it relates to other policy considerations, and who would mainly be responsible for implementing it (Backman et al. 2008). Especially from 2000 onwards, the debate within the UN broadened, thus leading to a specification of the right's meaning – with the HIV/AIDS case as a central catalyst. Human rights-based legal arguments were used in campaigns and in courts to contest discriminatory laws and policies, particularly restrictive or discriminatory HIV/AIDS health care and treatment policies (Enoch/Piot 2017: 118; Forman 2019: 492, 496). Specifically, PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis), a biomedical prevention that effectively lowers the risk of infection, is essential for the implementation of the right to health, making its roll-out the most crucial aspect of the HIV response (Blouin-Genest/Erb 2019: 239).

UNAIDS' strategy, established in 2014, pursues a vision of ending AIDS by setting up three essential targets to be met by 2030: 95 percent of all people living with HIV need to know their status, 95 percent of those should receive antiretroviral therapy, and 95 percent of those should have viral suppression and are thus unable to transmit the virus (UNAIDS 2014: 1). In addition to the 95-95-95 target, UNAIDS promotes a health environment with "zero stigma" that is based on norms of inclusion and sexual self-determination and, for reasons of effectiveness, targets specific key populations that are

often minority groups facing exclusion at different levels. Therefore, UNAIDS initiates or coordinates worldwide multi-stakeholder consultations with key actors from civil society, professional healthcare personnel, experts, and political actors. In sum, HIV policies, with their focus on 95-95-95 and zero stigma, are deeply entwined in normative assumptions and international norms. Specifically, they refer to the right to health and sexuality rights, encompassing sexual orientation and gender identity.

Relevant intergovernmental organizations within the issue area are the WHO and UNAIDS, the "Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS," on the medical side. While the WHO constitution is a binding treaty in international law, it is not highly precise, and the delegation to the organization appears weak, leaving states in the position to decide whether they follow WHO rules or not. Regarding the UN human rights conventions, legalization appears harder since the treaties are not only binding but rather precise in what is forbidden and what must be implemented to comply with international commitments. In addition, their treaty bodies have been delegated specific practices to facilitate transparency. In sum, the strategies of the WHO and the treaty bodies to increase compliance rests on management practices, specifically by discussing obstacles to better implementation of the norms.

Within this international context, the FTCI's activities started with its foundation on December 1st, 2014, initiated by four core partners: the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (IAPAC), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), and the City of Paris. Its webpage does not disclose information on headquarters, but its technical partner, IAPAC, is based in Washington, D.C. (UNAIDS 2023).

The FTCI is a global partnership between cities and municipalities around the world. Its so-called Paris Declaration outlines a set of commitments to achieve the initiative's objective to end AIDS. Seven goals are central for the FTCI as the Paris Declaration indicates: 1) End AIDS as a public health threat in cities by 2030, 2) Put people at the center of everything we do, 3) Address the causes of risk, vulnerability and transmission, 4) Use our AIDS response for positive social transformation, 5) Build and accelerate an appropriate response to local needs, 6) Mobilize resources for integrated public health and development, 7) Unite as leaders (FTCI 2023a). In 2022, FTCI added the Sevilla Declaration to its mission and self-understanding that underlines the importance of affected communities and stakeholders for the initiative's success (FTCI 2023a).

With regard to the FTCI's aims, all seven categories of aspirations are addressed: FTCI is devoted to exchange and learning through different instruments that include international network conferences or reports by UNAIDS, but most importantly, FTCI established a best practice repository and public dashboards that are used by member cities to document progress in implementation and experiences on their way (FTCI 2023b, 2023c). Also, FTCI's principle of data transparency is central to organizing exchange and learning. In this regard, IAPAC generates technical support for collecting and managing

appropriate data (IAPAC 2023a). Regarding networking, FTCI addresses different actors beyond the network that it aims to work with, via close cooperation and coordination, especially local stakeholders within the cities, which are pivotal. Also, FTCI has a clear internationalized orientation through its close working relations with international organizations such as UN-Habitat and especially UNAIDS. However, FTCI does not explicitly communicate an aim to play a significant part in international meetings or negotiations. Instead, it understands itself as a transmission belt to translate global norms and standards to the local level (RFE). This also adds to the aim of implementation. FTCI aspires to implement global norms, especially the 95-95-95 and zero stigma standards, as well as other fast-track goals. Even more, the Paris Declaration holds that the member cities shall act as leaders in the global HIV response, which refers to the aim of leadership. Finally, a more implicit reference towards representation is found in the Sevilla Declaration, which understands FTCI as an instrument to bring urban voices and experiences to global politics (FTCI 2023a).

Generally, FTCI engages in norm adoption by explicitly supporting the existing norms within HIV/AIDS politics. While this means that members implement UNAIDS' 95-95-95 and zero stigma standards, cities also adapt these norms due to different local demands, especially with regard to specific key populations or minorities. Therefore, how the FTCI members implement these norms may differ. For example, in Eastern Europe, where people injecting drugs are exposed to a high risk of infection, an effective HIV response might include substitution therapy, while in other surroundings, safe spaces for transgender persons or the effective rollout of PrEP are central. Thus, FTCI members support specific groups that may be marginalized at the national level and introduce the provision of novel treatments that are still debated or even contested nationally. Especially in these situations, member cities act as leaders that engage in norm amplification by accelerating their response to HIV/AIDS quantitatively as well as qualitatively. In the end, FTCI members not only strengthen their HIV response but also advance sexuality rights and the right to health (Jakobi/Loges 2022). FTCI's activities indicate no signs of an obvious contestation or initiation of norms.

Concerning the structure of the FTCI, the documents analyzed provided no information on the general budget of the FTCI or the specific number of financial contributions by actors listed as FTCI's sponsors. While FTCI's website refers to a membership of over 350 cities and municipalities, we only counted about 280 cities. Since the members are cities and municipalities alone with no other types of actors involved, they make up 100 percent of the members. At the same time, FTCI has members from 79 countries and lists member cities in every region of the globe: 30 in Africa, 8 in Asia, 25 in Europe, 2 in Northern America, 12 in Central and South America, 2 in the Middle East (FTCI 2023d). Whether an asymmetry in membership is apparent is open to further research. With regard to specific criteria of membership, the webpage does not set any standards in order to become a member but explains how

cities join the initiative and what their expected commitments are: To become a member of FTCI, the mayor has to sign the Paris Declaration, and then city officials develop a specific strategy to accelerate the HIV response in close coordination with affected communities and stakeholders.

FTCI has largely informal structures and working relations: While its founding members IAPAC and UNAIDS support the initiative with their own staff, FTCI does not have a formal secretariat, specific governance units, or staff. Yet, IAPAC and the FTCI started a Fast-Track Cities Institute with regional directors for Asia Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, Europe, and North America. Also, the Institute initiated the "IAPAC-Lancet HIV Commission on the Future of Urban HIV Responses" in cooperation with ViiV Healthcare to "document and summarize experiences and best practices in urban HIV responses, reflecting the diversity of the world's urban settings and their health successes and challenges in HIV prevention, care, and treatment" (IAPAC 2023b).

Central to the mission of FTCI are partnerships with stakeholders within the cities, especially with affected communities that are not members of the network as such (FTCI 2023a). Also, FTCI has different so-called global program partners and program supporters from various backgrounds, including NGOs, businesses, and governmental agencies. The degree of involvement ranges from project-based contributions to long-term support in financial or technical terms. FTCI has a special relationship with UNAIDS and UN-Habitat since both organizations are founding partners of the initiative. However, the international organizations are not formal members of FTCI (IAPAC 2023c).

3.2 Strong Cities Network³

The SCN engages in the field of violence prevention and human rights advocacy. Focusing on the particularities of urban contexts, the network addresses an urban perspective on violence and supports local governments in developing programs to prevent and respond to hate, extremism, and polarization. The network aims at building socially cohesive and resilient cities by reducing discriminatory behavior against people based on race, religion, culture, or ethnic belonging as breeding grounds for violence. In this sense, it seeks to promote security through the advocacy of human rights and, thus, contributes to international norms of human rights and security politics (SCN 2023a).

Norms of non-discrimination are formulated in several international and regional human rights conventions (UN 2024; UNODC 2024). One central aspect of the SCN is hatred, which is seen as an infringement of those rights. Hatred as an act committed by individuals or groups is primarily addressed in terms of hate speech or hate crime. The United Nations understands the societal consequences of hate speech as undermining and threatening democratic principles and shared values by eroding societal

³ Anja P. Jakobi supported the case study on SCN with additional information.

cohesion. "Hate speech is, in itself, an attack on tolerance, inclusion, diversity and the very essence of our human rights norms and principles, [...] setting back the cause of peace, stability, sustainable development and the fulfilment of human rights for all" (UN 2023a). In 2019, the UN developed a United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech that seeks to identify and understand the root causes and consequences of hate speech in society. It, thereby, focuses on the support of states in implementing human rights to strengthen the resilience against hate and discrimination on the national level. The plan includes establishing partnerships between the UN and relevant stakeholders from the public and private sectors like governments, regional and multilateral organizations, private companies, media, religious authorities, and civil society (UN 2023a).

On the regional level, the Council of the European Union defined hatred in the Framework Decision (2008) - both in terms of hate speech and hate crime - as an illegal action that is to be prosecuted (EU 2023). Whereas hate crime initially referred to antisemitism, the debate has been expanded towards different social and political contexts. It includes violent acts based on race, color, religion, descent, or national or ethnic origin. However, this wider understanding of hate crimes did not remain uncontested as it may conflict with other human rights, such as the right to the freedom of speech and expression (Bleich 2011; Brudholm 2016).

However, discrimination and extremism do not only present a violation of human rights but relate also to international norms of security. Especially in the context of terrorism, hate speech and social polarization were identified as psychological driving forces for terrorist attacks (Chetty and Alathur 2018). Traditionally, international and national policies to fight terrorism refer to strategies of counterterrorism that primarily rely on intelligence and military action (Dahl 2005). The United States' "war on terror" intensified the debate among practitioners and scholars on the efficiency of those means of counterterrorism (Hajjar 2019). In consequence, international security policy widened towards multi-layered approaches that include pillars of prevention. One example is the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy 2006, which addresses the conditions of the emergence and spread of terrorism, stresses the need to combat terrorism through the capacity building of states, and promotes respect for human rights and the rule of law (UN 2006).

On a regional level, the European Union plays an active role in developing the Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) program, emphasizing the importance of cooperation between diverse types of actors engaging on different levels. Other institutions like the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) share the joint action approach and provide an informal platform for policymakers and practitioners who aim to reduce peoples' vulnerability to terrorism by strengthening preventive strategies (GCTF 2023). As a part of this forum, SCN facilitates the cooperation between national and local governments and contributes to developing guidelines and good practices for the implementation.

The SCN started with its activities in 2015, when the network was launched in the United Nations during a General Assembly meeting. The SCN's headquarters is in London. The official mission statement on their website is: "Our vision is to catalyze more involvement and elevate the role of mayors and other local leaders and the governments they lead in preventing and responding to hate, extremism and polarization "(SCN 2023a). In this sense, the SCN understands itself as a platform that supports mayors and local authorities through various modalities. A key aspect of its mission is the promotion and coordination of joint action: The SCN aims to strengthen the interaction between the cities but also to facilitate contact with other local stakeholders in order to promote better national-local coordination in violence prevention by building strong, socially cohesive and resilient cities (SCN 2023b). The network's activities are also presented in UN contexts, like the UN Counter-Terrorism Week (UN 2023b).

Accordingly, the network announced strategic principles as guidelines for action. One of the central aims of the SCN relates to exchange and learning, as it aims to "improve and develop local approaches that take account of good practices internationally and which can be tailored to local contexts" (SCN 2023 c). It seeks to strengthen the interaction among cities within and across different countries so that they can share and learn from each other and provide their members with training and capacity building that allows them to develop applicable local policy programs. This is also reflected in their provision of online material, guidelines, and case reports. Therefore, the SCN emphasizes its networking approach, bringing together different actors from different fields to enhance collaborations and coordination among policymakers and practitioners at the local and international levels. However, the SCN not only fosters cooperation but also expresses an internationalized orientation by supporting the cities' desire to become a recognized and actively participating actor in the international arena (SCN 2023d). Another central statement published in their policy brief on the National-Local Cooperation (NLC) refers to advocacy and the protection of human rights through the implementation of the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy at a local level to build social cohesion and community resilience to all forms of extremist- and hate-motivated violence (SCN 2023b). In doing so, the SCN addresses any form of hate and discrimination and supports the cities as urban policy actors "to fulfill their potential as leadership in prevention" through the implementation of a non-discriminatory and rights-based approach by providing the necessary social and political framework toolkits (SCN 2023e). Also, with regard to representation, the SCN stresses the centrality of mayors and local government actors and pursues the aim to represent their perspectives as well as the needs of the urban population regarding the challenge of extremism and the need to combat these threats in the context of the cities. To pursue these objectives, SCN also revised its strategy internally over time and with the support of other partners (ISD 2022).

As presented in its public statements, the SCN engages in global norm adoption by supporting the respect for human rights and the preventive pillars of the UN strategy on counterterrorism. The key mission of the network is to help its members to adapt existing norms on the ground, in a way that fits the particularities of the local context. Therefore, the network offers diverse means to strengthen the capacities of local governments to implement political agendas. Member cities benefit from the networks' opportunities to exchange experiences through regular meetings or from the provision of diverse material like case reports, guidelines, and scientific data. Underlining the importance of local differences, both in the particularities of polarization dynamics and the capacities of local governments to combat extremism, the SCN promotes tailor-based policy programs. With the emphasis on the promotion of human rights as a key tool to counter violence, the SCN supports an overall preventive security approach against terrorism that does not rely on means of policing, intelligence, or prosecution enacted by law enforcement agencies. However, the SCN does not explicitly criticize and thereby contest existing norms but rather emphasizes the importance of prevention adjusted to local circumstances.

In terms of internal structures, the SCN has no formalized criteria for membership and is open to every city or other local government unit to join the network:

"Strong Cities works with all sub-national authorities, ranging from capital cities to rural towns, municipalities, provinces, counties, and other regional governments. 'Cities' is used as a broad term to refer to all these variations of sub-national authorities." (SCN 2023a).

Every city or governmental authority is free to join, but SCN expects its members to confirm the networks' principal guidelines and contribute to achieving its mission. By now, the SCN comprises 199 city members from six continents and 54 countries (Europe: 18 countries and 89 city members; Africa: 15 countries and 39 city members; Asia: 8 countries and 25 city members; North America: 3 countries and 23 city members).

The SCN is composed of an International Steering Committee (ISC), a centralized Management Unit, and four temporarily existent Regional Hubs, which were created in 2022 (SCN 2023g). The ISC is comprised of a geographically diverse group of 25 members and is chaired by two mayors who hold this position for one year. The committee meets twice a year and is responsible for the overall assurance that the networks' mission and means of action meet the needs of their members and "to discuss the Network's thematic priorities and determine its strategic direction" (SCN 2023f). The ISC is supported by a Management Unit (currently hosted by the Institute of Strategic Dialogue) of 11 staff members and comprises a "central team." The unit drives the overall network and its activities, while the central team directs and supports the "field-based" regional hubs that are responsible for the majority of city members in the four regions of Western Balkans (3 members of staff), East and Southern Africa (3 staff),

South Asia (2 staff), Middle East and North Africa (2 staff). Besides the regional hubs, the SCN created a special unit called the "young cities," run by two members of staff (SCN 2023f; SCN 2023h).

The SCN's funding structure is not based on membership fees but relies on external funding. The network receives funding from the European Commission, the United States, and other governments, as well as support from member cities (SCN 2023i).

3.3 Cities Coalition for Digital Rights

The CC4DR is active in the emerging field of digital governance, focusing on digital rights in urban environments. Digital governance connects to multiple policy fields, such as security, economy, sustainable development, administration, education, and health (Filgueiras et al. 2020), but also to new emerging policy issues, such as e-commerce, data governance, and artificial intelligence (Floridi 2018, Almeida et al. 2019, Zalnieriute 2019). Its central themes are the access to and the stability and openness of information and communication technologies (ICTs) as well as the Internet, including aspects of cybersecurity, privacy, data protection, digital inclusion, and online platform governance. The complex nature of digital governance determines the key characteristics of the policy field: Its normative landscape is inherently conflicted and multi-stakeholder-oriented. Most contested is what aspects should be regulated, by whom, and how (Redeker et al. 2018, Josukutty 2020, Wentworth 2017).

Most existing declarations and commitments have been produced by civil society organizations, governmental agencies, international organizations, or corporate actors, often in collaborations (Redeker et al. 2018). One central digital governance institution is the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), which coordinates the global 'Domain Name System' (DNS), which constitutes a key aspect of the Internet's infrastructure. ICANN has a special status as an institution in global digital governance as it is controlled by private actors but acts as a "quasi"-IO, making decisions of global relevance for the international community (Zalnieriute 2019, 289). In the last decade, the United Nations has intensified its work on digital human rights. The first resolution, "Right to Privacy in the Digital Age," from 2013, reaffirms the validity of human rights, such as the right to privacy and the right to access information in the context of new communication technologies and digital spaces (UN 2013). More recently, the development of a Global Digital Compact has been announced, a normative framework that aims to ensure the responsible and sustainable usage of digital technologies. The initiative seeks to involve all relevant stakeholders through a multi-stakeholder approach with open consultations. It is to be agreed upon at the Summit of the Future in 2024 (UN 2023c).

Such a rights-based perspective on digital governance is increasingly being connected to sustainable urban development issues (SDG11) as the challenges and chances that digitization creates

are predominantly experienced on a local level (Filgueiras/Almeida 2021: 28). The New Urban Agenda as a central document for global urban governance specifically addresses the issue of digitization by promoting the usage of "citizen-centric" digital governance as well as a "smart-city approach" to foster digital transformation in cities and use information and communication technology to achieve sustainable urban development (UN 2017, 66., p.19.). Recognizing this approach, UN-Habitat initiated its "People-Centred Smart Cities Flagship Programme" in 2019 to aid national and local governments with their digital transition and support sustainable digital governance that "ensure[s] sustainability, inclusivity, prosperity and human rights in cities" (UN-Habitat 2023).

The CC4DR was initiated in 2018 by the cities of Barcelona, Amsterdam, and New York City in partnership with UN-Habitat (Andrews 2018). The central document for the activities of the CC4DR is the 'Declaration of the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights', which defines five key principles and specifies its mission and objectives. It includes statements addressing digital technologies, data, connectivity, and participatory processes based on five key principles: Universal Internet access; privacy, data protection and security; transparency and accountability; participatory democracy and open and ethical digital standards. One central element of the CC4DR's work is the participatory approach to the governance of digital urban spaces. The network aims to include all stakeholders, including citizens, in the decision-making processes that determine the usage of digital technologies in cities (CC4DR 2023a). In October 2023, in light of the fifth anniversary of the network, the CC4DR announced a strategic re-orientation and presented the "Global Package of Digital Human Rights." This involved revising the mission statement to articulate six specific goals to enhance the implementation of the Coalition's principles in the future, each managed by two "Leading Cities" (CC4DR 2023d). The six missions are: "1. Boost transparency & participation in data and digital technologies (led by Amsterdam and Barcelona) 2. Provide proactive digital services that meet resident needs (led by Helsinki and Porto) 3. Promote the ethical use of digital technologies and data (led by New York City and Toronto) 4. Promote tangible solutions for inclusion (led by London and Portland) 5. Empower residents and cities to support digital rights (led by Vienna and Dublin) 6. Make digital rights part of the global agenda (led by Bordeaux and Maceio)" (CC4DR 2023d). This mission statement indicates that the CC4DR aims to advance an equitable and ethical digital transformation of cities while simultaneously advocating for the integration of digital rights into the global political agenda (CC4DR 2023d, 2023e).

CC4DR engages in exchange and learning as well as networking: The network connects cities that want to establish digital infrastructures and technologies. It fosters information exchange between local governments and serves as a forum to share best practices and know-how of policies, strategies, and methods between cities (Calzada/Almirall 2020; CC4DR 2023a). The networking activities include partnerships with other ICNs, namely Eurocities, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and

Metropolis, as well as international agencies and organizations, such as UN-Habitat and the European Union. Moreover, the network engages with civil society entities, such as the Open Society Foundation (CC4DR 2023a). In this regard, the CC4DR has a clear internationalized orientation. It advocates for establishing international and regional frameworks on digital rights and policies on the governance of digital spaces. Although most of its activities are centered around the implementation of digital rights policies and governance programs in its member cities, one of its objectives is to "improve policies, laws, plans and strategies for better open and ethical digital service standards at the city and global level" (CC4DR 2023a). Moreover, since late 2023, the CC4DR has explicitly aimed at "Mak[ing] digital rights part of the global agenda" (CC4DR 2023d). Both aspirations are evident in the two recent projects of the CC4DR: The Digital Rights Governance Project and the Global Observatory of Urban Artificial Intelligence (GOUAI). The Digital Rights Governance Project promotes a strategic framework for implementing digital rights in cities (Digital Rights Governance Framework). This framework is being piloted in Brussels, Dublin, Sofia, and Tirana, which receive support and technical advice through an established Digital Risk Helpdesk. The project is carried out in collaboration with UN-Habitat, UCLG, Eurocities, and the Open Society Foundation. It aims to foster capacity building and information exchange on the implementation of governance structures for digital cities (CC4DR 2023c). As the first comprehensive governance framework that specifically addressed the protection and promotion of digital human rights in cities, this document serves two purposes: to assist cities by implementing digital rights policies in their local regulations and to promote the rights-based approach to digital governance within the international community. Furthermore, the CC4DR aims to assume a leading role in digital rights governance by supporting the activities of its member cities, especially Amsterdam, New York City, and Barcelona (CC4DR 2023b). CC4DR does not state in its mission statement that representation is a central aim.

In a broader sense, the CC4DR's member cities adopt and localize the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, promoting the development and implementation of sustainable programs and policies in cities. This includes access to digital spaces and the recognition of privacy rights and data security while using digital technologies and the Internet. Moreover, the network emphasizes the risks of using automated and autonomous digital systems in urban areas and advocates for governance systems that acknowledge these risks. These activities can be considered as norm adoption, as they were established in partnership with the UN-Habitat to promote the rights-based perspective in global digital governance (UN-Habitat/CC4DR 2022). Because this rights-based approach is only recently emerging as a norm in digital governance and there are no binding international treaties yet, the activities of the CC4DR could also be considered as norm initiation, propagating the digital human rights norm in global politics. These entrepreneurial activities are underpinned by the reach of their 'Declaration of the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights,' which is being recognized by the two large TMNs, UCLG and Eurocities, uniting more than 190 local and regional entities in 39 countries under the vision of digital rights governance (CC4DR

2023a). Although the activities of the CC4DR can be considered as opposition to or rejection of these "techno-centered" practices that governments or corporations employ in the context of digital urban governance, there is, as previously mentioned, no established global norm in the field of digital governance. Therefore, the CC4DR does not employ norm contestation.

UN-Habitat, as well as the networks Eurocities and UCLG, are official partners of the CC4DR. These partners support the network's activities by providing human resources for coordinating and organizing projects as well as expertise and guidance in practical and organizational matters. In this context, representatives from the partners are present in each management body; however, they only provide guidance and coordination support (CC4DR 2024). The network closely collaborates with UN-Habitat; due to this partnership, it is connected to the UN. Moreover, it is also connected to the European Union due to its close collaboration with Eurocities (CC4DR 2023a). The network's activities are funded by the member cities with support from its partners; there is no funding for the network itself, as it has no institutionalized structures or dedicated staff but is city-led (CC4DR 2024).

To become a member of the CC4DR, the applicant has to recognize the five principles of the network's declaration, provide existing "practice measures" for protecting and promoting digital rights in their city, and provide a plan for future measures to implement the network's goals. The city-exclusive network currently has 59 members in 23 countries from Europe, the Americas, Australia, and the Middle East. While 37 of the 59 member cities are located in European countries and 13 in North America, there are seven member cities in Central and South America, as well as one member city in both Australia (City of Sydney) and the Middle East (Amman) (CC4DR 2023c). The CC4DR operates on the voluntary commitment of member cities, with no formal, institutionalized management bodies or staff. Therefore, the scope of the activities relies heavily on the engagement of individual cities, more specifically on the engagement of individuals within city administrations. However, as cities are constrained in their capacity for action by evolving political and socioeconomic contexts, the engagement of individual cities in the Coalition is also subject to fluctuations. The three founding cities, Barcelona, Amsterdam, and New York City, have been playing a leading role in the network's activities. Especially Barcelona is an active player in the field of smart city governance as well as the advocacy of global digital rights (Andrews 2018; Calzada/Almirall 2020). Since the re-orientation of the CC4DR in 2023, the 12 leading cities have emerged as proactive members, while other cities assume more observational roles within the network's framework.

The network operates primarily through informal structures, fostering connections among members through regular meetings and collaborative events. Despite lacking a formalized institutionalized organizational structure and a secretariat, the CC4DR remains highly structured, coordinating its activities through internal management bodies, including an executive committee, a

mission coordination team, and a leadership board that meets regularly (CC4DR 2024). The executive committee oversees the administrative organization of the network, including community management, communication, partnerships, advocacy, and funding. Comprising representatives from leading cities and partner organizations such as Eurocities, UCLG, and UN-Habitat, this committee ensures the functioning of the network. The mission coordination team, comprising representatives from the 12 leading cities and partner organizations, focuses on the practical implementation of network activities. This team serves as a platform for cities to share their initiatives, receive feedback, and gather support. Finally, the leadership board, consisting of CTOs and CIOs from proactive member cities, forms the political foundation of the network. While meeting less frequently, this board is responsible for making formal decisions regarding governance, objectives, and strategic direction (CC4DR 2024).

The members of the CC4DR meet annually at the General Assembly, which has been held since 2019 at the site of smart city-related European or global events, such as the 'WeMakeTheCity' Festival in Amsterdam 2019 (City of Barcelona 2019) or the 'Smart City Expo World Congress' in Barcelona 2021 (CC4DR 2021). In 2023, the annual General Assembly was held in Bordeaux, where 32 of the 59 cities, as well as representatives of the partner organizations Eurocities, UCLG, and UN-Habitat, were present (CC4DR 2023d).

3.4 Rainbow Cities Network

RCN is active in the context of human rights politics, focusing on the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex persons (LGBTI) or so-called SOGI rights (sexual orientation and gender identity). Sexual orientation and gender identity "refer to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and intersexual as well as to 'men who have sex with men' and a variety of traditional sexual identities such as third genders" (Symons/Altman 2015: 61). Such sexuality rights norms include the decriminalization of homo- and transsexuality, reduction of harm through more inclusive and non-discriminative policies on partnerships, issues of reproductive health and also the rights of sex workers (Smith 2017: 3; Symons/Altman 2015: 65). Generally, these sexuality rights "have been among the most contentious topics in contemporary human rights debates" (Thoreson 2014: 4). While the UN Human Rights Council adopted its first resolution on SOGI rights in 2011, for some contestants, sexuality rights often serve as examples of "how absurd or unprincipled human rights discourse has become" (Thoreson 2014: 93). Oftentimes, the contestation is based on the argument that norms of sexuality or gender should be dealt with on a national level in order to reflect local developments, religious identities, or cultural values (Symons/Altman 2015: 65). While there is a global trend towards institutionalizing sexuality rights at the national level (Frank et al. 2010), some states maintain legal systems that

marginalize or criminalize people based on their sexual activities or identities (Lamontagne et al. 2018: 967).

From a perspective on treaties, international organizations, and their strength, it must be noted that there is no specific international treaty on SOGI rights yet. When LGBTI rights are considered an integral part of human rights law, they are legalized in a binding way, somewhat precise, and delegated insofar as the treaty bodies have standardized procedures to monitor compliance with the treaties. Therefore, relevant organizations or bodies are the UN Human Rights Council, the UN's Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, or the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights. Still, overall acceptance of LGBTI norms is high, as the majority for adopting respective documents in the UN Human Rights Council or the General Assembly show. However, opposition is also always present and outspoken.

RCN as a formal network was formed in 2019, but it traces back to 2012 when Amsterdam, Barcelona, Cologne, and Turin informally established it. More members joined in 2012 (a total of 12 members), and in 2013, the network established its activities, goals, and organizational structure at the first meeting that the Dutch government funded. In 2017, the Dutch government stopped funding, initiating the RCN to form "an independent and self-sustainable international organization." Finally, in 2019, RCN was registered as an organization. Its headquarters is based in Mannheim, Germany (RCN 2023a).

"Rainbow Cities Network and its member cities work to guarantee a person's sexual rights with the help of innovative public policies in their respective cities enhancing the LGBTI people to enjoy their sexual identity and exercise control over their own bodies" (RCN 2023b). RCN's mission is to bring like-minded cities together to exchange how SOGI rights may be supported at the local level: "Since discrimination of LGBTI people often takes place in their direct surroundings, municipal and regional authorities have an important role to play in combating discrimination of LGBTI people. Discrimination of LGBTI people is seldom explicitly dealt with by most local administrations. The Rainbow Cities are the exceptional in this regard as they consider it their responsibility to protect and support their LGBTI citizens" (RCN 2023a).

RCN communicated different aims on its website that, in sum, meet all seven categories above. First and foremost, RCN engages in exchange and learning. Its members exchange experiences, lessons learned, and best practices regarding policies, projects, and initiatives regarding sexual orientation and gender identity, collaborate in specific projects like exhibitions, inform on updates and developments in international LGBTI policies, and network with other international networks and organizations. Also, all members must contribute an annual one-pager to the conference, which is published on the webpage, to document progress in LGBTI policies. Additionally, RCN mentions networking in two ways: As close

cooperation with different communities within the cities themselves and as exchanging with other international networks. However, it needs to be clarified which specific networks are addressed and what these networking efforts may look like. Regarding an internationalized orientation, RCN's mission is rather vague since the webpage mentions that RCN aims to link with international organizations to advance the protection of LGBTI rights without giving any details on which international or regional organizations are seen as addressees. Also, RCN understands its mission to foster the implementation of LGBTI public policies at the local level. All activities aim to implement policies, strategies, and instruments to ensure respect for SOGI rights and prevent discrimination. In this regard, RCN also implicitly mentions the aim of leadership by aspiring "to become the benchmark for the implementation of LGBTI public policies around the world"(RCN 2023b). While cooperation with stakeholders is important to RCN, there is no sign of aiming to bring their interest to the global level by referring to representation as a central goal within RCN's mission.

Due to a polarized international situation, assessing RCN's contributions to global norm dynamics on SOGI rights is difficult. Since RCN supports LGBTI norms through activities that aim to implement them within cities, it clearly is a form of norm adoption. Through differing programs and foci, the member cities also adapt and localize the norms to meet the demands of different populations. However, since the respective norms are not explicitly set out in a binding treaty, the activities can also be seen as norm entrepreneurship that helps norm initiation at the global level by keeping the debate going and supporting other actors, that lobby to institutionalize SOGI norms. Still, while RCN may contest or even oppose the perspective of states that argue against international SOGI rights, this does not count as norm contestation. In the end, contestation needs a specific norm that is criticized on the grounds of validity or application. Anti-LGBTIQ+ practices, however, have never been a norm in global politics or international law – at least not since the introduction of modern human rights – and therefore, standing up against the discrimination or criminalization of SOGI issues cannot be seen as norm contestation.

Funding structures of the RCN changed over time: Although the Dutch government paid for the network's first meeting in 2013, it stopped funding in 2017. This decision led to the initiative to form RCN as "an independent and self-sustainable international organization." From 2019 onwards, RCN's budget is member-based. All members must pay an annual fee (RCN 2023c). Additionally, the "Europe for Citizens" program by the European Commission granted RCN a funding of 140.000 Euro in 2021 to draft the first LGBTI policy guidelines for local governments. Since RCN has public annual reports that include detailed financial information, it shows that the network has a budget of about 85.000 Euro and employs the managing director and maybe some supporting staff (RCN 2023d).

RCN has 50 members from 22 countries as of August 1st, 2023. Only boroughs, counties, or cities are accepted as members. Therefore, they mark 100 percent of members, making RCN a city-only

network. With regard to the geographical representation in its membership, RCN has most of its members in Europe (Northern, Southern, Western), two member cities in North America (San Francisco, USA and Montréal, Canada), also two member cities in South and Central America (Sao Paulo, Brazil and Mexico City, Mexico) and only one in Asia (Taipei, Taiwan). This suggests that asymmetries in membership are worth analyzing in further research. RCN has specific conditions and expectations for membership: Cities must be represented by a policy officer from the city's social development offices. In addition, the mayor must guarantee political support by signing the Memorandum of Understanding by sending in a one-pager that outlines the recent LGBTI policy and another one-pager that presents the three most successful projects regarding LGBTI policies (RCN 2023b). RCN also details the expected standards for active members: They must report on progress regularly, attend the annual meetings, and cover the annual fees (RCN 2023c).

RCN has a managing director and is administered by a board comprising five member cities. In more detail, the different units have specific responsibilities and election modes: The board is elected at annual meetings for two years. Its primary task is to guarantee that the by-laws are observed and to supervise the coordinator's performance. The managing director is responsible for internal and external communication as a spokesperson, directs RCN's different activities and initiatives, and initiates and maintains networking with other networks. Finally, the audit committee controls all RCN's finance-related issues and serves for only one year (RCN 2023a). Apart from these different responsibilities, RCN has no other governance units or decentralized thematic or regional structures.

In 2021, the European Commission granted funding for a specific project. However, this collaboration is project-based and cannot be seen as a permanent link to the EU (RCN 2023e). RCN does not mention formal cooperation with specific external partners or international organizations on its website.

4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ICNS

Our analysis of four different city networks is confronted with a high empirical heterogeneity. Yet, our analytical framework, with its three dimensions, categories, and indicators, enables us to generate insights into the activities and structures of these case studies.

Table 2: Comparing Contexts, Activities, and Structures of ICNs

	FTCI	SCN	CC4DR	RCN
CONTEXT				
Political Context				
Issue Area	Health, HIV/AIDS	Violence prevention, human rights	Digital governance, human rights	Human rights, LGBTI
Institutional Context				
- Existing Norms or Norm Clusters	x	x	x	x
- Broad Acceptance of Central Norms	x	x	-	-
- Binding International Treaties	x	x	-	x
- Intergovernmental International Organizations	x	x	x	x
- Specialized International Organization	x	-	-	-
ACTIVITIES				
Founding				
Founding Year	2014	2015	2018	2019
Initiation				
- Bottom-up	-	-	-	x
- Top-down	-	-	-	-
- Partnership	x	x	x	-
Self-Proclaimed Missions				
- Exchange and Learning	x	x	x	x
- Networking	x	x	x	x
- Internationalized Orientation	-	-	x	x
- Implementation	x	x	x	x
- Leadership	x	x	x	x
- Representation	x	x	-	-

	FTCI	SCN	CC4DR	RCN
Contribution to Norm Dynamics				
- <i>Norm Initiation</i>	-	x	x	x
- <i>Norm Adoption</i>	x	x	x	x
- <i>Norm Contestation</i>	-	-	-	-
STRUCTURE				
Funding				
- <i>Member Fees</i>	-	-	-	x
- <i>Public Funding</i>	o	x	x	-
- <i>Private Funding</i>	o	o	o	o
- <i>IO Funding</i>	o	x	x	o
Internal Structures				
Membership				
- <i>Number of Members</i>	280	199	59	50
- <i>Countries Covered</i>	79	54	26	20
- <i>Urban Actors as Members</i>	x	x	x	x
- <i>Other Types of Members</i>	-	-	-	-
- <i>Conditions for Membership</i>	x	-	x	x
Internal Management Bodies				
- <i>Secretariat</i>	-	-	-	o
- <i>Multiple Governance Units</i>	o	x	x	x
External Relations				
External Partners				
- <i>Partnerships with civil society</i>	x	x	x	o
- <i>Partnerships with business</i>	x	o	-	x
- <i>Partnerships with other ICN</i>	o	x	x	o
Links to International Organizations	x	x	x	x

Table legend: x = yes, - = no, o = no available information in our data; Source: own account

We summarize our findings in Table 2 and present our detailed comparison results in the following section, organized according to the three dimensions: context, activities, and structures.

4.1 Comparing the Contexts of ICNs

The dimension of context assesses the political and institutional factors in which ICNs are embedded, enabling us to better understand how their activities respond to or are affected by specific institutionalizations.

Our results show that all selected ICNs are actively involved in the specific topics of their policy fields: HIV/AIDS policies in health politics, violence prevention in security politics, human rights in digital governance, and LGBTI representation in human rights politics. Yet, they operate in different institutional contexts with regard to the respective global governance architecture: While various norms exist within the realms of digital governance and LGBTI rights, a consensus on specific norms, their appropriateness, and their significance is still in flux. Therefore, these fields are characterized by competing norms within and beyond norm clusters and rather diverse discourses. In the contexts of health and security, institutionalized norms exist, yet their implementation may be lacking, or disputes over their application may give them a contested status. Also, specific problems are not normatively addressed, and thus, norms are missing to guide behavior in particular situations, as the proposed human rights-based approach to prevention in counterterrorism underlines.

Divergence with regard to institutionalization also shows: In the issue areas of health, human rights, and security, binding international treaties exist (while not in digital governance). However, discrepancies in addressing or institutionalizing the specific issue persist in all areas: While the UN Human Rights Council has issued resolutions on rights in digital governance, there are no legally binding agreements. In security governance, various international treaties exist on different levels but lack a specific focus on preventing extremism. Also, LGBTI rights are implicitly recognized in global human rights conventions but have become subjects of explicit dispute within the international community. Formally accepted international standards for HIV/AIDS treatments exist, although their human rights implications for affected communities are still contested, as missing protection for minorities and criminalization highlights.

With regard to international organizations, the UN is actively involved in all areas relevant to our ICNs, but in different forms. Issues such as HIV/AIDS and LGBTI rights are addressed in specific institutions like the WHO, UNAIDS, and the UN Human Rights Council. In contrast, security (understood as violence prevention) and digital governance exhibit a more cross-sectional nature, necessitating coordination across multiple institutions since they lack a dedicated agency or central institution within the UN systems. At the same time, the institutional context in digital governance is predominantly multi-stakeholder-oriented, with ICANN serving as the key organization regulating international governance. In comparison, the context of health and HIV/AIDS policies stands out for its comparatively dense institutionalization, with UNAIDS playing the central role and possessing widely accepted competencies.

Besides these differences in contextual terms, all four ICNs refer to human rights in their missions. While RCN focuses solely on human rights, given its LGBTI advocacy, FTCl deals with the right to health at the intersection of health and human rights politics. SCN and CC4DR employ a rights-based perspective in their policy fields, referring to the human rights aspects in security and digitalization by identifying non-discrimination and privacy as relevant topics.

4.2 Comparing the Activities of ICNs

The dimension of activities is utilized to evaluate the four networks' founding, self-proclaimed missions, and intended contributions to global politics.

All four ICNs were founded in a comparable period between 2014 and 2019, with Fast-Track Cities Initiative being the oldest network (2014) and Rainbow Cities Network the most recent (2019). They differ regarding the founders involved: While the Rainbow Cities Network was initiated “bottom-up” by the cities of Amsterdam, Barcelona, Cologne, and Turin, all other networks were established in partnership with international governmental organizations. The SCN was founded with involvement of the United Nations, the CC4DR was initiated by cities and UN-Habitat, while the FTCl is being co-founded by the City of Paris, UNAIDS, IAPAC, and UN-Habitat. Notably, the UN was involved as a founding partner or initiator in three of the four cases. With regard to cities, the comparison outlines the prominent role of Amsterdam and Barcelona, which are founding members of two of the four networks.

Drawing on the missions of the four networks, they share various characteristics regarding their aims and activities in international politics. All of them emphasized exchange and learning possibilities for their member cities. By providing opportunities to meet other members, the networks institutionalize channels of communication that allow an exchange of experiences. In addition, providing different written material like guidelines, toolkits, and program reports helps to diffuse best practices and lessons learned within the network. Another common feature of the four ICNs is their networking activities with different political and societal actors. ICNs do not only connect their members but also reach out to international organizations, local authorities, civil society, private actors, and other ICNs with whom they establish diverse collaboration to strengthen their expertise, position, and potential influence. The FTCl differs from the other three networks as it mainly focuses on networking with local stakeholders within the cities and less on the international level. The mission statements also incorporate different positions on their internationalized orientation: While the CC4DR and the RCN aim to participate in and influence international debates in their respective fields, the FTCl and the SCN do not explicitly target international forums or discussions, though the SCN supports direct city-based participation in the international realm. However, all four ICNs engage in implementation practices: They understand themselves as actors who serve to facilitate practical strategies and instruments suited for the local contexts of their member cities.

Nonetheless, differences exist between the networks in terms of how the policies they seek to implement are specified: While the RCN refers to the implementation of LGBTI rights in general, the CC4DR, the FTCI, and the SCN also aim to implement concrete policies or programs such as Digital Rights Governance Framework, UNAIDS' standards, or the UN Strategy on counterterrorism.

The mission statements assign their members a leadership role in different intensities: The SCN refers to urban leadership as one of their strategic priorities by underlining the crucial role of local governments in bridging political approaches in violence prevention across different levels. Cities must lead political responses to violence as attacks affect the urban population in the first place, and simultaneously, most perpetrators are recruited in the urban context. From a different angle, the CC4DR states that it aims to follow the leading role of its founding members, and the RCN aspires to become "the benchmark" for LGBTI policies. In addition, FTCI refers to its Paris Declaration that explicitly states that the member cities should play a leading role in combating HIV globally and accelerate their responses. In terms of representation, just the FTCI and the SCN mention the aim of representing local perspectives. The most concrete statement comes from the FTCI's Sevilla Declaration that assigns the municipalities "a seat at the global table," thereby representing the urban experiences in the response to HIV. The SCN, however, seeks to elevate the voices of mayors in the international arena.

Regarding their contributions to global norm dynamics, all four networks clearly engage in the adoption of global norms as they support existing international frameworks, contribute to the implementation of action plans or programs of international organizations, or develop tailored programs for different local contexts. The FTCI explicitly contributes to the implementation of UNAIDS' norms and standards, establishing itself not only as a supporter but as an amplifier of global norms. The other three networks also adopt global norms, but they do so by introducing them to contexts where these norms have not been central before or where the relevance of such norms is still debated. In the case of the CC4DR and the emerging field of digital governance, the adoption of norms is reflected in a rights-based perspective on digital governance. Specifically, the CC4DR addresses human rights abuses in the digital sphere. It promotes a sustainable approach cited in the SDGs, although there are no accepted guiding norms or binding treaties so far. Similarly, the engagement of the SCN in combating extremism relies on the adoption of human rights and addresses local challenges. In cooperation with different actors on the local level, the network supports the implementation of violence prevention programs. In addition, the RCN also refers to human rights and aims to contribute to their implementation, thus adopting and supporting existing global norms.

Based on available information about ICNs' activities, three of the four networks engage in more than norm adoption: In the case of the SCN, the CC4DR, and the RCN, their mission to strengthen human rights can be interpreted as an initiation of new normative frameworks in the respective issue area, since

specific norms or treaties with a focus on violence prevention, digitalization, and the protection of LGBTI people are largely missing. However, their norm entrepreneurship depends on the political and institutional context: Although the advocated human rights norms have been institutionalized in general, they have seldom been central within the specific issue areas before. Finally, norm contestation cannot be observed according to our material, meaning the ICNs do not oppose central norms in their issue area.

4.3 Comparing the Structures of ICNs

The dimension of structure is employed to assess the funding, internal organizational structures, and external relations of the ICNs.

As mentioned above, publicly available data on financing is scarce. RCN and SCN state that they are co-funded by several cities. For the other ICNs, we found evidence for indirect public funding, as the member cities and partners allocate employees to work for the network. Only RCN provides detailed information on its budget, while the other networks list partners and indicate funding is received from various public, civil society, or private entities.

Regarding their membership, all four networks have only local authorities as members. The CC4DR and RCN only accept cities as members, while FTCI allows municipalities. SCN encompasses various local governmental actors, such as cities, federal states, provinces, counties, districts, boroughs, villages, and municipalities. However, since the definition of cities, their jurisdiction, and competencies vary, this variance may indicate differences in names but not necessarily in substance. The number of members varies between 50 and 280. While RCN (50) and CC4DR (59) have a relatively small member base, FTCI (280) and SCN (199) have a rather high number of members. The number of countries covered varies from 20 to 79, with RCN (20) and CC4DR (26) covering the least number of countries and SCN (57) and FTCI (79) covering the most. All four networks are represented on nearly all continents. However, the geographical distribution of their members has different regional foci: While RCN and CC4DR have the most members in North American and European countries, most member cities of FTCI are located in African and European countries. SCN's members are widely distributed, with many members in Europe, Africa, Asia, and North and South America. The continent of Oceania is underrepresented, with Australia being the only country with member cities in FTCI, CC4DR, and SCN.

All ICNs examined have conditions for membership, although they vary: SCN has a low entry threshold, with applicants only having to register on the network's website. In contrast, the other three networks define specific conditions. First and foremost, the applicants have to identify with the mission and aims of the respective network by signing the key strategy documents, namely the Paris Declaration

(FTCI), the Memorandum of Understanding (RCN), or the Declaration of Cities for Digital Rights (CC4DR). Moreover, the applicants must demonstrate their involvement in the network's activities by submitting existing or planned strategies and programs. Lastly, the applicants must ensure the city's commitment as a political-administrative entity by providing the signature of the city's mayor (FTCI, RCN) or another eligible representative. In addition, applicants of RCN must verify the representation by a policy officer from the city's social development offices. RCN and SCN also specify standards for active members, such as frequent progress reports, attendance at meetings, or payment of membership fees. Therefore, membership criteria not only create expectations and responsibilities but also may structure the activities that member cities engage in.

There is variation between the internal management bodies and governance structure of the four networks. None of the four networks has a formal secretariat, but the RCN has a formal coordinator. While RCN and SCN have established governance units, such as a board (RCN) or a steering committee (SCN) led by representatives of member cities, CC4DR has several management bodies, including a leadership board, executive committee, and mission coordination team. However, this governance structure is mainly based on regular meetings and informal exchange rather than formal institutionalization. In contrast, FTCI is more informal and has no independent organizational structures. Although the members of the CC4DR coordinate themselves in regional chapters, SCN is the only network with formal regional hubs as organizational units that coordinate the activities of their assigned members and facilitate communication with other management bodies of the network.

Three of the four networks have external partners. Both FTCI and CC4DR work with UN-Habitat as one of their core partners. While FTCI and SCN have numerous partnerships with entities from civil society, the private and the public sector, CC4DR's only official partners besides UN-Habitat are other city networks. Only RCN does not publicly name any partners. However, all networks have connections to international organizations, with the UN and EU being the most frequent partners or supporters.

4.4 Summarizing Our Findings

The results of our assessment highlight the potential of the framework presented in this paper. They demonstrate its utility for analyzing, systematically comparing, and typologizing ICNs based on their activities and structures. They also underscore the significance of evaluating network structures within the context of their specific issue areas to comprehend their missions and contributions to that field.

Overall, the levels of institutionalization across policy fields differ significantly concerning the acceptance of central norms and the quality of their legal nature. Simultaneously, the relevance of international organizations to the four ICNs varies, as they seldom specialize in the respective policies

and may lack authoritative compliance mechanisms. Interestingly, all networks make strong references to the advocacy of human rights, though operating in different policy fields.

Our comparative analysis of ICNs' activities mirrors existing findings in this research area but also shows relevant differences: All examined ICNs aim to exchange between member cities to learn from experiences. They also network with different actors beyond their formal members. In addition to these rather inward-bound activities, the aspirations of ICNs also reach beyond the city and network levels. While two networks specifically state their internationalized orientation (CC4DR and RCN), the other two indicate they aim to represent urban voices at the international level (FTCI and SCN). All four ICNs consider themselves leaders in their respective activities, which has so far mostly been observed with climate and environmental ICNs. Thus, ICNs contribute in varying ways to global norm dynamics: While most studies conclude that ICNs largely adopt global norms and thus implement them locally, our analysis reveals nuanced developments that go beyond a role as pure norm takers or as transmission belts in their respective issue areas. Three of four networks also engage in an evolving form of norm initiation (SCN, CC4DR, and RCN) or go further than adoption by amplifying norms at the local level (FTCI). In addition, we found no instances of norm contestation or outright norm rejection. In the more contested domains, such as digital or security governance, the involved ICNs take a clear position, advocating for the rights-based perspective and demanding more and better international institutionalization. In sum, it is evident that all four networks address the existing norms and institutions within their respective policy fields, thus actively participating in global norm dynamics.

5. CONCLUSION: THE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCES AND PATTERNS LINKED TO ICNS

ICNs have become relevant political actors, not just on the urban but also on the international level. This development is mirrored in the growing number of studies. However, an analytical approach that systematically assesses the empirical heterogeneity of ICNs was still missing. Aiming to fill this gap, this paper developed a framework for comparing ICNs, focusing on the three dimensions of context, activities, and structure. The framework adds analytical benefit in several respects: First, it offers an essential list of central characteristics that allows a comparative perspective on ICNs. Second, it enables a systematic portrayal of the empirical variance of city networks across policy fields. Third, comparing not only what ICNs do and how they are organized but also illuminating the political and institutional background, allows us to analyse these networks in their broader political context of global governance and helps assess their contributions to global politics.

Applying our framework to four ICNs from different issue areas demonstrated that the systematic comparison of institutional contexts reveals differences in the existence and acceptance of norms and the degree of their formal institutionalization. Both aspects inform the networks' activities and structures and relate ICNs to global norm dynamics, international debates, and important actors like international organizations. Regarding the variance of activities ICNs engage in, the framework systemizes the missions and aspirations of networks and offers a classification of their normative contributions to global governance. Accordingly, our results outline that ICNs share various aims, like using networks as platforms for exchange, learning, and networking, but differ in their outward orientation: While some ICNs pursue to impact global politics directly, others seek to represent urban perspectives on the international level instead. However, through their activities, ICNs may adopt existing norms, initiate new norms, or criticize them and thus engage in contestation. The comparison shows that all four ICNs adopt global norms as they support their implementation and, at times, also engage in their amplification by facilitating the development of tailor-made instruments and strategies for their members. With regard to norm initiation, the analysis has shown that ICNs also introduce norms to contexts, where these norms have not been central before: Specifically, CC4DR and SCN advocate for a perspective on digital governance and security politics with a dedicated focus on human rights and, thus, initiate a renewed standard of appropriateness in their issue area. Still, none of our four ICNs did engage in norm contestation. The framework also improved insights on the structure of the ICNs through its comparative perspective: While the comparison revealed differences in funding, membership criteria, and geographical distribution of the networks, the available information on their internal organization and external relations call for improved ways of data generation. Therefore, our framework also helps to indicate gaps in publicly available information.

Moreover, the comparison not only portrays a systematic picture of the empirical heterogeneity but raises further conceptual and explanatory questions: The case studies suggest that the three dimensions of context, activities, and structure are interconnected, possibly influencing and interacting with one another. However, their causal relations remain unclear. We do not know whether specific structural elements enable or restrict ICNs to specific activities. It is also still unclear whether relations with actors like IOs are central to specific contributions to global norm dynamics. Ultimately, identifying the similarities and differences of ICNs can help develop and test hypotheses on the relation between the activities and the structural composition of ICNs. Further research could, therefore, translate these framework dimensions into a research design that examines casual patterns and relations in different contexts. Such triangulation or complementary studies would deepen our understanding of particular dimensions and, ultimately, ICNs and global governance in general.

In sum, our findings improve the knowledge of ICNs as actors in global politics by enabling us to categorize their activities and structures embedded in a specific institutional context. Comparing the four cases not only shows variance and patterns in the institutional and normative context of their activities but also generates knowledge on which aims the networks share and if their actions contribute in similar ways to global norm dynamics. For global governance scholars, at least three critical findings result from our comparison: First, ICNs engage in activities within and beyond the network with varying internal and external effects. However, even within such a small number of cases, not all ICNs explicitly focus on the global level with their activities, although all four cases represented ICNs that consider themselves "international." Second, their activities represent different contributions to global politics, although we see a cluster in norm adoption and, to a lesser degree, in norm initiation. That none of the four ICNs engage in norm contestation in a fundamental form of opposition and, at the same time, diffuse already established norms to issue areas where such norms were not central before, indicates a rather supportive role of ICNs within global governance that aims at defending the normative status quo. However, whether ICNs in general support norms needs further research. Third, the institutionalization of the ICNs themselves differs strikingly, indicating different structural backgrounds for the activities of ICNs. This is an interesting finding with regard to the general assumption that ICNs have a networked quality and spurs questions about whether ICNs are indeed political networks or a particular form of transnational or even international organizations. While many aspects of ICNs as actors in global politics are still unanswered, our framework can facilitate further systematic assessment and analysis of ICNs in IR and beyond.

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