

Perspectives

This thesis concludes that in Strasbourg, a high level of activity was visible regarding the issue where to situate institutions of the European Communities, even though the decision power lay on the intergovernmental level, on which most academic literature has focussed on. It can be hypothesised that similar fields of activity exist in other (provisional) international institution host cities, which some local activity in Strasbourg also hinted at.

The empirical basis of the dissertation

The empirical analysis is based on five different archives; archives of the European Parliament, the Council of the EU and the Council of Europe, as well as the municipal archive of Strasbourg and the departmental archive of Bas-Rhin. In this study, the two local archives contain the mainstay of sources on local activity, while the three institution archives provide information about correspondence between the organisations and the municipality and contextual information.

About Claudia Leskien

Claudia Leskien is a historian. She produced her PhD dissertation at the Department of Culture and Society, Section for European Studies, Aarhus University, where she has been part of the History, Archaeology and Classical Studies research programme and the project Institutions of democracy in transition. Transnational fields in politics, administration and law in Denmark and Western Europe after 1945. Her research focus is on European Integration, transnational politics and local politics.

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PhD dissertation by Claudia Leskien

OPERATION WELCOME: THE MUNICIPAL POLITICS OF CONSOLIDATING STRASBOURG'S POSITION AS EUROPEAN INSTITUTION HOST FROM 1949 TO 1979

Summary of the main points of PhD dissertation Operation Welcome: The Municipal Politics of Consolidating Strasbourg's Position as European Institution Host from 1949 to 1979 by Claudia Leskien, Department of Culture and Society, Aarhus University. The dissertation focuses on the role of the local level of European institution host cities in the question where to locate headquarters of the European Communities on the example of Strasbourg, France, by focussing on various local agents and their strategies to consolidate the city's position.

An active local level

Literature on the seat question of the European Communities contains an accepted narrative that the issue in which city to locate its institution headquarters was decided on the intergovernmental level between the member states. This dissertation expands this view and argues that activity at the local level is an important factor in this matter and by including other organisations than the EU and its predecessors on the example of Strasbourg. A set of highly active local political and association agents used many different strategies to consolidate the city's position against competing host cities and the European Communities.

Strasbourg's local European agents

This study found that a highly specialised "bubble" of municipal politicians and civil servants,

prominently including Mayor Pierre Pflimlin (1959-1983) as a separate structure within the city administration showed a high level of activity towards welcoming the European institutions in the city and providing them with facilities and other infrastructure. Regarding the first part, they were supported by private organisations which had been purposely founded in response to the European presence. In infrastructure issues, the municipality was supported by local construction and transport agencies.

The competitive factor

Next to influencing decisions of the European Communities, local agents in Strasbourg faced competition from other cities which provisionally housed European institutions or applied to house them. The most serious competitors were fellow hosts of European Community institutions Brussels and Luxembourg. For example, this constellation resulted in a "building race" in the end of the 1970s in order to provide the best facilities for a directly elected European Parliament from 1979 and therewith achieve the status as premier choice for location of the assembly whose services were spread over the three cities.

Three themes of strategies

The research showed that strategies of local agents to consolidate Strasbourg's position centred on the three themes hosting European parliamentarians and civil servants, as well as developing transport and building infrastructure to the advantage of the European institutions located in the city. Each of the three themes enjoyed a decade of principal focus, starting with hosting in the 1950s and ending with constructions in the 1970s. A set of strategies common to all themes was defending the city from (perceived) threats to its status and constructing a historic European mission of Strasbourg which was especially visible in hosting efforts.

Conclusion

A highly active set of specialised local politicians, supported by different associations were occupied with consolidating Strasbourg's position as provisional host city of the European parliament and permanent home of the Council of Europe. It employed three different sets of strategies, hosting, transport and building infrastructure and for a long time symbolic measures to influence the European Communities' personnel in the city in favour of Strasbourg. In this endeavour, the competitive situation with the other two host cities Brussels and Luxembourg was an important factor.