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Cities and Global Human Rights Politics: Amsterdam as a 'Human Rights City'

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Cities and Global Human Rights Politics: Amsterdam as a ‘Human Rights City’

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Abstract

This thesis explores what role cities play in promoting and implementing human rights. In particular, the thesis delves into the Human Rights Cities movement through a case study of Amsterdam as a ‘human rights city’. Inspired by a growing global movement of ‘human rights cities’, Amsterdam has expressed its commitment to incorporating human rights in its policy-making. This thesis shows cities have increasingly claimed a role for themselves in international human rights politics and have cooperated on human rights initiatives with a range of actors globally. The Human Rights Cities movement points to the potential of cities to innovate human rights promotion and implementation through integrating human rights in daily local government work and through the ‘localization’ of rights. Its focus on enhancing participation might also lead to the ‘renegotiation’ of rights, making them more effective and meaningful for people’s daily lives in cities. However, this potential of the movement is also limited by unequal power relations, neoliberal influences and inadequate resources.

List of abbreviations

Cities Coalition for Digital Rights (CC4DR)

Economic, social and cultural rights (ESC rights)

European Union (EU)

Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) of the European Union

Human Rights Cities movement (HRC movement)

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

People's Movement for Human Rights Education (PDHRE)

United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

United Nations (UN)

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF)

Chapter 1: Introduction

‘As an **international phenomenon**, the human rights cities movement brought together hundreds of local authorities in all the world's regions ... to collectively promote human rights from renewed and locally-grounded perspectives’ (UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-b). This quote refers to the diverse global Human Rights Cities movement (HRC movement) which has developed since the 1990s. This movement is positioned in a context of urbanisation and decentralisation processes, where cities have increasingly claimed a position for themselves on the international stage and have worked together to address global issues (Oomen, 2016, p. 2). In particular, a growing number of cities globally have profiled themselves as ‘human rights cities’. These cities claim to base their policies on human rights, and strive to form coalitions with a wide range of actors to implement human rights initiatives (Tsutsui & Smith, 2019, pp. 593–594). This thesis focusses on the varying ways cities aim to incorporate human rights in their policies, programs and statements. Moreover, it will explore how cities have cooperated on this transnationally through various networks. The research question the thesis aims to answer is:

- What role do cities play in promoting and implementing human rights? –

The Amsterdam case

I explore this question through a case study of Amsterdam. Amsterdam’s city council has worked to set up a ‘human rights agenda’ for the city (E. Van den Berg, 2016, pp. 55, 62). This thesis looks at this agenda to see who has been involved in this, what plans Amsterdam proposes and promotes, how it implements its ideas, and how it cooperates with cities and other actors internationally. Through this case study I aim to explore the wider influence of the ‘human rights cities’ movement on international human rights politics.

Overall, this thesis reveals the growing influence of cities in international human rights politics and explores the ways cities have lobbied nation states and international institutions for support. The HRC movement points to the potential of cities to innovate human rights promotion and implementation through the ‘localization’ and ‘renegotiation’ of human rights, and through the incorporation of human rights as an integral part of daily local government work. However, the potential of the movement for ensuring a better realisation of human rights is limited by a lack of resources, neoliberal influences and unequal power relations.

In research on human rights politics, the focus is often on national governments and international institutions, but this thesis looks at human rights promotion and implementation by focussing on the role of cities in this. In particular, analysing the relationship between cities, national governments and international institutions in promoting and implementing human rights might give more insight into changes and developments within international human rights politics and state-centred governance structures.

In particular, the relation of cities and nation states in promoting and implementing human rights has formed a central focus point in scholarship on ‘human rights cities’ which has significantly expanded in recent years (Grigolo, 2019; Oomen et al., 2016; Tsutsui & Smith, 2019; Van Lindert & Lettinga, 2014). My research aims to engage with debates in this field through my case study of Amsterdam and will contribute to literature on the potential and limitations of human rights at the city level. I will discuss the changing role of cities in international politics and engage with scholarship on how the HRC movement ties in with wider shifts in global human rights politics.

The next two chapters will first include the literature review this thesis is based on, followed by the design and methodology of my research. Chapter 4 starts with an analysis of the histories, actors and ideas behind the HRC movement. Subsequently, I will go further into the context of my case study of Amsterdam. Against this background, I will explore the ideas and actions around human rights *in, by* and *through* the city that are present in Amsterdam and in what ways these might be linked to the wider HRC movement globally. In general, I will go into the potential and limitations of ‘human rights cities’ for innovating human rights promotion and implementation. Moreover, I will analyse how this movement relates to city diplomacy and how cities might use human rights as a form of city branding. I will explore in what ways Amsterdam profiles itself in its city policies and statements around human rights. Finally, the conclusion will tie together my argument and provide insight into what role cities play in promoting and implementing human rights.

Chapter 2: Literature review

In 2015, Amsterdam's city council decided in favour of creating a 'human rights agenda', which would be set up through discussions with people living in the city and would guide its policy-making in different fields (College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016; E. Van den Berg, 2016, p. 55). This shows Amsterdam's intention to specifically address human rights at the city level. Crucially, it is not the only city striving to incorporate human rights into their programs and statements. In fact, Amsterdam is encouraged to do so by a growing movement of cities asserting themselves as key players within human rights promotion globally. In recent decades, a diverse global network of 'human rights cities' has expanded. A 'human rights city' can be defined as 'a municipality that refers explicitly to the UDHR and other international human rights standards and/or law in their formal charters, policies, statements, and programs' (Tsutsui & Smith, 2019, p. 594). This literature review will engage with research on and academic debates around this phenomenon. It will do so in order to support my thesis which will explore what role cities play in promoting and implementing human rights. I will use Amsterdam as a case study and explore how this city has incorporated human rights in its policies and statements. More generally, my research will look into the histories, actors and ideas behind the HRC movement.

In this literature review, I will first engage with scholarship on the shifting dynamics of city diplomacy and city branding against the background of urbanisation processes. Specifically, I will engage with growing interdisciplinary scholarship on the shifting role of cities in international (human rights) politics. Then I will go into the growing field of scholarship specifically on 'human rights cities'. A major theme in this scholarship has been the relation between cities, nation states and international institutions in promoting and implementing human rights. I will go into the debates around this by discussing the potential and limitations of human rights cities for innovating human rights practices and challenging state-centred governance structures. I will relate this to wider scholarship that engages with recent developments in global human rights politics and wider critiques on how human rights are institutionalised and promoted globally. Finally, I will outline how my research uses the analytical tools of norm localization and entrepreneurship to explore the wider use of human rights by cities.

The HRC movement is placed in a wider context of a shift to the local and municipal in world politics. Over half of the world's population lives in cities, and this number is still increasing. Urbanisation and decentralisation processes have made cities important players in addressing global challenges (Oomen, 2016, p. 2). The term 'city diplomacy' itself points to the significance of cities in world politics. Through city diplomacy, cities aim to 'influence global policies' and this consists of many elements, including city branding, which they use to enhance their 'global profile' (Sevin & Amiri, 2020, p. 4). Cities are also seeking each other's cooperation and are forming alliances directly with international organisations or corporations. In this regard, global city networks have played an important role (Acuto & Rayner, 2016; Davidson et al., 2019; Lin, 2018). As city governments have 'engaged in relations' with a range of actors internationally, they have challenged the role of nation states in global diplomacy (Acuto, 2013, pp. 490–491, 495). Although these are not completely new developments, scholarship on the role of cities in international relations has expanded in the last decade and has tried to shine light on the multiplicity of dimensions behind this phenomenon (Acuto, 2013; Barber, 2013; Curtis, 2014). For example, Gordon & Ljungkvist (2021) have recently emphasised the importance of 'focusing on the global identity of the city' as 'who cities (think they) are on the global stage' shapes their actions (pp. 1, 6). Overall, Sevin & Amiri (2020) argue the focus of current scholarship needs to be diversified as there are many different fields in which cities work together. They point out, cities' initiatives to cooperate on human rights also form an example of 'globally shared policy challenges that are tackled through city diplomacy' (pp. 3–4, 9). This thesis, therefore, goes into the increased influence of cities in world politics specifically in relation to global human rights politics.

In particular, the global HRC movement has grown since the 1990s. While some cities aim to include a wide range of human rights, many focus on a specific set of human rights in their statements and programs (Tsutsui & Smith, 2019, pp. 593–594; E. Van den Berg, 2016, pp. 44, 47, 62). Some decide to incorporate certain human rights in their policies to explicitly go against the refusal of their national government to do so. Another reason for cities to highlight human rights in statements, is that it frames their reputation on the international stage and gives them access to strategic networks. Above all, it needs to be emphasised that 'human rights cities' are constituted through negotiations between a multiplicity of actors with diverse interests (Oomen, 2016, pp. 7–8; Tsutsui & Smith, 2019, p. 593). According to Oomen (2016), human rights practices at the local level mainly consist of enhancing human

rights education, ‘monitoring human rights compliance’, and a focus on the broad participation of stakeholders in policy-making (p. 14). Another important aspect of human rights cities to look into is the formation of international alliances to discuss issues and policies. I hope to shine light on these aspects through my case study of Amsterdam. I have chosen Amsterdam since it is a major city that holds archives that I can easily access, and has often profiled itself as an ‘open’ and ‘tolerant’ city in national and international discourses (City of Amsterdam, n.d.-b). Therefore, it would be interesting to examine in what ways this city has referred to and incorporated human rights into specific programs and policies.

Scholarship on human rights initiatives at the city level has grown significantly over the last decade. It has looked into and recognised the diverse ways in which human rights have been referred to and transformed by cities, with the concept of ‘human rights city’ as one of the lenses available to study this (Chueca, 2016; Darling, 2016). Overall, research has examined the HRC movement as part of a broader development of municipalism and local actor interaction around human rights, situated in specific social, economic and cultural contexts, and challenging nation states as well as international institutions. Crucially, Oomen (2016) states, ‘The potential of cities to deliver where nation states have failed has become a central argument in an ever-expanding body of scholarship’ (p.2).

To go into the debates around this, I will first discuss the proposed advantages cities might have for human rights implementation. First, the focus of cities on ‘pragmatism instead of politics’ and ‘problem solving’ has been mentioned as important in their ability to create broad partnerships to take daily action (Barber, 2013, p. 5; Oomen, 2016, p. 3; Soohoo, 2016, p. 275). Moreover, since city governments are deemed by some scholars to be in closer contact with the lives of citizens, they might hold more potential in actually addressing their problems, especially since projects around human rights seem to actively encourage participation of residents in many cities. They might also contribute to the expansion of human rights, through a focus on ‘proximity-based rights’ that have a direct link to public services in areas such as healthcare, sustainability and housing. This, in turn, might place economic, social and cultural rights (ESC rights) more firmly on the human rights agenda (Barber, 2014, p. 18; Chueca, 2016, p. 119; Oomen, 2016, p. 4).

Meanwhile, limitations have been pointed out in the ways that some cities incorporate human rights in their programs. Chueca (2016) argues local governments often play a dominant role in setting the agenda for human rights in the city. The role of citizens in policy-making around human rights is reduced to looking at how predefined human rights could be

incorporated, instead of reimagining them in a new context (p. 119). Broader questions have thus been raised by scholarship about the relationship of local communities and the city government in constituting ‘human rights cities’, specifically looking into who is driving human rights efforts, and who might be excluded (Ángel-Cabo & Sotomayor, 2021; Chueca, 2016; Grigolo, 2016). Moreover, the question is whether local governments turn human rights into policies or simply use them as a framework to refer to. Especially in case of a lack of accountability mechanisms, the question is whether city governments will actually adhere to their proclaimed human rights commitments (Soohoo, 2016, p. 258). Nevertheless, Soohoo (2016) argues that although this is problematic, cities’ human rights efforts are still important in driving ‘structures to infuse human rights into their day-to-day work of governance’ and can complement the efforts of national governments (pp. 258, 271–275).

These discussions fit into wider research where scholars debate what recent changes the ‘global human rights movement’ has seen in its organisational structure and activism. It has been proposed that human rights at the city level might also respond to wider critiques on how human rights are institutionalised and promoted globally. Scholars have criticised human rights organisations for their failure to address social-economic inequalities, and for their ties to neoliberal practices (Chandhoke, 2005; Hopgood, 2013; Moyn, 2018). Moreover, scholars like Hopgood (2013) and Chandhoke (2005) have criticised the role of powerful Western actors in and the imposition of Western norms through this structure. At the same time, they see how global power relations have been changing. Interestingly, Hopgood (2013) distinguishes between human rights, as a language of resistance and human equality that is diverse, and Human Rights, the global organisational structure of human rights that claims ‘one voice’. Therefore, Hopgood argues, as this structure has been crumbling, cultural diversity and locally informed activism should now be at the forefront of human rights (pp. 3, 20-22). Tsutsui & Smith (2019) describe how this is already happening through activists mobilizing at local levels, in response to the failure of international human rights institutions and national governments to sufficiently improve human rights practices that affect people’s daily lives (pp. 593-6). They describe a ‘sandwich effect’ which means that ‘global institutions’ pressures from above and grassroots mobilization from below combine to increase the pressure on local and national governments’ as well as corporations, to adhere to human rights norms. They thus identify a growing network of local human rights initiatives ‘producing more immediate small-scale changes with a view to accumulating these’ to effect global change (pp. 595-6). This broadens the idea of the ‘boomerang pattern’ which describes

how ‘domestic NGOs bypass their state and directly search out international allies to try to bring pressure on their states from outside’ (Sikkink & Keck, 1998, p. 12). Central to their arguments is the role of ‘civil society’ actors in forming alliances. For human rights cities, these alliances and networks, either between local governments and other local ‘stakeholders’, or with international NGOs and other cities, are crucial (Oomen, 2016, pp. 4–5). Scholars have thus pointed out the importance of local initiatives in localizing human rights, and constituting change at the local level. Yet scholars have also argued that shifting attention to the city level in human rights promotion does not necessarily solve major human rights issues like inequality, especially since ‘neoliberal agendas’ affect cities too. Therefore, structural change at this level is necessary in order for human rights in the city to actually mean something for people’s lives (Ángel-Cabo & Sotomayor, 2021, p. 265; Darling, 2016, pp. 124–125; Van Lindert, 2014, p. 26).

Finally, it is necessary to go further into norm localization and entrepreneurship since these will form central analytical tools in my thesis to study the HRC movement. This research will look into what effects human rights incorporation in cities has on the meanings and uses of human rights. It will analyse how notions of human rights are transformed to function in the context of cities. Acharya (2004) innovated ‘norm diffusion’ literature, as pushed forward by scholars like Risse-Kappen et al. (1999), by exploring how ‘local agents’ adapt ‘foreign norms’ to function in their own frameworks, and relate to their own identities. He stresses their agency through his concept of ‘localization’ which refers to the ‘complex process and outcome by which norm-takers build congruence between transnational norms ... and local beliefs and practices’ (pp. 240–241). Merry (2006b) has also been an important scholar in this field, appointing a central role of ‘intermediaries such as community leaders, nongovernmental organization participants, and social movement activists’ to the translation of human rights moving between the local and global (p. 38). Moreover, Merry (2006a) asserts norm localization does not mean human rights ‘displace other frameworks’ but form ‘a new dimension to the way individuals think about problems’ (p. 180). Related to this, recently Tsutsui & Smith (2019) have argued for the need to expand on ‘the construction of movement actorhood by global human rights’. This is focussed on how global human rights can influence local actors themselves, their perspectives on their rights and their wider ‘social and political world’ (p. 589). Many scholars have contributed to developing methodologies around norm localization, and how to set up case studies, with a specific focus on the renegotiation of human rights at the city level by a multiplicity of actors (Aguilar, 2011; Merry, 2006a).

Oomen (2016) points out this renegotiation of rights at the local level might lead to norm entrepreneurship by cities (p. 14). Likewise, Gready & Lockey (2019) view human rights ‘to be shaped and transformed *by* context rather than simply interpreted *in* context’ (p. 384). Both norm localization and norm entrepreneurship will form analytical tools in this thesis to explore what the concept of human rights *in, by* and *through* the city means for Amsterdam.

Building on case studies of human rights cities, my thesis will look into specific practices Amsterdam has promoted or implemented regarding human rights. It can contribute to research on networks and alliances within and between cities. Moreover, it can critically analyse how human rights at the city level may or may not address wider critiques on human rights promotion and implementation. Last, it will show the dynamics of norm localization and entrepreneurship in Amsterdam. So far, Amsterdam seems to have taken initiative in human rights education, and specific sets of human rights promotion within the city and on an international stage (E. Van den Berg, 2016, p. 55). Since the movement around ‘human rights cities’ is diverse, through my case study, I hope to give insight into the complex and innovative ways in which cities and communities use human rights in their daily work and daily lives. My research on Amsterdam thus adds to literature on norm localization and entrepreneurship, transnational human rights activism, city diplomacy, and the potential and limitations of human rights at the city level.

Chapter 3: Design and methodology

My research on the ideas, actors and histories behind the HRC movement will be based on a case study of Amsterdam. Amsterdam has been encouraged by the HRC movement to critically engage with how it views, promotes and implements human rights. I will look into what drives the city in this and how it works together with other cities. Through this case study, I hope to gain insight into the diverse and complex processes behind the HRC movement. Above all, I aim to shine light on the main research question driving this thesis, what role cities play in promoting and implementing human rights.

This thesis is based on qualitative research as this provides an appropriate framework to study the multiplicity of dimensions behind the HRC movement. Qualitative methods allow me to analyse the context, nuances and histories behind the movement. I will use both primary and secondary sources to engage with the debates in the field of global human rights politics, and the role of cities in world politics, as outlined in the literature review. The primary sources my research relies on include interviews, archives, policy documents and newspapers. I use interviews as sources as they can provide more in-depth information about the human rights agenda of Amsterdam. Moreover, they complement the other written sources by providing nuance and further insight into the ‘experiences, motives, and opinions’ of actors involved in human rights projects in Amsterdam. My purpose is to gain insight into their wider perspectives on what the HRC movement means in Amsterdam (Lamont, 2015, p. 178; Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 3). Finally, interviewing has been guided by my research question, asking how Amsterdam views its role in promoting and implementing human rights.

I use semi-structured interviews as my format, since these have a flexible nature yet enable the interviewer to provide direction to the conversation. These interviews are guided by main questions and follow-up questions. Listening and being attentive to the meanings of interviewees’ responses are prerequisites for these interviews to succeed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 7). The interviewer in this format has an ‘active, reflexive, and constitutive role in the process of knowledge construction’ as the aim is to ‘generate data interactively’ (Mason, 2011, p. 1020). Therefore, attention to research ethics is crucial. It is especially important to go into the role of positionality and reflexivity in conducting interviews. Instead of pretending to be a neutral observer, I recognise my own role in shaping the framework in which the interviews take place, in directing their course and in interpreting their meanings. Moreover, I

am not looking for one single ‘truth’ in my interviews, yet I am interested in the subjectivities, interpretations and variety of perspectives on ‘human rights cities’ of the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 10). Positionality refers to ‘how *who we are* might shape *how we are perceived* by those with whom we interact during the course of our research’. It is thus important to be conscious of how my identity influences my research, the interviewing process, and the conclusions that I draw from conversations. Reflexivity means ‘the practice of reflecting on our own personal biography and biases with respect to our research’. Especially in relation to bias, it is important to critically think about how this might shape the framework of an interview and influence the interpretation of answers (Lamont, 2015, p. 65).

It is also important to go into the role of power relations in conducting interviews and how this shapes their trajectory (Lamont, 2015, p. 65). Due to the limitations on the framework, time and resources of my research project, I have only been able to interview one city government official, neglecting the role of other actors involved in human rights initiatives in Amsterdam. I have interviewed the director of the International Office of Amsterdam, Sabine Gimbrère. This means I have interviewed someone with an elite position in policy- and decision-making in Amsterdam. It is important to establish a relationship of trust, integrity and confidentiality to be able to conduct these interviews as an MA student (Liu, 2018, p. 7). I have made sure the purpose and nature of my interview is clear to the interviewee. I have informed the interviewee of how I will use the interview and what for. I have provided her with the list of questions beforehand, as well as information about the interviewing process and her rights, and have asked for her informed consent to record the interview and use her information. Transparency has been an essential component of the research process (Lamont, 2015, pp. 64, 71). I have recorded the interviews and carefully transcribed them. As a native Dutch speaker and a fluent English speaker, I have translated the interview conducted in Dutch to English. I have paraphrased the information to incorporate it in my thesis.

Based on this source base and methodological framework, my thesis thus aims to contribute, in a limited way, to scholarship on the HRC movement and case studies of cities globally promoting and implementing human rights.

Chapter 4: Analysis

4.1 Human Rights Cities movement

In this first analytical chapter, I will go further into the histories, actors and ideas behind the HRC movement. This is necessary to subsequently be able to understand Amsterdam's position in regards to this movement. Overall, this thesis aims to provide insight into the diverse ways in which cities promote and implement human rights. This chapter works towards this goal by delving deeper into the motivations behind and objectives of a growing global movement of Human Rights Cities.

In particular, the HRC movement has grown significantly since Rosario in Argentina became the first 'official' human rights city in the late 1990s (E. Van den Berg, 2016, p. 44). It is noteworthy that Rosario was appointed as a 'human rights city' based on the People's Movement for Human Rights Education (PDHRE) framework. This NGO started to work together with various city governments, civil society groups and local communities internationally in the 1990s, in a shifting context of UN human rights mechanisms following the Vienna Conference in 1993. These coalitions were influential in establishing 'broad popular participation' and human rights education as ideals of the blossoming HRC movement (Tsutsui & Smith, 2019, p. 594; UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-b; Van den Berg & Oomen, 2014). Overall, these developments in international human rights politics in the 1990s against a background of urbanisation furthered 'discussion on how human rights could be better protected when framed and implemented locally' (UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-b).

It is necessary to point out, however, that there are many different ways through which 'human rights cities' are constituted, as there are different definitions of a 'human rights city' (Grigolo, 2016, p. 277; Oomen, 2016, p. 7). In this thesis, I focus on Amsterdam's conceptions of what it means to be a 'human rights city', and relate this to definitions as found in scholarship and proposed by large organisations in the HRC movement. The meanings and conceptions of 'human rights cities' have always been specific to the historical, social and cultural contexts of the cities themselves. In fact, cities in different regions throughout the world started to form their own regional HRC 'charters' and through these, established regional cooperation (Tsutsui & Smith, 2019, p. 594; UCLG Committee on Social

Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-b). An important organisation was United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), which brings together local and regional governments to represent their interests on a global stage. Especially the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights has been crucial in connecting and coordinating the HRC movement (Oomen, 2016, p. 9; UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-a). Going beyond regional cooperation, the World Human Rights Cities Forum (WHRCF) that started in 2011 in Gwangju, South Korea, meant a next stage in the growth of a global HRC movement. At this forum, cities that identify as ‘human rights cities’ based on the WCHRF framework come together to inspire each other, discuss their policy initiatives and potential collaboration (World Human Rights Cities Forum, n.d.).

Due to these developments in the recent decade, the United Nations (UN) also have increasingly recognised the role of cities in world politics, including in human rights. In fact, UN Human Rights bodies such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) are involved in organising the WCHRF (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.-a; World Human Rights Cities Forum, n.d.). Since 2015, various UN Human Rights bodies have published reports recognising the role and responsibilities of local governments around the promotion and implementation of human rights (Haddad & Cui, 2021, p. 504; UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-d; Van den Berg & Oomen, 2014, p. 12). Lobbying for this recognition from the UN was important ‘to connect local government challenges and priorities with global human rights discussions.’ It would allow cities to share their human rights initiatives, collaborate and lobby for resources (UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-d). The recognition fits in with wider UN ambitions for an ‘inclusive multilateralism’ as proposed in the report ‘Our Common Agenda’ by the United Nations Secretary-General (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.-a). Moreover, Da Silva (2018) mentions the connection that is made between cities and human rights in the New Urban Agenda of the UN which ‘sets a human rights-based approach to policy-making and service delivery as a path towards inclusive and sustainable urban development.’ The document emphasises the responsibilities cities have in promoting and implementing human rights in a context of urbanisation (p. 290).

Another organisation that is especially relevant to mention in relation to Amsterdam’s engagement with HRC discourses is the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) of the European

Union. In a context of urbanisation, where more than 70 percent of people in the European Union (EU) now ‘live in urban settings’, the EU has increasingly recognised the role of cities in international politics (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021, p. 5; S. Gimbrère, personal communication, 4 May 2022). Since the European Charter for Safeguarding Human Rights in the City (ECHRC) was launched in 2000, a network of ‘human rights cities’ in the EU has grown and EU rights institutions have likewise become more involved (UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-b, n.d.-c). The FRA has supported cities in the EU to become ‘human rights cities’ and cooperate on human rights initiatives. It encourages the formation of coalitions between cities, EU institutions and NGOs. It has established a framework through which EU cities can become ‘human rights cities’. This encourages cities to ‘formalise’ their human rights commitments, ‘integrate’ these into their work and ensure ‘a human rights-based approach in daily activities’ (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021, p. 1).

It is also important to go into the relation between the HRC and the ‘right to the city’ movement. Both movements have grown in response to urbanisation processes, which in many places have led to more people facing ‘inadequate living conditions ... and greater disparities, inequalities and discrimination’ (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.-b). Many urban social movements in diverse contexts have confronted these growing inequalities and varying effects of ‘neoliberal urban development’ (Chueca, 2016, p. 114; Darling, 2016; Tsutsui & Smith, 2019). In particular, Chueca (2016) describes how from the 1980s, social movements for ‘urban justice’ grew in the Global South, specifically in Latin America, which allied as the ‘right to the city’ movement. It has emphasised ‘the social function of the city’ and worked towards the ‘equitable redistribution of goods, resources and opportunities’ (pp. 103, 116). Rodríguez (2016) writes the movement works towards ‘a change in the social, economic and political landscape of the city’ with a focus on ‘the empowerment of the city’s inhabitants’ (p. 222). The key idea is that everyone ‘should be able to participate in the construction of the cities in which they live’ and ‘access their benefits’ (Ángel-Cabo & Sotomayor, 2021, p. 272). This movement has led to charters and declarations in different regions and cities, such as the Mexico City Charter for the Right to the City (Rodríguez, 2016, p. 220). In various ways, the HRC movement has been enabled and inspired by the ‘right to the city’ movement (Tsutsui & Smith, 2019, pp. 591, 593; UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-b).

There are some key ideas and motivations behind the HRC movement, which will all have different meanings and effects in the local contexts where they are applied. The HRC focusses on the indivisibility of human rights and aims to ensure these rights through making human rights the basis of local government work. Through declarations, charters, human rights committees and human rights budgeting, cities attempt to incorporate human rights as an integral part of their policy-making and aim to innovate human rights promotion and implementation (Chueca, 2016, p. 108; Oomen, 2016, p. 14; E. Van den Berg & Oomen, 2014, pp. 11, 14–15). Moreover, the role of ‘cooperation’ and ‘diverse coalitions’ between local governments and different stakeholders, such as residents, ‘civil society’, and international organisations are central to the HRC movement ideology and functioning (Oomen, 2016, pp. 4, 14–15; Tsutsui & Smith, 2019, p. 594; E. Van den Berg, 2016). This thesis specifically aims to explore ‘this interplay within cities, amongst cities and between the global and the local’ (Oomen, 2016, p. 11).

Finally, the HRC movement is driven by the ‘renegotiation’ of rights as it takes human rights as a diverse language for resistance (Darling, 2016, p. 126). Inspired by the ‘right to the city’ movement, it aims to enable the ‘renegotiation of rights’ through enhancing participation and accountability, especially in relation to marginalised groups (Chueca, 2016, p. 108). In the end, through ensuring active involvement of residents, the aim is to make rights meaningful for people’s lives in the city. Chueca (2016), however, argues that the ‘right to the city’ movement actually realises this involvement better than the HRC movement since the former is explicitly led by civil society and social movements while the latter often remains a ‘top-down process’ directed by the local government (pp. 119–120). Interestingly, Darling (2016) goes beyond comparing these two movements to explore the wider ‘urbanisation of human rights’, as ‘rights are claimed, negotiated and critiqued as part of urban life’ in different ways and based on different contexts (pp. 128, 138). Overall, it is thus important to contextualise the motivations, objectives and effects of the HRC movement. Although limited by the scope of my research, this chapter has aimed to highlight the diversity and multiplicity of dimensions behind the HRC movement. In the next chapter, I will further outline my case study of Amsterdam as a ‘human rights city’.

4.2 Case study: Amsterdam

In this chapter, I will establish the framework of my case study and provide more insight into Amsterdam as a ‘human rights city’. Amsterdam is the capital city of the Netherlands, and around 900,000 people live in the municipality of Amsterdam (Kruyswijk, 2022). Just like other cities in the Netherlands, it has been affected by urbanisation and decentralisation processes, especially in the social domain, in recent decades. This has led to more responsibilities and tasks for the municipality. In this context, Amsterdam has aimed to take its responsibility around human rights implementation and promotion as the biggest city in the Netherlands. Its ‘human rights city’ declaration states the city’s public services and policy areas such as education, housing and healthcare are intimately connected with human rights. Therefore, Amsterdam has expressed its commitment to incorporating human rights in its policies and policy-making (College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016, pp. 1–2).

In a country where human rights have been ‘traditionally viewed as mainly relevant for external affairs, not for domestic issues’ and where the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights was only established in 2012, the HRC movement likewise took hold quite late in the Netherlands. For example, no Dutch cities were involved in the ECHRC created in 2000. Over the last decade, however, cities throughout the Netherlands have increasingly engaged with the HRC movement (E. Van den Berg, 2016, pp. 47–48). The national government has also recently recognised the growing importance of cities in human rights promotion and implementation and in 2021, started a ‘human rights platform for municipalities’ meant to encourage networking and coordination between cities around human rights policies and initiatives (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021, p. 23). Cities have thus been recognised as a complementary level of governance to ensure human rights protection. However, an important motivation behind ‘human rights cities’ has also been developing more progressive and effective policies than the national government has done. This has been the case for example as numerous cities in the Netherlands, including Amsterdam, have aimed to provide shelter and increase access to healthcare for undocumented residents in opposition to national government policies violating human rights (UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, 2020; United Nations Human Rights Regional Office for Europe, 2019, pp. 4, 23). Moreover, Amsterdam has made policies around human rights education in primary schools as the national government did not respond to this

demand of various human rights organisations (E. Van den Berg, 2016, p. 62). This shows how cities might attempt to protect and ensure human rights, especially of marginalised groups, and respect international human rights law, when the national government refuses to do so. In general, as Grigolo (2016) states, human rights cities aim to create progressive policies using human rights as a framework and foundation (p. 282). Likewise, Amsterdam views itself as a ‘progressive’ and ‘tolerant’ city and relates this self-representation to its decision to becoming a ‘human rights city’ by writing human rights are fundamental values of the city (College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016, pp. 1–2; S. Gimbrère, personal communication, 4 May 2022). I will further explore the ways in which Amsterdam profiles itself and how this influences its vision of a ‘human rights city’ in the next chapters.

Inspired by the HRC movement, Amsterdam has thus worked towards becoming a ‘human rights city’. From 2014, it started to expand its international engagement around human rights, especially through networks such as the Shelter City network, motivated by its ‘Amsterdam International Responsible Capital City’ policy (College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016; Gimbrère, 2019). Following this, the development of a ‘human rights agenda’ in Amsterdam was included in the municipal budget. This agenda became based on 30 conversations that were held with residents throughout the city in 2015, organised with the help of civil society organisations (College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016, p. 3; E. Van den Berg, 2016, p. 55; N. Van den Berg et al., 2015). In 2016, the College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam published a letter which specifically designated Amsterdam as a ‘human rights city’. It outlined what its ‘human rights agenda’ would look like based on the conversations held with residents. Seven policy areas were most prominent in the discussions, including policies around housing, healthcare, refugees, marginalisation and discrimination, physical accessibility to buildings and public transport, privacy, and education and dialogue. The city council suggested the inclusion of children’s rights as the eighth policy area. The letter then outlined how those themes were organised in current policies. The first four of these the city government believed were already established in existing policies. Amsterdam’s vision for the last four, however, were briefly outlined in the letter. Overall, the letter established Amsterdam’s wider commitment to ensuring human rights would become an integral part of and view on policy-making (City of Amsterdam, n.d.-b; College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016). Throughout the thesis, I will go into examples of Amsterdam’s efforts in these policy areas to be able to discuss Amsterdam’s role in human rights implementation and promotion, and its relation to the HRC movement. I

will specifically zoom in on Amsterdam's initiatives around digital rights, as these form a good example of cities contributing to the innovation of human rights practices, especially through international cooperation. Moreover, it was mentioned as a priority as data protection had become an increasingly important topic in local government work. I will also go into Amsterdam's focus on education and dialogue, as these are key parts of the HRC movement. Both policy areas are also part of the four areas mentioned in which the city government would work towards establishing a stronger connection to human rights. Finally, I will explore Amsterdam's view on the indivisibility of human rights and how this influences the way in which it engages with human rights in its policies. As the indivisibility of rights is an important part of HRC discourses, it will be interesting to see to what extent Amsterdam has been influenced by this.

Internationally, Amsterdam aims to enhance its position and profile through establishing 'new partnerships in order to address urban challenges' such as sustainability. The city also believes it should 'offer help and show solidarity' internationally (City of Amsterdam, n.d.-c). The coalition agreement for the period 2018-2022 between the left parties PvdA, GroenLinks, SP, and the centre-left party D66, states Amsterdam works with other cities so that 'the EU puts our urban agenda at the centre' as 'the major European challenges of our time are being solved especially in the cities' (*A New Spring and a New Voice*, 2018, p. 68). Amsterdam, however, takes a selective approach when it comes to joining international networks, and is not involved in all parts of the HRC movement. This is characteristic of the HRC movement itself, which consists of a coalition of different frameworks and platforms which cities can join. There is not one single organisation that defines and leads the HRC movement, however, there are a few major international platforms. Amsterdam has not joined the WHRCF in its human rights networking between cities, however, has joined various international networks around specific sets of human rights (S. Gimbrère, personal communication, 4 May 2022). Some major international networks in which Amsterdam is involved include the Cities Coalition for Digital Rights (CC4DR), the Eurocities' Inclusive Cities For All network, Shelter City Network and the Rainbow Cities Network. I will go further into the role of these kinds of networks in Amsterdam's international policy around human rights in chapter 4.4 (Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, n.d.; Eurocities Inclusive Cities for All, n.d.-c; Gimbrère, 2019).

Overall, then, Amsterdam has declared itself a human rights city without committing itself to participating in all global HRC platforms. This in itself shows the loose and diverse

nature of the HRC movement which is more about inspiration and cooperation, than single frameworks or organisational structures. In the recent decade, there has been a proliferation of 'labels' that cities can have, which to differing extents require specific commitments from cities to acquire them. Within the HRC movement, there is a tension between either requiring too strict a framework which again imposes conditions on cities that do not work for their context, or having no set requirements for cities in order to claim the title of being a 'human rights city', thus emptying the term. Therefore, organisations such as the FRA and platforms as the WHRCF have tried to establish guiding principles for becoming a 'human rights city', and most of all, have aimed to provide more support for cities in this process (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021; UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-b, 2020). Overall, however, the HRC movement values the agencies of cities and their roles in localising human rights. Cities' efforts around human rights are diverse and need to be contextualised, which I aim to do through my case study of Amsterdam. I will explore the specific vision Amsterdam has for its engagement with HRC ideas in the next chapter. In particular, I will further go into the meanings behind the 'human rights agenda' of Amsterdam in relation to the international HRC movement.

4.3 The ‘human rights agenda’ of Amsterdam

In this chapter, I will relate key ideas behind the HRC movement to the case study of Amsterdam, and see how the city has been inspired by the HRC movement. In this way, I hope to shine light on Amsterdam as a case study of an international movement of ‘human rights cities’. I will analyse what meanings Amsterdam attributes to human rights *in, by and through* the city. I will go into how the city government in Amsterdam has ‘localised’ and adapted various parts of the HRC movement to function in the context of the city and its wider policy goals. Finally, based on my case study of Amsterdam, I will analyse the wider potential and limitations of ‘human rights cities’ to innovate human rights practices. In doing so, this chapter provides further insight into what role cities play in promoting and implementing human rights.

One of the key ideas behind Amsterdam as a ‘human rights city’ is that human rights should be integral to policy-making and form the basis of local government work. In Amsterdam’s ‘human rights city’ declaration, the city government expresses its commitment to ensure human rights are driving policy-making, and are used as a lens through which policies are looked at. It views a ‘human rights city’ as a city that refers to the UDHR and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in its policies. The city states next to providing a juridical basis for policies, human rights also provide a moral basis (College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016, pp. 1–3). This definition relates to the various definitions of HRC circulating through international institutions, such as the UCLG-CISDP that defines the concept of a human rights city as ‘an overarching vision ... to promote human rights and turn them into a cross-cutting driver of local agendas on the basis of each city’s history, challenges and priorities’ (UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-b).

The city government of Amsterdam has tried to formulate its vision of what it means to be a ‘human rights city’ and has aimed to incorporate human rights in its policy-making mainly through enhancing participation and raising awareness of human rights in the city. Participation and coalition-formation between a variety of actors, as well as raising human rights awareness, are likewise key parts of the wider HRC movement. Amsterdam proclaims it aims to involve stakeholders in its policy-making. Indeed, local organisations and communities were involved in the creation of a human rights agenda for Amsterdam. In the conversations that were held with residents in 2015, which subsequently informed the agenda,

people were asked how they experienced human rights in Amsterdam. Based on the UDHR, they talked about what they identified as the most pressing issues that affected them and how human rights played a role in this. The idea was that human rights should be relevant for the daily lives of *Amsterdammers* (College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016, pp. 1–3; N. Van den Berg et al., 2015, pp. 6–7).

Among the topics that arose in the conversations were ‘human rights awareness’, human rights education and a need for permanent dialogue between residents, institutions and the city government (N. Van den Berg et al., 2015, pp. 23–24). To be able to execute its human rights agenda, and especially to raise awareness of human rights in the city at all levels, Amsterdam has started to work together with human rights organisations, schools and universities. They have organised events raising human rights awareness and trainings for city government officials around human rights (College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016, pp. 4–5; Gimbrère, 2019). Especially human rights education at schools has been an important pillar of the city government, working together with Amnesty International, while it has lobbied the national government to support its efforts (College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016, p. 5; E. Van den Berg, 2016, pp. 55, 62). The focus on human rights awareness and participation in Amsterdam’s ‘human rights agenda’ is clearly inspired by the wider HRC movement. As E. Van den Berg (2016) states ‘many human rights cities ... seek to advance human rights consciousness by organising public events where human rights are discussed and linked to local issues’. Civil society organisations have played an important role in more cities in the Netherlands, as well as internationally, as they aim to ‘create more awareness about the relevance of human rights for local problems’ (pp. 49, 61).

Next to human rights awareness and dialogue, another important focus is ‘privacy’. Through diverse coalitions locally and internationally the city aims to protect digital rights as part of its human rights agenda. The main goal is that data and information should be accessible to everyone and people living in Amsterdam should be able to use technologies ‘without compromising basic human rights such as privacy and freedom of expression.’ Through its Citizen Voices for Digital Rights pilot which lasted five months, the city government discussed digital rights with residents and local activists (City of Amsterdam, n.d.-a; College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016). The city has also created a ‘register’ outlining its use of artificial intelligence and algorithms (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021, p. 28). Amsterdam’s efforts around digital rights can be seen

as an example where a city uses a human rights framework to confront ‘emerging challenges while coming up with new, practical ways to implement rights’ which is central to the HRC movement (UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-b).

Another important ideal behind the HRC movement is the indivisibility of human rights. The idea is that cities’ efforts around human rights might strengthen the protection of ESC rights ‘as the provision of several public services related to ESC rights depend on municipalities’, for example in the areas of housing, healthcare, and public transport (Chueca, 2016, pp. 108, 119). Amsterdam’s human rights agenda also includes policy areas, housing and healthcare, that specifically relate to ESC rights (College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016, pp. 1–2). However, how to frame the link between ESC rights and these policy areas has been a topic of discussion within the municipality. The city espouses the view that all human rights are integral to its policies as human rights form the basis of the city’s values. Therefore, human rights, including ESC rights, are considered to be the foundation of the local government’s work. Social policy, with a focus on ‘equal opportunities’, has in fact been a pillar of the city government. However, ESC rights are less explicitly incorporated as ‘human rights’ into policies like housing because of their juridical basis. In this sense, Amsterdam limits the expansion of human rights as it would entail juridical commitments (Gimbrère, 2019, p. 1; S. Gimbrère, personal communication, 4 May 2022). It seems Amsterdam is influenced in this by ‘pre-existing meanings and discourses of human rights’ with a traditional focus on civil and political rights (Grigolo, 2016, p. 278). The city does not seem totally unlike other human rights cities, however. Linda Voortman, alderperson of Utrecht, stated Utrecht ‘might not speak every day explicitly in terms of human rights’ but like Amsterdam, focusses on raising awareness about the relevance of human rights to daily lives and local government work, as the HRC movement promotes (UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, 2020). Still, tension remains between a vision of human rights as an integral part of the city’s policy-making yet an unwillingness to explicitly link human rights to ESC policies. Therefore, although international HRC discourses emphasise the indivisibility of human rights, the question is how much impact this has in cities.

Although its human rights agenda concretely mentions 8 policy areas, Amsterdam thus also states human rights are meant to be an overall perspective applied to policy-making. However, in contrast to other ‘human rights cities’, Amsterdam has not set up permanent

human rights committees or other HRC bodies that might work towards the integration of human rights in city government work (Grigolo, 2016, pp. 288–289). The FRA emphasises the need for ‘setting up a human rights office’ and other efforts for ‘mainstreaming human rights’ in local government work (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021, p. 6). Amsterdam has not done this. The risk in this is that Amsterdam can pick and choose in what areas it wants to directly establish a link with human rights, instead of actually ensuring them as guiding principles throughout its policy-making. Moreover, if the indivisibility of human rights is not ensured, and certain policy areas are not considered to be part of its human rights agenda while others are, then the interrelated dimensions of issues might be ignored. The question, then, is how Amsterdam will ensure policies are implemented in such a way that they work together towards addressing the various human rights that are involved in various city policy areas. Amsterdam does address these problems to an extent and states it takes an ‘integrated approach’ to incorporating human rights in all relevant policy areas. Moreover, it does have monitoring systems on various policies and since 2018, at the request of the city council, Amsterdam has planned to do a ‘human rights scan’ every year on the realisation of different human rights treaties. It has done a first scan specifically on children’s rights (Gimbrère, 2019; Ombudsman Metropool Amsterdam, n.d.-a). Important also is the ‘Ombudsman’ that residents of Amsterdam can contact for complaints about the municipality (Ombudsman Metropool Amsterdam, n.d.-b). This shows Amsterdam does have certain mechanisms in place, however, has not specifically created a human rights office following its expressed commitment to become a ‘human rights city’.

The ‘sandwich effect’ that Tsutsui & Smith (2019) identify in international human rights politics can also be seen in Amsterdam to an extent (pp. 595–596). It is clear that Amsterdam is influenced by international ideas promoted by the HRC movement and international institutions involved in this and that it adapts these ideas to fit its own context. There is also pressure from civil society organisations and local communities. These have been involved by the city government in the preparation of its human rights agenda and in policy initiatives around this. However, the overall process of becoming a ‘human rights city’ has remained a largely top-down process guided by the city government. The city government ultimately leads the process of selecting, defining and incorporating human rights in its policies. The city government has the authority to implement policies, civil society can lobby the government and be involved in the promotion and implementation of policies, while participation of residents seems to remain limited to providing feedback on what issues they

face and how these might be solved. Moreover, between these actors there are unequal power relations, and the question is who has access to participation in HRC in Amsterdam, who defines this participation and what interests prevail (Merry, 2006b). Obviously there are many organisations and movements lobbying the city government on many topics, however, the process of becoming a ‘human rights city’ seems to be largely guided by the local government. Chueca (2016) argues there is potential for the ‘renegotiation’ of rights if the city government actually ensures ‘sound dialogue mechanisms’ and platforms that ensure a more permanent form of participation of residents (p. 108). These, in turn, would further increase accountability. A lack of these, then, limits the potential of human rights at the city level to bring about concrete changes in people’s lives.

Moreover, as Ángel-Cabo & Sotomayor (2021) point out ‘neoliberal agendas’ have played an important role in cities and city governance, they question whether cities can be ‘both the problem and the solution to socio-economic exclusions’ (pp. 265, 272). Especially if city governments do not explicitly include and focus on ESC rights, the potential of the HRC movement to work towards more equal and just cities becomes limited (Chueca, 2016, p. 108). As long as city governments do not commit to working towards structural change, the question is what impact expressed commitments to human rights really have. In order for HRC to really mean something, communities in cities, especially marginalised communities, should be able to ‘participate actively’ in policy- and decision-making and ‘benefit directly’ from the resources and growth of the city that they are a part of (Ángel-Cabo & Sotomayor, 2021, p. 278). Regarding the potential of the HRC movement towards innovating human rights promotion and implementation, Grigolo (2016) makes the case that the movement both sustains ‘existing practices’ but also encourages ‘new practices’ as human rights cities become ‘sites of agency and new engagements’ (p. 282). The potential of a ‘human rights city’ then depends on whether it can be ‘a site of resistance to the interest of economic actors in the city’ and the wider circumstances in which the city operates (Grigolo, 2016, pp. 280, 293). Overall, it seems pressure from social movements remains important to move all levels of government to protect human rights.

In conclusion, Amsterdam has appointed itself as a human rights city, expressing its commitment to human rights as an integral part of its policy-making. It becomes clear Amsterdam has been inspired by the HRC movement in its focus on participation, human rights awareness, and innovation. However, I have also shown the potential tensions around and limitations of cities localising HRC discourses and implementing human rights. In the

next chapter, I will further discuss Amsterdam's international policy and cooperation around human rights. In a wider sense, I will analyse the role of city diplomacy in international human rights politics.

4.4 City diplomacy

In this analytical chapter, I will go further into the role of cities in international human rights politics specifically related to the HRC movement. I will go into city diplomacy between ‘human rights cities’ and the role of city branding in the HRC movement. I will analyse how Amsterdam profiles itself in its international statements and declarations around human rights. I thus want to explore in what ways cities use human rights as a form of city branding, and what role city diplomacy plays in their engagement with human rights. Overall, I aim to explore what this reveals about the changing role cities play in international human rights politics, and how ‘human rights cities’ might view themselves as international actors.

First, I delve deeper into city diplomacy in relation to the HRC movement. The HRC movement consists of platforms for cities to network, lobby other international actors for support and coordinate action. These platforms include the WCHRF, and events organised by UCLG in cooperation with UN Human Rights bodies (UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights, n.d.-d; World Human Rights Cities Forum, n.d.). The goals behind these various platforms is for cities to be able to connect with a range of international actors, learn from each other and promote their own initiatives, as well as lobby for investment and resources to actually be able to implement these initiatives (Acuto, 2013; Acuto & Rayner, 2016). Amsterdam likewise is motivated by these reasons in seeking international cooperation around human rights. It does this through establishing bilateral relations with other cities, and encouraging connections between businesses and organisations from its own city with those of another. As part of these relations, Amsterdam often aims to put human rights on the agenda and to discuss human rights initiatives, together with human rights organisations (City of Amsterdam, n.d.-c; College of Mayors and Alderpersons of Amsterdam, 2016, p. 2; S. Gimbrère, personal communication, 4 May 2022). In this chapter, however, my main focus is on Amsterdam’s participation in international city networks that promote human rights to explore the wider role of city diplomacy and city branding in international human rights politics. This is because these networks especially play an important role in connecting and expanding the HRC movement. Davidson et al. (2019) describe how ‘complex networked urban governance structures’ have grown in recent decades, in which a diverse range of international actors is involved (p. 3545). This is evident in the HRC movement where UN institutions, city governments, and NGOs cooperate and negotiate on human rights initiatives.

In this context, Amsterdam's approach to joining city networks is selective. Unlike other self-proclaimed 'human rights cities' in the Netherlands, Amsterdam does not participate in the main platforms of the HRC movement, such as the WCHRF. The reason behind this is two-fold. Against the background of an immense growth of city networks, Amsterdam considers it to be necessary to be selective and it prefers to join networks that offer concrete support to address pressing issues the city faces. However, the city government emphasises its efforts around human rights do not depend on whether Amsterdam is an 'official' member of the movement. Overall, it is clearly inspired by the HRC movement in declaring itself a 'human rights city' but limits its engagement with its institutions. Mainly, its international engagement with human rights has found expression in various networks it has joined. These give the city opportunities to lobby, share expertise, and cooperate on specific initiatives (S. Gimbrère, personal communication, 4 May 2022). Its domestic human rights agenda informs its international cooperation. For example, its focus on 'privacy' becomes clear in Amsterdam's international cooperation with cities on digital rights. An example of a city network behind which Amsterdam has been a driving force is the CC4DR. Together with Barcelona and New York, it started this international network in 2018 and more than 50 cities are now involved. CC4DR is 'committed to promoting and defending digital rights in urban context through city action' and to creating guiding principles 'to advance human rights in digital environments' (Cities Coalition for Digital Rights, n.d.). It works with UN institutions towards the creation of a 'digital rights helpdesk', which will support local governments to incorporate human rights in digital policies. This network has also enabled Amsterdam's norm entrepreneurship around digital rights in an international context. In the FRA framework of 'human rights cities', Amsterdam's initiatives around digital rights are mentioned as innovative human rights practices (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2021). Its cooperation with cities internationally has contributed to putting digital rights more firmly on the human rights agenda of international institutions.

Meanwhile, both the UN and the EU have increasingly recognised the HRC movement. In fact, these institutions create reports on human rights initiatives by cities and how these might contribute to the promotion and implementation of human rights. Amsterdam has increasingly cooperated with other cities in the EU against a background of increased opportunities for cities to lobby the EU and increased support by EU institutions. In particular, Amsterdam has become an increasingly active player within Eurocities, which has brought cities in the EU together to network and lobby (Eurocities, n.d.; Gimbrère, 2019; S.

Gimbrère, personal communication, 4 May 2022). For example, Amsterdam is a member of the Eurocities' Inclusive Cities for All network that started in 2019 'with 21 cities presenting pledges at the European Parliament' based on the European Pillar for Social Rights. The network is meant to be a 'political campaign' but also provides access to a 'mutual learning programme' where cities can share their practices and expertise (Eurocities Inclusive Cities for All, n.d.-c, n.d.-b, n.d.-a). As a focus on 'equal opportunities' has been especially important for Amsterdam, it specifically has signed up for this pledge, together with a pledge to ensuring human rights education. Overall, this shows Amsterdam's increased cooperation with EU cities on human rights, and how its priorities locally inform their actions internationally.

It is also important to delve deeper into how Amsterdam has profiled itself in its international policy, specifically around human rights, and how this profile influences its international policy goals and efforts. International policy is also about considerations around self-representation. For example, Amsterdam has profiled itself as an 'open' and 'tolerant' city, emphasising the values of 'equality and freedom'. This discourse has subsequently influenced its motivations behind and choices in international policy. Amsterdam talks about its 'DNA' of being a safe and inviting place for everyone that is persecuted because of their beliefs, and so human rights attention is integral to this discourse of the city's 'DNA', its identity and its self-representation (Gimbrère, 2019; S. Gimbrère, personal communication, 4 May 2022). From this position, Amsterdam for example has joined the Shelter City network at the request of the city council. This network 'offers temporary housing, training, and protection to international human rights defenders'. It has also actively established conversations with other cities on anti-discrimination policies, LGBTQI+ rights and gender equality (Gimbrère, 2019; S. Gimbrère, personal communication, 4 May 2022; Van den Berg, 2016, p. 55). All of this fits in with Amsterdam's self-representation as an 'International Responsible Capital City' which necessarily includes engagement with other cities on human rights (City of Amsterdam, n.d.-b).

Finally, it is important, especially, to explore how cities might use human rights as a form of city branding and to enhance its international profile. Throughout the chapter it becomes clear Amsterdam profiles itself and aims to enhance its international position through city networks. Especially in a context of 'inter-urban competition for investment' and resources, city branding has become a central part of city diplomacy (Tsutsui & Smith, 2019, p. 593). Moreover, declarations around human rights can provide access to 'avenues towards

international networks, sources of funding and expertise' and enhances a city's international profile (Darling, 2016, p. 128; Oomen, 2016, p. 8). This, for example, can be seen in Amsterdam's role in the CC4DR or Eurocities where the city can promote its own role in human rights initiatives while lobbying for support. Especially interesting in city branding is the role of statements and declarations. For example, the Eurocities' Inclusive Cities for All network encourages cities to sign 'pledges' to become a 'champion city'. In order to achieve a title, it is important to sign a declaration. A similar process is in place for becoming a 'human rights city' (Eurocities, 2020). The risk, then, is that cities will make empty promises around their progressive goals as this brings them 'opportunities for reputational, social and economic capital'. However, this might also have beneficial effects if 'cities compete over not merely the language of rights, but their practical implementation too' (Darling, 2016, p. 128).

Still, the question remains if initiatives are actually implemented, and in what ways. It is important to point out the power dynamics behind these city networks. For example, there are differences in influence between bigger and smaller cities in these networks, where some cities have more resources to participate in global networks (Davidson et al., 2019, p. 3551). Especially the economic interests involved in city networks, which often are supported by both international institutions but also corporations, influence the way these networks operate and the way initiatives are implemented. In this sense, a focus on broad coalitions can be a risk as the most powerful actors, such as corporations which promise investment, can become dominant or influence the agenda of networks (Acuto & Rayner, 2016, pp. 1150–1151, 1157, 1160; Davidson et al., 2019, p. 3545). This can limit the potential of city networks for transformation, and can likewise limit the radical nature of the wider HRC movement. This all might sustain 'market-driven urban development' (Ángel-Cabo & Sotomayor, 2021, p. 276; Grigolo, 2016, p. 280). Interestingly, Grigolo (2016) therefore argues 'the human rights city and the neo-liberal city are in a relation of competition and collateralism' (p. 280). Whereas the HRC movement promotes a discourse of progressive local governments coming together to ensure human rights and the 'right to the city' to work towards more equal cities, this discourse leaves out how in practice economic interests, competition and investment continue to play a role in the cooperation of cities through networks (Grigolo, 2016, p. 280). In fact, the HRC movement has arisen against a background of varying processes of urbanisation, decentralisation and privatisation, dependent on context (Tsutsui & Smith, 2019, p. 595). An example in which discourses of 'right to the city' and HRC come together is the international Cities for Adequate Housing Declaration that Amsterdam signed in 2018. This declaration

was specifically published in the context of the New Urban Agenda. In this declaration, governments expressed their commitment to the ‘right to adequate housing’ and lobbied for more authority and resources ‘to regulate the real estate market in order to fight against speculation and guarantee the social function of the city’. The HRC focus on innovation and cooperation between different stakeholders is present in the declaration while the cities also promise increased efforts for the ‘social function of the city’ against neoliberal interests (Cities for Adequate Housing, 2018).

Overall, it seems Amsterdam’s efforts around human rights both challenge and complement those of the national government. In a wider sense, the HRC movement likewise seems to simultaneously oppose and fit in with existing governance structures in global human rights politics. The movement has challenged existing practices of human rights promotion and implementation through its focus on the localization and ‘renegotiation’ of human rights. Cities increasingly cooperate, lobby for their own position in human rights politics, and for their ability to innovate human rights practices, make them more effective and add ‘legitimacy’ to them (Oomen & Baumgärtel, 2018, p. 608). However, cities simultaneously emphasise complementarity of different levels of government, in the sense that each level of government takes its own responsibility, and supports each other in this. This is important for cities like Amsterdam because otherwise a risk of the HRC movement would be that national governments further decentralisation processes without providing cities with adequate resources (S. Gimbrère, personal communication, 4 May 2022; Soohoo, 2016, p. 261). As many cities have been affected by ‘neoliberal agendas’ and are influenced by private interests, Ángel-Cabo & Sotomayor (2021) question whether the HRC movement led by city governments is an adequate response to ‘the increasingly globalizing characteristics of urban poverty and inequality’ (pp. 265, 275). In the end, it needs to be emphasised that structural changes are necessary within cities and city governance, as well as other levels of government, for the HRC movement to be able to genuinely live up to its commitment of working towards more equal and just cities, through more effective and meaningful human rights promotion and implementation based on local contexts.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has explored what role cities play in promoting and implementing human rights. In particular, through a case study of Amsterdam, I have analysed the Human Rights Cities movement. My case study of Amsterdam as a ‘human rights city’ reveals how the HRC movement has encouraged and brought together cities internationally to promote and implement human rights through incorporating them in policy-making. Overall, this thesis shows cities have increasingly claimed a position for themselves in international human rights politics and have worked in coalitions consisting of a range of actors internationally to promote and implement their human rights initiatives. Although cities are often motivated to promote certain human rights if the national government refuses to do so, the movement still emphasises the complementarity of cities’ human rights efforts to those of nation states and international institutions. The HRC movement points to the potential of cities to innovate global human rights promotion and implementation through integrating human rights in daily local government work and offering opportunities for participation which might lead to the ‘localization’ and ‘renegotiation’ of rights. This is important for human rights to become more meaningful to people’s daily lives in cities. However, the potential of the movement for ensuring a better realisation of human rights and innovating human rights practices is also limited by unequal power relations, neoliberal influences and inadequate resources and support.

The international HRC movement has grown since the 1990s against a background of urbanisation and decentralisation processes which have led to more responsibilities for many cities. These processes have also led to an increased recognition by cities themselves and other international actors that local authorities have a responsibility to ensure human rights. Therefore, cities have increasingly cooperated internationally on human rights. My case study of Amsterdam shows the influence the HRC movement has had on discourses around human rights promotion and implementation globally.

In particular, Amsterdam created its ‘human rights agenda’ based on conversations with its residents. This shows how the city followed other human rights cities in their focus on the participation of stakeholders. Moreover, as in other cities that are inspired by the HRC movement, civil society organisations played a crucial part in the preparation and execution of its human rights agenda. Especially in raising awareness around human rights these organisations were crucial in organising discussions around how international human rights

treaties might relate to local issues. This, then, relates to an important point about the HRC movement, the ‘renegotiation’ of rights at the local level.

However, considering the unequal power relations behind the opportunities for involvement in a city’s ‘human rights agenda’, it is important not to overestimate the effects of the enhanced participation of residents in human rights cities. In many human rights cities, including in Amsterdam, the formulation of a human rights agenda often remains a top-down process directed by the city government, which decides in what ways to incorporate human rights in its own policies and decides how to implement them. This becomes clear, for example, in the discussions around the indivisibility of human rights. Although, the HRC movement aims to innovate human rights promotion and implementation through linking cities’ daily activities and public services to human rights, Amsterdam is held back in explicitly linking policy areas such as housing to human rights, because of their juridical nature and the obligations that cities would be held accountable for. This raises questions around the potential for the ‘renegotiation’ and expansion of human rights in Amsterdam, through their incorporation in its policy-making. Moreover, I have pointed out questions around the accountability and the implementation mechanisms of Amsterdam.

The HRC movement also enables cities to promote their human rights initiatives internationally and lobby for support. The movement shows the increasing influence of cities in international politics. City diplomacy has become increasingly important in international (human rights) politics and has enabled the HRC movement to grow. Both regional cooperation between cities in the form of regional organisations and charters, as well as international platforms like the WHRCF, have been crucial in the enhanced position of cities in international human rights politics. As cities are dependent on support from their national governments and international institutions, it was crucial that these actors would recognise their efforts, which they have increasingly done in the last decade. Especially network-formation between cities has been crucial in sharing their practices, expertise, and in lobbying other international actors for support.

Norm localization and entrepreneurship are defining characteristics of the HRC movement and this thesis has especially been interested in how the local and global influence each other. Norm localization can be seen in Amsterdam in the process of basing its human rights agenda on conversations with residents and in political choices of the city government around how to frame and implement human rights in Amsterdam. I have also emphasised that it is important to recognise that the dynamics behind how human rights cities view and profile

themselves as international actors influence their international policy around human rights. Likewise, I have emphasised that in a context of competition between cities for investment, city branding is a central part of cities' international activities. Norm entrepreneurship is also important and can be seen in Amsterdam's involvement in the CC4DR. Through its engagement in city networks, and especially the signing of statements, declarations and 'pledges', Amsterdam aims to profile itself in certain ways so that the city can connect with platforms that can further its goals and provide resources.

In certain ways, Amsterdam is representative of many cities inspired by the ideals behind the HRC movement in its focus on participation, raising awareness, the relevance of human rights for daily local government work, but also in its ambivalence around the indivisibility of human rights. These issues relate to wider trends and discussions in international human rights politics. Amsterdam especially works together with other EU cities to claim a position for themselves in EU human rights politics. However, Amsterdam differs, for example, from other Dutch cities like Utrecht in its refusal to commit to the main platforms of the 'official' HRC movement. Interestingly enough, it seems Amsterdam is inspired by and adapts certain strands of both HRC and 'right to the city' discourses to function for its own context, through negotiation locally. Overall, it is again important to emphasise the diversity of the HRC movement and to analyse the circumstances in which a city operates.

Overall, this thesis has aimed to provide insight into the role of cities in promoting and implementing human rights and might contribute to wider discussions on city diplomacy, norm localization and global human rights politics. It encourages future research to delve deeper into the power dynamics between various actors within cities, and on the international stage. It has argued cities innovate the promotion and implementation of human rights to the extent that they attempt to make human rights meaningful for local contexts and people's daily lives through a focus on enhancing participation, linking human rights to daily local government work and public services. Moreover, through cooperation, cities aim to enhance human rights promotion and implementation and increase their influence in international human rights politics. At the same time, cities lobby national government and international institutions because they recognise that they are complementary levels of government. Above all, the HRC promotes a vision of cities globally cooperating to address issues based on a human rights framework rooted in local contexts working towards more just and equal cities.

However, questions remain around the power relations behind the movement, the actual impact of the movement and its limited radical nature.

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