

THE ACTOR-RELATIONAL PORT CITY INTERFACES

Ghent, Belgium



If we want to find new port city synergies, we have to recognize the complexity and local character of clusters

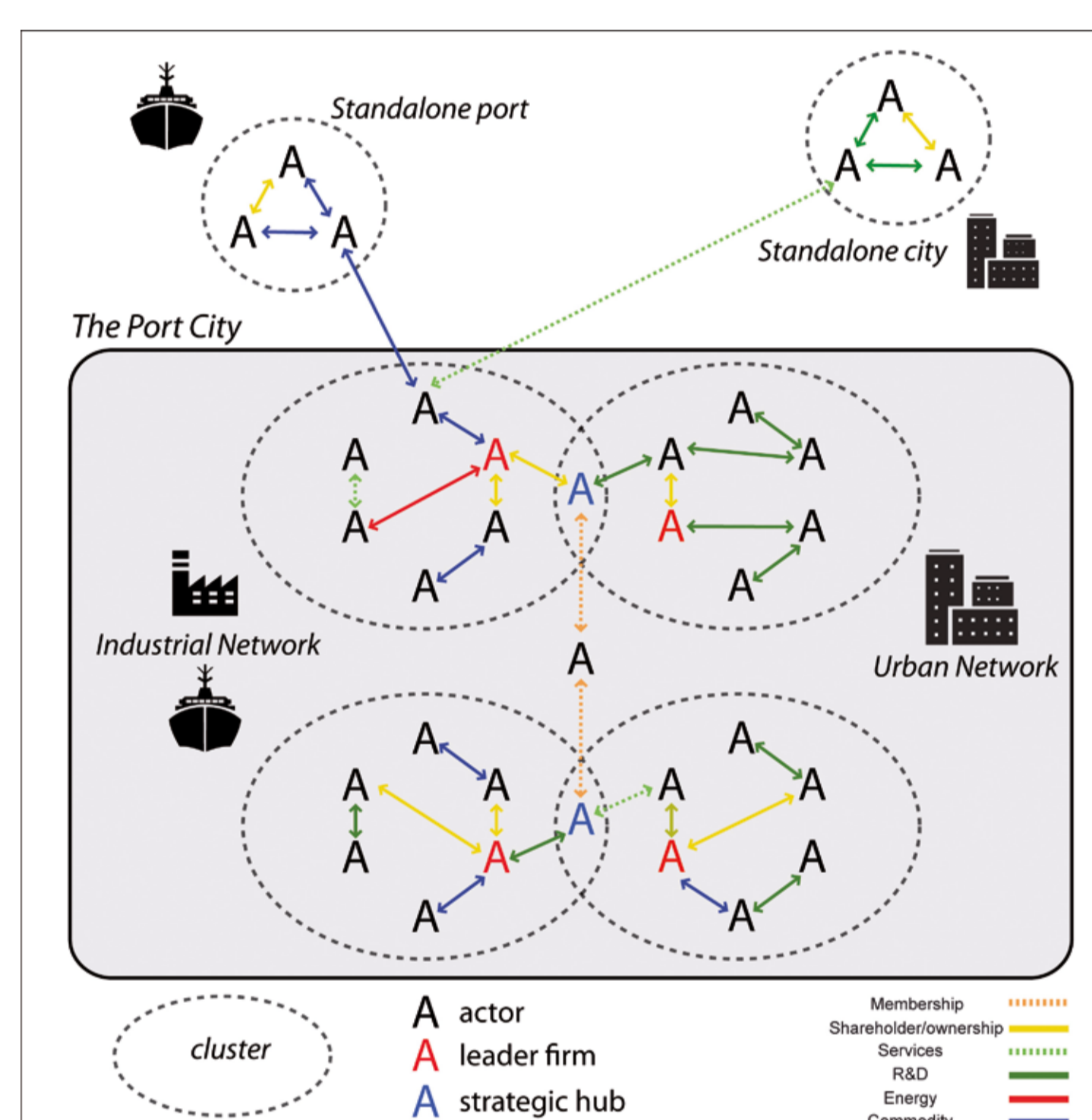


Figure 1

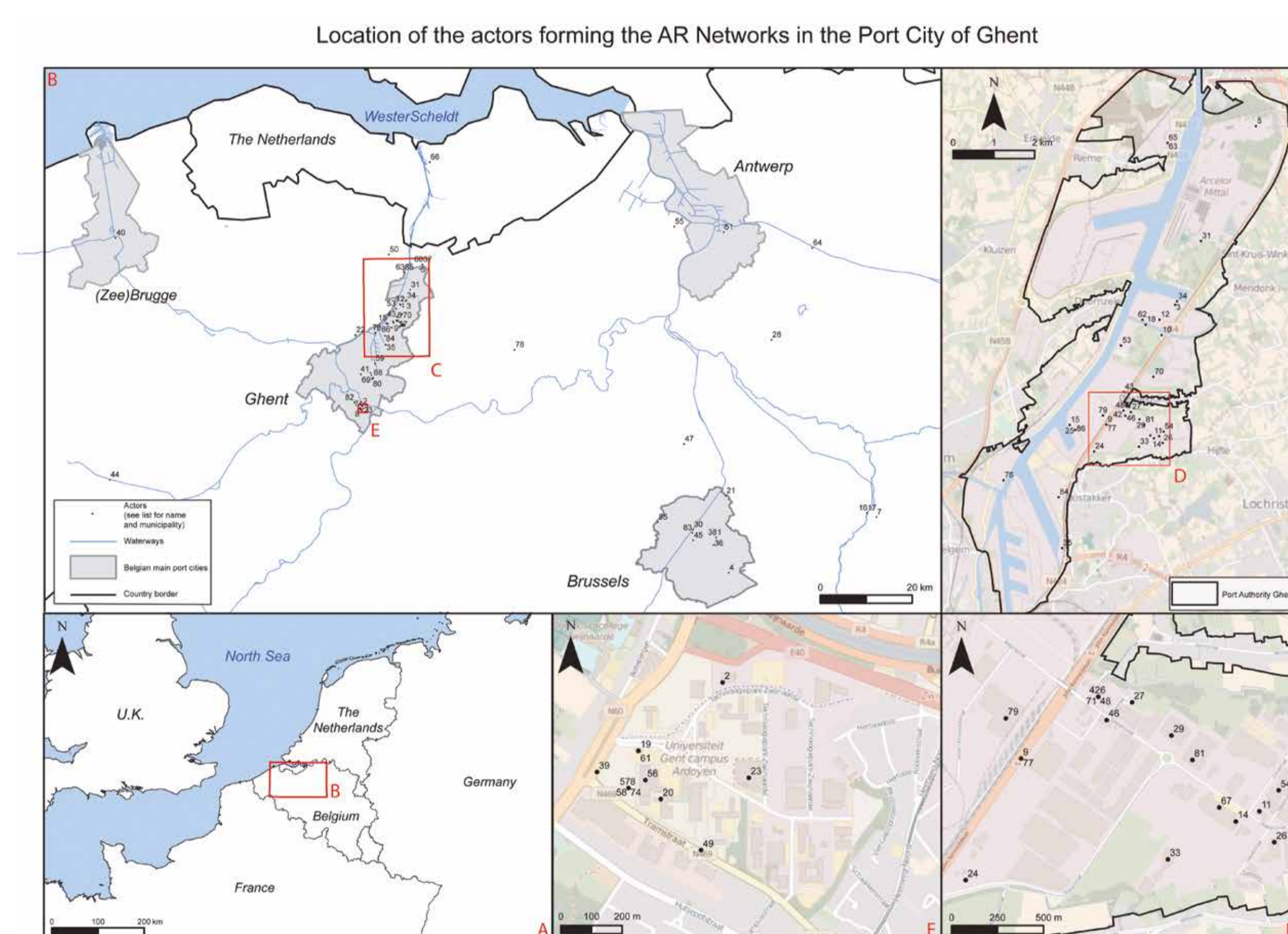


Figure 2

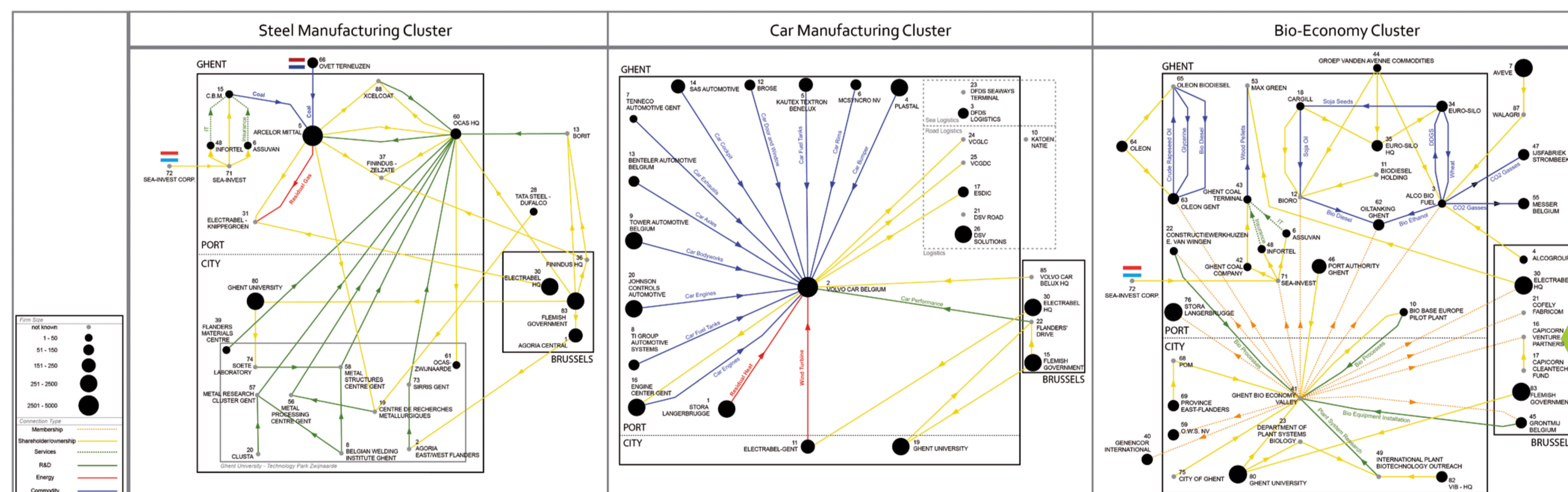


Figure 3

Following the consecutive industrial revolutions, port cities have changed dramatically. During the last sixty years, ports around the world excelled. At the same time, ports moved out of the urban areas. Consequently, the former closely tightened port city interfaces have been split up in multi-dimensional ways: (i) socio-economic, (ii) cultural and most recently (iii) institutional.

Nevertheless, the recent crises of 2008 and onwards, show the limitations of the ongoing economies of scale and functional zoning which characterized the port developments around the world. There is a need to achieve a global competitive edge in particular by the preservation and expansion of the high quality functions that ensure long-term viability. Following this rationale, the OECD (2013) called to find or renew the synergies between port and city. However, before we can find new synergies, we first need to understand the current situation.

RESEARCH ON PORT CITY SYNERGIES IN GHEENT

The main goal of this research is to visualize the port city interfaces. Hereby, we use the dynamic and multi-scalar Actor Relational Approach, this instead of conceptualizing the port city interface as a geographical area, or as the built up waterfront. This point of view fits well with the cluster concept. Clusters are the geographical concentration of agglomeration economies. The key to enhance innovation in a cluster lies in the related and unrelated variety. Hence, for port city clusters it is important to diversify its functions. Therefore, we looked for relations as:

- Commodity (physical products)
- Financial (e.g. ownership or shareholder)
- Energetic (e.g. electricity or residual heat)

- R&D and advanced producer service (e.g. IT, insurance)
- Membership of an association

A port city can be conceptualized as an assemblage of different industrial, more large scale, and urban, more knowledge based, cluster of actors working together in various ways, each around a lead firm(s), potentially connected to other actors belonging to other clusters through a strategic actor or hub (Figure 1).

In this research, we examine the port city of Ghent (Figure 2). Ghent is an interesting case in the Dutch-Belgian region (OECD, 2013), because it has a more industrial profile than the other ports nearby. The hypothesis is that the port city interfaces in Ghent are still more intense and not grown apart in a same way then in comparison with the other port cities nearby.

To answer this question, first we need to understand the socio-economic situation. The port city of Ghent has a diverse socio-economic profile. Out of this overview, the most interesting sectors and clusters to look into detail are (direct value added):

- The car manufacturing sector (port: 33%)
- The metalworking sector (port: 21%)
- The bio-economy sector (parts of chemical sector (port: 15%); fuel sector (port: 3%), food sector (port: 4%); energy sector (port: 6%))
- The government, education and health care sector (urban: 32%)

The value added of latter is difficult to study and will be highlighted in examine the first three clusters. By using economic datasets, as well as interviews with several firms in the Ghent port city region, we examined the different sectors.

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RESULTS

The visualization of the three different clusters is twofold. Figure 2 shows the location of the actors involved in the different clusters. Figure 3 shows how these actors are connected and informs us if the actor is situated in the administrative urban or port area (Ghent) or in another city, as well the firm size.

Noticeable is that all three clusters are very different constructed. The metalworking cluster is mostly an urban cluster with a high number of R&D firms doing research on metal processes. Most of these firms are situated in the Ghent University Technology Park (Figure 2 E). Arcelor Mittal is clearly the leader firm, but is a standalone firm. The car manufacturing cluster is in many ways the opposite of this. Around the Volvo Car Belgium firm, a large supplier network exist. This cluster, however, lacks urban R&D functions. The bio-economy cluster is diversified. The cluster has a strong port industrial network, as well as an urban knowledge network.

CONCLUSION: WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

If we want to find new port city synergies, we have to recognize the complexity and local character of clusters. Therefore, first policy makers have to analyse their port city intensively. Second, this in contrast with the separation of the port city interfaces, policy has to find the right port city governance model, capable of facilitating the dynamic port city synergies.

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