



Japan Local Government Centre

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Online International Activity of UK Local Authorities 2017

A data analysis of the level of international activity carried out by local
authorities since the EU referendum result

Text & Graphs

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Editor

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Data Analysis of Online International Activity of UK Local Authorities 2017

Background

Since the June 2016 referendum result to leave the EU, often referred to as Brexit, local authorities in the UK have been left with multiple challenges in securing trade and international connections. As the UK central government shifts power to the local level through devolution, new forms of city diplomacy are sometimes proposed as a means to create opportunities for cities and regions in the UK to improve its international presence and bring growth.

The research in this paper seeks to understand the level of international activity carried out by Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) and city regions in the UK since the referendum result. In particular, the research will look to identify which parts of the UK are making their international activity most public; whether there are international strategies being developed as a consequence of Brexit; and which countries are involved in these international activities.

Data

Data that was included in the research was taken from news articles, press releases and documents relating to international activities which were published between July 2016 and July 2017.

Data was sourced from the official websites of the following:

- Local Enterprise Partnerships (39)
- Combined Authorities (9)
- Core Cities (10)
- Key Cities (21)
- Scottish Cities (7)
- Greater London

Cities and counties that did not fall into any of the above categories were omitted due to time constraints and to ensure comparisons were balanced, i.e. a non-LEP county would not be compared to a LEP.

Method

Data was extracted from articles and documents published on official local government or LEP web pages. Certain documents from official web pages could only be accessed indirectly (via search engines). Local authorities and LEPs with more than one website were not counted as separate entities per website, but by the parent organisation (e.g. articles taken from www.london.gov.uk and www.londonandpartners.com would be counted as articles for Greater London overall). Social media sources were not included.

Articles and documents were dated according to the day the article was published. In the case of monthly newsletters that only displayed the month, the data was recorded as being published on the last day of that month.

Collated data was categorised into the following:

- Trade mission/business
- Inbound delegation
- International event hosting
- Strategy/framework
- Twinning and international links
- Workshop/event
- Comms/PR

Countries that were involved in the international activities were also noted.

Considerations

- Local governments and LEPs may not have published all or any of their international activities on their official websites.
- The number of news articles and press releases varied greatly between websites, with some not publishing any.
- Social media, in particular Twitter, was the main platform for PR and communication for certain local governments and LEPs.

Findings

Totals

From 86* local government and LEP websites checked, 40 contained information related to international activities (will be referred to as cases from here on).

**Note: Glasgow was categorised as both a Scottish City and a Core City with data being included in both.*

Website category	Websites checked	Websites with cases found	Number of cases
Local Enterprise Partnerships	39	20	44
Combined Authorities	9	2	6
Core Cities	10	7	53
Key Cities	21	6	20
Scottish Cities	7	4	17
Greater London	1	1	8

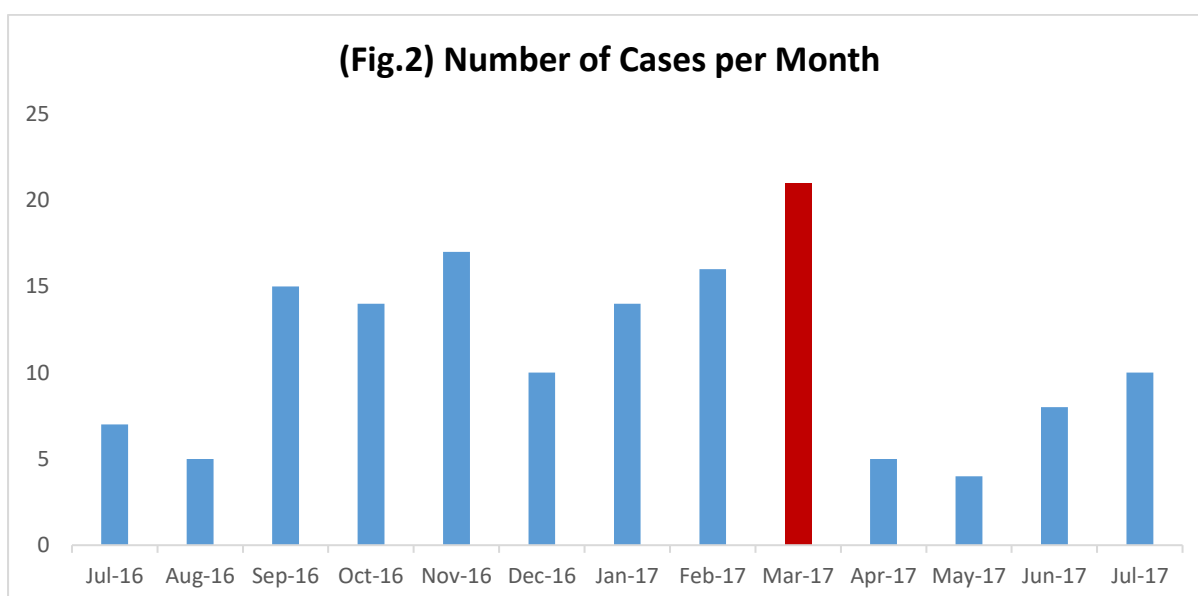
Fig. 1.1

Case category	Count	Percentage
Trade mission/business	42	28%
Inbound delegation	32	22%
Twinning and international links	29	20%
Strategy/framework	22	15%
International event hosting	8	5%
Comms/PR	8	5%
Workshop/event	5	3%

Fig. 1.2

Cases per Month

The number of cases per month were analysed to see whether there were any immediate reactions to the Brexit result in June. Certain articles and documents mentioned the need for internationalisation strategies as a reaction to the Brexit situation, however there were no clear correlations regarding the timing of publication. The data showed that March had the highest number of cases, however this was mostly due to the high level of news related to MIPIM, the world’s largest international real estate event hosted annually in Cannes, France.



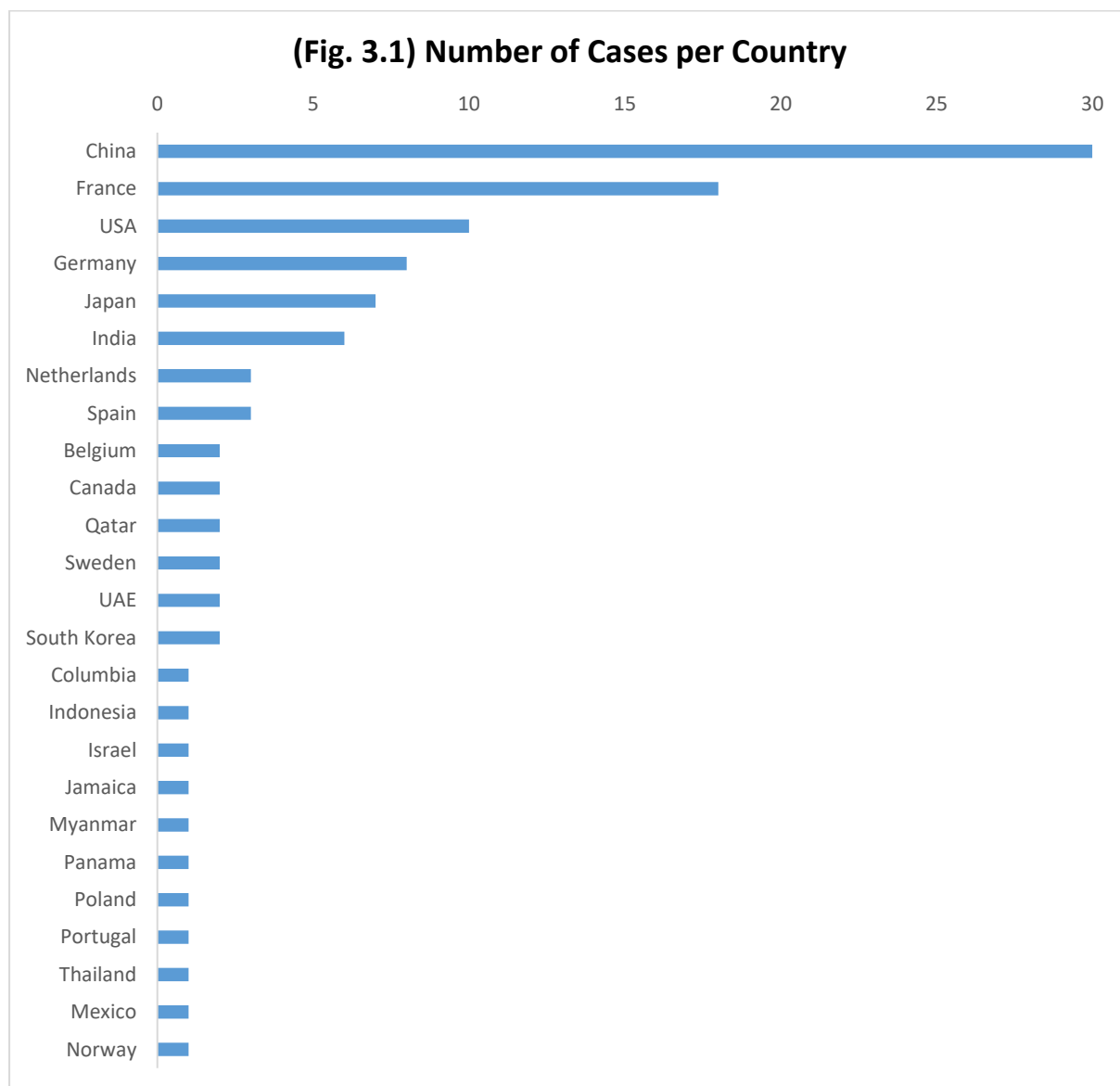
Cases per Country

China had the highest number of cases with 30. Of these, seven were trade missions from the UK, 12 were inbound delegations and eight were related to twinning and international links. The majority of the cases were cited from organisations in the Midlands and Liverpool. This is most likely due to the Midlands Engine push by central government and programmes run by the Department for International Trade. It should be noted however that many of the China-related cases had developed from previous interactions before Brexit and from existing twinning projects.

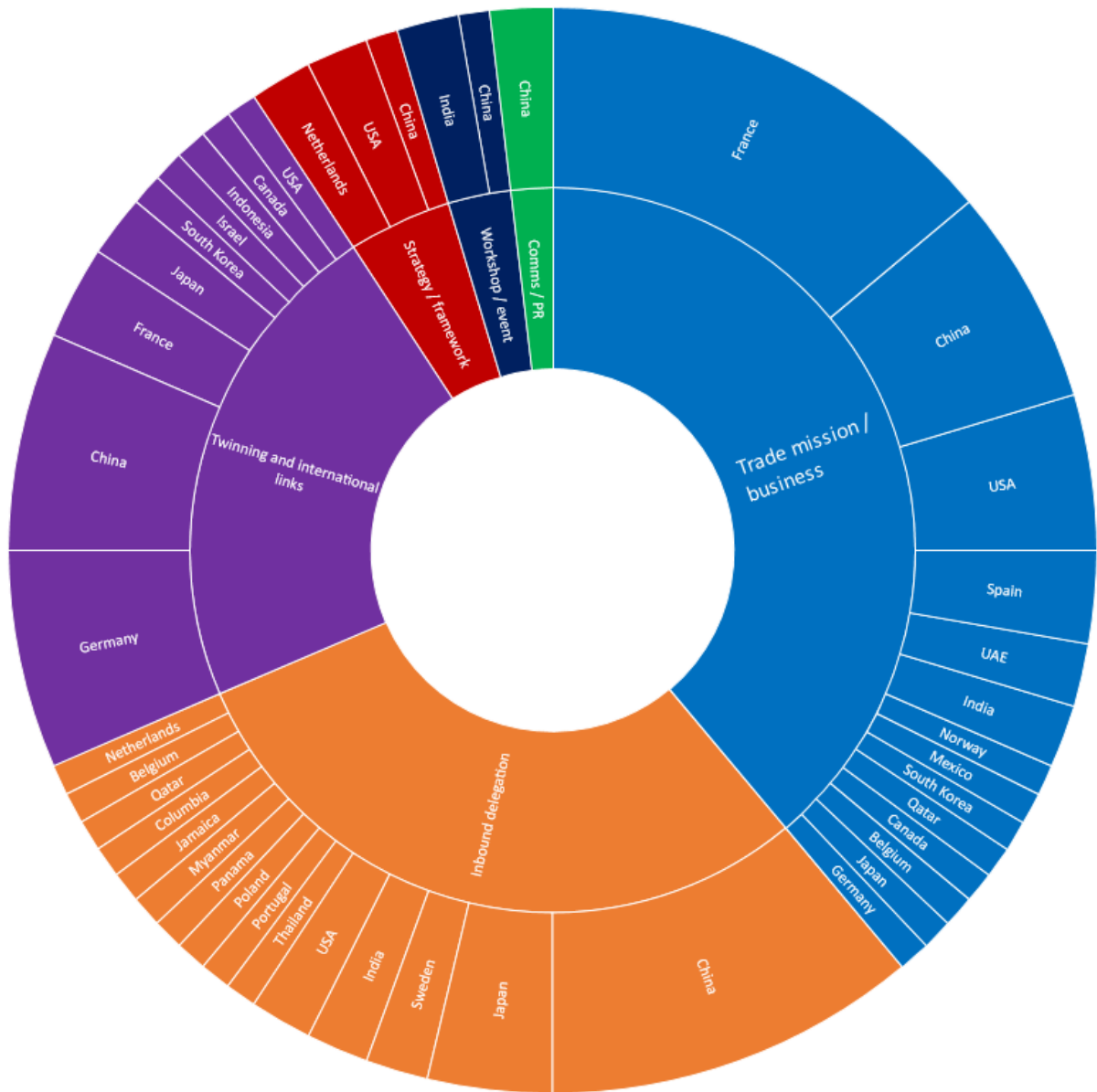
France had the second highest number of cases with 18 of which 15 were related to trade missions and business. As noted in the Number of Cases per Month analysis, news related to MIPIM was covered widely, particularly by LEPs, and accounted for 11 cases in total.

Barring China and France, cases that involved other countries were minimal. Even with USA that had 10 cases, only five LEPs and cities published related news.

The below charts show a breakdown of number of cases per country and the ratio of case categories for each country found.

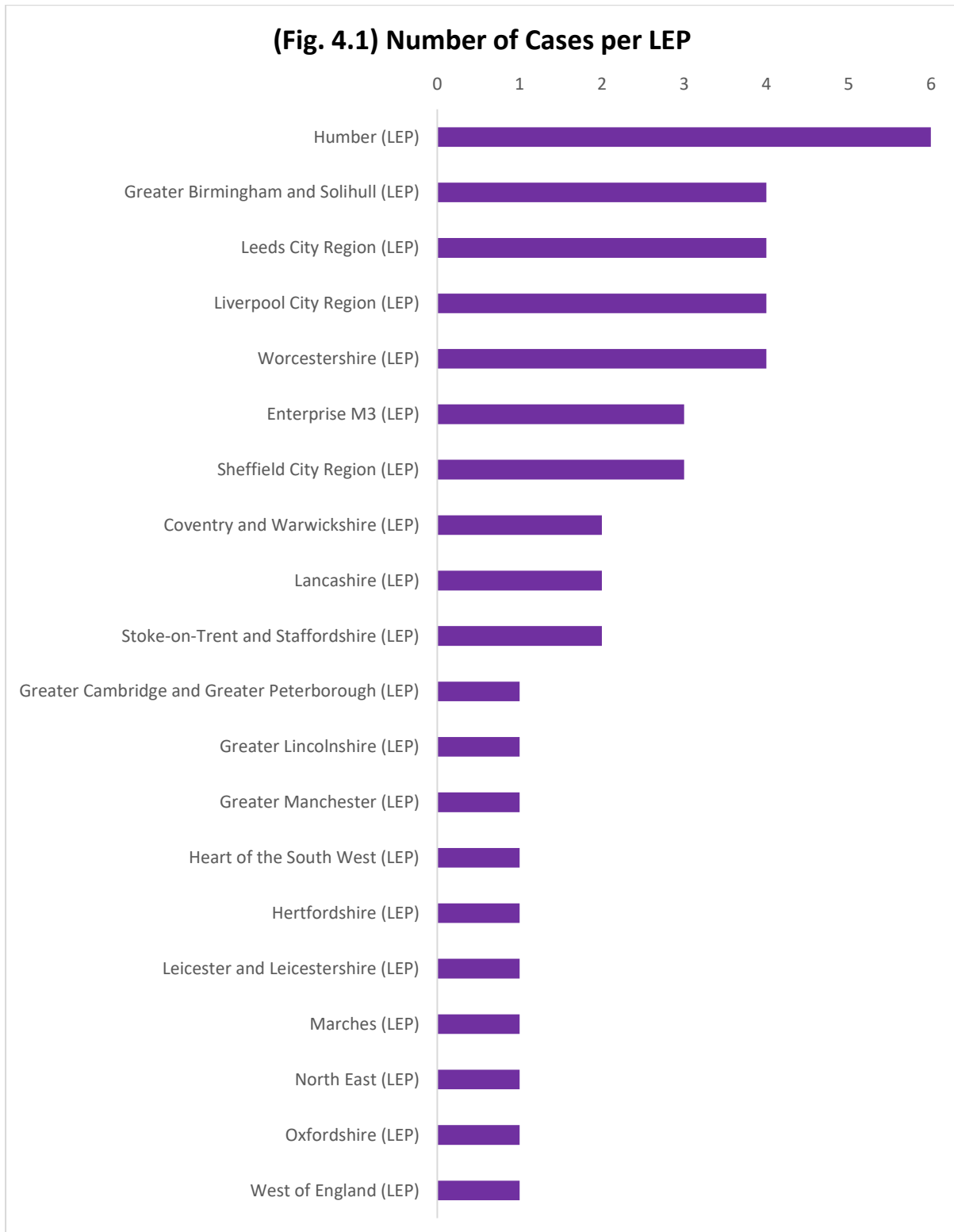


(Fig. 3.2) Ratio of Case Categories per Country



Cases per Website

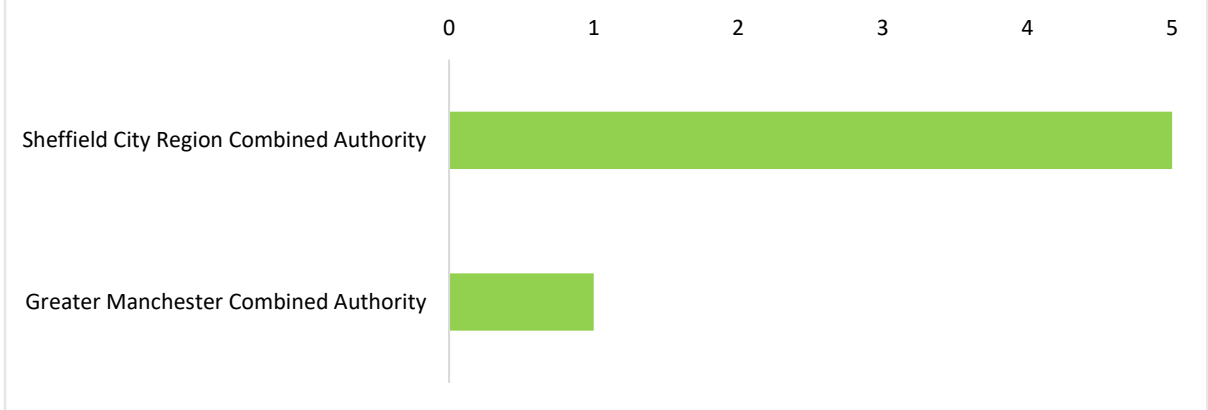
The below charts show like-for-like comparisons of number of cases found on the websites, in addition a breakdown of case categories found on each website.



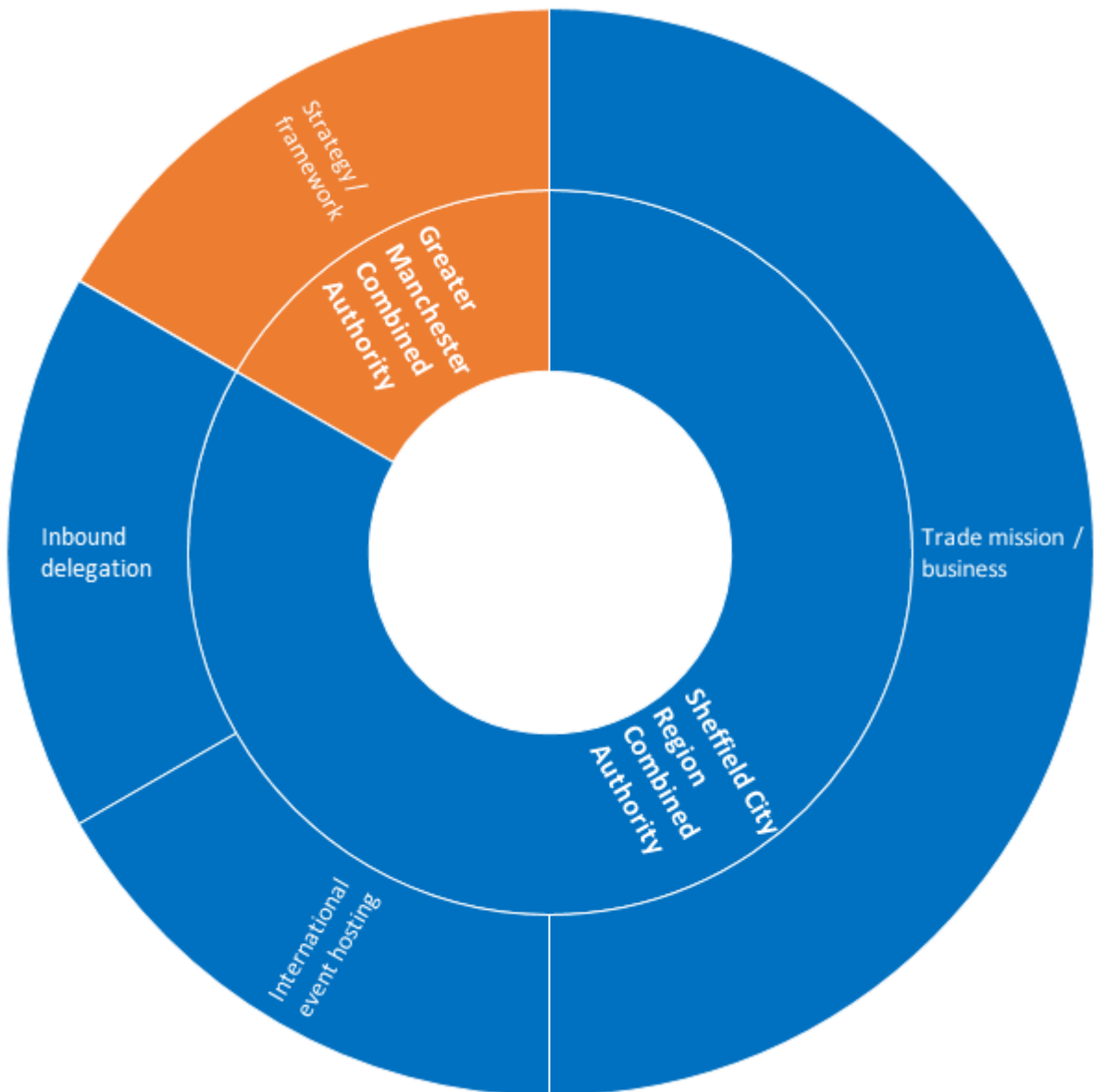
(Fig. 4.2) Ratio of LEP Cases per Category



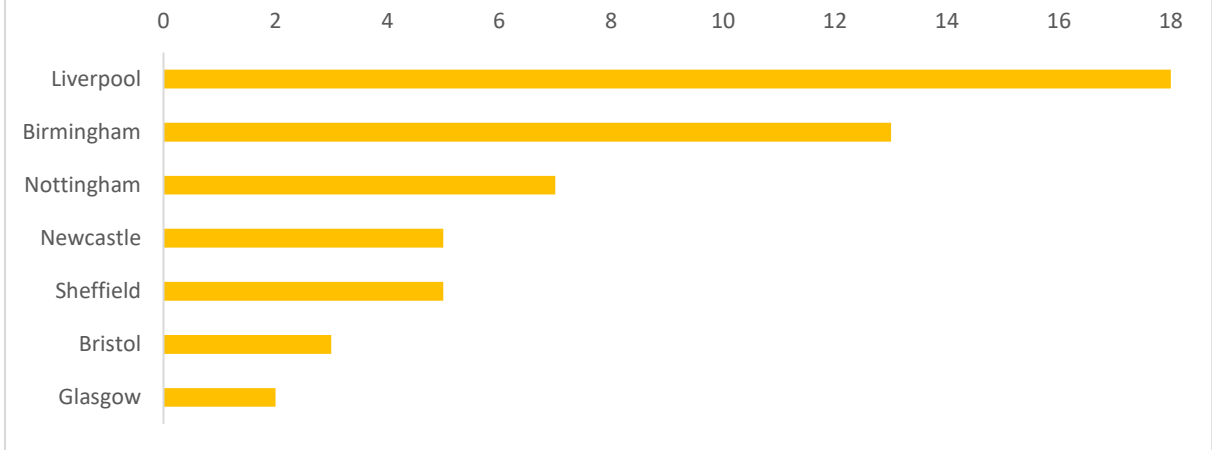
(Fig. 5.1) Number of Cases per Combined Authority



(Fig. 5.2) Ratio of Combined Authority Cases per Category

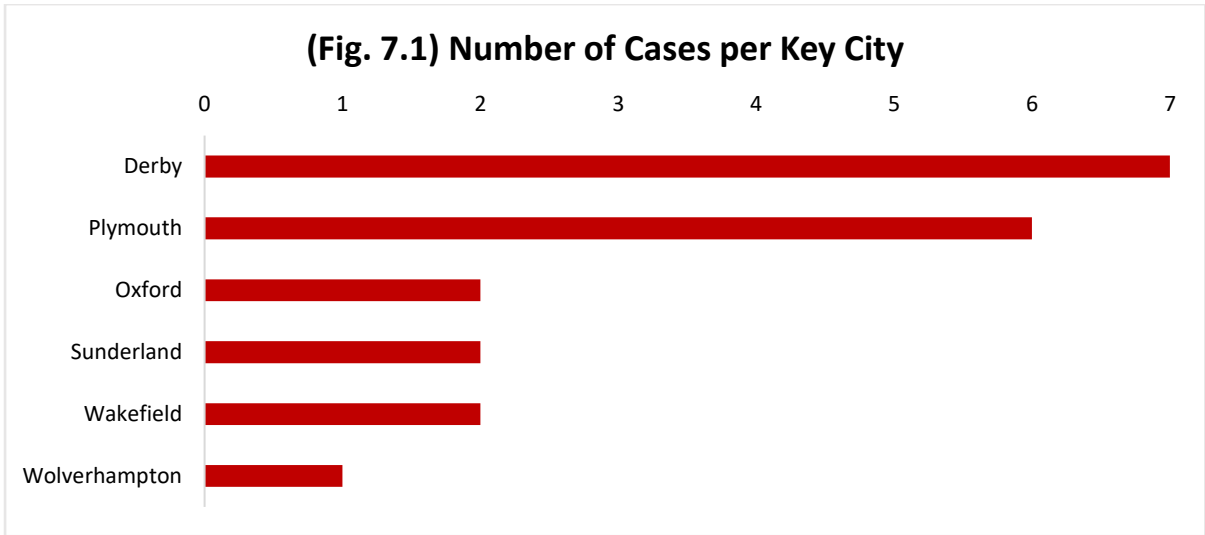


(Fig. 6.1) Number of Cases per Core City



(Fig. 6.2) Ratio of Core City Cases per Category





(Fig. 7.2) Ratio of Key City Cases per Category



(Fig. 8.1) Number of Cases per Scottish City

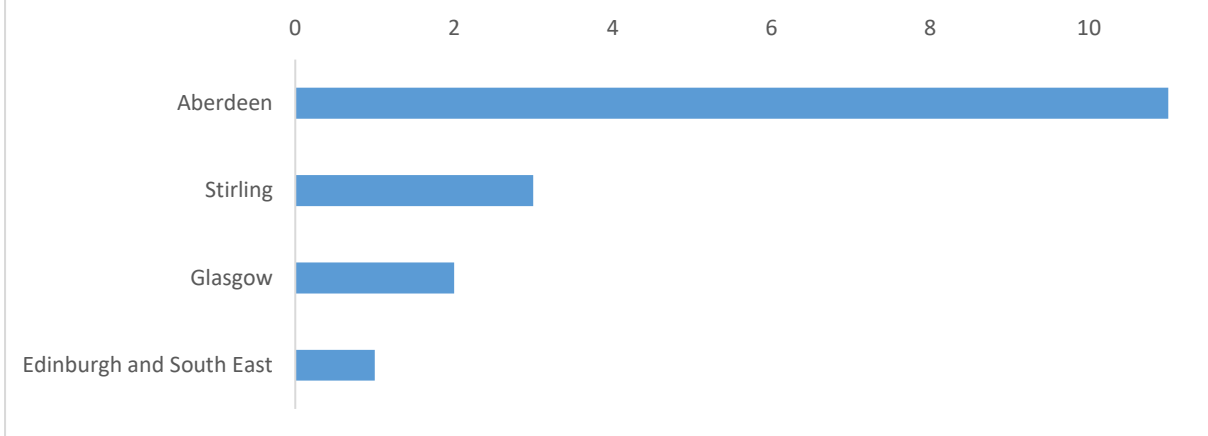
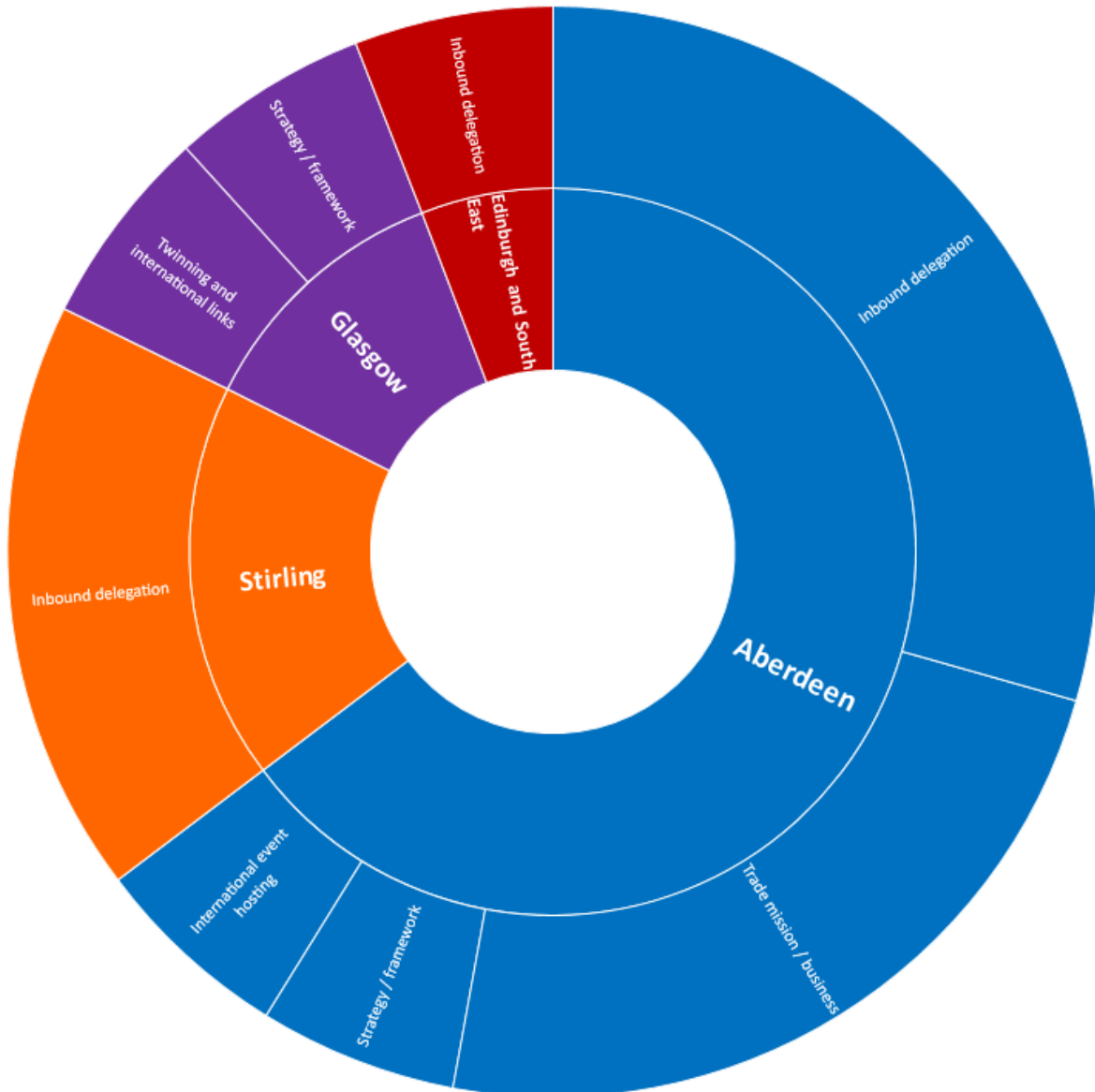
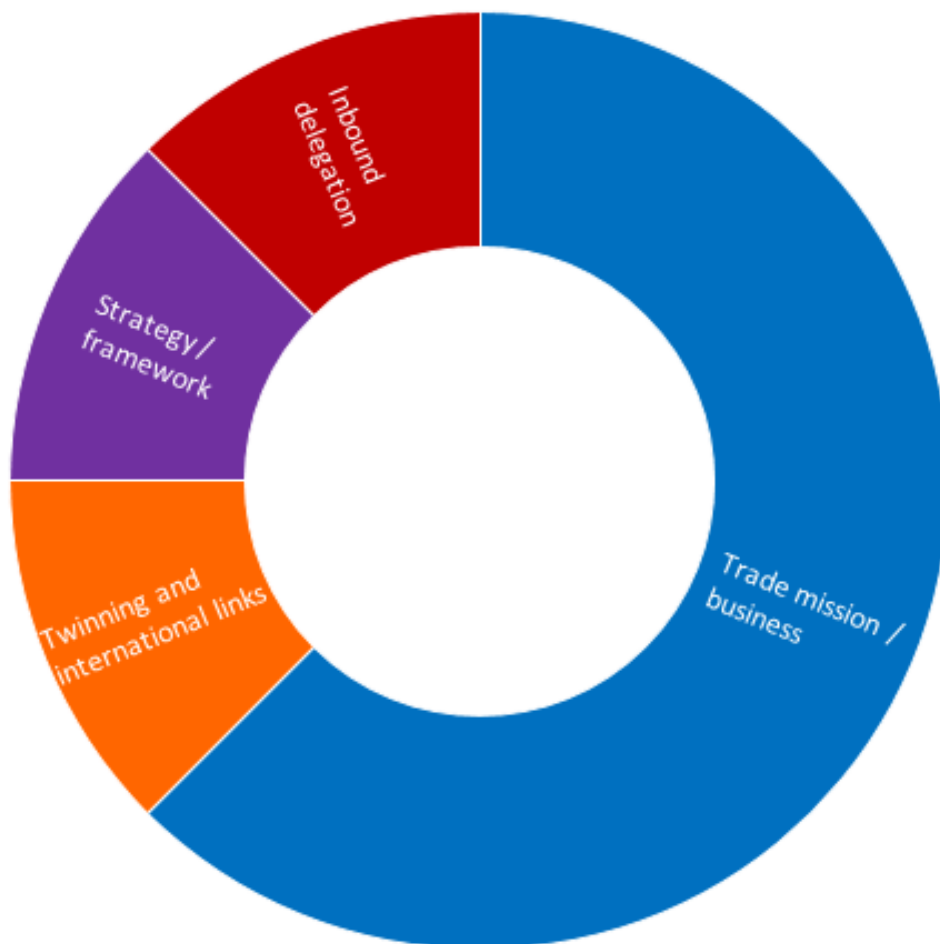


Fig. 8.2) Ratio of Scottish City Cases per Category



(Fig. 9) Ratio of Greater London Cases per Category



Observations and Comments

A small number of local authorities have established dedicated economic development subsidiary companies to attract inward investment. Liverpool Vision is one such example and even though the reported cases did not always provide in-depth reports of international activities, it produced the highest number of cases. It should also be noted the establishment of such subsidiaries does not necessarily equate to a vast number of cases, as clearly shown with Make it Sunderland which had only two.

Although we can get an idea of the type of activities that cities, combined authorities and LEPs engage in, the number of cases found from the websites do not necessarily reflect the level of activity. Evidence of this are LEPs which advertise trade missions headed by the Department for International Trade, yet reports regarding the overseas visits are not published. Furthermore, as social media has become the main platform for public engagement for numerous organisations, few or even no news articles are published on a number of local government websites.

Conclusions

Various cities, combined authorities and LEPs have been carrying out international activities since the Brexit result. Many of these activities are a continuation of existing projects and relations rather than a reaction to Brexit, however without analysing social media channels, it is difficult to get a clear picture of the extent of the efforts to boost internationalisation at the local and regional level.

Sources

Data that was included in the research was taken from news articles, press releases and documents relating to international activities which were published between July 2016 and July 2017. This can be found in the tables [attached](#) (Excel format).