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**LOCAL POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT IN
BELGIUM
THE IMPACT OF REGIONALIZATION ON LOCAL LEADERSHIP**

Filip De Rynck, Johan Ackaert and Ellen Wayenberg
University College Ghent and University Hasselt
Belgium

filip.derynck@hogent.be

00-32-09-2424256

Abstract

The federalization of Belgium can be considered both as the result of an ongoing divergence of mind and practices as well as an important new institutional impetus towards the establishment of divergent regimes of local government. Is there an evolution towards a Flemish and a Walloon local regime? At the heart of those regimes is the conceptualization of the set of roles of political leaders. The paper is based on a triangulation of (1) institutional, (2) quantitative (surveys) and (3) qualitative data (case analysis). Our analysis in the first section confirms that the federalization of local government was an opportunity for the regional political forces to mold “their” local government to the dominant culture. However, “political localism”, very typical for the Belgian political system, has also been strengthened by the federalization process. Exploring role perceptions of the mayors in section 2 confirms that regional cultural variables have a significant impact on role perceptions, particularly towards new management arrangements. In the final section we introduce a set of interpersonal, cultural and structural variables in order to obtain a better understanding of the impact these new management arrangements have in the Flemish region as well as on the contingent interactions between politicians and top administrators.

Introduction

Belgium's local government system has been repeatedly labeled as exemplary of the so-called 'Franco'-type (Hesse and Sharpe, 1992). This label suggests that Belgian local government has few competences, on the basis of which it primarily fulfils territory oriented tasks and less welfare - tasks in comparison with other countries. Due to far reaching central regulations and supervision, it has little discretion as far as its own organization, management and task implementation are concerned. On the other hand, local political leaders have high access to central government giving rise to strong political localism, one of the typical features of the Franco model (Wayenberg, 2003). The result is a political system whereby the central decisions on the distribution of local goods and local services are based on territorial and party-political affiliations between decision makers at the central level and local politicians. That is the Belgian local "regime" to the core. In one of the rare recent surveys comparing the role perception of local top administrators in the Flemish and Walloon regions, the hypothesis was put forward that this is the main explaining variable for their rather marginal impact on local policy making (Van Gool, 2005).

This label surpasses Belgium's federalization process. It started in the 1970s and turned Belgium from a unitary into a federal state with three regions (the Flemish Region, Brussels-Capital Region, the Walloon Region) and three communities (the Flemish speaking, French speaking and German speaking community). All regions and communities have a governmental body of their own, giving rise, from a local government's point of view, to a new layer of central government. Regional and community governments have been attributed with a growing number of competences that used to belong to their federal counterpart. The regions are today responsible for nearly 60% of the overall state budget.¹ This institutional change has had a drastic impact on the country's local government system. At least that is what could be expected. Its impact reaches beyond the creation of that extra layer of central government that has given rise to divergent local government steering in the various policy fields according to regional legislation. As a result of the federalization process, several key competences with regard to the political and managerial local government organization have also been transferred from the federal to the regional level. Among others, these competences concern central supervision over local government (1980), the municipal fund (1988), inter-municipal cooperation (1993) and, most importantly, the basic laws regulating local government's political and administrative functioning (2001). If "institutions matter", regional governments are then able to mold the framework for local leadership.

Repeatedly, the hypothesis has been put forward that Belgium's main linguistic divide also functions as the demarcation line between two types of local government systems. The Franco or southern European type would prevail in the Walloon and Brussels region, as the primarily French speaking part of the country while the northern European type would appear in the Dutch speaking part of Flanders.² Flemish political leaders have regularly fed this hypothesis/presumption as they love to refer to a shift in Flanders they perceive as moving towards a northern oriented system of modern new public management, breaking down the heritage of "political localism" in the intergovernmental relations. By the same token, they often refer to the local government system in the south as still being a copy of old Belgian traditions

and thus of a “Franco” style of governing. This presumed contradiction among the local government systems is undoubtedly a side effect of Belgium’s federalization and does more often than not lack a solid, well-researched basis. Hence the central questions in this paper. What is, if any, the impact of federalization on the Belgian system of local government or should we say systems of local government? The process of federalization of local government systems could be considered as both the result of an ongoing divergence of mind and practices as well as an important new institutional impetus towards the establishment of those divergent local regimes. Is there an evolution towards more divergence between those systems or is there more convergence than the political elite likes to hear? Are there a Flemish and a Walloon local regime or, should we say that the core of the system is the Belgian regime with several marginal regional characteristics? At the heart of those regimes is the conceptualization of the set of roles of political leaders including their interactions with top administrators and the set of roles of those “top managers”.

The paper is based on a triangulation of institutional, quantitative and qualitative data. The research in the first section is a comparative analysis of facts and figures and regional legal frameworks, based on document analysis and interviews (De Rynck and Wayenberg, 2007). This is the section of institutional analysis. Is there an institutional divergence going on? The second section focuses on the role perception of the mayors, based on a very large survey and face-to-face interviews with local mayors in Flanders and the Walloon region (Ackaert, 2005). Do those role perceptions differ and is the regional variable determining those differences? The third section presents the results of an in-depth multi case analysis of policy making in Flemish cities (Vallet and De Rynck, 2005) and of an interactive audit based on panel discussions with politicians, public officials and citizens in Flemish cities (De Rynck and Tops, 2006). It adds important cultural and structural variables of the local regime and is the first step towards further research. What kind of variables should be integrated into the analysis to grasp the nature of local political and managerial leadership?

1 Comparative analysis of facts, figures and regional policies

Its demography and geography, stupid?

As indicated by figure 1, the average population of the 589 Belgian local governments³ amounts to 17,734 inhabitants. This number shows significant differences between the three Belgian regions. In the more urbanized Flemish region the surface area covered by the local government is relatively small and the average population is high. This is certainly the case in the very densely populated Brussels region. In the Walloon region, which is much more rural than the other two regions, the average population is quite low in comparison to the large surface area. Figure 2 shows that the Walloon region is dominated by small, rural local governments (60% versus 29.5% in Flanders). That means that we should handle our hypothesis regarding the impact of linguistic and cultural differences with care. Maybe a third variable has more explanatory power? We will return to this in the second section, is social geography and demography more important for the nature of local leadership than the linguistic and cultural background of the local government?

Figure 1
Average number of inhabitants per region (2006)

Flanders:	19,621
Walloon:	12,962
Brussels region:	52,987
Belgium:	17,73

Figure 2
Local government in the three Belgian regions according to absolute and relative size

	Flanders	Walloon region	Brussels region
+ 100,000	3	3	2
40,000-100,000	12 (3.8%)	6 (2.2%)	9 (47.3%)
20,000-40,000	69 (22.4%)	31 (11.8%)	7 (36.8%)
10,000-20,000	133 (43.2%)	62 (23.6%)	1
-10,000	91 (29.5%)	160 (61%)	0
	308	262	19

The explosion of local personnel: booming business

Local government is a booming sector. Between 1973 and 2004 the amount of local personnel grew from 125,000 to 326,000 (Belgium). It was by far the fastest growing segment in public administration and it changed the nature of local governments into the “welfare city”, since this spectacular growth is mainly due to the explosion of local welfare services. In the Flemish region the personnel doubled in that period, there was an increase of 80% in the Walloon region and a limited growth of 20% in the Brussels region. In this sense the local “public” sphere expanded even more significantly in Flanders compared to the Walloon region (RSZPPO, 2004). Overall the number of local public officials grew at a considerable pace, putting pressure on the management of local government and thereby possibly having an impact on the nature of political leadership.

The following ratios reflect the regional differences in public employment, as figure 4 illustrates:

Figure 3
Public employment in general and at local level, per region

<i>Public employment (2002)</i>	Flanders	Wallonia	Brussels
Public employment (per 1000 inhabitants)	54	69	161
Local governments	31	44	52

The Flemish region, even with the fastest absolute growth, is clearly less public than the other regions. Those proportions could also be interpreted as an indicator of more privatized local

services. This is an important contextual factor for local leadership. Due to ideological and historical reasons, local governance is more dominant in the Flanders region (see below for more evidence). A recent survey demonstrated that Walloon local politicians are much more reluctant and even more hostile towards privatization (Reynaert and Steyvers, 2005: 237). The personnel ratios reflect the divergent perception on the role of the public sector.

Intergovernmental relations

The share of spending of “local government” in the total Belgian GDP was traditionally low, from a European perspective (7%). It remained at that level after more than thirty years of federalization. The conclusion that federalization mainly included an important transfer of Belgian budgets and competences to the regions, led to regional centralization and activated a new regionalism in stead of a new localism (De Ceuninck, Devos, 2005: 34) appears accurate. The most important result in decades of state reform is that the number of tasks to be performed at local level increased drastically, in all regions. This was reflected in a spectacular rise in the number of local personnel cited in the former section of the paper. But the main effect is that nearly all local policy domains, also those domains with a considerable degree of political autonomy traditions, became even more interwoven with regional policies. There are more new tasks in more policy domains, with less or restricted autonomy which is dependent on the regional level. This seems to be the convergent institutional hardware of both regions.

Our research did reveal that there is some divergence in the nature of the institutionalization of new intergovernmental relations. On the Flemish side those new competencies are often based on “contractual” relationships (environment, transport, culture, youth policy, etc.), which lead to an increase in intergovernmental “contracts” between central and local level (Wayenberg, 2003). This type of instrument aims at introducing more objectiveness in the policy field and creates less room for so-called “clientele” policy. Meanwhile, the Walloon region also established new policy programs by creating specific funds for specific programs (rural development, public infrastructure, etc.). Local governments are free to enlist. The policy interactions in the Walloon region are more susceptible to local political pressure than the Flemish programs. This is reflected in figure 5 presenting the sources of local revenues.

Figure 4
Local revenues (2005)

	Flanders	Wallonia	Brussels region
<i>% of local revenues</i>			
Service delivery	4.7%	4.8%	4%
Funds	23.1%	20.5%	18.9%
Taxes	49%	39.6%	45.5%
Subsidies	18.1%	29.5%	25.7%
Warrants	5.1%	5.7%	5.8%

If central funds (as an indicator of an unconditional central grant) and local taxes (as an indicator of a free space for political decisions) could be (theoretically) considered as a straight indicator of local autonomy, then the conclusion should be that local governments in Flanders have a

higher degree of autonomy (72%; 60% in Wallonia and 64% in Brussels). This is confirmed by the proportion of central earmarked subsidies in local revenues of the Flemish local governments (18% of local revenues; 29.5% in Wallonia and 25.7% in the Brussels region). The latter indicator is reliable. Applying for earmarked subsidies from central regional government means that this opens up strategies for “political localism”. And on this point there is some regional divergence since and due to federalization. The degree of local autonomy seems to be more important in the Flanders region, at least in the field of daily local politics. In the sphere of regional government, political localism still dominates the intergovernmental relations when it comes to decisions concerning important infrastructure and investment at local level (roads, elderly care, culture, public works, parks, industrial zoning, etc.), also in Flanders. The provisional conclusion is that dual development is occurring in Flanders. On the one hand, more formalism and “management” for local policies and, on the other hand more “political localism” for all the important “local” decisions of the Flemish government within her own realm of competency.

One feature of “political localism” is the combination of local offices and offices at central level. This was a persistent Belgian tradition and is still a common feature in the three regions. Members of federal or regional parliaments combine their national job with a local mandate (mayor or alderman). All the attempts to block or to abolish these practices have failed. The main argument of local politicians is in line with our statement that this offers them the possibilities to influence central decision-making in favor of the needs of local governments. 76% of the Walloon members of the federal parliament combine their job with a local mandate and 65% of the Dutch-speaking members (Ackaert, 1994). There is a slight linguistic difference, confirming our dual conclusion, but *le cumul des mandats*, so typical for the southern type of local government, is at the core of the local regime in Belgium.

Comparing the regional legal frameworks

Since 2001 the regions are able reorganize the basic organization of their local government. The communal (Belgian) law has been replaced by three regional laws on local government. This is comparable to the German Länder. We consider these laws to be the expression of the dominant culture of the regional communities of practitioners. If divergence is growing then these regional laws should be an indicator of that divergence. We focus on institutions related to the management of local government (figure 7).

The modernization of the administrative organization of local government started quite late in comparison with other countries. The federal government had blocked it. This modernization is concentrated in the Flemish region. The newly gained regional competencies opened up a window of opportunity in Flanders. It started the mid 1990’s with a new type of budgeting and accounting (1995), new forms of “agencies” (1995) and the introduction of more management inspired personnel management (1993). Our research leaves no doubt on this subject. While the Brussels and Walloon legislation are, at this moment still dominated by a rather classic Weberian bureaucratic culture, the shift in Flanders towards a more NPM-inspired approach of local management is undeniable. This trend is confirmed by the comparative analysis of regional decrees. There is, at least at this point, a causal relationship between federalization and divergence.

Figure 5

Administrative organization and management: regional decrees compared to former law

	Belgian law	Flemish decree	Walloon decree	Brussels decree
Secretary: top manager	Works under the supervision and control of college and mayor; no legally attributed management competencies; lifetime appointment but with the possibility of a mandate system	Works under supervision; no legally attributed competencies, but delegation of power from the college and is possible (local choice also: delegation from the secretary to head of departments); Possibility to work with temporary mandates (local choice) also for the financial manager	No change	No change
Collector (financial manager)	Life-time appointment: reporting to the college; equal to the secretary	Reporting to secretary; for certain tasks reporting to the college (dual authority structure)	No change	No change
Management team	No obligation	Obligation by decree; composition is local choice	No change	No change
Planning	Obligation of pluri-annual policy document at the beginning of the legislature (art 242 bis)	Obligation: strategic plan for the legislature, yearly policy plan	No change	No change
Delegation of daily management competencies and budgets to the heads of departments	Not possible	Possible (local choice)	No change	No change
Internal control	No provisions; local choice	Obligation of system of local control and reporting; operational local choices	No change	No change
Audit	No provisions	External audit by regional committee (public officials of the regional government) and for all local governments	Internal audit for + 20,000; external audit by regional committee for all local governments	No change

Personnel management	Lifetime statute: general principle; labor contract is an exception; mandatory system not possible	Lifetime statute general rule but more possibilities for labor contracts; mandatory system is possible (local choice)	No change	No change
Financial management	Annual budget cycle; annual account	Decree introduces a new system and a cycle of financial reports	No change	No change
Agencies	Internal deconcentration and functional decentralization (autonomous local companies)	Flemish decree elaborates the relationship between council and agencies in more detail (more control over the council); restricts the use of private law - agencies; obligation of a policy agreement with the agency	No change	No change

The Flemish decree on local government is a copy of the framework inspiring the reform of the central Flemish administration. It introduces the strategic planning cycle. The instrument of delegation is an important tailor-made management instrument. The “delegation of power” from council to executive college, from college to secretary as the head of office and from secretary to top management. This “delegation” offers much more autonomy to local governments enabling them to adapt their internal division of labor and style of management to their own needs.

The decree introduces instruments to enhance the operational responsibility of the top managers. The town clerk is provided with stronger autonomous competencies and there is an obligation to create a management-team of top administrators. The interaction with the politicians should be based on a written agreement with the college on their respective responsibilities. The Flemish decree introduces the instrument of the mandatory statute for all leading public officials. It emphasizes a shift towards more contractual employment. There should be a system of internal control and external auditing should be created. The interaction with agencies should be based on contracts⁴ and a new system of performance related budgeting put into prospect. On all of these aspects “no change” is noticed in regional legislation in the other regions. Proposals to introduce some of these instruments in the Walloon region have been rejected.⁵

The most important explanatory variable seems to be a cultural and linguistic one. There are different perceptions of the role of politics, the interaction with public officials and of management techniques. We find some additional support for this conclusion in the attitudes of both communities during earlier conflicts (within the Belgian framework). The Walloon politicians opposed, at different moments the changes in Belgian law, for instance, when the

Flemish politicians wanted to strengthen the role of the secretary as a general manager. A study of the reorganization of federal administration (the only bilingual administration with public officials from both language groups) delivers us other circumstantial evidence. In the French speaking services of the Belgian government, NPM and management in general are often associated with privatization, the break down of permanent appointment and a threat to the power of trade unions and political parties. In the first place possibly even a threat to the “primacy of politics” (Hondeghe and Depré, 2006). The same Walloon political parties dominate federal administration, the regional government in Wallonia and the most important local governments in the Walloon region. Earlier studies revealed that clientele politics, which is opposed to the principles of NPM, was strongly developed in the Walloon region as compared to the Flemish region.⁶ The literature associates this pattern mainly with the southern countries, while this is a rather exceptional practice in the northern type of local government (Page and Goldsmith: 1987: 164).

Conclusion of section 1

The main characteristics of the Belgian political system and of Belgian political localism are alive and kicking and the federalization of the state system reinforces these features. There is some slight regional divergence, but in general convergence is dominant. The regions have copied Belgian political traditions against the background of a considerable growth of interwoven policy relations with new regions. There is a firm and solid political infrastructure “made in Belgium”. There is, however regional divergence in the practice of institutionalization of daily local policy programs, particularly in the field of local management. The Flanders region, on this point, is clearly much more influenced by the New Public Management culture, thereby putting pressure on the perceptions of interaction with politicians.

2 Set of roles and role perception of mayors in Flanders and the Walloon region

In this section we present empirical conclusions of our research concerning role and profile of the mayors, using data from interviews and two surveys.⁷ We used these findings in a search for confirmation of the preliminary conclusions in the research from the first section. Is there a divergence between the local regimes of the regions and to what extent is this divergence due to cultural - linguistic variables? In general, this section supports the conclusion that language and linguistic-ethnic communities are a significant explanation for differences in role patterns.

Perception of the role of the town clerk

The following figures demonstrate that mayors in the Walloon region have a more “traditional” perception of the role of the town clerk. The Walloon mayor perceives himself to be the head of administration. But, also in Flanders a vast majority of mayors states that they are the head of administration. More than 60% of the Flemish mayors perceive the role of the top administrator as the personnel manager, compared to nearly 50% in the Walloon region. There are significant regional divergences, but there is also a dominant underlying (Belgian?) pattern.

Figure 6 Should the secretary be the head of administration?

	Pct. Yes	N=
Region		
Flanders	36.6	172
Walloon region	16.4	152
Brussels region	18.8	16
Average	26.8	340
Chi ² = 17,315; d.f. = 2; Sig. =.000		

Figure 7 Should the secretary be the personnel manager?

	Pct. Yes	N=
Region		
Flanders	62.8	172
Walloon region	49.3	152
Brussels region	100.0	16
Average	58.5	340
Chi ² = 17,909; d.f. = 2; Sig. =,000		

Figure 8 Regression analysis: variables explaining the attitude of the mayors towards the role of the town clerk

	Unstand. B	Standard. Beta	Sig.
(Constant)	2,701		0.054
Region	1,642	0.412	0.000
Size	0.000	-0.020	0.798
Pct. High skilled people	0.013	0.023	0.743
Number of personnel	0.332	0.135	0.080
Age	-0.011	-0.052	0.515
Seniority	-0.005	-0.017	0.816

R =.427; R² =.182; adjusted R² = 124; F = 3.139; Sig. =.000

Figure 11 demonstrates that the regional factor is the variable with the greatest explanatory value for the perception of the mayors' vis-à-vis the role of the town clerk. These results are confirmed by the analysis of time consumption by the mayors: Walloon mayors spend more time on daily interactions with their administration. There is a higher degree of direct political intervention in organization management and in personnel management. These findings are confirmed by a

similar and more recent survey. On the question “*local top administrators should respect and strictly carry out the policy goals of the college and mayor*”, nearly 61.3% of the Walloon mayors responded positively compared to 17.4% of the Flemish mayors (Reynaert and Steyvers, 2005: 239). All of these findings confirm the more traditional, hierarchical perception of the role of top administrators in the Walloon region.

Perception of the role of policy maker

For our survey we understand the role of “policy maker” to be: putting forward the policy strategy, discussing policy goals, deciding upon policy programs.

Figure 9 Ranking the role of the mayor as “policy maker”

Region	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
1,00 Flanders	3.88	126	2.753
2,00 Walloon region	6.01	86	2.793
3,00 Brussels region	4.00	5	2.345
Total	4.73	217	2.940

Figure 10 Regression analysis: variables explaining the ranking of policy maker

	Unstand. B	Standard. Beta	Sig.
Constant	4.800		0.054
Region	-2.252	-0.380	0.000
Size	0.000	-0.158	0.035
Pct. Unemployed	-0.109	-0.128	0.169
Pct. Skilled inhabitants	0.011	0.021	0.770
Age	0.085	0.258	0.019
Seniority	-0.051	-0.127	0.196
Entry in politics	-0.597	-0.103	0.327
Profession: member of parliament	-2.310	-0.227	0.076

R = .534; R² = .285; adjusted R² = .214; F = 4.033; Sig. = .000

When asked to rank a set of possible roles (figure 12), the Flemish mayors considered themselves, in general to be “policy makers” to a higher degree than did their Walloon colleagues (figure 12). The regional difference on this topic is more important than on the former one. And the regression analysis again proves that the regional factor is not the only explaining

variable, but it clearly is the most important one (figure 13). Other important variables are the age of the mayor and the size of local government.

The mayor as lobbyist

Figure 11 The importance of the role as lobbyist

	Ranking of roles	N=
Region		
Flanders	5.0	131
Walloon region	3.2	89
Brussels region	2.0	6
Average	4.2	226

Figure 11 deals with the importance of the role as lobbyist in the role perception of mayors. It is clear that this role is much more important for a Walloon mayor than for his Flemish colleagues. The regression analysis is convincing: the role perception of lobbyist can be explained mainly due to regional characteristics. The recent survey of Reynaert and Steyvers confirms this result. The role of lobbyist at the central level is the most important one of 12 possible roles, ordered by the Walloon mayors, while the Flemish mayors rank this role 9th on the list of 12 (Reynaert and Steyvers, 2005: 233-235).

Conclusion of section 2

Exploring the role perception of the mayors seems to provide us with enough evidence for the conclusion of this second section. Regional-cultural variables have an impact on the role perception of mayors. Our analysis of institutions and regional policies in the first section confirmed that the federalization of local government was an opportunity for the regional political forces to mold “their” local government to their dominant culture, expressed by the role perceptions of the mayors analyzed in this section. The Walloon mayors perceive themselves mainly as managers of the administration and as lobbyists. The Flemish mayor perceives himself mainly as a policy maker. We should also be aware that an important number of Flemish mayors identifies with the “traditional” roles. Belgian heritage is persistent. Heirs still share a common legacy, but a growing number of the Flemish side of the family want to go their own way. This means that the ambitions of the Flemish decree for a more autonomous role in the local administration causes divergence within the Flemish region. There is an important group of Flemish local governments with role perceptions that differ substantially from those embedded in the Flemish decree. This brings us to the third section of our analysis. After the macro institutional analysis (section 1) and the meso level of the role perception of mayors (section 2), we focused on the micro level of the internal dynamics of local government, looking for additional variables to complete our triangulation.

3 Towards a new interaction model of political and managerial leadership in Flanders?

Alderman model and management team model

The last section of the paper focuses exclusively on the Flemish cities. We have, so far, no comparative case studies in Walloon cities. The Flemish Decree is both the result of a changing culture and an incentive to introduce new arrangements in the interaction between politicians and top administrators. What then, if any, is the possible impact of those arrangements on that interaction? We will focus on the micro-level, looking from the inside and bottom-up.

The Flemish Decree aims to establish a more New Public Management inspired relationship between local politicians and public officials. The Decree imposes a so-called “management team”, a group of leading public officials. The Decree provides this team with a cluster of pivotal managerial tasks, such as strengthening the strategic quality of policy, arranging interaction between politics and administration, improving coordination and enhancing management quality in local government. The town clerk presides this management team as the CEO of the organization. These management teams are now in search of their profile and new roles. At this point, we will introduce several findings from our qualitative research in Flemish cities (Vallet and De Rynck, 2005; De Rynck and Tops, 2006).

The executive in the Flemish communes is the “college of aldermen and the mayor”. The mayor is the “primus inter pares” in that college (“college” here means that no decision whatsoever can be made by any one individual alderman). But in Flemish day-to-day practice, the autonomy of an individual alderman can be very important. They are, on behalf of the college, responsible for policy preparation and implementation follow-up in certain policy fields. In that blurred sphere of political and managerial autonomy, the alderman sometimes functions as the daily manager of the services, even taking over the operational responsibilities of “their” public managers. This practice is widespread and is called the “alderman model” (Plees and De Leemans 1997, De Rynck and Bouckaert, 2000). The “management-team” model would like to abolish the “alderman model” and its routines. It is based on a demarcation of the roles of politicians and managers. This does not mean that the routines and the arrangements related to the alderman model would completely disappear. In practice, the interaction between politicians and top administrators is a contingent mix of traditional alderman model routines and new routines based on the management team model.

A contingent set of variables at micro level

In our research we elaborated on a distinction between interpersonal, cultural and structural local variables. This helped us to grasp the complex nature of interactions in Flemish city administrations. It is also possible to find a similar set of variables for Walloon cities. This would add more contingency to the rather generalized conclusions in the former sections, concerning their traditional orientation.

The aldermen model covers a much more complicated interpersonal interaction than the name suggests. We found clear examples of the strong political leader dominating the managers, but also examples showing completely the opposite. For example, a strong manager dominating or

manipulating the politician in an “administrative state” in another policy field. We found examples of strong internal coalitions between politicians and managers taking the lead, compared to other policy fields and weaker teams or teams with antagonistic relationships between politicians and managers. In the same city at the same time some policy fields gained momentum from that team for several years, while others came to a stand still (Vallet and De Rynck, 2005). We were able to develop a better understanding of the motives of politicians intervening in the daily operations of a department. In some cases these interventions were detrimental to the departments efficiency. In other cases politicians were urged to intervene in the implementation stage of certain programs in order to lift blockades caused by bad or absent management or never ending power struggles between or within administrative departments.

A second set of variables is culturally determined. We have called this a modern and more traditional role perception on behalf of politicians and public officials. In a more traditional style, the politician is oriented to a clientele style of politics and he/she uses a more ad hoc or incremental style of decision-making. Typical is their hierarchical attitude towards public officials (the primacy of the politician). The role perception of the more traditional oriented public official is in line with that hierarchy. The public official does not play an active role in public policy making and the acceptance of this passive role is part of its internalized role perception. The opposite of this is the modern role perception, in which politicians explicitly want an interactive relationship with their public officials in the policy preparation stage. These public officials expect to play a more active role in policy making. They want to be accepted and respected as professional managers with their own skills and expertise. This cultural dichotomy of role perception does, of course need further testing.

Besides these more interpersonal (1) and cultural (2) variables, there are also structural (3) variables, which explain the types of relationships found at the top of the organization in Flemish cities.

The first factor is the structural impact of the “policy agreement”, a program document which political parties bargained on at the start of the new legislature. In some cities this agreement has the status of a very detailed contract between political parties. It then functions as an instrument of social and political control for the behavior of individual aldermen as well as a tool for strategic games between policy domains and administrative departments.

A second structural factor is the existence of a so-called “core cabinet” of the most important aldermen in the coalition. Agreements in the “core cabinet” are to be respected by all aldermen. A third element, closely linked to the former, is the leading role of the mayor. In some Flemish cities, but not in all, the mayor is omnipresent, making for a very personalized leadership. In some cities the mayor is responsible for the most important programs and projects, setting strategic priorities. The aldermen then take on the role of secretary to the mayor (see the French model “maire adjoint” The mayor is in fact the main coordinative mechanism. We should, therefore replace “alderman model” with “mayor model”. Many observers notice that the mayor model is gaining power while, at the same time, the legitimacy of political parties is diminishing.

A fourth element is the rise in integrated projects or area-oriented policy programs as a management instrument. They urge to combine a mix of policy fields transcending individual responsibilities of the aldermen. It makes project-management necessary by putting pressure on the personal priorities of alderman and public managers.

A fifth variable is the nature of the policy setting. In a more company-oriented setting of service delivery the nature of the interaction between politicians and managers differs from the setting of complex policy development regarding, for instance urban development or spatial planning. In the latter a close interaction and a mix of roles is a bare necessity. The roles of politicians and managers intertwine in these areas.

The sixth structural variable has to do with several observations concerning how the newly established management teams function:

- The management of these management teams rests in the hands of the town clerk. Only in a couple of cities are there some signs of additional professional “management” support for the management team. In fact, there is very little “management”. Therefore some management teams are in fact mainly occupied with a bureaucratic agenda and/or their main role is transferring information from the college to the departments.
- All top managers in the team are engaged in their own departments and in many cases, major managerial transformations are going on that level and need a close follow-up. Their priority is the management of their departments. This is a consequence of the performance-oriented mandate system (see Christophe Pelgrims’s paper).
- Top managers sitting together do not necessarily function as a “team”. The interaction between the heads of department is marked by the path dependency of bureau-politics in the past following the “alderman model”. Politics plays just as great a role in the management team as in the college of aldermen. Real political strategies are carried out at both levels, each using the other in its own power play.

The impact of the New Flemish Decree (with a new set of roles for the management team) at this moment is difficult to measure. Based on preliminary qualitative research, there is some evidence (to be tested) that the installation of new management teams introduces a new kind of bureaucracy and new models of hierarchy. All projects, plans, procedures and practices are yet to be approved by the management team. But local policy in Flemish cities is about “getting things done”. We noticed, though this must still be underpinned with further research, that the middle managers were rather distant when the discussing the functioning of the management team. It is, at this point, not “their” management team, but a new arrangement made at top level and not yet implemented in work at the middle level of city government, where the real pressures of politics, clients and environment are felt. We had the same feeling when interviewing politicians. They were also a bit distant. “Well, the management team is new, they are very busy with reorganization, modeling strategy and management, but for the real problems we are engaged with “our” managers at middle level. That is where the heart of city politics beats”. Our impression at this moment is that an interesting new coalition is growing: between politicians, middle and field managers. It seems to indicate that the management team model is not suited to support the strong points of political leadership in Flemish cities and that it could be a threat for

productive relationships between politicians and managers. There is a certain danger that this could harm the effectiveness of political leadership in Flemish cities.

Conclusion of section 3

In this section we introduced a set of interpersonal, cultural and structural variables for a better understanding of the contingent interactions between politicians and public officials in Flemish cities. It helps us to better understand the complex world of interactions in the real world and adds evidence to the institutional analysis and role perceptions. We ended up with a new hypothesis stating that the introduction of management teams could harm the effectiveness of local political leadership. It could possibly influence the role perceptions of the Flemish mayors. Belgian heritage may prove to be extremely solid, even in a federalized system.

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¹ In the daily life of local management and local policy making there are important interferences of regional and federal competences and of administrative procedures for instance in the field of economic policy, housing, welfare politics, traffic policy (see Ingelaere and Clemer, 2001). Policy fields such as police, fire brigades, disaster management, courts of justice, social security and railways still belong to the competency of the Belgian government. The combination of autonomous regional or federal competencies with the mix of competencies of both central authorities in other fields, combined with conflicts between both levels regarding the interpretation of the political agreements, the zones of no man’s land and the hidden areas of conflicting procedures or forgotten aspects of the regionalization means that, from a local viewpoint, managing the “Politikverflechtung” really is typical for local policy in Belgium. This could in fact be a factor encouraging ‘political localism’.

² This is the main linguistic divide as there are several such divides in Belgium due to the fact that the country has three official languages: French, Dutch and German. The latter is spoken in 9 local governments that fall under the respective competency of the German-speaking Community and the Walloon Region. As such, they indicate that the Belgian regions and communities are not competent for the same geographical area.

³ In this paper, local government is used to refer to the “gemeenten” (les communes, die Gemeinde). These governments operate on the level closest to the citizen. They have a directly elected council, an executive, a mayor and their own administration. Next to each “gemeente”, there is also a so-called ‘public centre for social welfare’ active on the local level. This centre also has its own council (composed of politicians appointed by the municipal council), a president and its own administration. We do not focus any further upon these public centres for social welfare, as they are not of primary comparative relevance for other European countries.

⁴ Nearly 25 % of Flemish local governments created autonomous agencies for service management. In the Walloon region 11 % of Walloon local governments made this choice (2006).

⁵ The Flemish decree introduces the concept of the mandatory statute for all personnel, also for top managers (secretary and financial manager: mandatory contract for a period of ten years). The local government can use this as an additional instrument for its management. In the Walloon region first ideas of this kind have been launched, though discussion is in a very preliminary stage. The association of local governments has also rejected the concept (letter of the UCVW, 2006).

The Flemish decree (2005) introduces the instrument of external audit, established by a commission of high public officials appointed by the Flemish government. Also in the Walloon region the debate on the audit commission has begun, initiated by the Walloon government, after some scandals and corruption in local governments. The regional government wants to introduce the internal audit in all local governments above 20,000 inhabitants and the external audit for all local governments, installed by the regional government. In both regions the associations of local governments expressed their concerns. They fear that the audit could be used as an additional instrument of supervision instead of being a support for local governments themselves. But the basic motives for the audit differ quite substantially. The introduction of the audit in the Flemish region is part of the ongoing trend of introducing New Public Management (the audit is one of the key instruments, even the cornerstone of NPM), while in the Walloon region the introduction of the audit has been activated through external circumstances. It is inspired by “conservative” motives: to prevent corruption rather than to support the transformation of local governments towards more management oriented institutions.

⁶ Number of “clientele” interventions: 1978 (yearly base) per person for Dutch speaking parliament members versus 2631 for French speaking members (De Winter, L., (1994) “Politiek dienstbetoon”, in Deweerdt, M. ea, Wegwijs Politiek, Davidsfonds: Leuven).

⁷ Ackaert, 2005: survey 1993/1994 with a follow-up in 2002. Response rate: 172 of the 308 Flemish mayors; 152 of the 262 Walloon mayors; 17 of the 18 Brussels mayors. Response rate of the follow up in 2002: 38 of the 44 mayors (province of Limburg, Flemish region)