Henry Bäck · Hubert Heinelt
Annick Magnier (Eds.)

The European Mayor

Political Leaders in the Changing Context of Local Democracy

BUNDESTAG GRUNDGESETZ POLITISCHES SYSTEM EUROPÄISCHE UNION WAHLEN VERFASSUNG INTERNATIONALE BEZIEHUNGEN POLITISCHE THEORIE PARTEIEN INSTITUTIONEN POLITISCHE KULTUR POLITISCHE ELITEN PARLAMENTARISMUS DEMOKRATIE MACHT REGIERUNG VERWALTUNG FÖDERALISMUS POLITISCHE SOZIOLOGIE GLOBALISIERUNG POLITISCHE KOMMUNIKATION PARTEIENSYSTEM RECHTSSTAAT GERECHTIGKEIT STAAT POLITISCHE ÖKONOMIE POLITIK BUNDESTAG GRUNDGESETZ POLITISCHES SYSTEM EUROPÄISCHE UNION WAHLEN VERFASSUNG INTERNATIONALE BEZIEHUNGEN POLITISCHE THEORIE PARTEIEN INSTITUTIONEN POLITISCHE KULTUR POLITISCHE ELITEN PARLAMENTARISMUS DEMOKRATIE MACHT REGIERUNG VERWALTUNG FÖDERALISMUS POLITISCHE SOZIOLOGIE GLOBALISIERUNG POLITISCHE KOMMUNIKATION PARTEIENSYSTEM RECHTSSTAAT GERECHTIGKEIT STAAT POLITISCHE ÖKONOMIE POLITIK BUNDESTAG GRUNDGESETZ POLITISCHES SYSTEM EUROPÄISCHE UNION WAH

URBAN AND REGIONAL RESEARCH INTERNATIONAL

VS VERLAG FÜR SOZIALWISSENSCHAFTEN

Henry Bäck · Hubert Heinelt · Annick Magnier (Eds.)

The European Mayor

Urban and Regional Research International
Volume 10

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Bibliografische Information Der Deutschen Bibliothek
Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar.

1. Auflage Mai 2006

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www.vs-verlag.de

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Umschlaggestaltung: KünkelLopka Medienentwicklung, Heidelberg
Druck und buchbinderische Verarbeitung: MercedesDruck, Berlin
Gedruckt auf säurefreiem und chlorfrei gebleichtem Papier
Printed in Germany

ISBN-10 3-531-14574-6
ISBN-13 978-3-531-14574-7

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1 Introduction

Henry Bäck, Annick Magnier and Hubert Heinelt

There are various images of the political leader in Europe's cities and towns. There is the time-honoured ceremonial mayor watching over the keys of the city. But there also is the political boss ruthlessly governing his/her 'subjects'. We might also offer the streamlined university educated professional or the executive committee leader promoted to a *primus inter pares* after long service in a political party.

With this book we aim to describe and analyse the selection, daily life, networks and values of local top political leaders in seventeen European countries. The empirical basis for the investigation into town halls across Europe is a survey conducted mainly in 2003 and 2004 with mayors and corresponding top local political leaders. The data covering responses from more than 2,700 leaders[1] constitute a unique and rich material allowing descriptions and analyses pursuing a number of lines of inquiry.

1.1 The changing context

An important point of departure for the book is that major structural changes have been taking place in European local government systems around the turn of the millennium (see e.g. John 2000; Le Galès 2002; Kersting and Vetter 2003; Denters et al. 2003; Haus et al. 2005; Heinelt and Kübler 2005), changes that have already had substantial consequences for local political leadership and are likely to bring about further change in the future. A number of such restructuring trends are sweeping over the continent, but - and this may be significant - from different starting points, at varying pace and in various mixed configurations. Local governments in Britain and Scandinavia with traditionally a heavy emphasis on the provision of welfare state services do not start out from the same circumstances as newly erected local authorities in post-communist

1 For inter-country comparison we have weighted data to compensate for varying national response rates. This means that inferences are made to the total population of European mayors (restricted to the participating countries).

eastern and central European countries or, for that matter, highly fragmented south European systems deeply embedded in and intertwined with central government's political and administrative bodies. Federal systems such as Austria, Belgium, Germany and Switzerland present yet other contexts for local governments. The research was designed to assess how, by playing on these different contexts, the re-restructuring trends and reforms inscribed in the wider framework of increasing global exchanges impact on the concept and praxis of political representation at local level.

One such important reform movement has been privatisation, contracting out and generally mimicry of private sector institutional arrangement, be it the management of big companies or the fragmented self-regulating market that serves as the model. This reform movement has often been labelled '*New Public Management*'. We planned to investigate how this movement, in one of its numerous interpretations, has led, beyond the visible structural and functional transformation of local authorities (acting less as service providers, more as regulatory or mobilising organs) to different relationships within the town-hall between political officials and non-elected administrators, and is influencing the traditional "ecology" of local political-administrative systems..

Another key power with which local governments must necessarily interact consists of the upper levels of the public sector, including central government. In most European local government systems the general trend of change in central-local relations has been described as *decentralisation*, whereby new tasks have been allocated to the local level. There are examples of reforms of central government grant systems and equalisation schemes that increase the discretion of local authorities. The reconstruction of autonomous local governments in Central and Eastern Europe is a historic instance of decentralisation. But there are examples of the opposite movement. Especially during the years of the Thatcher regime there were obvious trends of centralisation and dismantling of British local government. In some cases decentralisation has primarily been a case of strengthening the intermediate regional level, as for instance in France. Devolution to the Scottish and Welsh regions is another example. Whether globalisation is considered the leading process in the current construction of local practice or not, one common assumption in the literature concerns the growing competition between localities. We sought to enquire into the concrete significance of such competition for local representatives and to assess its outcome using political leaders as observers of recent tendencies in multi-level government restructuring.

If the private sector and business on the one hand, and the upper levels of government and especially central government on the other, are crucial points of orientation for local governments in Europe, the third aspect is undeniably that

of *political parties*. The importance of political parties varies greatly between and within national local government systems as well as between municipalities. The first local authorities, especially those in the pre-democratic era, were not party politicised. Party politicisation proceeded with democratisation, typically spreading out from urban centres to rural peripheries, and in some countries this process is still under way. Indeed, in a number of countries and a number of local authorities within the countries the party system has matured to the point of becoming overripe. The much-discussed phenomenon of 'the decline of parties' has also affected local governments. In some cases, as in Italy with the collapse of the traditional party system in the early 1990s, this has happened in dramatic forms. It is of interest, in this perspective, to compare such developments with the situation in Eastern Europe: if cities where parties decline could be regarded as post-modern, Eastern and Central Europe are pre-modern. The old party system in this area, which was a one-party system, has likewise collapsed and a new party system is now being constructed, but it remains haunted by the unfavourable reputation of political parties inherited from the old regime.

Thus our general aim in observing mayors' past and present dependency on political parties as a possible step in building their career, winning the election and defining their policy priorities was to measure the concrete transformation of their influence in the local polity.

A fourth trend of change concerns the internal institutional arrangements of local authorities. In many countries these changes directly concern the role of political leadership. *Strengthening the political executive* has been the hallmark of institutional reforms in a number of countries. Direct popular elections of mayors have been introduced in systems that previously practised the system of appointment by the council (Borraz and John 2004; Caciagli and Di Virgilio 2005). This has been the case in Italy and Poland and in a bandwagon reform movement in Germany. The option of direct mayoral elections has been one of the options offered to British local authorities in the re-shaping of the constitutional setup of Britain. But there are also examples of reforms aiming at *increasing the influence of citizens* by using local referenda and initiatives as in Germany, strengthening citizens in their role as users of municipal services as in Denmark or through the use of, often one-way, consultation procedures as in Britain. A common denominator of many of these reforms concerning both the executive and citizen influence is the tendency to bypass the political parties, thus conflicting with the observed trend of increasing party politicisation in many systems.

The structural transformations in terms of 'New Public Management', central-local government relations, party politicisation, the formal position and organisation of the executive and arrangements for strengthening citizen influence

all may be seen as concerning that which in a current discussion has been labelled 'local government', as against 'local governance'. The catchphrase 'from government to governance' has been used to describe an alleged transformation of the local political arena with increasing involvement of actors and actor categories which, unlike local government organisational units, cannot be integrated into hierarchical chains of command, but which form exchange networks and coalitions with local government and its political and administrative leadership.

In this structural context in flux the position and role of the mayor is changing; variations between and within national systems as well as differences between mayors are highlighted by the contributions to the book and form the focus of this analysis.

1.2 The Comparative Research Design

In these circumstances where change appears to be a dominant feature, the groups working jointly on the research (see Box 1) all acknowledged the lack of basic up-to-date information available for cross-national (or supra-national) analysis on issues of European local government. More precisely, their shared ambition was to gather data on local leadership, offering a partial but thought-provoking prospect for an assessment of the transformation of European local democracies, as it is perceived by the holders of the role subjected to the most significant revisions, namely the role of mayor, or as it may be inferred from changes in their recruitment, career, behaviour, expectations and culture.

The population investigated consists of political leaders in European municipalities[2]

- holding a position at the top of the city's administration and/or political bodies, thus being endowed with

  (i) organisational resources not available to other actors,
  (ii) political influence not available to other actors,
  (iii) an overall responsibility with respect to urban policies, and
  (iv) representative functions not carried out by other actors,

- being publicly visible in what they do and politically accountable for their actions by depending on some form of consent by the citizenry or its representatives and being controlled by modes of public communication (informational rights, local media etc.).

2 See for this definition of local political leaders Haus and Heinelt 2005: 27.

Box 1: Composition of the international research group

The idea of the research was first delineated in a meeting of the Euro-loc network (coordinated in Syddansk Universitet, Odense) held in Bordeaux in 2002. After having concluded the 'Udite Leadership Study' on appointed municipal chief executive officers (see Klausen and Magnier 1998; Mouritzen and Svara 2002) it was decided to reinforce cooperation for comparative research on local government between the members of this network. Promoted by Florence University, the project gathered a first core of participants from inside the Euro-loc network before enlarging it to the seventeen European teams which finally participated in collection of the data. These teams were:

- *Austria*: Franz Fallend (University of Innsbruck);
- *Belgium*: Herwig Reynaert, Kristof Steyvers (Ghent University),
- *Czech Republic*: Zdenka Vajdova, Michal Illner (Academy of Science, Praha),
- *Denmark*: Ulrik Kjær, Rikke Berg (Syddansk Universitet),
- *England*: David Sweeting (University of the West of England, Bristol),
- *France*: Eric Kerrouche (Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Bordeaux Talence),
- *Germany*: Hubert Heinelt, Björn Egner, Michael Haus (Darmstadt University of Technology),
- *Greece*: Nikos Hlepas (University of Athens), Panagiotis Getimis (Panteion University),
- *Hungary*: Gabor Soós, Gyorgyi Ignits (Tocqueville Research Centre, Budapest),
- *Ireland*: Paula Russell (U.C. Dublin),
- *Italy*: Annick Magnier, Pippo Russo, Chiara Zanoccoli, Giovanna Cutrone, Irene Borselli, Nicola Malloggi (University of Florence), Clemente Jesus Navarro Yanez (Universidad Pablo de Olavide Sevilla),
- *Netherlands*: Bas Denters (Universiteit Twente), Harry Daemen (Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam),
- *Poland:* Pawel Swianiewicz (University of Warsaw),
- *Portugal*: Manuel da Silva e Costa, José Pinheiro Neves; Jean Dominique Ackle (Minho University),
- *Spain*: Carlos Alba, Carmen Navarro (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid),
- *Sweden*: Henry Bäck, Vicki Johansson, Folke Johansson, David Karlsson (Göteborg University),
- *Switzerland*: Daniel Kübler (University of Zürich), Pascal Michel (Lausanne).

The political leaders thus defined are included in the study, irrespective of whether they have the formal title of "mayor" (or the closest corresponding term in the various languages) or not. For convenience we have throughout the book adopted the term "mayor" for all respondents to the survey. The definition of 'political leader' implies for instance that in English cities without a directly elected mayor, it is the council leader that will be included in the study, and in Swedish municipalities it will be the leader of the executive committee. We are also aware that there are important variations in the degree that our two criteria – political/administrative top position and visibility/accountability – are met. The political/administrative top position of ceremonial Irish mayors could for instance be doubted; likewise, one could dispute the local political accountability of Dutch mayors since they are central government appointees.

The written questionnaire was prepared through an attentive secondary analysis in the distinct thematic areas; it was then discussed and approved in two international meetings (see Box 2).[3] The questionnaire was translated and contextualised by the national teams and finally sent to the mayors in charge of local authorities with more than 10.000 inhabitants.[4]

Box 2: International seminars of the research group

International seminars of the research group were held at the following places and with the support of the mentioned institutions:

- Florence, in February 2003 (at the Dipartimento di Scienza della Politica e Sociologia),
- Madrid, in July 2003 (at the Summer School residence of the U.A.M., at La Cristallera),
- Hydra, (Greece) in March 2004 (in the Town Hall),
- Lerici, (Italy) in September 2004 (in the Town Hall),
- Darmstadt, in June 2005 (at the Institute for Political Science of Darmstadt University of Technology).

3 The full text of the common questionnaire is included in Appendix 1 in the version distributed to the national teams for translation in their own languages. In this version, the 'language' used was a 'basic' English which demonstrated fitter to partake the research problems faced in the different questions than the correct 'English version', which was elaborated to be submitted to the English mayors.

4 The echelon of 10.000 inhabitants allows to attain a minimal similarity of the milieu (of urbanity) in which mayors are acting in and thus a consistent sample in all the covered European countries. However, it has been clear that this selection of the sample implies limits which will be successively reflected in many of the contributions of this volume.

There was general agreement among the partners that the questionnaire should be enriched through the constitution of sub-groups in which the different disciplinary and national approaches to the problems would find room and lead to the proposal of thematic chapters.

Referring to the classical typology of Rokkan (1969), the research can be labelled as a case of 'cooperative' cross national survey, but with significant variations on the ideal-type. Although the data collection was executed by the national teams the design of the survey (and especially the questionnaire) was developed with the contribution of the entire international team during the two above mentioned seminars. In a series of further international seminars (see Box 2) the interpretations of the data were discussed. These interpretations were proposed by the international thematic groups who had contributed to elaboration of the questionnaire in the early stage of the research.

Policy-oriented questioning was combined with idiographic orientation to inspire data interpretation through the whole set of contributions. But such questioning in many of the contributions, focuses on domestic experiences and problems, relying on comparison to address theoretical or operative national or regional issues. Furthermore, even in presence of European enunciations on the trends of change in local government (under labels like governance, NPM, entrepreneurship etc.), the research community in the past decades has in fact encountered few opportunities of sharing hypotheses and ideas in the field on a continuous basis. Consequently, it was agreed to allow the different international thematic groups considerable freedom to define their own sets of hypotheses and interpretative tools. This implies for example that variables appear from one chapter to another as dependent or independent variables.

Table 1: Basic information about data collection in the different countries

Country	Survey conducted	dataset	response rate
Austria	February 2004	40	54,8
Belgium	April 2003 - June 2003	140	41,9
Czech Republic	June 2003	78	45,1
Denmark	November 2003	108	76,1
England	July - October 2003	123	31,8
France	June - December 2003	188	21,0
Germany	April 2003	636	41,0
Greece	December 2002	145	66,8
Hungary	June 2003	82	59,0
Ireland	July 2003	20	35,1
Italy	April - September 2003	256	25,3
Netherlands	September 2003	234	58,0
Poland	Sept. - November 2003	229	27,8
Portugal	March - May 2004	41	22,5
Spain	March - July 2004	155	24,2
Sweden	April - July 2003	142	65,4
Switzerland	June 2003	94	66,7
Total		2711	36,7