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Close Ties in European Local Governance

Linking Local State and Society

Edited by
Filipe Teles
Adam Gendźwiłł
Cristina Stănuș
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Palgrave Studies in Sub-National Governance

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PREFACE

WHY DID WE PUBLISH THIS BOOK?

We intend to deliver a readable and informative book, particularly useful for those interested in local governance and in the role of institutionalized networks between societal actors and local government. This book's originalities lie in the comparability it allows and in the comprehensive information it provides about these networks, which—despite their relevance—have been less discussed.

It should be made clear, just at the beginning of this book, that it presents just results of a first step of a broader research project¹ and that these results will form the basis for a much more ambitious undertaking—namely a survey of actors involved in networks representing local state-society relations in the countries from which project partners are involved.

As not all kinds of local state-society relations in these countries can be covered by the planned survey, criteria for selecting some for each country (between three and five per country) have to be defined. In the planned survey the respondents will be recruited only from the networks described in the country chapters of this book. The first criterion for the selection of networks was (as already mentioned) that they are institutionalized. The institutionalization can be done either by law (of upper levels of government) or by contract of the involved partners.² Furthermore, the focus should be put on the networks which are of representative types: either characterizing local state-society relations in a country by a particular form or representing features which also other (similar) networks have.

Finally, networks of local state-society relations have to be characterized. This is not only crucial for this book to reflect on the patterns to be found among the networks along or across countries and policy domains. More importantly, characteristics of the networks have to be made clear from which participants will be included in the survey. Such characteristics are set out by a typology presented in Chap. 2 and are operationalized in Chap. 3.³

The identification of different types of networks in the countries included in the study will allow a robust comparison and analysis. Such comparative reflections of the findings presented in the country chapters will be offered in the concluding chapter. The comparative reflections deal with a number of questions. Obvious questions are (a) whether or not patterns of the identified types of networks can be detected, (b) whether or not these patterns are country-specific or policy-specific, and if country-specific patterns can be detached and (c) explained by the typology of “national infrastructures” for local governance arrangements developed by Sellers et al. (2020; see also Sellers and Kwak 2011 and Sellers and Lidström 2014). Furthermore, there is the question why there are differences among countries also in networks which are substantially structured by EU legislation—like the Local Action Groups (LAGs)⁴ of the LEADER⁵ funding scheme.

THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK

This book originates from the work of a group of scholars organized into the standing groups on Local Government and Politics (LOGOPOL) of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) or the European Urban Research Association (EURA).

This group has carried out surveys since more than 20 years on actors performing different roles within local government.⁶ The main aim of these surveys has been to shed light on issues that cannot be specified either by comparative analysis of the institutional set-up of local government or by comparative case studies on individual cities in different countries—that is, issues like problem perceptions or attitudes toward the administrative reforms of mayors, councilors, or high-ranking appointed employees as well as their values, policy priorities, behavior, role definition, perception of self-influence, and role behavior, including leadership style. Furthermore, little comparative information was available at the

time on the social profile of these actors. The same applies to their notion of democracy and whether and how it differs among countries, how differences in their notions of democracy can be explained, and whether different notions of democracy matter for instance with respect to role definition and role behavior or attitudes toward administrative reforms. Moreover, no information was available to determine whether problem perceptions and notions of democracy (a) differ among mayors, councilors, or high-ranking appointed employees as well as (b) among councilors from different levels of local government (i.e. municipalities and the so-called second tier of local government, like counties, provinces, and départements), and (c) whether they have changed over time. The interest in these topics has been naturally extended to cover the non-state actors involved in institutionalized networks of local state—society relations, which are the subject of this project.

The composition of the academic network and the themes that it addresses correspond to the current mixed configuration of “urban political science,” namely the convergence among different approaches in political science and sociology, as more or less explicitly illustrated in many of the international assessments of the state of the art (e.g. Mossberger et al. 2012; Loughlin et al. 2010).

Several workshops were organized for the current study on local state-society relations. The first one took place in Bensheim (Germany) from 24th to 26 November 2017 to reflect conceptually on the interaction between municipalities and societal actors and to consider if and how a survey related to the actors involved in these interactions could be carried out. A second workshop took place on the Greek island of Hydra between 10 and 13 May 2018. This workshop was focused on the planning of the theoretical chapters as well as country chapters of this book. Furthermore, the participants initiated the development of a questionnaire which will be sent to actors involved in selected local state-society network. Both drafts of book chapters and a draft of the questionnaire were discussed at a third workshop, which took place in Aveiro (Portugal) on 6 and 7 March 2019. A fourth workshop took place in Kaunas (Lithuania), on 14 and 15 November 2019, where the questionnaire for the survey was agreed among the involved partners. The organization of these workshops and, consequently, the development of this book were partially supported by a small grant of the European Urban Research Association.

This volume is clearly a collective effort of a longstanding group of scholars whose most recent contribution to this field of knowledge is reflected in the following pages. The editors would also like to acknowledge the significant number of other academics who voluntarily agreed to follow this endeavor, namely through their helpful and valuable comments, suggestions, and blind review of every chapter of this book.

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NOTES

1. This research project receives no direct funding. Instead, the involved partners mobilize and bring in own resources for the studies presented in this book and for the planned survey. In those cases where there is/was individual/national funding for developing research, it is acknowledged in the respective chapter.
2. Without going further, we like to emphasize that we proceed from new-institutionalist approaches that are not just looking at “organisation fields” (created by law or contracts) but also at “meaning systems” and the complementarities between the two (see Scott 1994: 57 ff. and 70–71). It is left to the project partners to follow one of the different new-institutionalisms (see Hall and Taylor 1996 as well as Schmidt 2010).
3. It must be emphasized that these characteristics are generalizations referring to the country as a whole. This means that there can be local differences. These differences (and their extent) can only be determined by the planned survey.
4. More details about LAGs will be presented in various country chapters of this book (see particularly the chapter on Spain).
5. The acronym corresponds to *Liaisons Entre Activités de Développement de l'Économie Rural*, that is, linking activities of rural economy development.
6. An overview about these surveys, their core questions and main findings, as well as the publications which resulted out of them is given in Heinelt and Magnier 2018 and Heinelt et al. 2018: 2–4.

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Praise for *Close Ties in European Local Governance*

“This edited volume on local state-society relations is the result of an ambitious comparative research project. In focus for the book are intermediate structures between local authorities and actors and stakeholders in the local community in European countries. The country chapters are structured according to a theoretical framework developed by the authors that leads to a typology for describing the structures sampled for each country according to the autonomy, cohesion and effectiveness of the networks and institutions. This book is recommended for students and scholars in governance and local government studies.”

—Henry Bäck, *Emeritus Professor of Public Administration, Gothenburg University, Sweden*

“A book on local state-society relations fills a most important gap in the literature on, and understanding of local politics and policy-making. The systematic and comparative approach, and the scope of the book (22 European countries) means that theory-building in the field may proceed on much firmer ground than before since previous contributions have often been case studies or single-country studies. The typology of municipal-society relations that guide the country studies included in this book will remain a benchmark in the field in the years to come.”

—Harald Baldersheim, *Professor Emeritus in Political Science, University of Oslo, Norway*

“This book is about analyzing, measuring, explaining local state-society networks in more than 20 European countries from Austria to Britain, Greece or Poland. This book goes convincingly beyond national typologies to emphasise the role of agency and innovation in particular policy sectors. A major contribution to grasp the local governance of Europe.”

—Patrick Le Galès, *CNRS Research Professor of Sociology and Politics, Science Po, Paris, France*

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Interactions of Societal Actors and Local Government in Institutionalized Governance Arrangements: The Book's Scope and Content

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and Hubert Heinelt*

Interactions of societal actors in institutionalized governance networks with local government are one of the most common features of contemporary local governance. The multiple and diverse forms it can take provide relevant clues concerning different roles of local government in Europe,

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administrative, civic and political cultures, governance arrangements, decentralization processes, state–society relations, local practices in interest intermediation and political action. Comparative studies on this topic providing an in-depth analysis of institutionalized governance networks are needed.

The book will provide an understanding of the types of networks in a large number of European countries, their formal differences and partly also the motives for their creation. Given the comprehensiveness of subjects, dimensions, historical and political events to cover, this book will proceed by selecting the most relevant topics to address and identifying reasonable arguments in order to classify these differences between European countries but also policy domains. The comparative lessons and implications are particularly interesting not only for the scholarly debate but also for political practice. These are useful for those pursuing this debate and implementing similar agendas: local government associations, local authorities and professionals.

This book is focused on relations between (a) individual and collective or corporate societal actors and (b) municipalities, that is, the first tier of local government with a directly elected representative body as the crucial organ for taking binding decisions. This clarification might be necessary for readers who—due to particular circumstances in their countries—would probably look at this phenomenon from a legal perspective and regard local government not as a level of statehood but as means of self-administration and, in this sense, as part of the executive branch of a state.

In this book, organized interests—ranging from chambers of commerce and industry and so on to differently organized associations with various kinds of membership (from enterprises to elderly people)—as well as individuals engaged in the policy process are regarded as societal actors.

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The focus on the municipal level of local government means that we will consider local representatives of state (national or sub-national) authorities or agencies only in cases where they are interacting with societal actors when representatives of municipalities are also involved. The focus on the local level also means that there are numerous cases of networks of each type and that the networks' institutional design is adapted locally.

The book concentrates on institutionalized interactions between representatives of municipalities (mayors, councilors and members of the municipal administration) and societal actors. Consequently, those municipal committees which consist only of councilors who occasionally ask societal actors and experts for their opinion will not be considered.

Some local state-society relations have developed in the field of inter-municipal cooperation or reach beyond the border of just one municipality. These forms of organized interest intermediation at the inter-municipal level will be considered as well. However, as will be shown by the country chapters, most of the forms of local state-society relations considered here are located within the boundaries of one municipality.

The question of the size of the municipalities under study is defined precisely: Municipalities of all sizes should be included—providing institutionalized interactions between representatives of municipalities and societal actors exist. However, actually the number of smaller municipalities considered has been limited because, particularly in countries with two tiers of local government (municipalities on the one hand and counties, provinces, etc. on the other), some forms of local state-society relations are located at the second tier of local government. In these countries, only 'cities with county status', 'kreisfreie Städte', 'unitary local authorities' and so on which combine the competencies of both tiers of local government have been considered. These are usually urban centers and municipalities with a larger number of inhabitants.

ORGANIZED INTERESTS AND THEIR INTERACTION WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT—AND THE QUESTION OF HOW DEMOCRACY IS UNDERSTOOD

Although individual actors will also be considered as part of institutionalized interactions between representatives of municipalities and societal actors, empirically the latter are usually collective and corporate actors (in

the sense outlined in Sect. “Measuring the Coherence of Societal Actors” of Chap. 3 in this book). This implies that we are ultimately dealing with organized interests and how they interact with local government in interest intermediation, decision making and partly also the implementation of decisions. Interest intermediation within interest organization and between them and government has been a ‘traditional’ topic of debates in political science for decades (for an overview, see Schneider and Grote 2006 or the contributions in Petracca 1992). The topic has been examined by proponents of pluralism, neo-corporatism and the policy-network approach. However, these debates have been focused mainly on societal processes at large and the national level of political systems. As will be discussed in greater detail in the next section of this chapter, these debates have dealt only marginally with policy making at the local level (as already argued by Cawson 1985). Nevertheless, some ideas developed in these debates were considered as starting points for the work carried out so far by the authors of the contributions to this book—as will be outlined in the following section.

However, one issue in the debates among proponents of pluralism, neo-corporatism and the policy-network approach, as well as those of governance, has served as a starting point for the common work presented in the book—namely the relationship between organized interest and democracy or, more precisely, the understanding of democracy.

Particularly proponents of neo-corporatism, but also those interested in policy-networks and governance arrangements as empirical phenomena, are in danger of not being critical enough to recognize the ‘democratic deficits’ and limitations of citizen participation as a core element of democracy in their objects of investigation (for this criticism see, for instance, Dahl 1994; Bekkers et al. 2007). This danger has been emphasized in scholarly as well as political debates against the background that nowadays political systems in the ‘Western World’ have been characterized as a ‘post-democracy’ resulting from the complexity of modern society (Zolo 1992) and are sometimes considered as a ‘crisis of egalitarian politics and the trivialization of democracy’ (Crouch 2004: 6).

Nevertheless, the authors of the contributions to this book agree that a democratic political system has to ensure ‘a degree of participation so great and so fairly spread about that no one feels neglected and everyone feels, with justice, that his viewpoint has been pretty fairly attended to’ (Dahl 1971: 112). However, they also agree with the dictum of Schmitter (1993: 4) that a democratic political system is not to be conceived of as one ‘regime’ ‘but as a composite of “partial regimes”’ because it consists

of a complex web of various forms of participation. This also means that in a democratic political system ‘citizenship, its most distinctive property, is not confined to voting periodically in elections. It can also be exercised by [—] joining associations or movements, petitioning authorities, engaging in “unconventional” protest, and so forth’ (Schmitter 1993: 4). To put it precisely, in this book we are not focused on the use of ‘citizenship [...] confined to voting periodically in elections’ but on its exercise ‘by [...] joining associations or movements’ and engaging in what is called ‘functional interest representation’.¹ In this sense, we are looking beyond a ‘thin’ liberal (or representative) democracy (as Barber 1984 called it) to a (broader) participatory democracy.²

STUDIES ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETAL ACTORS: WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED? WHAT IS MISSING? WHAT COULD BE HELPFUL FOR CLOSING THE RESEARCH GAP?

Much has been written about local governance in the sense of governing a city beyond city hall (or: Who [really] governs the city?). However, most of it has been focused on single case studies or, at best, comparative case studies. The focus on case studies can be explained because it is taken for granted that ‘city matters’ (see Boddy and Parkinson 2004). This assumption is based on the fact that the relevance of space and ‘locality’ has been emphasized at least since the 1980s (see Gregory and Urry 1985; Savage et al. 1987). In this scholarly debate, *place-specific* and sometimes *historically rooted circumstances* are often invoked to explain local differences in the relations between city hall and societal actors (see, for instance, Goodwin and Duncan 1986).

Nevertheless, these differences between cities or the distinctiveness of a single city have been explained in line with more general approaches and research interests. This particular attention to the local context should be taken into account and considered as a useful building block for further research—particularly with regard to the planned survey and the studies which will be based on it.

This applies, for instance, to different versions of *interest* theory (i.e. either from neo-Marxist positions or by referring to rational-choice models). They played and still play a role in the debate about ‘urban regimes’ (see Elkin 1987; Stone 1989, 2004a, 2004b and with a critical perspective Davies 2002, 2003, 2004; Imbroscio 2003, 2004; Pierre 2005). Furthermore, *ideas* have also gained attention in the context of case