



PALGRAVE STUDIES IN
SUB-NATIONAL GOVERNANCE



Perspectives on Local Governance Across Europe

Insights on Local State-Society
Relations

Edited by

Björn Egner · Hubert Heinelt
Jakub Lysek · Patricia Silva
Filipe Teles

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Palgrave Studies in Sub-National Governance

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Jakub Lysek • Patricia Silva • Filipe Teles
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Introduction: The Book's Scope and Content

*Björn Egner, Hubert Heinelt, Jakub Lysek, Patricia Silva,
and Filipe Teles*

Interactions by societal actors with local authorities in institutionalized governance networks are one of the most common features of contemporary local governance. The many different forms they can assume provide relevant clues regarding various roles played by local government in

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Europe as well as in relation to administrative, civic and political cultures, governance arrangements, decentralization processes, state-society relations, local practices in interest intermediation and political action. Extant research has provided only limited in-depth analysis of institutionalized governance networks from a comparative perspective, particularly within the political science domain. The main ambition of this book is to fill this gap.

WHAT IS THE MAIN FOCUS OF THIS BOOK?

The book results from the work of an international research network that is focused on local state-society relations conceptualized as institutionalized interactions between (a) individual and collective or corporate societal actors (according to the definition of these actors by Scharpf, 1997) and (b) municipalities (i.e., the first tier of local government with a directly elected representative body as the crucial organ for making binding decisions).

To clarify why the local state-society relations being considered here were chosen, three relevant selection aspects need to be highlighted. First, societal actors are regarded as both “organized interests—ranging from chambers of commerce and industry etc., to differently organized associations with various kinds of membership (from enterprises to elderly people)—as well as individuals engaged in the policy process” (Teles et al., 2021b: 2). Second, the analysis is focused on the municipal level of local government. Hence, institutionalized relationships are considered only to the extent to which the diversity of actors included interacts with municipalities (Teles et al., 2021b: 3). Finally, “institutionalized interactions between representatives of municipalities (mayors, councilors and members of the municipal administration) and societal actors” (ibid.) are taken as the unit of analysis. This means that occasional and intermittent interactions—often with the goal of gathering the opinion of experts and societal actors—are not included in the analysis.

The selection of networks in individual countries, to which these characteristics apply, had to be done by the partners of the international research network (as experts on local state-society relations in their respective countries). The selection was based on two criteria: The networks considered were to be either typical for local state-society relations in the country or display characteristics that other networks in the country also have (Teles et al., 2021b: 8).

THE SURVEY OF LOCAL STATE-SOCIETY RELATIONS: HOW IT WAS PREPARED AND CARRIED OUT AND HOW TO INTERPRET THE RESULTS

The research network mentioned has already published a book with Palgrave Macmillan in the “Palgrave Studies in Sub-National Governance” series (Teles et al., 2021a). As already emphasized in that book, the local state-society relations presented in its country chapters would form the basis for the next step of the work of the international research network—namely, a survey conducted by the national teams. Furthermore, the typology of local state-society relations presented in this book (Teles, 2021) was used for characterizing the institutionalized relations between local government and societal actors at the municipal level in 22 European countries chosen for systematic and comparative analysis (Heinelt et al., 2021).

The questionnaire for the survey was mutually agreed upon and translated by the partners into the languages of their respective countries. While the survey was initially planned for mid-2020, the Covid-19 pandemic postponed the launch of the survey to September 2020, and the collection of responses from those who took part was completed in June 2021.

Of the 22 European countries covered in the first book, which provided an in-depth characterization of typical local state-society relations, only 20 were included in this survey. This is due to the serious challenges faced by country experts (from France and Romania) in mobilizing the financial resources to implement the survey. In addition to the smaller number of countries included, the survey did not cover all the 83 networks described in the first book. This is only partly (as in the Netherlands) due to the fact that the partners did not always have the financial resources to include all networks or their members in the survey. More importantly, it was only when searching for contact addresses of networks that it became apparent that some networks display a low degree of relevance in terms of how often they interact. This applies, for example, to some networks in Portugal or Poland. In other cases, data protection requirements prevented the collection of responses from young people under the age of 18, as reported in Iceland and Ireland. Nevertheless, it was ultimately possible to include 68 networks in the surveys of their members. Annex I provides further description of how the survey was carried out in the individual countries.

As depicted in Annex II, the response rate varied significantly among individual networks (from 0.5 to 78.8 percent) as well as countries—with

a mean value of 14.2 percent and a median value of 9.2 percent. This can be attributed to various possible reasons—from individual case-related difficulties in reaching the respondents as well as country- and network-specific reservations held by the target group about participating in surveys such as ours. No speculation will be made here about these reasons regarding single networks or countries. It must be acknowledged, however, that in some countries with large populations especially, the number of respondents is quite low. This applies to England (with 51 responses in total), the Netherlands (with 78 responses in total) and Poland (with 95 responses in total).

Furthermore, it had to be noted that not all respondents completed the questionnaire in the survey. This is certainly due to the fact that the questionnaire was quite long, with 32 questions and 191 items. Nevertheless, roughly 11,700 people across all countries took part in the survey, and half of them answered the full set of questions.

Low case numbers, however, do not necessarily call the representative nature of the survey results into question. To estimate representative sample sizes, insights and observations about the targeted population group would be required. Unfortunately, such information is often not available. Where this kind of information was available, it is reported by the national teams in Annex II.

Nevertheless, generalized conclusions should, of course, be drawn with caution when the number of cases is small. For this reason, absolute figures are usually included when presenting the results of analyses based on small numbers of cases in the following chapters of this book. This should allow readers to assess for themselves the validity of conclusions drawn by the authors from the results of the analyses presented. Furthermore, the authors of this book agreed—as a rule of thumb—that descriptive statistics would require at least 20 valid cases in order to be reported.

MAIN FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY AND THE CONTENT OF THE BOOK

The following chapters address multiple questions related to the functioning, membership, roles and performance of local state-society networks in Europe. All chapters follow a comparative approach by drawing lessons from multiple cases in different countries. This section facilitates a better understanding of the multiplicity of aspects addressed and the main research paths followed in the next pages.

The book is structured into two parts. While the first includes a comparative analysis of all the local state-society networks covered (from the notion of democracy among its members and their claims to representation to the inner workings of the networks), the second part is devoted to particular networks (such as Local Action Groups or local state-society relations having only a consultative function) or particular groups of a country or part of Europe.

The first part of the book begins with *Filipe Teles's* assessment of network members' perceptions of the autonomy, coherence and relevance of such governance arrangements. In his chapter on "Devil in details: beyond deceptive comparisons of European local governments", Teles helps increase understanding of the main differences and patterns in European local governance and explores how such processes reflect a wide range of local state-society arrangements. In addition to a dialogue on frequently used typologies, the chapter also puts into perspective existing classifications of local state-society relations as well as of local government systems in order to examine their complementary aspects and explanatory capacity in drawing a more accurate landscape of European local governance. The fact that only very few dimensions in some policy fields and specific countries follow expected patterns indicates that administrative traditions do not have a decisive and direct impact within the set of possible determinants of network diversity and, consequently, underlines the limitations of current comparative typologies of local government as well as local governance. The chapter highlights the discrepancies between those typologies in use for country variation and the observable phenomenon resulting from the local governance arrangements actually formed, which reinforces the claim that context, governance arrangements fluidity and agency do matter.

Decision-making in local state-society relations obviously takes place outside or in parallel to the municipal council as the core body of representative democracy at the local level. Previous surveys, however, demonstrate that even mayors and councilors do not clearly support a notion of democracy in line with representative democracy, emphasizing the significance of electoral legitimacy and decision-making competencies of elected representative bodies. Instead, mayors and councilors represent clearly different notions of democracy, which correspond to the distinction between a "thin" liberal (or representative) democracy (as Barber, 1984 called it) and a (broader) participatory understanding of democracy (see Vetter et al., 2018). *Hubert Heinelt* and *Björn Egner* show that the conceptually

distinguishable models of participatory and representative democracy can also be found among actors involved in local state-society relations. Furthermore, the authors show that the support of one of these models can be explained neither by the role played by actors involved in local state-society relations—namely, as representatives of (certain) societal actors or of the municipalities, and whether the latter were elected politicians or civil servants—nor can it be explained by the function of participation of societal actors in these networks according to the typology of Arnstein (1969). Instead, general political attitudes (self-placement on a right-left scale) and socio-structural characteristics (age and gender) of the respondents correlating with political attitudes make a difference in whether one of these models of democracy is supported or rejected.

In their chapter on “The democratic quality of non-electoral representation through local state-society relations”, *Karin Fossheim* and *Hans Vollaard* explore the relevance of local state-society relationships as a mechanism for reinvigorating local democracy because they involve non-electoral representatives in decision-making processes. However, non-elected representatives in such governance arrangements cannot rely on elections for their authorization and accountability. Nevertheless, the authors show that most non-elected representatives in local state-society networks across Europe are sure that their proclaimed constituencies agree with their positions, while they feel obliged to be accountable to the constituency they claim to represent. Non-elected representatives also inform their proclaimed constituencies through personal contacts and in general meetings. These mechanisms of authorization and accountability are seen by the authors as an indication that non-electoral representation can reinvigorate local democracy.

In their contribution to “Legitimacy claims of societal actors involved in local state-society relations” *Björn Egner* and *Hubert Heinelt* reflect on how claims to representation are underpinned by non-elected members of local governance arrangements. Their starting point is the following: If it is true that a shift from government to governance has taken place, in other words, that the making and implementation of socially binding decisions have shifted from the core institutions of statehood formed by the various bodies of government—including local government—to various spheres of society, then the concept of citizenship may need to be reconceptualized. This is because the conventional understanding of citizenship implies that it grants people particular rights that are set and secured by the government as the core institutions of the (nation) state. Using

Schmitter's (2002) holder concept, an attempt is made to rethink this conventional understanding of citizenship and to empirically identify how particular societal actors (as "holders" in the sense of Schmitter's typology) justify legitimacy claims to representation. The authors show that societal actors refer in their claims to act as representatives to three independent dimensions of legitimacy; namely, to (a) possession of specific knowledge required for the effectiveness of decisions taken or suggestions made by the network and their awareness of the issue at stake in the network; (b) representation of the residents living in the territorial boundaries of the network and therefore those who are affected by measures taken by the network; and (c) representation of those who contribute financially to the activities of the network and can carry out suggestions or decisions made by the respective network.

Carmen Walenta explores the social and ideological variables that explain active participation in local governance arrangements. She demonstrates (in the chapter on "Ideology, trust and autonomy: Differences between elected politicians and all other participants of local state-society networks") that participation by democratically elected members of networks stems from a high level of general trust, perceptions of autonomy, and ideological extremism. The usual suspects of demographic variables—such as age and gender—do not emerge as significant explanatory variables. The chapter depicts an interesting puzzle pertaining to the interaction between ideology and education, as left-wing individuals with higher levels of formal education are less likely to actively participate in institutionalized political participation.

Taking as their point of departure the observation that a shift from local government to local governance has taken place and referring to publications in which a new role of elected local politicians as metagovernor in such governance arrangements is emphasized (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Sørensen & Torfing, 2005, 2009), *Tom Verhelst* and *Koenraad De Ceuninck* address in their chapter "Does metagovernance matter?" the question of whether societal actors involved in the local state-society relations assign elected local politicians this role—and how it is to be fulfilled specifically. The main finding indicates that first and second-tier councilors as elected representatives are mainly concerned with facilitating cooperation, building trust among partners, protecting the common interest and enhancing democratic deliberation.

Patricia Silva, *Filipe Teles* and *Luís Mota* discuss "The unbearable lightness of coherence within local governance arrangements". Their argument

stems from the theoretical expectation that local governance arrangements are dependent on the coordinating efforts of the network and its ability to improve the legitimacy and clear democratic anchorage of these arrangements. These dimensions, however, are permeated by the effect of *coherence* of local governance arrangements, which the authors claim to be a “fundamental property of state-society relations”. The chapter demonstrates that coherence positively impacts the effectiveness and coordination of local networks, which are also propelled by personal and institutional *trust* among local stakeholders. As the chapter highlights, while coherence may be the engine driving local state-society relations, coherence is by no means immutable. Instead, such arrangements cannot easily be established once and endure over extended periods unless the actors involved take action to maintain coherence over time.

Carmen Navarro, Joan Carles Pamies and Lluís Medir analyze the relevance of “Throughput legitimacy in European local state-society networks”. Throughput legitimacy is seen as a form of legitimacy that may result from the phase in the policy process where the input (demands and support of people) is converted into policy output—provided that this phase of policy-making is made possible by extended forms of participation that ensure transparency and accountability about why inputs have been converted into particular policy outputs (see Haus & Heinelt, 2005; Heinelt, 2010: 27 and 66–67; Schmidt, 2013). Drawing on results of the survey, the efficacy, inclusiveness and transparency of the interactions of actors involved in local state-society relations as well as their accountability are assessed. In doing this, the chapter seeks to reveal the extent to which local state-society networks meet standards of throughput legitimacy and to explain differing degrees of its fulfillment. The findings indicate a generally positive evaluation of throughput legitimacy in local state-society networks and confirm a high level of accountability of network members, as well as of the efficacy, inclusiveness and transparency of communicative interaction and, depending on the network, decision-making. Although the question of how to explain differences in the level of throughput legitimacy could not be answered unambiguously, it could be shown that it is particularly high in some policy-specific cases (such as Local Action Groups) and also in individual types of networks distinguished by Teles (2021)—namely, “collaborative” and “independent networks”.

The term “governance” refers not only to a change in the role played by public and private or societal actors and how they interact, but also draws attention to the fact that territorially determined “container spaces”