The Hidden Constitutions: How Informal Political Institutions Affect the Representation Style of Local Councils

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ABSTRACT

The constitutional setting of a political system determines the division of power between institutions and positions, and regulates the interaction of political actors. Politicians form their notions of democracy and interpret their roles as elected representatives in relation to the institutions that regulate their practice. However, considerable parts of the constitutional framework are not written down or formalised. Instead, informal institutions regulate political practice. This is especially the case in European local government, where local informal rules create a great variation in practice within formal municipal systems. In a comparative study of 428 municipalities in 15 countries, this article identifies a number of indicators for such informal institutions – the hidden constitutions of European local government. The results show that informal institutions affect the representation style on local councils to at least the same degree as formal institutions. For example, municipalities with an elitist power structure tend to strengthen the ideal of party loyalty among councillors.

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1. Introduction

Institutions are 'the rule of the game in a society, or […] the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction' (North 1990). Each political system is based on a collection of political institutions, i.e. a 'constitutional setting' (compare Ostrom 2007), which guides and limits the actions of the actors within the system. Situated in a political system, actors will consider the lay of the land, adapt their notions about what the appropriate conduct is for actors like themselves in this environment and then, as a consequence, adjust their behaviour. 'The process involves determining what the situation is, what role is being fulfilled, and what the obligations of that role in that situation are' (March and Olsen 1989: 160). Each actor forms his or her own views on how democracy ought to work, and these notions help them shape their roles as actors within their political system. Notions of democracy, especially notions concerning the role behaviour of actors, are therefore causal mechanisms between political institutions and actor behaviour.

The constitutional setting is the framework that defines the function and mandate of an elected politician in a representative democracy. The institutions regulate the political work in a way that the representative must obey, while in other parts, they leave room for individual discretion. This also means that the role interpretations of representatives may be changed by means of institutional reforms (de Groot, Denters and Klok 2010). For studies on what forms the role interpretations of political representatives, these formal constitutional institutions are central as the omnipresent reference points for what is possible and appropriate to do (Egner and Heinelt, 2008). For example, in an electoral system, where constitutional rules limit the choice of voters to lists of party nominated candidates with weak instruments for preference voting, a representative primarily has the party to thank for his/her mandate – and the representative has strong incentives to follow the party line to secure re-nomination. In other electoral systems, where the voters have a stronger say on exactly which candidates are elected, the representative has a much stronger claim to an individual mandate in relation to the party (Carey and Shugart 1995). A system's model for the appointment of the political executive further defines the role of a parliamentarian, in terms of support and opposition, facilitator or supervisor, etcetera.

The most well known institutions of a constitutional setting are the regulations formally codified in law. However, the literature on institutional theory has underscored that many institutional regulations in political systems are not written down (Peters 1999, Lauth 2000, Ostrom 2007). Helmke and Levitsky (2004) have identified informal institutions as a subject of particular

interest in the field of comparative politics. They claim that scholars who fail to consider the informal rules of the game risk missing many of the most important incentives and constraints that underlie political behaviour.

Thus, if a formal constitution provides more or less strict guidelines for an elected official, regarding the interpretation of his or her role, we could expect informal institutions to have the same effect, complementing, substituting or competing with the formal institutions (Helmke and Levitsky, 2004). However, while the significance of informal institutions is widely recognised in social science research, they are frequently omitted in comparative studies, probably due to their notorious obscurity. Often, informal institutions are mentioned as the residual explanation, i.e. the factor lying behind those aspects that cannot be explained by formal institutions. Since such informal constraints seldom are explicitly recognised, they are hidden from people on the outside of the political organisations and they are probably vague for many political insiders as well.

An example taken from Scandinavian local government can illustrate the significance of informal institutions. By international comparison, the Nordic mayors are, on paper, weak in relation to the council and the administration (Goldsmith and Larsen 2004, Aars 2009). Nevertheless, studies show that the influence of the Swedish 'mayor equivalent' (the chair of the Executive Board) over local affairs is no less than the influence of mayors in other countries (Bäck 2005). The reason for this is that while no formal power is legally vested in the chair, the authority of the chair is built on informal rules and expectations. This formally unregulated situation naturally produces considerable room for individual role interpretation and a great variation in leadership styles (Bäck 2006, Aars 2009), but such variations could also be found in countries where the functions of the mayor are much more regulated and where institutional frameworks are created intentionally to produce a certain type of leadership (Lowndes and Leach 2004).

The influence and functions of the mayor are examples of aspects that provide the institutional context that potentially affects the role interpretations of the local councillors. For example, it might be easier for a councillor to take a more independent role in an environment where top leaders are less authoritarian. Whether the mayoral influence in this case is high or low due to formal or informal factors is probably irrelevant for the interpretation of what is possible and appropriate for a councillor to do.

In this article, informal local political institutions – the hidden constitutions of European local

government – are explored. The aim is to determine indicators for such institutions and to investigate whether, and to what degree, informal local institutions can explain the variations in role perceptions on local councils.

The dependent variable in the study is *representation style*, more specifically the proportion of party soldiers on local councils. This variable has been selected as a central indicator of how the proper conduct of elected representatives is interpreted on a council. Representation style is a well-established concept in research into elected politicians, and the proportion of party soldiers on a council is a measure of the balance between party loyalty and individual discretion among councillors when decisions are made. The non-formalised institutional aspects of local constitutions that are introduced as independent variables in this study are 1) local variations in the *distribution of influence* between political actors and 2) *interaction patterns* between councillors and other local actors.

The article is structured in the following way: in section 2, methodological aspects of the study, sources of data (the MAELG survey) and selection issues (428 municipalities in 15 countries) are discussed. In section 3, the dependent variable, the proportion of party soldiers on local councils, is presented. In section 4, the article gives a short overview of the formal constitutional aspects of European local government systems, in relation to which the effects of informal institutions must be distinguished. In section 5, the independent variables – the indicators for local informal institutions, are identified and presented. In section 6, the effects of the informal institutions on the proportion of party soldiers on European local councils are determined by regression analysis (with controls for the effects of formal institutions and city size). The article ends with section 7, where the conclusions on the perceived importance of informal institutions – the hidden constitutions – are discussed.

2. Method and source of data

Localities are steeped in cultures, traditions and ad hoc circumstances that all contribute to the great variation in the contexts surrounding local politics (Birch 1959). However, the identification of informal social structures is methodologically a very tricky business. In quantitative survey based research, we are confined to using crude indicators for social phenomena that, by their nature, are complex and fluid. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to avoid acknowledging factors that are essential for explaining society just because they are hard to measure. Survey meth-

ods also bring a number of advantages. In their research agenda for informal institutions in comparative studies, Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 734) called in particular for large-n surveys, in order to obtain information on informal institutions: 'Survey research may capture actors' expectations and beliefs about the "actual" rules of the game'.

Informal institutions can be detected by using one of two approaches: the first is to observe the institutions by their effects, i.e. inferring them from systematic patterns of interactions between actors. In line with this, the article will use the patterns in the contact frequencies between councillors and other local political actors to indicate the presence of informal institutions.

An alternative method is recommended by Helmke and Levitsky (2004), who propose that the first question to be asked, when making an effort to identify informal institutions, is 'what are the actors' shared expectations about the actual constraints they face?'. To find patterns in the actors' assessments of the local constitutional setting in terms of power distribution is thus another way to find informal institutions, which will be used in this article.

Such analyses can be made at the individual data level, where for example a councillor's perception of a certain local institution can be related to his or her notions of how to act in relation to these institutions. However, this article is looking for the effects of existing institutions, not the effects arising from the perceptions of institutions that may or may not exist. An institution is a phenomenon that affects all, or at least most, actors in a system, and which exists independently of a specific actor and his/her awareness of it. This is why all the analyses in this study are made on the municipal (and not on the individual) data level and a municipality's local constitutional setting is indicated by its councillors' collective assessment of these aspects.

This approach raises several methodological challenges. Reliable measures for indicators must be found in each municipality studied and, if by institutions we mean constraints that are valid for all, or at least many, actors within a political system, we must build indicators for such institutions based on information from a sufficiently large number of actors. This approach requires a survey design study.

The source for the data in this article are responses from about 12 000 councillors from councils of approximately 800 municipalities included in the MAELG-survey (see Heinelt 2012). The assessment of a municipality's institutional arrangements and the proportion of representation styles in its council are determined based on the councillors' perceptions as recorded in the survey answers. Unfortunately, the response rate varied considerably between countries and mu-

nicipalities. To ensure that the measures for a local situation are reliable, all municipalities where less than ten councillors answered the survey have been excluded from the analysis, with the exception of municipalities where less than 10 people, but more than 50 per cent of the councillors, replied. This means that the analyses in this article are based on values from 428 municipalities and 7 065 councillors within these municipalities.

In this selection of municipalities, cases are represented for all the categories of the established European municipal typologies (i.e. of Hesse and Sharpe 1991, Mouritzen and Svara 2002, Heinelt and Hlepas 2006). Of the 16 countries in the MAELG survey, municipalities from 15 of them are included, since no Israeli municipality met the selection criterion for the response rate.

3. Role interpretations on local councils: Party soldier as representation style — the dependent variable

Given the aim of this article, the analysis requires a dependent variable that is an indicator for how the roles of elected representatives are interpreted on local councils. Representation style and the proportion of party soldiers on a council is such a variable. It measures to what degree the ideal of party loyalty is incorporated in the interpretation of a council mandate. By 'the ideal of party loyalty' should be understood the normative acceptance of party supremacy among councillors when political decisions are to be made, not the party whip's influence over dissident individuals.

The concept of representation style was developed in the USA (Eulau et al. 1959; Wahlke et al. 1962) and it has since long been used in research into local politics (Newton 1974). The theory alludes to what is most important for a political representative when a decision is to be made: his /her own judgment, the voters' judgement or the judgement of the party. To determine which of these three alternatives a representative puts first, the MAELG questionnaire included the following question: 'If there is a conflict between a member's own opinion, the opinion of the party group on the council and the opinion of the voters, how should, in your opinion, a member of the council vote?'. The three response alternatives were: vote 1) according to his/her own conviction, 2) according to the opinion of the voters or 3) according to the opinion of the party group.

In accordance with the conventional terminology, representatives preferring alternative 1 are called *trustees* while those who chose alternative 2 are called *delegates* (Eulau et al. 1959). Representatives who prefer alternative 3 are called here *party soldiers*, which is a representative style that was added to the other two in later research (Holmberg 1974; Wallin et al. 1981).

These styles are all ideal type positions and many representatives combine elements of all three in their role as representatives (compare 'the politico' style, Wahlke et al. 1962). However, the survey question faced the respondents with a critical choice and reveals towards which ideal type position the councillors lean the most. In practice, a trustee or a delegate could be very loyal to their party, but they do not view the party as the final source of legitimacy for their mandate, as is the case for a party soldier.

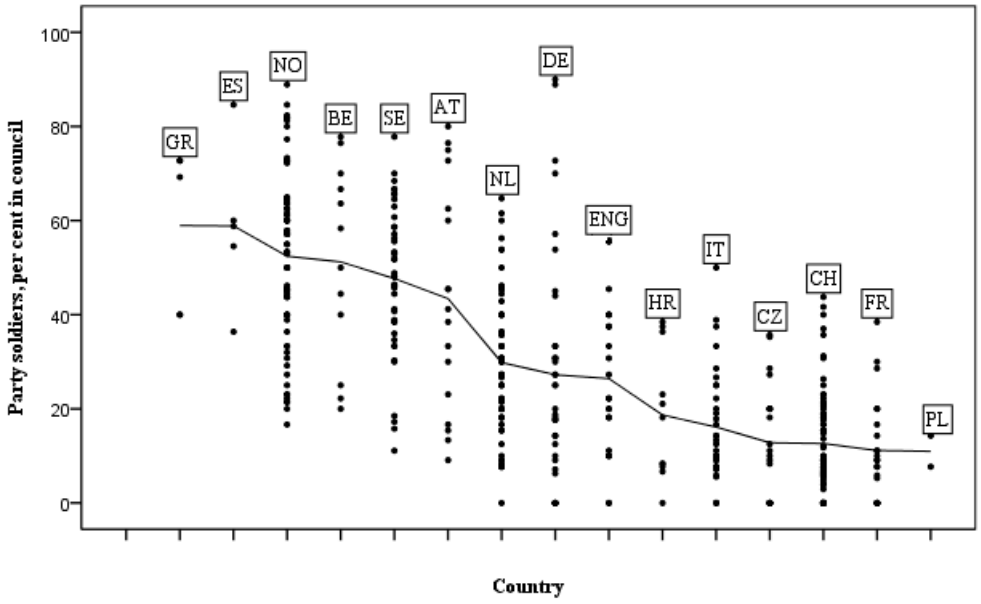
We know from earlier studies (Converse and Pierce 1986; Gilljam et al. 2010) that the main division in representation style is between being a party soldier on the one hand or, on the other hand, an actor independent of party who bases decisions on his/her own opinions or perception of the voters' opinions. When operationalising representation style to a single dependent variable, the choice in this study is the occurrence of the party soldier a representation style on local councils.

The mean value of the dependent variable, *the proportion of party soldiers on a local council* in the 428 councils in the study is 31 per cent, but the proportion of party soldiers varies greatly between individual cases. In 37 of the councils, there are no party soldiers while in 11 cases there are at least 80 per cent party soldiers.

One possible basis for a comparative analysis of local constitutional institutions would be countries, since the municipalities in a country have much in common in terms of laws, traditions and cultural heritage. As we will see, there are also great variations in the representation style between countries. Unfortunately, it follows as a consequence of this study's selection criteria that a number of countries are represented in the data material by only a few municipalities and a country-based analysis would therefore produce unreliable results. Fortunately, the research field of local government studies has developed several sets of municipal typologies that allow us to group countries into a limited number of categories, and these typologies – not countries – will be used as indicators of formal constitutional settings in the forthcoming analyses. In some cases, the typologies also acknowledge the existence of several municipal systems within the same country, which is a further advantage. These typologies will be introduced in Section 3 below.

It was however possible to obtain a general impression of country differences, which it could be illuminating to study before turning to the aggregated analyses. Figure 1 provides us with a graphic overview of the inter- and intra-country variations of the dependent variable.

Figure 1: Party soldiers on local councils by country *(per cent)*



Comments: The dots in the graph indicate the percentage of party soldiers on the council of each municipality in the study. Municipalities are grouped by country, and the countries are sorted by their overall mean value for party soldiers on local councils as shown by the line. N = 428.

The Figure indicates that Greece and Spain show the highest proportions of party soldiers (59 per cent), while Poland only has 11 per cent. All three of these countries are represented by only a few cases in the material and the results should therefore be regarded with caution. Among countries with a high number of cases in the study, we note that Norway, Belgium, Sweden and Austria have the highest mean value of party representatives on local councils while Italy, the Czech Republic, Switzerland and France have significantly lower values.

While there are large country differences in terms of the mean value, the variation within each country is considerable. Among the German cases for example, we find municipalities with the highest as well as the lowest proportions of party soldiers in the selection. The range in the Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, Belgium and Norway is also considerable. The lowest internal variation, among the countries with many cases in the selection, is observed for Switzerland and Italy.

4. Municipal systems and formal local constitutions

The independent variables in this study will be indicators of local political institutions. If we believe that all institutional aspects affecting role interpretations on local councils are to be found within the

formal constitutional arrangements of a municipal system, then we would expect the power distribution and interaction patterns in all municipalities in such a system to be roughly the same. To a degree, this is the case, but as we will see, there is also great variation in terms of power distribution and interaction patterns among municipalities within the same formal framework. Thus, if a municipality diverges from the 'normality' of the formal system to which it belongs, then the existence of local informal institutions is confirmed. Since the local constitutional setting is a composite of both formal and local/informal institutions, and this article is looking for the effects of informal institutions, indicators for the formal constitutional settings are needed as control variables. Inclusion of indicators for both informal and formal institutions in the same analysis will also provide the opportunity to assess the relative explanatory power of each. The indicators for formal constitutional settings will be three sets of municipal categories, which are well established in European local government research.

Over the years, several attempts have been made to create comprehensive models of local government systems. Some of these categorisations are based primarily on the *vertical* relations between local and national levels, with the focus on the distribution of power and responsibilities (Page and Goldsmith 1987; Hesse and Sharpe 1991; Sellers and Lidström 2007). In their model, Hesse and Sharpe distinguished the 'Franco type', the 'Anglo type' and the 'North-Middle European type' of local government. Later, a 'Central-East European type' has been added to the model.

Other studies have developed models relating to the *horizontal* relations between the actors and institutions within the municipalities i.e. the 'local constitutions'. The model of Mouritzen and Svara (2002) was based on the relations between the Mayor, the council and the Chief Executive Officer. The four categories in this model included the 'strong mayor form', the 'committee-leader form', the 'collective form' and the 'council-manager form'. Later, Heinelt and Hlepas (2006) proposed a merged Hesse and Sharpe/Mouritzen and Svara model called the POLLEADER typology. This model puts the Mayor at the centre and identifies municipal types such as the 'executive mayor type', the 'political mayor type', the 'ceremonial mayor type' and the 'collegial leader type'.

Egner and Heinelt (2008) have taken this theoretical development one-step further; with the help of the POLLEADER survey (Bäck et al. 2006; see also Heinelt 2012). Their analysis focused on explaining the variation in the Mayors' perception of the council's role in their own municipality. Egner and Heinelt found that their model was strengthened when a number of more specific variables for the institutional function of the mayor in a municipal system were added. The main conclusion of Egner and Heinelt is that the institutional position of a mayor matters

when determining the role of a municipal council.

Another contribution of Egner and Heinelt (2008) was to introduce information from the municipal data level into the equation. The most interesting of their results, from the point of view of this article, is the large variation remaining unexplained by their analysis. It is apparent that even if the formal institutions of a municipal system do matter, they are only able partially to explain the variation in perceived council roles between municipalities. It follows from the results of Egner and Heinelt (2008) that inter-municipal variation in central constitutional aspects is high in Europe, both overall and within institutional systems. This implies that a significant part of the actual local constitutions is informal and local. This, in turn, raises the question of whether, and how, knowledge of such informal local constitutions can help us to understand the variation in the councillors' interpretation of their political role.

In the analyses in this article, the three municipal typologies mentioned above (Hesse and Sharpe, Mouritzen and Svara, and Heinelt and Hlepas) will be used as independent control variables. However, before using them as such, let us first turn to Table 1, which establishes how well the typologies, separately and together, are able to explain the variation between the municipalities with respect to the dependent variable in the study – the proportion of party soldiers on local councils.

Of the three typologies, Mouritzen and Svara is by far the best for explaining the variation of party soldiers on European local councillors ($Eta^2 = 0.282$, which translates to 28.2 per cent explained variation) followed by Heinelt and Hlepas (18 per cent) and Hesse and Sharpe (6 per cent). The explanatory power of all three typologies put together, as measured through Adjusted R^2 in a multiple regression model with categories included as independent dummy variables, is 28.4 per cent. This means that when added to Mouritzen and Svara, Heinelt and Hlepas plus Hesse and Sharpe only contributes fractions of one per cent to the explanatory power.

Table 1: Percentage party soldiers on local councils by municipal typology *(Mean value and explanatory power (Eta^2))*

Hesse & Sharpe typology	Party soldiers (Percent)	Mouritzen & Svara typology	Party soldiers (Percent)	Heinelt & Hlepas typology	Party soldiers (Percent)
Franco	26	Strong Mayor	25	Political Mayor	26
Anglo	26	Committee-Leader	48	Executive Mayor	21
North & Middle European	34	Collective	23	Collegial Leader	28
Central-East European	13	Council-Manager	52	Ceremonial Mayor	52
Eta^2	0.057		0.282		0.183

Comments: The table presents the percentages of party soldiers on local councils in 12 different municipal categories. The mean value of all municipalities is 31 per cent. N = 417 municipalities (not Croatia).

5. Finding variations on local constitutional settings – the independent variables

Let us now turn to measuring local institutional variations in the constitutional setting in the municipalities of Europe and thereby identifying indicators for the informal institutions constituting the independent variables for the analysis.

Helmke and Levitsky (2004) have established a typology of informal institutions depending on: 1) whether the existing formal institutions are effective or not, and 2) whether the outcomes of formal and informal institutions converge. If the formal institutions are effective and the outcomes are convergent, then the authors assert that a *complementary* situation is present. If the formal institutions are ineffective and the outcomes divergent, it can then be said that, the informal institutions are *competing* against the formal. Helmke and Levitsky also identified a situation where formal institutions are effective, but outcomes are still divergent. Here the informal institutions are *accommodating*, and 'create incentives to behave in ways that alter the substantive effects of formal rules, but without directly violating them; they contradict the spirit but not the letter of the formal rules'. A fourth situation arises when formal institutions are weak and not enforced, but the outcomes are compatible. Here actors seek outcomes in line with formal institu-

tions, and *substitutive* informal institutions achieve that which formal institutions were designed, but failed, to achieve.

In all these situations, the function of informal institutions is defined by Helmke and Levitsky in contrast to existing formal institutions. In line with this perspective, this article has stayed close to crucial aspects of formal political constitutions in order to identify informal local institutions. *The distribution of power and interaction between local political actors* are two key components in all political constitutions, and the informal aspects of these components will be focused on in the analysis.

Levels of influence for political organisations and actors within a political system are elementary to constitutional theory and this perspective was also in focus when Mouritzen and Svara (2003) and Heinelt and Hlepas (2006) constructed their municipal typologies. Theoretically, local variations in the distribution of power can reinforce or compete with formal institutions. A set of questions in the MAELG survey concerned the level of influence that a number of actors had over the activities of the local authority. The councillors were asked specifically to indicate the actors' degree of influence 'independently of the formal procedures'.

Ten local political actors mentioned in the MAELG questionnaire are listed in Table 2, along with mean values for their relative degree of influence in the 428 municipalities. The table also shows the correlations between the influence levels for the different actors, revealing whether some actors benefited from others' relative lack of influence.

There is no doubt that the Mayor is the most influential single actor in most municipalities, but there are quite a few cases where other actors are more powerful. The analysis showed positive correlations between the strength of the Mayor, on the one hand, and the strength of council presidents, council committee leaders, CEOs, heads of departments and party leaders on the other. This indicates that in the municipalities, strong mayors generally coexist with other influential leaders rather than compete with them.

What is apparent, however, is the very high negative correlation between the influence levels Mayors and single councillors (-0.50). The pattern widens when we take into account that when Mayors are weak and single councillors are strong, party groups and organisations are then, in general, also strong. In these numbers, an underlying elite/pluralism-dimension could be discerned, a dimension which was also confirmed by a factor analysis. This dimension mirrors the fact that there is great variation in how decentralized political power is in European municipali-

ties. In order to operationalise the elitism-pluralism dimension, an index was constructed where the value for the influence of single councillors was subtracted from the mean value for the influence level for the four top leading actors in the municipality: the Mayor, the President of the Council, the Executive Board and the party leaders.

Table 2: ***The influence of local political actors*** *(Mean value, percentiles and correlations (Pearson' s r))*

		Mean	Percentiles			N	Correlations (Pearson's r)								
		(0-4)	25	50	75		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
A	The Mayor	3.3	3.0	3.4	3.7	428	1								
B	The President of the Council	2.4	1.8	2.2	3.0	340	.11	1							
C	The Presidents of Council Committees	2.2	1.8	2.2	2.5	428	.22		1						
D	The Executive Board	3.0	2.8	3.0	3.3	426	-.18	-.13		1					
E	Single councillors	1.8	1.6	1.8	2.1	428	-.50		-.14		1				
F	The Heads of Departments in the Municipality	2.5	2.2	2.5	2.8	428	.16		.14	.31	-.24	1			
G	The Municipal Chief Executive Office	2.7	2.3	2.8	3.2	417	.20	.19	.32	.29	-.24	.58	1		
H	Party leaders	2.0	1.8	2.0	2.2	428	.19	.11	.24	.15	-.30	.39	.26	1	
I	The party groups in the council	1.8	1.5	1.9	2.2	428	-.39			.16	.46		-.15	.19	1
J	Party organisations	2.4	2.2	2.5	2.7	428	-.29	.12	.12		.28			.21	.52

Comments: The table presents the mean value for the question 'On the basis of your experience as a local councillor in this City, and independently of the formal procedures, please indicate how influential each of the following actors are over the Local Authorities'. The answers were given on a scale from 0, No influence, to 4, Very high influence. The units of analysis in this table are the municipalities selected for this study, and the values for each municipality are based on the individual mean value for their councillors responding. The results presented in this table are mean values for these municipalities, the percentiles and correlations between the variables. All correlation values are significant on the .05-level, non-significant correlations are omitted. N=428 municipalities in most cases, but notably only 340 in the case of the President of the Council.

The strong correlation found between the influence of the CEO and the heads of departments (0.58) indicates that there is no need to differentiate between the influence of the CEO and the other leading bureaucrats; and an index based on the mean values of both these two actor categories was constructed.

Regarding parties, the results in Table 2 showed positive correlations between the levels of influence of party leaders, party groups and party organisations, especially between groups and organisations (0.52). However, the correlations with party leaders and collective party categories were weaker and, while party leader influence is positively correlated with the Mayor, party groups and organisations are definitely not. Hence, when an index for party influence was constructed, it was only based on mean values for the influence of party groups and organisations – not party leaders.

The key variables identified as indicators for the constitutional settings in a municipality, with respect to the actual levels of influence of political actors, were thus as follows:

- The influence of the Mayor
- The influence of the Executive Board
- The influence of parties (index of party organisations and party groups)
- The influence of leading bureaucrats (index of CEO and heads of departments)
- An elitism/pluralism index (Mean of Mayor, President of the Council, Executive Board, party leaders, minus the value for single councillors).

Systematic patterns of interaction are indications of institutional arrangements and a measure of the closeness and distance between councillors and other actors. The second set of indicators for informal institutions was based on a set of questions in the MAELG questionnaire, where the councillors stated how often they had contact with a number of other actors. In Table 3, the contact frequencies between local councillors and five other local actors are presented.

To obtain a theoretically consistent analytical model, the indicators of interaction between political actors should include the same actors as used in the power distribution indicators. For four of the five indicators this could be achieved, since the respondents had provided contact frequencies between themselves and the Mayor, the members of the Executive Board, the members of their own party group and civil servants in the municipality.

However, there was no indication of any pattern mirroring an elite-pluralism dimension in the data. The positive correlation values between the variables in Table 2 indicate a situation, verified by factor analysis, where the councillors, in general, have either a low or a high level of contact with other actors in the municipality. That means that if the councillors in a municipality are in frequent contact with the top leaders, there is an equal chance that they are in frequent contact with their fellow councillors, and vice versa.

Table 3: Interaction between local actors and councillors, number of contacts per year

(Mean value, percentiles and correlations (Pearson′ s r))

		Mean	**Percentiles**			**Correlations** (Pearson′ s r)			
		(0-104)	**25**	**50**	**75**	**A**	**B**	**E**	**L**
A	The Mayor	37	26	34	46	1			
B	Members of the Executive Board	39	28	38	52	.62	1		
E	Members of my party group	58	38	60	74	.17	.50	1	
L	Civil servants in the municipality	28	14	23	39	.68	.60	.15	1
M	Individual citizens in your role as a councillor	49	34	51	64	.35	.47	.39	.48

Comments: The table presents the mean values for answers to the question 'How frequently do you have contact with the following individuals or groups?' The answers were coded as follows: (almost) never=0, a few times a year =6, a few times a month =24 and a few times a week =104. The units of analysis in this table are the municipalities selected for this study, and the values of each municipality are based on the individual mean value for their councillors responding. The results presented in this table are mean values for these municipalities, the percentiles and correlations between the variables. N=428 municipalities. All correlations values are significant on the .05-level.

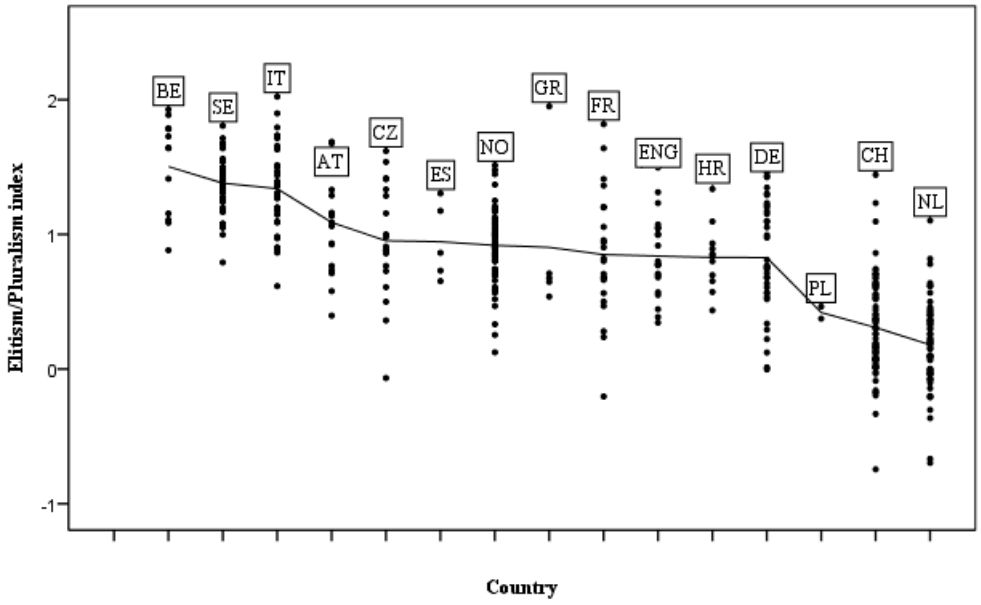
Instead of an interaction variable corresponding to the elite-pluralism dimension, a fifth variable measuring citizen contacts was included. One of the representative styles competing with party soldier is the delegate, a style that values the opinion of the voters higher than the will of the party. It is therefore reasonable to believe that the degree of interaction between the voters and their elected representatives is a factor for consideration when analysing the composition of representation styles on a council. The key variables identified as indicators for the councillors' contact patterns were thus the following:

- Councillors' interaction with the Mayor
- Councillors' interaction with the Executive Board
- Councillors' interaction with members of their own party group
- Councillors' interaction with civil servants
- Councillors' interaction with citizens (in the role as councillor)

As mentioned above, the data does not allow for advanced statistical inter- and intra-country analyses of the variables, since some countries in the data material are only represented by a few

municipalities. But it is still possible to obtain a general overview of country variations and Figures 2 and 3 present the results for single municipalities by country for one example of a power distribution indicator (the elitism/pluralism index) and one example of an interaction indicator (party group members). We should once again pay little attention here to countries where the number of municipalities represented is very low.

Figure 2: The degree of elitism in municipalities by country *(mean index values -4 - +4)*

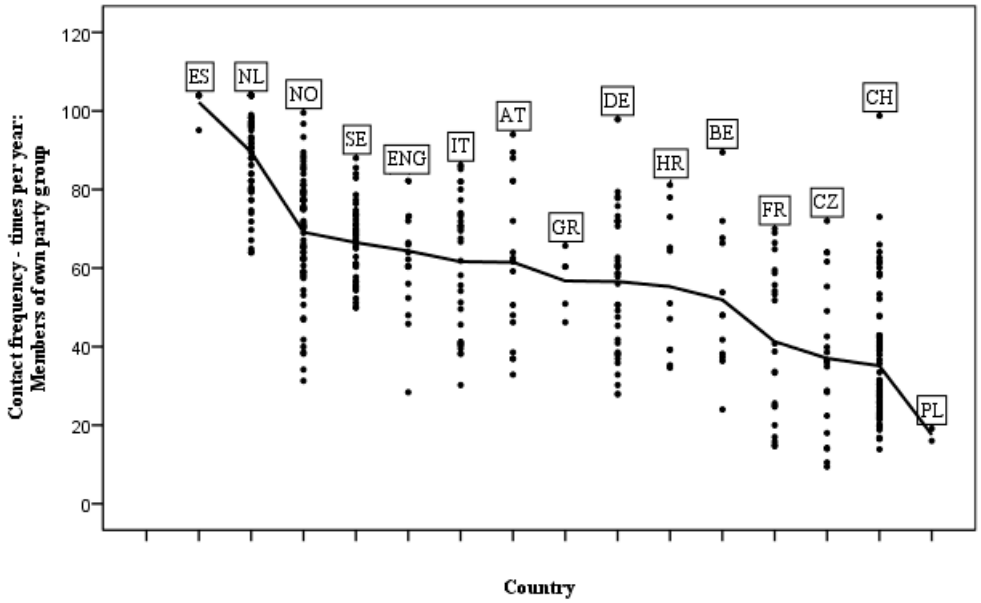


Comments: The dots in the graph indicate a value on an elitism/pluralism index for each municipality in the study. The index is based on the survey questions presented in Table 2. The influence of political actors was graded by the councillors on a five-grade scale, 0 No influence to 4 Very high influence. For each municipality, the respondents' perception of the level of influence for the Mayor, the President of the Council, the Executive Board was combined into a mean value index (potentially 0 - 4) and, from this index, the influence of single councillors (0-4) was subtracted to create a new index, potentially -4 - +4 (in reality minimum -0.7, maximum 2.0) Municipalities are grouped by country, and the countries are sorted by their overall mean value for the elitism/pluralism index as shown by the line. N = 428.

In Figure 2, the countries of Europe fall into three main groups: countries where municipalities were more elitist (Belgium, Sweden, and Italy and to some extent Austria), countries where municipalities were more pluralistic (the Netherlands, Switzerland and Poland) and the others that formed a middle group: (Czech Republic, Spain, Norway, Greece, France, England, Croatia and Germany). Even though there is a significant variation within most countries, the two extreme groups are quite distinct. There were only a few examples of municipalities within the elitist countries where the

distribution of influence was as decentralized as it is in the typical municipality in the pluralistic countries and vice versa. The variation in the middle group is much greater and in almost all of the countries in this group, there are examples of municipalities with an influence structure that would be normal in either of the two extreme groups.

Figure 3: Contact frequency between local councillors within party groups by country *(contacts per year, mean values 0 -104)*



Comments: The dots in the graph indicate the average number of times per year a councillor in each municipality in the study had contact with members of his or her own party group (See table 2). The answers were coded as follows: (almost) never=0, a few times a year =6, a few times a month =24 and a few times a week =104. Municipalities are grouped by country, and the countries are sorted by their overall mean value for intra-party contact frequency as shown by the line. N = 428.

In Figure 3, the results for the contact frequency between a councillor and his or her fellow party group members are shown. Two countries showed extreme values here, Spain (high level of contacts) and Poland (low level of contacts). Both of these countries were represented in the selection by only a few municipalities. After these, two countries followed with more cases in the analysis: The Netherlands (high level of contacts) and Switzerland (low level of contacts). However, it should be noted that there were quite a few Dutch municipalities where party group interaction was lower than was the case in some Swiss municipalities.

6. Analysis and results

It is now time to put the effects of the identified local constitutional institutions to a test. The test has to answer two main questions:

1. Does a municipality's status on the identified indicators of local institutional arrangements have any effect on the proportion of representation styles on the councils, and do bivariate effects remain in a multivariate analysis under control for formal constitutional models and city size?
2. Which set of explanatory variables are the most powerful when we try to explain variations in council representation styles: the formal constitutional models or the indicators of local constitutional settings?

In Table 4, the effects of ten indicators for the local constitutional settings are identified by regression analysis. The table shows both bivariate and multivariate effects (Model 1), on the percentage of party soldiers on the council, for each indicator. The three municipal typologies (Hesse and Sharpe, Mouritzen and Svara, and Heinelt and Hlepas) with their 12 categories are included in Model 2 as control variables. Hence, the remaining effects of the ten indicators in Model 2 are indicative of local informal factors, which are detectable and statistically confirmed when the formal constitutional settings are accounted for.

Municipal size is a well-established factor for consideration when analysing party politicisation (Kjaer and Elklit 2010). We know from Swedish studies that the number of inhabitants in a municipality is a potential explanatory factor for the representation style, and party soldiers appear to be more common in larger municipalities (Karlsson 2007; Gilljam et al. 2010). City size was therefore included as another control variable in Model 2.

In the bivariate analysis, four of the five influence indicators had a positive effect on the representation style on the council. Party soldiers were more numerous in municipalities where the Executive Board and the leading bureaucrats were particularly influential, and they were more common in municipalities where parties were stronger and the political elite was especially powerful in relation to the common councillors. The strength of the Mayor had no effect in the bivariate analysis. In the multivariate analysis of Model 1, where all five of the influence indicators were combined with the five indicators for the frequency of communication, the effects from the influence levels of the Executive Board and the bureaucrats were no longer significant, but the effects of party strength and the level of elitism/pluralism in the municipality remained undiminished.

Table 4: Effects of local constitutional settings on representation style *(bivariate effects and two models of multivariate regression)*

		Bivariate effects			Multivariate effects – Model 1			Multivariate effects – Model 2		
		B	Sig.	Adj. R^2	B	*β*	Sig.	B	*β*	Sig.
	Constant				-21.6	*0.00*		-64.8		***
Influence	The Mayor	0.4		0	-2.7	*-0.06*		1.1	*0.02*	
(scale 0–4)	The Executive Board	**11.4**	***	.04	3.4	*0.06*		**8.9**	*0.16*	***
	Parties	**15.6**	***	.07	**13.3**	*0.22*	***	5.3	*0.09*	
	Leading bureaucrats	**11.2**	***	.02	-3.5	*-0.05*		**-14.7**	*-0.21*	***
(Scale -4 – 4)	Elitism/Pluralism index	**12.0**	***	.08	**11.8**	*0.28*	***	**9.8**	*0.23*	***
Contacts	Mayor	**0.4**	***	.07	0.1	*0.07*		0.2	*0.10*	
(Scale 0–104)	Executive Board	**0.6**	***	.19	**0.3**	*0.23*	***	0.1	*0.09*	
	Party group	**0.4**	***	.15	**0.2**	*0.26*	***	**0.1**	*0.13*	*
	Civil servants	**0.2**	***	.03	0.1	*0.07*		0.2	*0.12*	
	Citizens	0.1		0	**-0.2**	*-0.22*	***	0.0	*0.00*	
Inhabitants (10 000s)		**0,1**	***	.04				0.1	*0.07*	
12 Municipal typologies (see Table 1)								*Accounted for*		
Adj. R^2					0.34			0.44		

Comments. Independent variables: influence and contact indicators: see Tables 1 and 2. Dependent variable: representation style – percentage 'Party soldiers' on council. Indicators for municipal typologies are included in Model 2 as dummy variables, but the B-values are omitted since the typology indicators are included as control variables and their individual effects and significance levels are irrelevant for this analysis. P-values: *** .001, ** .01, *.05. Bivariate analysis and model 1: N=428 municipalities, Model 2: N=417 municipalities (not Croatia).

Three of the contact frequency variables were very powerful explicators in the bivariate analysis. It was apparent that the percentage of party soldiers on the council was higher, where councillors were in frequent contact with the Mayor, the Executive Board and – to a lesser degree – the civil servants, and where the party group members were in touch more frequently. In the multivariate analysis (Model 1), the effects of the contact frequency between councillors and the Executive Board and party group members remained significant, if diminished. The effect of mayor and civil servant contacts became insignificant, but the effect of citizen contacts appeared instead. Party soldiers were fewer on councils where councillors communicated more with the citizens.

The answer to the first part of the first question, on whether there were any effects of the indicators for local constitutional settings on the representation style of the councillors, could be answered with a decisive yes.

The presumed effect of the control variable 'city size' on the proportion of party soldiers on a council was confirmed by the bivariate analysis: party soldiers are more common in larger municipalities and 'city size' explains 4 per cent of the variation in the dependent variable. Nevertheless, this effect does not remain significant in the multiple Model 2. The explanation for this may be that municipalities are larger in some, and smaller in other, of the municipal types. Some of the differences in representation style between municipal types may indeed be the result of differences in size of their average municipalities, but in this particular analysis, it is impossible to separate the effect of size from municipal type.

An earlier analysis (see Table 1 above) revealed that the typologies of Hesse and Sharpe, Mouritzen and Svara, and Heinelt and Hlepas as independent variables together were able to explain 28 per cent of the variation in the dependent variable. This should be compared to the 34 per cent explained by the ten indicators for local institutional arrangements in Model 1. Thus, the answer to the second question is, the local indicators were better predicators for the representation style than the combined municipal typologies, but the difference was not very large.
When included in the same analysis, together with city size, the adjusted R^2 amounted to 0.44. This means that of the 44 per cent explained variation, 16 percentage points derive solely from the indicators for local institutions, 10 from the municipal typologies plus city size, whereas 18 points are common between the two groups of variables.

In Model 2 of the analysis, we can see which indicators for local constitutional settings have independent effects after control for municipal typology. For example, we observed that the effects of party influence and citizen contacts on the representation style disappeared in Model 2. It should be underlined that this does not mean that these factors are unimportant but rather that they are inter-correlated with municipal system variables, or they are possible intermediate variables between municipal systems and representation style.

In the results for Model 2, we also discovered some positive answers to the second part of the first question, whether any of the local indicators for local constitutional settings have effects independent of municipal type. The most striking result was the effect of the elitism/pluralism indicator, which was the local factor that contributed most to the model's R^2. We can now conclude that, independent of the municipal system to which a municipality belongs, an elitist structure has a positive effect on the proportion of party soldiers on the council. An influential Executive Board and frequent contacts within the party group also increase the number of party soldiers on the council.

A remarkable result in Model 2 was that the indicator for bureaucracy influence returned as a significant factor, but now the effect was reversed, compared to the bivariate analysis! When controlled for municipal system and city size, a strong bureaucracy diminished the number of party soldiers on the council.

7. Conclusions

In this article, ten indicators for local constitutional settings for European local government have been identified. To a degree, the variations between different municipalities for these indicators were explained by the municipal system to which they belong; but the variations within each system were shown to be substantial. In practice, the constitutional settings, in terms of interaction and the power distribution for a given municipality, may have more similarities with a municipality in another country, with an entirely different local government system, than with the 'typical' municipality of its own country. These inter-municipal variations are indicative of the large extent to which constitutional settings in European local government are formed locally and informally. The aim of this article was to investigate if, and to what degree, such informal constitutional settings can explain variations in the role perceptions on local councils.

The results from the analysis have demonstrated that indicators for local constitutional settings can indeed contribute to explaining the occurrence of a crucial role interpretation in the local councils in Europe: the 'party soldier' representation style. It is difficult to be precise about the relative degree of the explanatory powers of formal and informal institutions, but the results of this analysis suggest that informal institutions are at least as important as formal institutions.

One important result in the analysis concerns the role of parties in the constitutional setting of a municipality. The strength of the parties in a local political system, as well as extensive intra-party contacts, increases the number of party soldiers on a council. This is not surprising, since it is easy to understand why councillors are more dependent on their parties in municipalities where these parties are influential and active. Nevertheless, large parts of these party effects are tied to formal municipal constitutions and do not show any statistically significant effects when controlled for such factors. With Helmke and Levitsky (2004), formal and informal party related institutions are complementing or substitute each other.

Another result was that in municipalities that could be described as elitist, rather than pluralist, the ideal for the representation style on the council is affected. Strong and present executives

seem to result in more party soldiers on local councils. A possible explanation for this is that when the local constitutional setting in a municipality is an established order, where individual councillors are weaker in relation to the top leaders, they form collectives and do not act as individuals with a personal mandate but rather as a member of their group.

The multivariate analysis also demonstrated that, when controlled for municipal type, a strong bureaucracy might decrease the number of party soldiers on a council. A possible explanation for this is that in any given system, where bureaucrats have gained influence, an administrative rather than a political logic may dominate the municipality and reduce party competition. If local circumstances are increasingly influenced by management organisation philosophy, the organisation of municipalities can be impacted by administrative logic to such a degree that they allow less space for ideological debates and discussion (Jonsson, 2008).

Finally, a word of caution is needed regarding the causal relationship between the constitutional setting in a political and democratic system and the actors' normative notions of democracy within this system. Modern institutional theory considers values and norms to be institutions just as valid institutions as rules and regulations of a regulative nature (March and Olsen 1989). Could it be so that the actors' role interpretation is the explanation for the constitutional arrangements, rather than the other way around? My suggestion is that the main results of this article are easier to understand as institutional effects on the councillors' role interpretations. It is not difficult to find convincing explanations for why party soldiers are more common in elitist municipalities, and where the parties are strong and the bureaucracy weak. It is more difficult to explain why the power structure of local actors would be affected by the councillors' abstract democratic notions. However, in the end it is not possible to distinguish fully the values of a constitution from its regulations and constraints.

The lesson to be taken from this article is that if we want to explain why role interpretations on local councils vary in different contexts, we not only need to consider to which formal system a municipality belongs but also the informal constitutional setting for each municipality. Regardless of whether the institutional arrangements change the democratic notions of the councillors or vice versa, the student of local government must never forget to place the municipality as such in focus and unveil its hidden constitution.

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