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The Anatomy and Drivers of Local Autonomy in a European Perspective

Harald Baldersheim, Andreas Ladner and Anders Lidström

Making democracy work is a continuous struggle (Putnam 1993). This also goes for local democracy (Wollmann 1999), including the maintenance of the autonomy of local government, which is the basis for local democracy.¹

The autonomy of local government varies across countries but there is little understanding of why systems of local government develop in such different ways. The purpose of this article is to contribute to such an understanding. The variation in local autonomy as well as the lack of explanations for it is remarkable since local autonomy is a cherished ideal for local government in liberal-democratic societies. Indeed, local autonomy is one of the constituent features of local government, perhaps the most fundamental feature. Local government is of course established by the state and serves the state both literally and in a wider sense. Yet, without some measure of autonomy from the state local democracy is meaningless — there will be no policy space for decision-makers and no choice for citizens. Arguably, local autonomy is also a driver of efficiency in local government affairs through the adaptive opportunities to local circumstances made possible by autonomous decision-makers accountable to local citizens as tax payers and consumers.

1 The anatomy of a concept

The value of autonomous local government is deeply imbued in the institutional structures of European states. Indeed, it can be argued that local autonomy is a core European value. It is embedded in the European cooperative structures such

¹ This chapter builds on and extends ideas presented in Ladner et al. (2016) and Lidström and Baldersheim (2016).

as the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union. The CoE has established a subordinate body, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, to follow up the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government that has been signed by all the 47 member states. The EU also recognises the importance of local and regional government in European states through its Committee of the Regions that enables local and regional authorities of the member states to influence decision-making at the European level.

The question why local government and local autonomy is such a vital concern to European states and the overarching European bodies is an interesting subject in its own right. The concern has, of course, historical roots that may go back to the jealously guarded independent position of many cities from the Middle Ages on. In Europe, the cities predate the states. Furthermore, through the Council of Europe and the European Charter of Local Self-Government the idea of local autonomy is connected to the idea of Human Rights and the need for intermediate bodies between the state and the individual to protect the individual. This idea received new salience in the wake of WWII. The idea may also be related to the concept of subsidiarity. For instance, Article 4.3 of the Charter of Local Self-Government states that “[p]ublic responsibilities shall generally be exercised, in preference, by those authorities which are closest to the citizen”. Originally a concern of the Catholic Church the concept was also picked up by the EU and made it into a corner stone of its institutional structures. Thus, the valuation of local autonomy is a convergence of a series of concerns of varying origins.

Nevertheless, in comparison to the volumes of research on local democracy and efficiency local autonomy has received little attention in the scholarly literature. Apart from a few landmark publications of the 1980s and 1990s (Clark 1984; Page and Goldsmith 1987; Page 1991) the interest in the subject did not pick up until the 2000s when data bases became available for comparative research (Sellers and Lidström 2007; Vetter 2007; Wollmann et al. 2010; Ivanyna and Shah 2014; Do Vale 2015).

How is the concept of local government autonomy to be conceptualized to be suitable for empirical research? Three catchwords keep recurring in approaches to local autonomy: freedom, influence and capacity. The first of these is exemplified by Clark (1984) and often takes a *top-down* view on local autonomy. Clark’s approach is largely a legal one, defining local autonomy as a combination of competences to act granted by the state and legal protection from state intervention. Political scientists tend to be more concerned with the degree of influence local authorities have over policy-making in their domain, including opportunities to exert influence at higher levels of government (Page 1991). Others have also included the capacities

possessed by local authorities to act in response to citizen demands, such as financial resources or human power and expertise (Sellers and Lidström 2007).

2 Operationalization

This article draws on a recently established database on local autonomy in European countries². The data base reflects the three approaches just mentioned but operationalizes the concept in a more detailed manner (Ladner et al. 2016) through eleven variables: institutional depth and legal protection, policy scope and discretion, financial autonomy (including taxation powers and borrowing rights), organizational autonomy, and access to higher-level governments (see appendix for coding details).

Institutional depth: The core of local government is the possession of freedoms that allow local decision-makers to respond to the collective preferences of local citizens, including the opportunity to take on new tasks in response to new citizen preferences, according to how local needs and political conditions might change over time. Consequently, the freedom to take on new tasks is a central aspect of local autonomy.

Legal protection: Legal protection refers to remedies of a legal nature open to local authorities in case of conflicts with other branches of government, such as for example constitutional clauses or recourse to administrative courts.

Policy scope: This variable measures the range of functions for which local government is responsible. The idea is, generally, that the more tasks allocated to local government, the greater is local government autonomy.

Effective political discretion: Effective political discretion denotes the space for independent local decision-making on various aspects of tasks that have been

2 In 2014, the European Commission’s Directorate for Urban and Regional Affairs launched a call for tenders to create a “Self-rule Index for Local Authorities”. Conducted from October 2014 to November 2015, the study analyses and reports change in the extent of decentralization in 39 European countries from 1990 to 2014. In order to deal with the different local units existing at the local level as well as the existing institutional asymmetries, a team of researchers familiar with the respective countries was brought together. The experts were requested to code their countries on the basis of a coding scheme which was developed by the project leaders and the country group coordinators. The common standardized code book for the eleven variables draws upon theoretical considerations and empirical studies, and especially the methodology of the Regional Autonomy Index (Hooghe et al. 2010, 2016).

allocated to local government. Since the space for local decision-making may vary considerably from task to task, also within countries, the scoring of local government on this variable had to proceed task by task.

Fiscal autonomy: This indicator refers to the taxation powers of local government. To what extent do municipalities have the power to impose taxes on their citizens? In some countries, local government can only set the base and rate of minor taxes or does not have the powers to decide on tax matters at all, whereas in other countries local government sets the base and rate of several major taxes.

Financial transfer system: In all countries, central government provides financial support to local government in one way or another. The precise features of the transfer system make a great deal of difference to local autonomy, however. Unconditional transfers or grants are generally seen as more conducive to autonomy than conditional or earmarked grants.

Financial self-reliance: This indicator gauges the extent to which the sources of revenue are of a local nature rather than coming from the central government or through redistribution mechanisms. The more locally financed local government is, the more financially self-reliant it is and the greater its autonomy since access to local sources to finance the local budget reduces dependence on other levels of government.

Borrowing autonomy: Local authorities often borrow money to realize investment projects decided by local councils. However, for reasons of national policy, central governments normally impose restrictions of a more or less stringent nature on local government borrowing. The more stringent these restrictions are, the more constrained local autonomy may be said to be.

Organizational autonomy: The indicator measures the extent to which local authorities may decide certain features of their own political and administrative systems or hire staff on conditions framed locally.

Administrative supervision: In order to secure compliance with national policies or to ensure the rights of citizens, in all countries, decisions and service provisions of local government are supervised by agents of the central government. The formats and intensity of supervision vary a great deal, however, from detailed scrutiny of the merits of local operations to reviews of the legality of decisions, and local autonomy is circumscribed accordingly.

Access to higher-level governments: The measurement of local autonomy also takes into account the access of local government to higher levels of decision-making. This may include channels of formal access of local authorities to national arenas of legislation as well as less formal procedures of consultation, provided they are of a fairly regular nature.

In addition to ideas from the literature mentioned above the coding scheme reflects the central concerns of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and also builds on and adds to the one developed by Hooghe et al. (2010) in their study of regional autonomy. The data base covers the years from 1990 until 2014. The focus of the coding is the lowest level of local government in the respective countries, often referred to as municipalities, communes or *Gemeinden*. In federal or regionalized countries responsibility for local government is mostly placed at the *Land*, canton or provincial or similar level and local autonomy and other features of local government may vary from one province to another. In such cases, each province, etc. is coded separately and an overall country score is calculated taking into account the population weight of the respective provinces.

3 Findings – patterns of local autonomy

The eleven variables, when added up, constitute the Local Autonomy Index (LA index). Figure 1 shows how 39 European countries scored on the Local Autonomy Index in 2014. The theoretical scale ranges from 0 to 37.

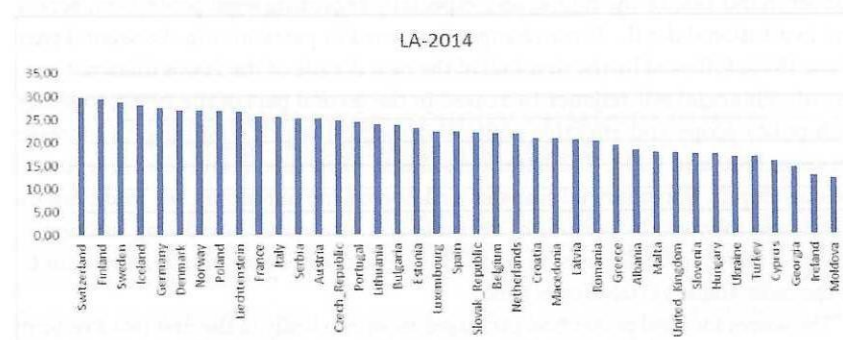


Fig. 1 Local Autonomy Index: Values for 39 European countries 2014. Scale = 0-37. (Copyright)

At the top end of the ranking a group of Nordic and Mid-European countries is found and at the lower end a mixture of English-speaking countries (the UK and Ireland), and Balkan, Black Sea and East-European countries. As mentioned above

there is considerable variation and the position of some countries is baffling, especially at the lower end. The grouping of countries does not correspond precisely to any existing typology of local government systems. For example, what do Moldova, Ireland and Cyprus have in common apart from a low score on the LA index? In the upper echelon, on the other hand, all five Nordic countries are found, which confirms the relatively strong and independent position of local government in this part of Europe (Loughlin et al. 2011). Interestingly, a post-communist democracy such as Poland is also close to this league of high-flyers, which indicates the opportunities for development and change in this regard. In the section below, we take a closer look at the changes.

Figure 2 demonstrates how all countries combined scored on the respective variables in 1990 and 2014. Between 1990 and 2014, there has been an increase of local autonomy on almost all variables measured, the only exception being borrowing autonomy within the state, especially as far as legal and institutional aspects are concerned. The mean value for institutional depth increased by 0.7 and the one for legal protection by 0.5.³ The access to higher level decisions has also increased by 0.5. As for the financial aspects, the increase is considerably lower. The decrease of borrowing autonomy has to be seen against the background of the financial crisis of 2007-08.

The most conspicuous changes have taken place on the variables in the upper and left hand side of the figure, and especially regarding legal protection, access and institutional depth. These changes happened in particular in the second part of the 1990s followed by the first half of the new decade of the 2000s (data not presented). Financial self-reliance increased in the second part of the 1990s, together with policy scope and effective political discretion which continued to increase between 2000 and 2004. The latter period also experienced an increase in institutional depth. For financial transfer and borrowing autonomy, we find periods of increase followed by periods of decrease and vice versa. Borrowing autonomy, however, seems to be decreasing since 2005. Fiscal autonomy, finally, turns out to be the most stable variable over time.

The scores for legal protection increased most markedly in the first two five-year periods (data not presented). Administrative supervision increased in the first and to a lesser extent in the third period and central and regional access in the second and the third period. Since 2005, the overall picture has remained quite stable, with a slight tendency towards a decrease.

³ Variables are standardized on a scale from 0 to 4.

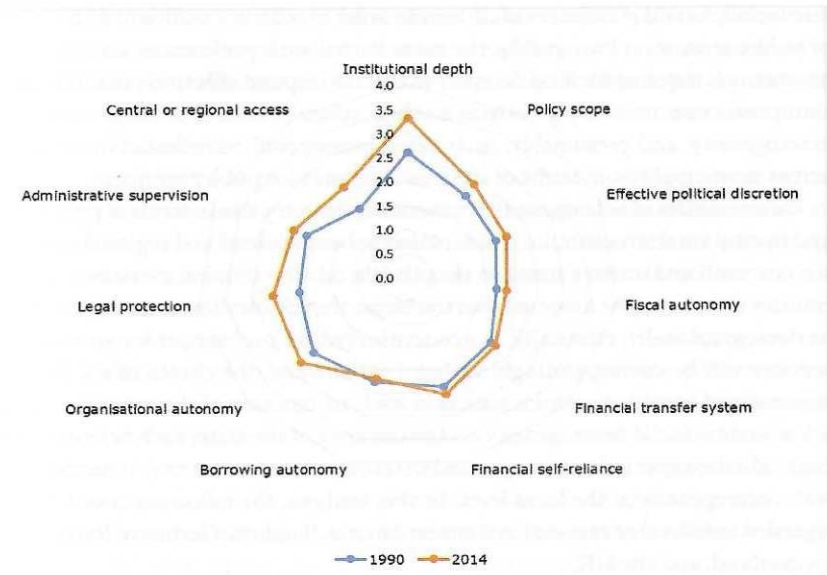


Fig. 2 The eleven variables measuring local autonomy (1990 and 2014) N1990 = 34; N2014 = 39. (Copyright)

4 Accounting for cross-country variations in local autonomy – hypotheses and results

How are we to account for the variation in local autonomy? With the intense learning among municipalities going on across European borders regarding good governance and with the Council of Europe's Congress of Local Authorities as a guardian and advocate of local autonomy one would have thought there would have been more convergence by now. Nevertheless, variations persist.

Here, five potential sources of this variation are explored: the heterogeneity of states, traditions of local government, the scale of local government, the zeal and efficiency of national governments as institutional modernizers, and citizen trust in local government.

Our first hypothesis (H1) relates the variation of local autonomy to the decentralization theorem of Oates (1972) and the characteristics of European countries. The theorem suggests that decentralized government is useful for responding to

territorially varied preferences of citizens in order to achieve an efficient distribution of public resources. Presumably, the more varied such preferences are, the more autonomy is required for local decision-makers to respond effectively in this regard. European countries vary greatly as to their ethnic, cultural or socio-economic heterogeneity, and presumably, such heterogeneity will be reflected in variation across municipalities in terms of citizens' demands for public services.

Two measures of heterogeneity are used here: country size in terms of population and institutional structure, i.e. a distinction between federal and regional states on the one hand and unitary states on the other hand. The simplest measure is that of country size: it may be assumed that the larger the country the more varied it will be demographically, ethnically, or economically, and preferences for government services will be correspondingly varied. Furthermore, the choice of a federal or regionalized constitution for a state is in itself recognition of the existence of political and/or social heterogeneity on the territory of the state; such heterogeneity could also be expected to be expressed in terms of local autonomy to further deal with heterogeneity at the local level. In this analysis, the following countries are regarded as federal or regionalized states: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK.

However, in federal and regional states local government is usually the responsibility of the regional level. Therefore, an alternative hypothesis in this regard could be that in federal and regionalized states semi-autonomous government institutions at the regional level absorb heterogeneity and that further autonomy at the local level is not needed. Consequently, such states could have less autonomous local government than other states.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) is inspired by new institutionalist theories, and the historical version in particular (March and Olsen 1985, 1998). This version emphasizes traditions and the path dependency of institutions. Such traditions can also be expected to influence the institutions of local government and the level of local autonomy in particular. Long traditions are not easily broken. We draw on some well-known typologies of local government systems for operationalizing local government traditions (Hesse and Sharpe 1991; Bennett 1993; John 2001). Here, we have singled out three types or groups of countries that presumably represent different traditions: the Nordic countries, the Napoleonic group, and post-communist democracies. We have already noted above that Nordic countries tend to have higher levels of autonomy than many other countries, but not uniformly so, and also other countries are in the group of high-flyers, while rather surprising patterns are found in other parts of the scale. We expect that the most conspicuous contrast to the Nordic countries will be the post-communist group. Here, the communist tradition of centralism seems to linger, often with unclear division of functions between central and local

government and frequent state interventions (Illner 2010). The South European countries may be found somewhere in between regarding levels of local autonomy; in these countries public administration is shaped by the Napoleonic heritage of hierarchy, legalism and close central government control, which may contribute to medium to low levels of autonomy.

Hypothesis 3 (H3) relates local autonomy to the scale of local government in the respective countries. In the academic literature (Dahl and Tufte 1973; Denters et al. 2014) as well as among decision-makers in many countries there is an on-going debate on what the appropriate size of local government units is. According to Dahl and Tufte, there is a trade-off to be made between two equally important democratic qualities: system capacity and citizen effectiveness. A preference for greater system capacities tends to lead to larger local government units, while a preference for citizen effectiveness favors smaller units. National reformers of local government often prefer more system capacity (Baldersheim and Rose 2010). The hypothesis in this regard is that the smaller the scale of local government, the more reluctant central governments will be to grant extensive powers to local government or to entrust it with important functions; the reluctance may be due to sheer practical difficulties that small municipalities will have in carrying out substantial tasks or it may be due to fear of local improprieties in small communities where everybody knows everybody else.

Hypothesis 4 (H4) picks up the thread from H3 but focuses more directly on the efforts of reformers of the scale of local government. Reducing the number of municipalities as part of a modernizing platform has been the objective of many European governments over the last decades (Baldersheim and Rose 2010; Swianiewicz 2010). Such efforts are often accompanied by promises to delegate power and extend functions to local government. Consequently, H4 states that the more national governments have succeeded in reducing the number of municipalities over the last decades the higher their score on the LA index.

Hypothesis 5 (H5) shifts the perspective to citizens and suggests that local autonomy is a function of citizen trust and/or interest in local government. In countries where citizens have high confidence in local government national governments may be more willing to delegate functions to the local level than in countries with low levels of citizen confidence. The data for exploring this hypothesis come from a Eurobarometer survey of citizens about their confidence in the elected bodies at local and regional levels in 30 European countries in 2012.

Tab. 1 Accounting for local autonomy. Correlates of local autonomy (Local Autonomy Index 2012). Pearson's correlation coefficients

	Correlation coefficients	N
H1a Country size (population log)	,030	39
H1b Regional or federal state (0-1)	,205	39
H2a Nordic group (5 Nordic countries – 0-1)	,495**	39
H2b Napoleonic group (4 countries Fr, Sp, It, Port – 0-1)	,137	39
H2c Post-communist group (17 countries – 0-1)	-,317*	39
H3 Municipal size – mean population 2012 log	-,121	39
H4 Pct. change in number of local authorities 1997 – 2012	-,069	39
H5 Citizen trust in local and regional authorities, Euro-barometer (2012) QA13.6	,526**	30

Levels of significance: **.01, *.05

These hypotheses are explored in table 1. With few cases ($N = 39-30$) it is difficult to test them in a rigorous way statistically. We investigate the suggested relationships through correlation analysis, which of course indicates correlates only, not causal paths. Nevertheless, the correlation coefficients may provide clues as to whether we are barking up the right trees or not.

So far, the results indicate that two of the five hypotheses may be pointing in the right direction regarding the understanding of variation of local autonomy. The high correlation coefficient with the Nordic group suggests that an element of path dependency is at work. The commonality of local government systems in these countries seems to include high levels of autonomy, a feature that has also been picked up by previous research. The negative sign of the correlation coefficient for the post-communist group of countries is also as expected, although the relationship is weaker than the one with the Nordic groups. There is however almost no correlation with the Napoleonic or Southern group of France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. They do not share a particular level of local autonomy and may thus not constitute a common tradition at all, or their tradition is not related to a particular level of local autonomy.

As suggested by H5 local autonomy is also related to citizen trust. The higher the trust the more autonomy for local government. This is the strongest relationship of all. We hasten to add that, of course, we cannot proclaim this to be a causal relationship, but again, we think this relationship is worth exploring further in order to better understand the interaction between citizen trust and institutional development.

It is, furthermore, highly interesting in view of ongoing amalgamation reforms to find that there is very little relationship between levels of autonomy and the scale of local government (H3). Size is of little importance in this regard. Indeed, if there is a relationship it points in the direction of a negative connection, that is, more autonomy in countries with small municipalities. It is in fact puzzling that the average size of municipalities matters so little.

It is also puzzling that modernization efforts are not related to (higher) levels of autonomy (H4). Countries that have reduced their number of municipalities (measured in relative terms) over the last fifteen years or so, have not granted more autonomy to their municipalities than countries where the number has remained stable. Thus, one may wonder why they bother to pursue amalgamation strategies.

There is also little support for the idea that heterogeneous states grant more autonomy to local government than homogeneous states do. State size is (interestingly) not related to local autonomy. The correlation with state type (federal & regional versus unitary) is somewhat stronger but does not point to a convincingly tight relationship. Presumably, complex state structures such as these absorb heterogeneity through their institutional structures at the regional levels as the alternative hypothesis suggested.

So we are left with two potential explanations of levels of local autonomy — citizen confidence and path dependency; the latter is indicated in particular by the contrasting correlation coefficients of the Nordic and the post-communist groups. The question is, are the two factors substitutes for each other?

In table 2, the regression analysis using the country groups and citizen trust as independent variables shows both to contribute substantially towards explaining local autonomy. Trust is the primary factor and contributes more consistently than the country groups do. On the whole the combination of trust and country group explains around 25-30 per cent of the variation (more in the combination trust/Napoleonic, less in the combination trust/post-communist). Another way of expressing the result is to say that when controlling for variations in citizen trust local government type or tradition explains some variation in local autonomy, or that the development of local autonomy is to some extent path dependent. Yet another way to state the result is to say that local autonomy is about more than

technically adjusting institutions to achieve more independent local government. You also need citizen confidence to get there.

Tab. 2 Local autonomy, citizen trust and local government type. Regression analysis. Beta coefficients. Dependent variable: Local autonomy 2012. N=30.

Citizen trust in local and regional authorities	.523**	.376*	.684***	.473**
Nordic group		.319(*)		
Napoleonic group			.405**	
Post-communist group				-.183
Adj. R ²	.250	.308	.372	.254

Levels of significance: ***.001, **.01, *.05

5 How to get to Denmark?

The ranking reported in figure 1 shows the Nordic countries along with Switzerland to be among the most autonomous local government systems in Europe while for example many of the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe are lagging behind. The measurement of local autonomy specified above demonstrates the technicalities behind high levels of local government autonomy, that is, how it is technically achieved. But the further question that needs to be addressed, and which is only partially answered here is, to quote Francis Fukuyama's famous phrase: "How to get to Denmark?" by which he meant how to achieve a stable state of good governance, which his analysis found Denmark to exemplify particularly well (Fukuyama 2014). If one thinks that local government autonomy is part of what good governance should be like, and this particular aspect of it is highly path dependent, then getting there may be easier said than done.

In a recent report for the Congress of Local and Regional authorities on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government deficiencies were identified in a number of countries. Many countries failed to live up especially to the standards set out in articles 4 and 9, i.e. articles specifying norms regarding decision-making powers and financial resources (Congress 2016, 21). Decision-making was often restricted by excessive controls from central government and financial resources were inadequate in view of tasks allocated to local government. New democracies of the Black Sea regions (former Soviet republics) especially had some way to go in this regard.

Nevertheless, our analysis has also shown that most post-communist countries have evolved towards greater local autonomy over the last 25 years. Poland in particular has moved in this direction, with scoring results overall in the top bracket. So perhaps Poland may show the way to Denmark? This is what needs to be investigated next.

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Methodological Appendix

Local Authority Index – Coding Instructions

Institutional depth	0 local authorities can only perform mandated tasks; 1 local authorities can choose from a very narrow, predefined scope of tasks; 2 local authorities are explicitly autonomous and can choose from a wide scope of predefined tasks; 3 local authorities are free to take on any new tasks (residual competencies) not assigned to other levels of government
Policy scope	Not at all; partly; fully responsible for: Education, social assistance, health, land use, police, caring functions, housing, public transport (scales: 0-2, 0-1)*
Effective political discretion	No, some, or real authoritative decision-making in: Education, social assistance, health, land use, police, caring functions, housing, public transport (scales: 0-2, 0-1)*
Fiscal autonomy	0 local authorities do not set base and rate of any tax; 1 local authorities set base or rate of minor taxes; 2 local authorities set rate of one major tax (personal income, corporate, value added, property or sales tax) under restrictions stipulated by higher levels of government; 3 local authorities set rate of one major tax (personal income, corporate, value added, property or sales tax) with few or no restrictions; 4 local authorities set base and rate of more than one major tax (personal income, corporate, value added, property or sales tax)
Financial transfer system	0 conditional transfers are dominant (unconditional = 0-40% of total transfers); 1 there is largely a balance between conditional and unconditional financial transfers (unconditional = 40-60%); 2 unconditional financial transfers are dominant (unconditional = 60-80%); 3 nearly all transfers are unconditional (unconditional = 80-100%)
Financial self-reliance	0 own sources yield less than 10% of total revenues; 1 own sources yield 10-25%; 2 own sources yield 25-50%; 3 own sources yield more than 50%
Borrowing autonomy	0 local authorities cannot borrow; 1 local authorities may borrow under prior authorization by higher-level governments and with one or more of the following restrictions: a. golden rule (e. g. no borrowing to cover current account deficits), b. no foreign borrowing or borrowing from the regional or central bank only, c. no borrowing above a ceiling, absolute level of subnational indebtedness, maximum debt-service ratio for new borrowing or debt brake mechanism, d. borrowing is limited to specific purposes; 2 local authorities may borrow without prior authorization and under one or more of a), b), c) or d); 3 local authorities may borrow without restriction imposed by higher-level authorities

Organizational autonomy	Local executive and election system; 0 local executives are appointed by higher-level authorities and local authorities cannot determine core elements of their political systems (electoral districts, number of seats, electoral system); 1 executives are elected by the municipal council or directly by citizens; 2 executives are elected by the citizens or the council and the municipality may decide some elements of the electoral system Staff and local structures — local authorities can: Hire their own staff (0-0.5); Fix the salary of their employees (0-0.5); Choose their organizational structure (0-0.5); Establish legal entities and municipal enterprises (0-0.5)
Legal protection	0 no legal remedy for the protection of local autonomy exists; 1 constitutional clauses or other statutory regulations protect local self-government; 2 local authorities have recourse to the judicial system to settle disputes with higher authorities (e.g. through constitutional courts, administrative courts or tribunals, or ordinary courts); 3 remedies of types 1 and 2 above, plus other means that protect local autonomy such as e.g. listing of all municipalities in the constitution or the impossibility to force them to merge
Administrative supervision	0 administrative supervision reviews legality as well as merits/efficiency of municipal decisions; 1 administrative supervision covers details of accounts and spending priorities; 2 administrative supervision only aims at ensuring compliance with law (legality of local decisions); 3 there is very limited administrative supervision
Central or regional access	0 local authorities are never consulted by higher level governments and there are no formal mechanisms of representation; 1 local authorities are consulted and/or have access to higher-level decision-making through formal representation but influence is limited; 2 local authorities are regularly consulted through permanent consultation channels and have substantial influence; 3 local authorities are either consulted or have access to higher-level decision-making through formal representation; and substantial influence

*Further coding details were specified — not presented here; see Ladner et al. (2016).

Die Organisation kommunaler Dienstleistungen

Befunde aus einigen europäischen Ländern¹

Christoph Reichard und Giuseppe Grossi

1 Einleitung

Während Kommunen früher die Dienstleistungen an ihre Bürger häufig direkt und unmittelbar mithilfe ihrer eigenen Verwaltung erbracht haben, ist die Organisationslandschaft kommunaler Leistungen seit einigen Jahren vielfältiger geworden. Kommunen bedienen sich bei der Leistungserbringung vermehrt eigener Kommunalunternehmen, arbeiten mit anderen Kommunen zusammen resp. betreiben mit diesen gemeinsame Unternehmen, beziehen private Partner in die Leistungserbringung ein oder lagern Leistungen teilweise oder vollständig auf private Dienstleister aus. Insofern verfügen Kommunen heutzutage über beachtliche Wahlmöglichkeiten bei der Organisation ihrer bürgerbezogenen Leistungen. In diesem Beitrag wollen wir mit Blick auf eine Reihe europäischer Länder die Verbreitung einzelner Organisationsformen der Leistungserbringung aufzeigen, die Spezifika der Organisationsgestaltung in diesen Ländern darstellen, und einige Trends und Wirkungen der beobachteten Strukturen darstellen und bewerten.

Da wir nicht alle europäischen Länder erfassen können, konzentrieren wir uns in diesem Beitrag auf die drei deutschsprachigen Länder sowie auf Italien, Estland, Finnland und Schweden. Immerhin sind wir damit in der Lage, in unsere Analyse Italien als ein südeuropäisches Land mit ausgeprägter napoleonischer Staats- und Verwaltungstradition, die drei mitteleuropäischen Länder Deutschland, Österreich und Schweiz, die beiden nordeuropäischen Länder Finnland und Schweden sowie

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