Urban Network Governance and the Role Perceptions of the European City Councillors

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Abstract

This paper assesses the implications of governance networks as a new mode of political steering on the influence and the role perceptions of the European city councillors. Drawing on two international research projects – on the one hand a survey on European mayors (Bäck/Heinelt/Magnier 2006) and on the other hand a study on European city councillors (“MAELG” project) – the broad hypotheses are tested if governance networks pose a threat to elected politicians and therefore to representative democracy as such (1) and if the councillors consequently adapt their role behaviour by placing emphasis on metagovernance (2).

The findings partly corroborate the hypotheses. Apparently, the design and the composition of governance networks matter to a large extent. Networks including business actors appear rather exclusive regarding local councillors. The parliamentarians perceive their scope of power as being narrower with stronger business networks. On the contrary, civic networks employ an inclusive approach and seem to be democratically anchored by involving local councillors. However, these relations vary considerably in different local government systems (Hesse/Sharpe 1991; Mourtizen/Svara 2002).

Regarding the role perceptions of the councillors, there is no evident adaptation to the changing political environment. The metagoverning role only prevails in inclusive network settings. So, the democratic drawbacks of business networks are not rectified by metagoverning councillors. This finding seems alarming from a democratic perspective.
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1 Introduction

The state as a single actor is not able to face the dynamic and complex problems of our times. It needs the knowledge, the resources and the support of private actors. Hierarchical steering is therefore being replaced by a horizontal mode of collective decision-making in networks of public, semi-public and private actors. This shift “from government to governance” is suggested by numerous comparative studies detecting the rise of new forms of political steering (see e.g. Bekkens et al. 2007; Denters/Rose 2005; Klok/Denters 2005; Vetter/Kersting 2003).

Network governance constitutes a particular mode of governance and focuses on the interactions between multiple interdependent, but autonomous actors in formal and informal networks (see Sørensen/Torfing 2007a). Regarding the democratic performance of these governance networks, the governance theorists’ points of view differ considerably. Some authors see networks as promising approaches to deal with complex policy issues and to make the political decision-making process more efficient. Thereby, they stress the fact that output-oriented legitimacy is being strengthened by network governance. The contrasting view points at the sinking level of input-oriented legitimacy and regards networks as a threat to democratic institutions and to the representative democracy as such (see Edelenbos el al. 2010; Sørensen 2006).

Within the theoretic frame of network governance, the present paper focuses on the role and the behaviour of the European city councillor. Presumably, the shift from government to governance has made it more difficult for parliamentarians to exercise sovereign rule. Case study results suggest that network governance indeed marginalizes politicians and consequently weakens representative democracy (see e.g. Sørensen 2006). Benz (1998) and Papadopoulos (2004) observed a similar development and assessed a loss of power of the local council due the increasing weight of public-private networks. Therefore, network governance theorists call for a new role for councillors: the sovereign ruler must become a metagovernor (Sørensen 2006: 98).

In the present paper, I try to assess in a first step if governance networks are indeed incompatible with representative democracy and the formal institution of a parliament. Are city councillors excluded from network structures in local politics and do they thereby experience a loss of power? Do governance networks indeed constitute a threat to representative democracy by marginalizing elected politicians?

As a second step, the role perception of the city councillors will be investigated. Have the European councillors already adopted a new role as metagovernors and broadened their leadership repertoire? Do they perceive their role as defining the overall political objectives and by shaping
the decision-making processes in networks or do they rather stick to their narrowly defined role as sovereign controllers of the public administration?

The analysis implements a cross-sectional approach comparing thirteen European countries and using the data from two international research projects. The broad data set creates the opportunity to study the formulated research questions quantitatively on a large scale. To measure the level and the design of urban network governance, I draw on a survey on the European mayors (Bäck/Heinelt/Magnier 2006). The aim of the so-called “Political Leaders in European cities” study is not only to contribute to a better understanding of the evolving role of elected officials in different contemporary Western democracies, but also to elaborate comparisons. It was conducted in 2003 and comprises approx. 2’700 cities with more than 10’000 inhabitants in 17 European countries. To capture on the other hand the power and role perceptions of the parliamentarians, a study on the European city councillors will be considered. This survey regarding “Municipal Assemblies in European Local Governance in Change” (MAELG) was carried out in 2008/2009 and comprises approx. 12’200 local councillors in 16 countries. As only 13 countries1 are represented in both data sets, the number of councillors in the analysis reduces to 9’344. To further investigate differences in the functioning of governance networks and the role perceptions of the councillors, two typologies on local government systems and on the design of local democracy are taken into account (Hesse/Sharpe 1991; Mouritzen/Svara 2002).

In the following, second chapter, the concept of network governance and the emergence of governance networks are presented and explained. The third chapter provides the measurement of urban network governance. In the fourth chapter, the impact of these governance networks on the councillors and their power perception is analysed. The fifth chapter discusses the role perceptions of the councillors – depending on the level and the design of the prevalent networks. The conclusion regarding the conducted analyses is provided in chapter 6.

2 Urban Network Governance and Local Democracy

2.1 The Emergence of Network Governance Research

The concept of governance is used frequently in the recent debates in the social sciences, but often with different meanings and implications. It does not have a well defined outline – every author

1 The considered countries are Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, England, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands.
employs it differently (see Benz 2004; Fenger/Bekkers 2007: 13-33; Kooiman 1993: 35-48; Pierre 2000; Rhodes 1997). However, in the literature it is often distinguished between two general notions of governance (see e.g. Mayntz 2009: 9-10). On the one hand, governance is defined as a rather narrow concept that relates to the design and the functioning of new horizontal modes of collective decision-making and political steering which comprise not only public, but also private actors. In this perspective, governance is clearly opposed to the concept of government that focuses on hierarchical steering by state actors. On the other hand, the governance concept in its broader form involves every mode of societal coordination – like hierarchy, market and networks.

Network Governance constitutes one particular mode of governance, a form of societal coordination between the steering modes of hierarchy and market (Jessop 2002a; Mayntz 1991; Rhodes 1997). Within the overarching concept of governance that comprises every form of societal coordination, network governance is focused on the interactions and negotiations between multiple actors from the public and private sector in formal and informal networks. Sørensen and Torfing (2007a: 9) define a governance network as: 1. a relatively stable horizontal articulation of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors; 2. who interact through negotiations; 3. which take place within a regulative, normative, cognitive and imaginary framework; 4. that is self-regulating within limits set by external agencies; and 5. which contributes to the production of public purpose.

The research on network governance emerged in the early 1990s and was primarily preoccupied with describing and analysing the formation and the functioning of this new non-hierarchical form of governance (Sørensen/Torfing 2007a: 14). With the beginning of the new millennium, so far unanswered questions were taken up by a second generation of governance network researchers (Pierre 2000). These questions focus on the conditions of governance success or failure, on the potentials and risks of metagovernance and on the democratic performance of network governance (Sørensen/Torfing 2007a: 14). So, the research agenda of the new millennium aims at assessing the normative and political impact of governance networks and at improving their performance (see e.g. Benz/Papadopoulos 2006; Klijn/Skelcher 2007; Sørensen/Torfing 2007b).

2.2 Urban Network Governance

If governance is applied to the city level, it is often referred to as urban governance. This term is rooted in the American concept of the urban regimes (Judge 1995: 5-6). In the middle of the 1980s,
the urban regime theory emerged as a new theoretic approach from the community power debate. Advocates of this approach regard urban regimes as collaborations between public and private actors (mostly from the private sector) in formal or informal networks. These actors allocate resources in order to gain capacity to act and to implement a common policy agenda (Mossberger/Stoker 2001: 829).

The trend towards urban governance is caused by external changes that can be subsumed under the term of globalisation (Andrew/Goldsmith 1998: 101-102). In the local context, Brenner (1999) speaks of a re-scaling downwards, a displacement of tasks and responsibilities from the level of the nation state to the local level. Thereby, the cities have profoundly changed. They now operate increasingly as urban nodes within global economic, political and societal networks – as global cities (Sassen 1991). This development caused a continuous urbanisation and enhances the competition between the different urban areas. To improve their strategic position in this international competition, the local governments often aim for closer cooperation with economic elites (John 2001: 10-11).

In the present paper, urban network governance is understood as an arrangement that enables the local government to strengthen its capacity to act by heavily involving the private sector (see Mossberger/Stoker 2001). This arrangement is built in order to allocate resources for implementing a common policy agenda. According to Le Galès (2001), we conceptualise the network structure as a network of actors and not as a policy network, since these local networks are not specifically oriented towards one policy sector but are composed of different key actors in urban politics.

2.3 Network Governance and Local Democracy

Until recently, the relationship between network governance and local democracy has not been a major research topic. In the absence of scientific evidence, the debate has been polarized (see Klijn/Skelcher 2007: 588). The two contrasting views draw on the two dimensions of democratic legitimacy of political authority (Scharpf: 1998: 85). In defining democratic legitimacy, Scharpf differentiated between input-oriented and output-oriented legitimacy of political authority. In his definition, Scharpf (1998: 85) drew on Lincoln’s famous Gettysburg address of 1863 where democratically legitimated authority is described as „government of the people, by the people, for the people”. So, input-oriented legitimacy is carried out „by the people” and comprises the different possibilities of participation, the quality of representation as well as the openness of the
agenda-setting process (Bekkers/Edwards 2007: 43-44). Output-oriented legitimacy relates to „government for the people” and addresses the performance of the system, its effectiveness and efficiency in producing public goods and increasing welfare. However, these two dimensions of democratic legitimacy are complementary and can therefore not be maximised at the same time (Scharpf 1970).

Regarding network governance, numerous governance theorists stress the ability of networks to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the political decision-making process. Networks are flexible and fluid and therefore regarded as promising approaches to deal with complex policy issues in a changing world. In this perspective, emphasis is placed on the output-oriented legitimacy that is being strengthened by network governance.

The contrasting view on network governance sees networks as a threat to democratic institutions and to the representative democracy as such (see Edelenbos et al. 2010: 47; Sørensen 2006: 99). According to Papadopoulos (2004: 224) the arena of governance is for the most part unconnected to the parliament. The often flexible and intransparent structure of public-private networks seems to be incompatible with representative democracy and the formal institution of a parliament. Bekkers and Edwards (2007: 48) argue that network governance challenges the monopoly of politicians to make binding decisions. Moreover, governance networks encounter democratic problems regarding the output norm of accountability and the selective inclusion of actors. So, advocates of this line of argument stress the shrinking extent of input-oriented legitimacy.

In the recent literature on network governance, there has been a considerable growth in research investigating the democratic dimension of governance networks (see Edelenbos et al. 2010; Hansen 2005; Klijn/Skelcher 2007; Sørensen 2006; Sørensen/Torfing 2005, 2009). According to Sørensen and Torfing (2005: 201), governance networks are not by definition ‘democratic’ or ‘undemocratic’. To measure the democratic performance of a network, they adopt the concept of democratic anchorage. The democratic anchorage of a network assures democratic legitimacy and is composed by the following four elements (ibid.: 201): 1. the governance network is controlled by democratically elected politicians; 2. it represents the membership basis of the participating groups and organizations; 3. it is accountable to the territorially defined citizenry; and 4. it follows the democratic rules specified by a particular grammar of conduct.

The shift from government to governance also changes the role of the elected politicians. It has made it more difficult for them to exercise sovereign rule. Sørensen (2006) shows in her case study on the role of politicians in four Danish municipalities that network governance indeed marginalizes politicians and consequently weakens representative democracy. Other studies also
demonstrate a predominance of public administrators and private interest groups in policy networks (Schneider 2000). It seems that parliamentarians are excluded from governance networks to a large extent. Benz (1998) and Papadopoulos (2004) observed a similar development and argued that the increasing weight of public-private networks results in a loss of power of the local parliament.

Therefore, network governance theorists call for a new role for councillors: the sovereign ruler must become a metagovernor (Sørensen 2006: 98). To anchor governance networks in democratically elected politicians, it is necessary that councillors play an important role in the exercise of metagovernance. The traditional model of representative democracy sees the parliamentarians as sovereign rulers that are expected to control all aspects of the governing process – the metagoverning politicians in contrast are expected to govern in a way that leaves considerable autonomy for stakeholders to govern themselves (ibid.: 99). In the recent governance literature, there is increasing focus on how the overall functioning of networks can be improved through metagovernance (Kooiman 1993; Jessop 2002b). In order to make governance networks more democratic, elected councillors need to broaden their leadership repertoire and to concentrate on metagovernance. According to Sørensen and Torfing (2005), metagovernance does not mean to control every aspect of the political decision-making process, but to structure and to frame the conditions for the interaction and communication processes taking place in governance networks. In doing so, the single councillors formulate the political goals and objectives to be pursued by networks.

In the present paper, I discuss the raised questions concerning the impact of governance networks on representative democracy and on the role behaviour of the European city councillors. Within the theoretic frame of urban network governance, I try to assess the implications of the level of network governance on the power of the local parliament and on the role perception of the councillors. As a first step, it will be analysed if parliamentarians are indeed excluded from governance networks, if the emergence of public-private networks really lowers their influence on local politics. Having assessed the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of governance networks and the potentially changing power structure in local politics, I investigate in a second step the role behaviour of the councillors. Do the European city councillors stick to their narrowly defined role as sovereign controllers of the public administration or do they adopt a new metagoverning role by defining the overall political objectives and by shaping the decision-making processes in networks? While discussing my research questions, I try to make a contribution in responding to the broad question if governance networks are indeed a threat to parliament and representative democracy and if councillors therefore adapt their role behaviour.
3 Measuring Urban Network Governance

To measure network governance in the local context, the “level of urban network governance” is being established by capturing the communication channels of the mayor. In the present paper, urban network governance is understood as an arrangement that enables the local government to strengthen its capacity to act by heavily involving the private sector (see Mossberger/Stoker 2001). So, the frequency of communication between the mayor and different private actors serves us as an indicator for the interactions in governance networks. Thereby, it has to be distinguished between different kinds of private actors, since the design and the functioning of the corresponding networks presumably differ. To this end, two different variables are constructed – on the one hand the level of network governance including business actors and on the other hand the level of network governance including civic actors such as voluntary associations and single issue local movements.

The measurement of these two independent variables is based on the data from the “European Mayor” project. The theoretic concepts and the used questions from the questionnaire read as follows:

Table 1: Measuring the level of urban network governance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Indicators (Questions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Urban Network Governance including Business Actors</td>
<td>▪ Frequency of communication with the local business elite (Mayor_v76, scale 0-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Urban Network Governance including Civic Actors</td>
<td>▪ Frequency of communication with leading actors from voluntary associations (Mayor_v71, scale 0-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Frequency of communication with representatives of single issue local movements (Mayor_v72, scale 0-4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To create the variable measuring the level of urban network governance including civic actors, an index has been constructed, composed by the indicators “communication with leading actors from voluntary associations” and “communication with representatives of single issue local movements”. Adding these two factors is regarded as legitimate since the correlation coefficient indicates a statistically significant linear relationship of $r=0.501$ (Pearson correlation coefficients). The index ranges from 0 to 8 and is normally distributed.

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2 The relevant documents of the project are to be found in Bäck/Heinelt/Magnier 2006.
Figure 1 shows the average level of both types of urban network governance per country.

Figure 1: Average level of urban network governance per country (scale of each variable 0-4)

To measure the impact of the level of urban network governance on the power and role perceptions of the councillors, it is necessary to connect the two data sources. Unfortunately, at this point we encounter difficulties: the samples of the European mayors and the European councillors do not completely correspond. The selected cities in the national samples are not identical in the two research projects. To overcome this obstacle, the variables measuring urban network governance are aggregated at the national level instead of the city level. This approximation is not arbitrary. The local government systems differ according to country. The political system at the local level and the intergovernmental relations structure the scope of the local executive, the involvement of private actors and the behavioural patterns of all actors concerned. So, we have good reasons to believe that this approximation will still provide reasonable data to pursue the intended analysis. Figures 2 and 3 show box plots of the levels of urban network governance – networks with either civic actors (figure 2) or business actors (figure 3). These charts reveal significantly different levels of network governance in the involved countries. So, the assumption that the level of urban network governance differs considerably between countries is regarded as confirmed.
The merged data are now hierarchically structured with the independent variables measuring urban network governance at the national level and the dependent variables, the power and role perceptions of the councillors, at the individual level. Such a data structure is evaluated best with a multilevel approach. However, the number of cases at the upper level is too small to allow for a multilevel analysis. So, normal regression and correlation analysis will be applied.
4 Inclusiveness of Urban Governance Networks

4.1 Power Perceptions of the European City Councillors

In the present chapter, I look into the question if governance networks are indeed a threat to representative democracy – as several authors suggest (see e.g. Edelenbos et al. 2010; Sørensen 2006) – by excluding elected councillors. To measure the inclusiveness of networks regarding the city parliament, a variable capturing the influence of the city councillors is employed. Therefore, I rely on the MAELG survey (“Municipal Assemblies in European Local Governance in Change”). The following items are used to build the dependent variable of the analysis:

Table 2: Measuring the influence of the European city councillors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Indicators (Questions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influence of the City Councillors</td>
<td>▪ 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 is over the Local Authority activities – Myself. (Council_v31, scale 0-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ 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 is over the Local Authority activities – Single councillors. (Council_v30, scale 0-4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The primary dependent variable is an index of two items measuring the influence of average members of the council. The creation of this index seems legitimate as the correlation of the two items indicates a statistically significant linear relationship with a value of $r=0.547$ (Pearson correlation coefficient).

On average, European councillors see themselves as being considerably less powerful than the city mayor and about as powerful as the local business elite (see figure 5).\(^3\) The responses all range between 0 and 4.

\(^3\) The other two items also relate to 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 is over the Local Authority activities – The mayor (Council_v26) / Local businessmen (Council_v38)”.
The power perceptions of the councillors differ according to country. Figure 6 shows the average perceived influence in local politics of the mayor, the local business elite and the council members per country as seen from the councillors’ perspective. Along general lines, the differences in the power perceptions are rather similar in all countries.
4.2 Inclusiveness of Urban Governance Networks

In a next step, we test the hypothesis that the established networks are indeed arrangements between the local government and economic or civic elites where the council is excluded. To this end, the implications of urban network governance on the power perceptions of the councillors are being analysed (table 3).

Table 3: Correlations between the level of urban network governance and the power perceptions of the city councillors (Pearson correlation coefficients)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Power Perceptions of the Councillors</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influence of the City Councillors</td>
<td>Influence of the</td>
<td>Mayor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Urban Network Governance</td>
<td>-0.060**</td>
<td>0.081**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>including Business Actors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of Urban Network Governance</td>
<td>0.028**</td>
<td>0.044**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>including Civic Actors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Coefficients are significant at the 0.01 level.

Overall, the table shows small, but highly significant correlations. It may seem surprising that different kinds of networks have unequal effects on the power perceptions of the city councillors. The level of network governance including business actors has a negative effect on the influence of the city councillors and therefore confirms the pessimistic hypothesis that the arena of governance is indeed for the most part unconnected to the parliament. A higher level of business networks corresponds to a lower extent of power perceived by the councillors. On the other hand, networks including actors from civil society – representatives of voluntary associations and single issue local movements – show significantly positive effects on the influence of the local parliament. It seems that civic networks are more inclusive than business networks and provide a higher democratic anchorage by allowing the involvement of elected politicians (see Sørensen/Torfing 2005).

Obviously, the design and the composition of governance networks matter. Where the relations between the mayor and local business actors are closer, councillors feel less included. The European city councillors perceive the parliament’s scope of power as being narrower with a higher level of business networks. On the contrary, civic networks have a positive impact on the power perception of the councillors. Furthermore, in both types of networks, the influence of the mayor is positively correlated with the network level – from the perspective of the city councillors. This
result is not surprising since the mayor presumably holds a strong position in governance networks (see e.g. Holtkamp 2007).

However, it can not be denied that the resulting coefficients take comparably low values. So, to shed more light on the described relations and to test the formulated hypotheses in more detail, an in-depth analysis is carried out taking into account different types of local government systems.

4.3 Governance Networks in Different Local Government Systems

To analyse the results in more detail and in relation to different country groups and different settings of local democracy, two widely known typologies are taken into account. On the one hand, I rely on a typology addressing vertical power relations – that is, between municipalities and upper-level governments – by Hesse and Sharpe (1991). On the other hand, a typology on horizontal power relations – that is, between the council, the mayor and other political and administrative leaders – by Mouritzen and Svara (2002) is being employed.

The typology by Hesse and Sharpe (1991) addresses the distribution of competencies in service provision as well as the political influence of the local level in relation to upper-level governments and the importance dedicated to local democracy. Hesse and Sharpe thereby draw a distinction between three country groups: the Anglo group, the Franco group and the North and Middle European Group. To cover the Eastern European countries in our sample, the typology is being extended by the Central East European type (see Heinelt/Hlepas 2006).

The typology by Mouritzen and Svara (2002) is oriented towards horizontal power relations and relies on three key organizing principles of municipal government: layman rule, political leadership and professionalism. Mouritzen and Svara (2002) thereby distinguish four ideal types: the strong mayor form, the committee-leader form, the collective form and the council-manager form.

Table 4 shows the impact of the level of urban network governance on the influence of the city councillors by applying the two typologies of local government systems.

4 Unfortunately, the conducted analysis does not provide results for the Anglo group. In this group, there is no variation in the sample since England is the only case.

5 Likewise, correlations within the committee-leader form and the council-manager form do not show results. In these groups, Sweden and Switzerland are the only countries in their respective group.
Table 4: Correlations between the level of urban network governance and the perceived influence of the city councillors in different local government systems (Pearson correlation coefficients)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Influence of the City Councillors</th>
<th><strong>Typology by Hesse and Sharpe (1991), extended</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anglo Group (ca. 700 cases)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Governance including Business Actors</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Governance including Civic Actors</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Level of Business Networks (scale 0-4)</td>
<td>1.323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Level of Civic Networks (scale 0-4)</td>
<td>0.950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Level of Influence of the City Councillors (scale 0-4)</td>
<td>1.762</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Typology by Mouritzen and Svara (2002)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong Mayor (ca. 3800 cases)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Governance including Business Actors</td>
<td>0.186**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Governance including Civic Actors</td>
<td>-0.055**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Level of Business Networks (scale 0-4)</td>
<td>1.844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Level of Civic Networks (scale 0-4)</td>
<td>1.224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Level of Influence of the City Councillors (scale 0-4)</td>
<td>1.662</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Coefficients are significant at the 0.5 level. ** Coefficients are significant at the 0.01 level.

The empiric evidence generally shows surprisingly strong and significant results. However, the most striking outcome is the clear difference between the country groups regarding the inclusiveness of governance networks.
Within the typology by Hesse and Sharpe (1991), the countries in the North and Middle European group and the Central East European group show the same impact of governance networks like in the evaluation of all cases, but the values of the coefficients are considerably higher. These councillors feel significantly less powerful if the urban networks between the executive and business actors are closer. Business networks correspond to a lower influence of the local parliament. On the contrary, civic networks seem to be inclusive regarding councillors and provide therefore a higher democratic anchorage.

However, councillors in the Franco group do not feel excluded from governance networks - neither from business nor from civic networks. The correlation coefficients amount in both cases to significantly positive and comparably high values. So, our pessimistic hypothesis that network governance poses a threat to the local parliament and representative democracy as such is not corroborated in the Franco countries.

Figure 7 shows the different strengths and directions of the relationship between business networks and the influence of the council members according to the typology by Hesse and Sharpe. Thereby, I only distinguish between the Franco group and all other countries since there is the largest contrast.

Looking for explanations for this striking difference is not easy. One possible approach relates to the fact that the level of governance networks is comparably low in the Franco countries (see table 4). The influence of private actors is not as expanded as in other countries that possess a
wider scope of discretion. So, a stronger position of civic actors opposite the mayor and the executive may provide more room and opportunity for city councillors to articulate their interests and to exercise power.

Regarding the typology by Mouritzen and Svara (2002), similar differences between the forms of municipal government come up. In the “collective form”, the impact of governance network differs according to their design: business networks seem to be exclusive in relation to parliamentarians, while civic networks appear democratically anchored. The correlations provide considerably high and significant values (see table 4).

Surprisingly, councillors of the “strong mayor form” experience the impact of governance networks the other way around. They feel significantly more influential with higher levels of business networks and less powerful with stronger civic networks. However, the second correlation coefficient does not take a high value.

Figure 8 shows the different strengths and directions of the relationship between civic networks and the influence of the council members according to the typology by Mouritzen and Svara. Thereby, I only distinguish between the “collective form” and all other forms of municipal government since there is the largest contrast.

Figure 8: The impact of civic networks on the influence of the city councillors according to the typology by Mouritzen and Svara (2002)

A promising explanation for the discrepancies between the two government forms lies in the person of the mayor. If the local government is dominated by a strong mayor, city councillors may regard a stronger involvement of private actors in local politics as positive since power is not
concentrated in one person anymore. By distributing power among several relevant actors, councillors receive multiple opportunities in gaining access to power. Via civic or business actors, exponents of the local parliaments can stick up for their concerns.

5 The Role Perceptions of the Councillors

The analysis conducted so far reveals in general a rather exclusive character of business networks and simultaneously an inclusive approach of civic networks. These relations are especially pronounced in the North and Middle European countries (Hesse/Sharpe 1991) and in the “collective form” of local government according to the typology by Mouritzen and Svara (2002). So, the hypothesis that network governance marginalizes politicians and consequently weakens representative democracy is only partly corroborated. It seems reasonable to take into account the design of governance networks since only business networks have a significantly high and negative impact on the influence of the city councillors. In the further analysis, I will therefore stick to the type of network governance including business actors as there obviously is some potential for conflict.

As a second step, the role perceptions of the city councillors are investigated. It is analysed if councillors adapt to the changing political environment and adopt a new role as metagovernors. Do the European city councillors stick to their role as sovereign controllers of the public administration or do they reformulate their tasks and exercise a metagoverning function by defining the overall political objectives and shaping the decision-making processes in networks?

To measure the different role perceptions of the councillors, the following two items of the MAELG-questionnaire are used:

Table 5: Measuring the role perceptions of the European city councillors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Indicators (Questions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metagovernance as a role perception</td>
<td>• In your experience as a councillor, how would you define your contribution regarding the following tasks – Defining the main goals of the municipal activity? (Council_v180, scale 0-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controlling as a role perception</td>
<td>• In your experience as a councillor, how would you define your contribution regarding the following tasks – Controlling the municipal activity? (Council_v181, scale 0-4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 displays the councillors’ role perceptions in different network contexts. The context variable is composed by the level of business networks and the extent of influence of the city councillors.

Table 6: Role perceptions of the city councillors in different governance network contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contexts of Network Governance</th>
<th>Role Perceptions of the City Councillors</th>
<th>Metagoverning (mean value; scale 0-4)</th>
<th>Controlling (mean value; scale 0-4)</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weak Business Networks, Low Level of Inclusion (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.872</td>
<td>2.134</td>
<td>-0.262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak Business Networks, High Level of Inclusion (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.616</td>
<td>2.523</td>
<td>0.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Business Networks, Low Level of Inclusion (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.111</td>
<td>2.125</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Business Networks, High Level of Inclusion (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.687</td>
<td>2.479</td>
<td>0.208</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To visualize the varying frequencies, they are additionally captured in the following chart. The categories of the context variable correspond to table 6.

Figure 9: Role perceptions of the city councillors in different governance network contexts

The graph does not show huge differences between the two role perceptions, but some findings are evident. One cannot speak of a new role adopted by city councillors – the two roles are exer-
cised to a similar extent. However, metagovernance prevails in inclusive settings where councillors perceive their influence in local politics as comparably large. The perceived influence of the councillors correlates with their role as metagovernors to the high degree of $r=0.408$ (Pearson correlation coefficient). Furthermore, if business networks are strong, the metagovernance role is considerably more frequent if the councillors feel involved. The causal direction of this relation is not evident.

6 Conclusion

In a nutshell, what are the new and relevant insights from this analysis? It is already widely known that informal network structures possess an inherent deficit of input-oriented democratic legitimacy (see e.g. Benz 1998). The shift to new steering modes, to changed structures of governance, rather strengthens output-oriented legitimacy. In the recent literature, network governance theorists additionally suggest that governance networks pose a threat to elected politicians and representative democracy (see Edelenbos et al. 2010; Sørensen 2006). Therefore, they call for a new role for councillors as metagovernors. The parliamentarians of today are not expected to control every aspect of the governing process, but to formulate the overarching political goals and to shape the conditions under which the governance networks operate.

In my analyses, I tried to assess the implications of governance networks on the influence of the city councillors and on their role perceptions. The results are partly in line with the theoretic assumptions. As a first interesting finding, the design and the composition of governance networks seem to matter to a large extent. Networks including business actors are more exclusive regarding the local parliament. The city councillors perceive their scope of power as being narrower with stronger business networks. On the contrary, networks including representatives of the civil society show an inclusive approach and seem to be democratically anchored by involving local parliamentarians. These relations are particularly pronounced in the North and Middle European countries (Hesse/Sharpe 1991) and in the “collective form” of local government according to the typology by Mouritzen and Svara (2002). However, in the Franco group and in the “strong mayor form”, networks are not significantly exclusive. Striking are the strong differences between the country groups.

So, the pessimistic hypothesis that governance networks are a threat to elected politicians is only partly corroborated. It seems to be confirmed regarding business networks and in relation to specific types of countries.
As a second step, the role perceptions of the city councillors are investigated. Thereby, I distinguish between a metagoverning and a controlling role. However, the conducted analysis does not reveal an adaptation in the councillors’ role behaviour. The empirical evidence shows that the metagoverning role only prevails in inclusive governance settings. The perceived influence of the councillors correlates with their role as metagovernors to a high degree.

Seen from a democratic perspective, the empirical findings are alarming. New modes of horizontal coordination in business networks pose indeed a threat to representative democracy. Presumably, councillors are excluded from these networks to a large extent. Furthermore, they have not adapted their role behaviour by adopting metagoverning tools and by broadening their leadership repertoire. Hence, the democratic drawbacks of business networks and the deficiencies regarding input-oriented legitimacy are not rectified by metagoverning councillors.
7 References


