

**SOCIAL POLICY-MAKING ON THE LOCAL LEVEL IN
FLANDERS:
ITS FUTURE IS CERTAIN BUT ITS NATURE FAR FROM**

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Social policy-making on the local level in Flanders: its future is certain but its nature far from

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1. Introduction

What kind of social policy will local governments in Flanders make and implement within a decade? This is an intriguing question in the light of the numerous trends and developments that come towards local social policy in Flanders. Throughout interviews with a range of local policy-makers, it became clear that several of these trends and developments are undeniable and will have an irreversible impact on local government and its policy-making in the social sphere. Others on the other hand do share this far-reaching impact but local policy-makers are uncertain whether these trends and developments will actually prevail in policy practice. However, once identified, these uncertain trends lay at the ground for the development of different scenarios, each covering a potential future of local social policy in Flanders.

In this paper, we present four future scenario's. In order to develop them, we have taken different steps throughout a research project concerning local social policy-making in Flanders, the northern part of Belgium. Each of these steps will be subsequently highlighted, starting with the identification and profiling of trends and developments within and around social policy-making on the local level.

2. Trends within and around local social policy-making in Flanders

2.1 Listing up trends

A first step in developing scenario's for the future consists in gathering knowledge about trends and developments that will or might colour that future. So we started our research with a thorough review of literature disclosing these kinds of trends and developments that have to do with local social policy-making in Flanders. Our review resulted in an up-listing of no less than 22 trends that we clustered into four groups as far as they concerned 1) general developments in society, 2) social policy-making in particular, 3) the nature of local government's tasks in this policy field as well as 4) its way of executing these tasks. Table 1 overviews these clusters and gives a brief description of each trend.

Table 1: Trends within and around local social policy-making in Flanders

	<i>Cluster 1: General developments in society</i>
Increasing individualization	Societal cohesion decreases and individual citizens feel less and less connected with others, unless these others belong to their peer groups ('there is no such thing as society')
Increasing diversity	More and more, society is characterized by diversity on ethnic, religious and cultural grounds. This diversity causes fragmentation of and within public space, resulting in multiple public spaces that are hardly connected to each other.
Increasing socio-economic disparity	There is an increasing evolution towards the so-called '80-20 society' in which 80% of the population does relatively well from a socio-economic point of view whilst 20% belongs to a lower layer of society (a growing distinction between the have's and the have-not's)
Ageing of the population	The population continuously gets older which increasingly results in a reverse population pyramid

Changing family ties	Traditional family patterns are more and more replaced by other forms of living together: single-parent families, newly composed families, partners of the same sex, Simultaneously, different generations of the same family are more likely to live further apart than before.
Citizens getting more and more articulate	Resulting from (amongst others) their higher level of schooling and better access to information, citizens get more and more articulate and critical. They expect high-quality service-delivery of all the organisations they get in touch with (private as well as public and semi-public).
Increasing development of modern technology	There is an increasing computerization of society, a spectacular growth of technological and digital applications in private and societal life, all resulting in a first generation of the so-called 'digital natives'.
A smaller government	The government and its role in society shrinks. More and more, public tasks are being transferred to quasi-governments and private actors (for as well as non-for profit)
	<i>Cluster 2: Social policy-making</i>
More government control of the social / care system	Social / care organisations are increasingly part of the apparatus of government due to their close connection to government (embodied through governmental allowances, licences, programs and other legal arrangements).
Increasing commercialization of the social / care system	More and more for-profit actors are getting involved in care and social issues whilst this domain used to be dominated by governmental and private non-for-profit actors.
Re-scaling of the social / care system	Social / care organisations are more and more forced to coordinate and collaborate with other institutions on their 'territory' in view of their strategic planning and the realization of their objectives.

Increasing community care	Social / care organisations are part of the (local) community, and the (local) community increasingly becomes part of care-giving (homecare, volunteer aid, civilian care initiatives, ...).
Professionalization of the social / care system	Social / care organisations increasingly professionalize. They get managers who in their turn introduce business-like practices such as marketing, quality control, strategic planning, cost-benefit analysis etc.
	<i>Cluster 3: Local government's tasks</i>
From a policy of care-giving to one that gives opportunities	The nature of policy-making evolves from being primarily curative and caring to creating opportunities for the citizen who takes up responsibility for his own situation.
From a policy that focuses upon care groups to one that targets all citizens	Social policy does no longer primarily focus upon specific care groups but targets all citizens, taking into account the various aspects of their lives ('everyone is customer of social services').
From vertical to horizontal policy-making	There is an increasing recognition of the fact that the traditional care groups (consisting out of the poor, the elderly, ...) face multi-dimensional problems (concerning housing, employment, education, ...) that require more horizontal and thus inter-sectoral policy-making.
From welfare state to welfare cities (more tasks)	Local governments get more and more responsibilities and tasks in (social) policy-making. These tasks are strategic in nature (making plans, coordinating service delivery, collaborating, ...) as well as operational (new services to be delivered, new target groups, ...).
	<i>Cluster 4: Local government's task execution</i>
Increasing professionalization	Local government increasingly plans, coordinates and monitors its policy and watches over its quality and integrity.
Increasing socialization	Local policy-making increasingly fans out, within as well as without the borders of local government. As a result, policy-making on the local level

	becomes more and a more a matter of many local actors and organisations (that take part in a local governance –network).
Increasing professionalization in and around the local governance network	Actors and organisations taking part in the local governance –network increasingly plan, coordinate and monitor their policy and watch over its quality and integrity.
From welfare state to welfare cities (policy tasks)	Local government is expected to perform more policy tasks and thus to increasingly involve in strategic policy-making throughout the various policy fields.
Dividing policy making and executing	As a result of previous trends, local government will take up more policy tasks and will increasingly leave the execution of tasks to other actors in the local governance –network.

2.2 Estimating the degree of certainty and the impact of these trends

Subsequently, we presented these 22 trends via an interview to 12 experts. Each of them was selected for his/her (academic) knowledge of and/or (practical) experience in local social policy-making in Flanders, providing him/her with a helicopter view on the matter. The aim of these interviews was twofold: gaining knowledge into the degree of certainty with which each of these trends would occur as well as into the impact of this occurrence. Therefore, all the interviewees were separately asked to estimate the degree of certainty and impact of each trend on a 1-7 Likert scale (with 1 and 7 respectively indicating the lowest and highest degree of certainty and impact). The results of this interview round were statistically analyzed, using SPSS, and are briefly presented by merely taking into account the average of all respondents' scores for each trend.

A. Degree of certainty

Table 2 overviews all trends (in the same order as presented in table 1) and indicates – amongst other things – the average degree of certainty with which each of them will

prevail in the next decade (mean). On the basis of this table, the 22 trends can be divided into three groups depending upon their association with:

- 1) a relatively low degree of certainty;
- 2) an average degree of certainty;
- 3) a relatively high degree of certainty.

Table 2: Trends analyzed according to their average degree of certainty

Trend	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Degree of certainty	Std. Deviation
Increasing individualization	12	2,5	6,0	4,750	Low	1,3229
Increasing diversity	12	5,5	6,0	5,958	High	,1443
Increasing socio-economic disparity	12	5,0	7,0	5,833	Average	,6155
Ageing of the population	12	3,5	7,0	6,333	High	1,0075
Changing family ties	12	3,5	6,0	5,292	Average	1,0544
Citizens getting more and more articulate	12	4,0	7,0	5,625	Average	,7724
Increasing development of modern technology	11	4,0	7,0	6,409	High	,9170
A smaller government	12	3,0	7,0	4,833	Low	1,1742
More government control of the social / care system	12	1,0	6,0	4,375	Low	1,8602
Increasing commercialization of the social / care system	12	3,0	6,0	4,792	Low	1,0544
Re-scaling of the social / care system	12	4,0	6,5	5,708	Average	,6895
Increasing community care	12	3,5	6,0	5,125	Average	,9799
Professionalization of the social / care system	12	3,5	6,0	5,625	Average	,8823
From a policy of care-giving to one that gives opportunities	12	3,0	6,0	4,958	Low	1,1766
From a policy that focuses upon care groups to one that targets all citizens	12	3,0	6,0	4,542	Low	,9643
From vertical to horizontal policy-making	12	4,0	7,0	5,625	Average	,7724

From welfare state to welfare cities (more tasks)	12	3,0	7,0	5,417	Average	1,3790
Increasing professionalization	12	5,0	7,0	6,000	High	,4264
Increasing socialization	12	3,0	7,0	5,750	Average	1,0553
Increasing professionalization in and around the local governance network	12	3,0	7,0	5,458	Average	1,1172
From welfare state to welfare cities (policy tasks)	12	4,0	7,0	5,833	Average	,8348
Dividing policy making and executing	12	2,0	6,0	4,208	Low	1,3049

There are 7 trends with a relatively low degree of certainty (amongst themselves, they score on average 4,64). Furthermore, there are 11 trends with an average degree of certainty (amongst themselves, they score on average 5,55). The remaining 4 trends have a high degree of certainty (amongst themselves, they score on average 6,18).

B. Degree of impact

Table 3 overviews all trends (in the same order as presented in table 1) and indicates – amongst other things – the average degree of impact of each trend (mean). Again, the 22 trends can be divided into three groups depending upon their association with:

- 4) a relatively low degree of impact;
- 5) an average degree of impact;
- 6) a relatively high degree of impact.

Table 3: Trends analyzed according to their average degree of impact

Trend	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Degree of impact	Std. Deviation
Increasing individualization	12	3,0	6,0	5,208	Average	1,0326
Increasing diversity	12	3,5	7,0	5,750	High	,8394
Increasing socio-economic disparity	12	5,0	6,5	5,958	High	,3343

Ageing of the population	12	3,5	7,0	6,000	High	,8790
Changing family ties	12	4,0	7,0	5,542	Average	,9876
Citizens getting more and more articulate	12	4,0	7,0	5,375	Average	1,0687
Increasing development of modern technology	12	4,0	7,0	5,542	Average	1,1172
A smaller government	12	2,0	7,0	5,292	Average	1,3561
More government control of the social / care system	12	1,5	6,0	5,042	Low	1,6161
Increasing commercialization of the social / care system	12	3,0	6,0	4,792	Low	1,0967
Re-scaling of the social / care system	12	4,0	7,0	5,583	Average	,9003
Increasing community care	12	3,0	7,0	5,250	Average	1,1966
Professionalization of the social / care system	12	5,0	6,0	5,583	Average	,4687
From a policy of care-giving to one that gives opportunities	12	4,0	6,0	5,208	Average	,8908
From a policy that focuses upon care groups to one that targets all citizens	12	3,0	6,0	4,958	low	1,0104
From vertical to horizontal policy-making	12	4,5	7,0	5,792	High	,7525
From welfare state to welfare cities (more tasks)	12	5,0	6,0	5,833	High	,3257
Increasing professionalization	12	4,5	6,0	5,792	High	,4981
Increasing socialization	12	6,0	7,0	6,083	High	,2887
Increasing professionalization in and around the local governance network	12	3,0	7,0	5,708	High	1,0104
From welfare state to welfare cities (policy tasks)	12	5,0	6,0	5,792	High	,3965
Dividing policy making and executing	12	3,0	6,0	5,292	Average	,9876

There are 3 trends with a relatively low degree of impact (amongst themselves, they score on average 4,93). Furthermore, there are 10 trends with an average degree of

impact (amongst themselves, they score on average 5,39). The remaining 9 trends have a high degree of impact (amongst themselves, they score on average 5,87).

2.3 Profiling all trends

Finally, we cluster both analyses in order to profile each trend according to its estimated degree of certainty and impact. The results of this cluster analysis are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Cluster analysis concerning degree of certainty and impact

Trend	Degree of certainty	Degree of impact
Increasing individualization	Low	Average
Increasing diversity	High	High
Increasing socio-economic disparity	Average	High
Ageing of the population	High	High
Changing family ties	Average	Average
Citizens getting more and more articulate	Average	Average
Increasing development of modern technology	High	Average
A smaller government	Low	Average
More government control of the social / care system	Low	Low
Increasing commercialization of the social / care system	Low	Low
Re-scaling of the social / care system	Average	Average
Increasing community care	Average	Average
Professionalization of the social / care system	Average	Average
From a policy of care-giving to one that gives opportunities	Low	Average
From a policy that focuses upon care groups to one that targets all citizens	Low	low

From vertical to horizontal policy-making	Average	High
From welfare state to welfare cities (more tasks)	Average	High
Increasing professionalization	High	High
Increasing socialization	Average	High
Increasing professionalization in and around the local governance network	Average	High
From welfare state to welfare cities (policy tasks)	Average	High
Dividing policy making and executing	Low	Average

3. From the analysis of trends to the development of scenario's

Profiling the 22 trends according to their degree of certainty and impact is a crucial step in the development of scenario's covering the future of local social policy-making in Flanders. After all, this allows us to depict trends that represent so-called 'critical insecurities' around which future scenario's can be built. These trends have two characteristics. First of all, they are a source of insecurity as it is uncertain whether or not they will prevail in the (near) future. And, secondly, they are critical because once they prevail, these trends are considered to have a major impact. Put differently, critical insecurities are trends that are characterized by a low degree of certainty and a high degree of impact.

In accordance with table 4, none of the 22 trends under investigation is profiled in this way as a critical insecurity. However, 4 of them come close as our interviewees estimated their prevalence as highly uncertain (a low degree of certainty) as well as of average impact. These four trends refer to (marked in bold in table 4):

- 1) the increasing individualization in society;
- 2) the evolution towards a smaller government;
- 3) the evolution from a curative, care-giving social policy to one that expects citizens to take up responsibility for their own lives and thus to grasp the opportunities that government offers to do so;

4) the increasing division between the making and execution of policy.

With a view on the development of future scenario's, we argue that trends 2 and 4 can be combined into one major trend. After all, the evolution towards a smaller (local) government can manifest itself into the fact that the (local) government limits its activities to specific tasks such as the making of policy plans and programs whilst their implementation is handed over to other actors in the (local) governance –network (for-profit as well as non-for-profit actors). In a similar way, trends 1 and 3 can be linked. After all, government's choice for a social policy that emphasizes the citizens' responsibility for their own life better fits into a society with increasing individualization than a traditional curative and care-giving policy.

In sum, we end up with two main critical insecurities around which four future scenario's can be built up as visualized in table 5.

Table 5: Future scenario's for local social policy-making in Flanders

	Decreasing individualization A social 'care' –policy dominates	Increasing individualization A social 'chance' –policy dominates
Smaller (local) government Task division between governmental and non- governmental actors	SCENARIO 1	SCENARIO 3
Bigger (local) government Government (on the local level) makes and implements policy	SCENARIO 2	SCENARIO 4

In the following paragraphs, these four scenario's will be described. During this description, we will zoom in on the role that each scenario preserves for the three main players in Flemish social policy-making: (local) government, the private non-for-profit sector and the private for-profit sector.

Each of the scenario's was presented to a panel of experts, different from those that initially estimated the certainty and impact of the underlying trends. We asked them

about the feasibility of each scenario as well as what is likely to happen in case it would become real. Their common thoughts and comments are included in the following description.

3.1 Scenario 1: A small local government in an altruistic society

Society is characterized by a high level of solidarity amongst its citizens. There is room for new care groups and their needs. Government, especially on the local level, takes up a small role in this society by focusing primarily on the making of social policy i.e. the frame within which social services will be delivered whilst the actual service delivery is outsourced to others. These others are primarily private non-for-profit actors as the private for-profit actors operate in their own and separate circuit. The latter primarily focus on affluent groups such as wealthy elderly or wealthy parents of children with special needs. Hence, these for-profit actors operate at some distance from local government and have little or no input into the making of governmental policy. The same can not be said with regard to the private non-for-profit actors: they do deliver input that is accepted by local government in the context of the altruistic society they all operate in.

Is this scenario feasible? And what are its main points of interest once it would become real? This scenario was not rejected by the experts in local social policy-making that took part in our panel. According to them, it is realistic that local government in Flanders – more than it already does – directs local social policy. However, they considered that this role of director would not be easy for local government. After all, there are strong for-profit actors that will only be willing to accept local government as director of local social policy-making ‘until the moment that they will have to actually adapt themselves to this scenario.’ Of course, local government can turn to the use of financial incentives in order to get these actors on his side. But, in turn, this requires that local government disposes over sufficient financial means. And possibly, it will need these means to provide social services additional to the ones provided by private non-for-profit and for-profit actors. After all, there might still be care groups in society that can not turn to private actors with their needs and will expect local government to help out in this scenario of an altruistic society.

In case that local government provides social services, there is another issue that comes to the fore. After all, local government then plays two roles: the one of director of social policy as well as the one of actor in social policy. And this can make private (non-for-profit as well as for-profit) actors even less willing to accept its directing role because in their view, local government will then be tempted to benefit its own service delivery over theirs.

Today, it is the public centre for social welfare – to be considered as a governmental agency on the local level – that provides most of local government's social services. Could this situation remain in the context of this first scenario? No, according to the experts in our panel. If the public centre keeps on delivering services whilst local government acts as overall director, the latter is believed to operate at a too big distance from day-to-day policy-making and to lose its feeling with it. Therefore, it was considered better to (re-)unite both institutions into one (major) local government in the context of this first scenario.

3.2 Scenario 2: A big local government in an altruistic society

This second scenario differs from the first one on main point. In the first scenario, local government was small whilst it is expected to take up a big role here. This role is twofold as local government is involved as director in social policy-making on the local level and also as actor by extensively providing social services itself. This last role was not played by government in the first scenario.

The role played by both non-for-profit and for-profit actors is unchanged. The former give input to the policy-making/directing role of local government whilst extensively delivering services themselves. The latter are – just like in the first scenario – operating in an alternative circuit that is primarily aimed at affluent groups and from which they give little or no input to government.

How feasible is this scenario? According to our panel, this scenario embodies an enlargement of our current situation into the near future as local government already

fulfils many tasks today. However, this situation should not stop local government from critically assessing its own tasks on a regular basis. After all, citizens are more likely to be in favour of getting more and more out of government than of rejecting services that are offered to them. And if a citizen and his/her partner decide both to go out working, is it then the government's task to provide cheap child care? Or is it acceptable to let the market forces play in this regard? Local government has to ask itself these kinds of critical questions, not all least because it will not have the financial means to keep on paying for all services that citizens want.

Possibly, this financial issue will force local government to grow more into a social local policy (instead of a merely local social policy) in which social considerations are included in other fields of policy-making apart from the merely social one.

This second scenario assumes local government to be big and thus raises the issue of the differentiation amongst the 308 local governments in Flanders today.

Is such a scenario feasible in case of a small local government located at the countryside? Put differently, is it not time to (re-)consider another round of scaling-up on the local level as well as the different ways to do so: mergers, intermunicipal cooperation, creating a new layer of regional governments, ...?

3.3 Scenario 3: A small local government in an individualistic society

This scenario takes place in a completely different context than the two previous ones. Now, society highly favours the individual and the initiatives that individuals take for – amongst other things – their own life. In this kind of society, care groups are strongly pointed to their responsibility for their own quality of life.

Intuitively, the idea of a small local government fits into this scenario, not at least as far as social policy is concerned. Hence, local government makes little social policy and hardly provides social services itself. After all, politicians would not really benefit from this in such an individualistic society.

Typical for this kind of society is the absence of so-called 'social entrepreneurs' i.e. people that really want to dedicate themselves to the social case. As a result, few services will be provided by non-for-profit actors. For-profit actors on the other hand will take plenty of initiatives, be it in a circuit alternative to that of local government. And, even more so than in the two previous scenarios, the for-profit sector will target affluent care groups such as wealthy elderly or wealthy parents that are in need of day-to-day care for their children.

What will happen in case this scenario becomes reality? The experts in our panel foresaw an intense core task debate. After all, what is still the task of a small local government in such an individualistic society? Is it still its task to develop a socially oriented culture or sports policy? Or does local government have to limit itself to its core tasks in the social field such as housing and employment? Of course, the answer to this question will largely depend upon the prevailing financial-economic situation. If local government still disposes over financial means, it will be able to make a social local policy. If not, it will have to limit itself to a local social policy.

Regardless these financial-economic considerations, the expectation lives that the nature of social policy on the local level will change under this scenario. It will become repressive rather than preventive. Put differently, the police man will replace the community worker from his spot on the street scene.

Citizens will turn to the local government for help but only in case of severe financial needs. In all other situations (in which they dispose over financial means), they are more likely to turn to their peer groups. And these peer groups will be more into self-organisation: they organise care for the elderly, the sick, the children, ... amongst themselves at least as long as membership fees are paid sufficiently and in time.

This scenario frightens and was considered the least desirable by the members of our panel. However, they did not judge it impossible for the near future in Flanders and already spotted the first signs of its appearance given the rise of so-called 'gated communities'.

3.4 Scenario 4: A big local government in an individualistic society

Contrary to scenario 3, local government keeps on playing a big role on the social field by facing needs that are socially acceptable, even though it operates in an individualistic society.

The role of the two other actors – for-profit and non-for-profit actors – remains the same. Non-for-profit actors play a little role, primarily due to the absence of social entrepreneurs in society. For-profit actors are stronger, be it that their activities primarily target the more affluent care groups.

What will this scenario bring about once it would become reality? This scenario raises the expectation of a strong distinction between so-called ‘old’ and ‘new’ social issues. The old issues will keep on dominating local government’s agenda as that government will continue to be involved in issues such as elderly care, health care and homecare. New social issues that have to do with diversity, the changing family ties or the psychosocial well-being of the citizens, will not that easily be picked up by local government. At first, the private sector will be expected to deal with them. But if this does not happen, these issues will end up on local government’s agenda as soon as they violate the rights and liberties of the ordinary man in the street too much. For example, if that man gets violated by groups of youngsters who skip school, he will expect local government to deal with this issue in order to feel safe again in his own neighbourhood. This example also illustrates the changed nature of government’s action. After all, local government is expected to act more in a repressive rather than in a preventive kind of way. And the (local) government will also be held more accountable for its actions by its citizens who want to know what happened with ‘their’ tax money. Hence, the increased attention in government for the monitoring and evaluation of results.

Which of these four scenario’s will colour the future of social policy-making on the local level in Flanders? Will it be the first, second, third or fourth? Our analysis does not allow us to give a firm answer to this question, only this: its future is certain but its nature far from.

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