

How local are local lists?

A quantitative and qualitative analysis of local lists in Flanders

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Abstract

Local party systems in Western democracies are characterized by the presence of so-called independent local lists, giving a distinct place-bound flavour to local politics. Moreover, the presence of these local or non-national lists is generally assumed to counterbalance the entry of national parties into municipal elections and considered as an indication for the incompleteness of the party politicisation process. However, political reality suggests that not all local lists are as independent or as local as their label indicates and instead are related to national parties in varying degrees. This paper aims to contribute to a more detailed and refined understanding of these non-national lists. To do so, the first part of the paper develops an innovative and contingent classification model based on local lists' vertical and horizontal autonomy. Consequently this classification model is applied to all non-national lists in Flanders over two electoral periods (2006 and 2012) allowing to establish the occurrence of the different types of local lists in Flanders. The second part of this paper aims to uncover the rationales of the different types of local lists. Based on a qualitative comparative case-analysis, the cost-benefit assessments relating to vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-seeking goals of the different types of local lists are explored. This analysis enables to revealing the local causal mechanisms influencing the strategic choices of the different types of local lists and to interpret and clarify the established variation within the large group of local lists in Flanders.

Local lists in Flanders, Part 1
Pseudo-local and pseudo-national lists
Combining the best of two worlds.

1. Local lists: peas in a pod or apples and oranges?

Political scientists generally agree on a historic nationalisation tendency, referring to the increasing homogenisation in the offer (political parties being present in the entire territory) and results (decreasing variation of the electoral results in the different constituencies) of national politics in Western democracies (Caramani, 1996; 2004). This nationalisation theory has also been applied to the local political context, however political scientists agree less on the local implications of the homogenisation tendency. Rokkan (1966) has introduced the concept of party politicisation for the observed '*breakdown of the traditional systems of local rule through the entry of nationally organised parties into municipal elections*' (Rokkan in Kjaer & Elklit, 2010, p. 338). In his view local party systems increasingly reflect their national counterparts, which according to him would result in completely nationalised local party-systems without independent local lists or non-partisan elements. A number of studies regarding the supply-side of local elections in Western democracies do indeed give indications for a constantly increasing party politicisation of local politics (Bäck, 2003; Aars & Ringkjøb, 2005; Kjaer & Elklit, 2009). However, other research contradicts this absolute end-state of local politicisation by pointing to the recent revival of independent local lists in many European countries (Reiser & Holtmann, 2008). The presence of local lists is thus considered as an indication for the incompleteness of the party politicisation process, counterbalancing the entry of national parties into municipal elections.

Indeed independent local lists have been a common and even growing phenomenon in Western democracies, apparently giving a distinct, place-bound flavour to the local party systems (Reiser & Holtmann, 2008). However, despite their enduring presence and success, these lists have long been ignored by political scientists or treated as a mere residual category when scrutinizing local divisions of national parties. Only recently local lists are given some more academic consideration, and although scholars acknowledge the internal variation of local lists, methodological concerns (comparability, lack of practical classification models, aggregated perspective) still impel them to consider local lists as a homogeneous category (Reiser and Holtmann, 2008). Nominal (list name) or numerical (list number)

criteria are generally used to make a binary distinction between local lists and their national counterparts (local branches of national parties). This generalizing approach obviously leaves little scope for internal differentiation and qualitative nuance of local lists and neglects specific national contexts inciting particular manifestations of local lists. Consequently, a more comprehensive and differentiated knowledge of local lists is needed to increase our understanding of local politics. Indeed, political reality suggests that local lists vary significantly from one another and are not all as local or independent as their label suggests. Disclosure of the actual links between local lists and national parties could substantiate the academic discussion on local party politicisation.

This article aims to pave the way for a more profound and refined academic comprehension of the meaning of local lists by studying them in the multipartisan context of the Flemish region in Belgium. We will focus on three main research questions: What is a pertinent classification model to discern different types of local lists? How are these different types of local lists distributed in the Flemish region of Belgium? (How) do the electoral results of the different types of local lists differ? The presented approach is innovative in its endeavor to develop a practicable and contingent classification system for local lists in order to deepen our qualitative understanding of this multifarious local phenomenon. Furthermore the systematic application of this compound model to the local political reality is unique in local political science research, generally proceeding from sheer nominal criteria or non-systematic classifications to situate local lists in the national/local dichotomy.

In the subsequent sections, we will first address the Flemish local electoral and party system and how this affects the presence and success of local lists in Flanders. Then a classification model for local lists is elaborated based on the analytical concept of vertical and horizontal decisional autonomy, followed by a methodological chapter discussing the research design. The subsequent analysis section establishes the occurrence of the different types of local lists by applying the proposed classification model to all non-national lists in Flanders (for the elections of 2006 and 2012). In a concluding chapter some general conclusions are formulated as well as suggestions for further research.

2. Belgian's local electoral and party system and the role for local lists.

Since the 1970s, Belgium has a regionalized party system. Due to the emergence of regionalist parties and the proceeding reform of the Belgian state towards a federal polity, former unitary national parties

split into a Flemish and French faction. The national electoral system is organized subsequently, implying a regionalized space of party competition. Local elections in Belgium are held every 6 years in all regions and are characterised by a high permissiveness in terms of candidacy¹. Although there is no formal electoral threshold and seats are distributed based on the proportionality principle, the Imperiali system for local elections slightly increases the factual electoral threshold, somewhat favouring bigger parties or constellations. This quasi-proportional representation system makes it easy for (new) parties to (successfully) compete in local elections in Belgium (Van der Kolk, 2007).

As in other Western democracies, national parties do play an important role in Belgian's local politics, but Wille & Deschouwer (2007) contend that no clear evidence could be found for a systematic nationalization of the local political offer. Also Steyvers & De Ceuninck (2013) have analyzed the ratio between national and local lists based upon the list number under which candidate lists confront the voter in Flanders². These authors established that in the most recent municipal elections of 2012, national lists clearly dominated the local party systems with at least one national list competing in almost 96% of the Flemish municipalities and an average of about four lists with a national list number per communality. On the other hand however, at least one local list participated in nearly 79% of the Flemish communalities, with an average of 1,4 candidate lists with a local list number per communality. These figures are strongly in line with the trend since the municipal mergers in 1976. Since then candidate lists with a local list number are found in about 70% of the Flemish communalities with peaks of 80% after the turn of the century which are attributed to the arrival of new parties and the fragmentation of the political landscape stimulating additional cartels³ (Steyvers & De Ceuninck, 2013). Also Verthé & Deschouwer (2011) attribute the presence of local lists in Belgium to the increased attractiveness of pre-electoral alliances.

Differentiating national and non-national lists based on their name instead of their list number results in an even higher share of local lists as illustrated in table 1 (Heyerick & Steyvers, 2013). Both in 2006 and in 2012, the ratio between national and non-national lists was highly similar with a majority of candidate

¹ Anyone can propose a list with one or more candidates, which then has to be submitted by a resigning councillor or by a certain (limited) number of voters.

² Each list receives a number to compete in local elections. The numbers one to seven are reserved for candidate lists related to national parties, the following numbers go to local lists (and small national parties)

³ Although the term 'cartel' generally has another connotation in political science (cfr the cartel party of Katz & Mair, 2006), the concept of 'cartel lists' is very familiar in Belgium (Flanders as well as Wallonia), referring to pre-electoral alliances in the form of joint candidate lists.

lists facing the voter under a unequivocal national party-name, while about 30% did so under a non-national name (at least a local element in the name).

	2006		2012	
	n	%	n	%
national name	1014	69,1%	1144	69,0%
non-national name	453	30,9%	515	31,0%
total	1467		1659	

Table 1: share of national and non-national lists in the Flemish local elections of 2006 and 2012.

Consequently, local lists appear to remain an important feature of local politics in Flanders. However, the common banner of local or non-national lists is assumed to cover a considerable heterogeneity and the authors are well aware of the incomprehensiveness of the numerical (list number) or nominal (list name) criterion to differentiate between local and national lists. Explorative research revealed that local lists in Flanders can differ on a variety of aspects such as their origin, electoral results, organisational structure, actual independence from national parties, ... (Heyerick & Steyvers, 2011). The empirical (occurrence of concealed national lists) as well as theoretical relevance (role of local lists in academic discussion on nationalization and homogenization of local politics) of the actual independence of local lists incites us to use this latter dimension as a starting point for developing a classification model for local lists.

3. Decisional Autonomy of local lists

A thorough understanding of local lists' differentiated role in local politics requires empirically founded knowledge-building based on practicable and relevant classification tools. As mentioned above, we have selected the actual independence of local lists as critical dimension for distinguishing different types of local lists. This dimension is closely related to the concept of *decisional autonomy* identified by Randal & Svasand (2002) as a component of party institutionalisation. These authors define decisional autonomy

as ‘the freedom from interference in determining its own policies and strategies’ (Randal & Svasand, 2002, p.14).

Consequently, local lists’ decisional autonomy can be influenced by national party centres, aspiring maximum presence at the local level because this provides them with valuable political resources, such as votes, funding, activist recruitment, party image, media exposure, preservation of member loyalty and linkage to society (Pedahzur & Brichta in Kjaer & Elklit, 2009, p.340). Moreover, local lists can benefit as well from national party support (financial, personnel, logistic, ...), especially in a competitive local environment with limited resources of their own (Heyerick & Steyvers, 2011).

In addition to this national involvement, local lists’ decisional autonomy can also be affected by association with other local actors. The latter is especially relevant in the Belgian context where the presence of local lists can to a certain extent be attributed to the increased attractiveness of cartel initiatives.

Given these two potential sources of interference, a horizontal and a vertical dimension can be distinguished in the decisional autonomy of local lists. On the vertical dimension - relating to the (freedom of) interference from national party centres –four categories of local candidate lists with decreasing linkage to national parties can be distinguished: national, pseudo-national, pseudo-local and local lists. On the horizontal dimension - concerning the (freedom of) interference from other local political actors - we distinguish two categories: autonomous local lists and cartel lists, the latter combining two or more local political actors who join forces in a specific and time-bound pre-electoral alliance. Combining the vertical and horizontal component of local lists’ decisional autonomy results in the following contingent classification model, identifying four types of autonomous candidate lists and four types of local cartel lists. (Figure 1).

Decisional Autonomy (DA)		Vertical			
		<i>National</i>	<i>Pseudo-national</i>	<i>Pseudo-local</i>	<i>Local</i>
Horizontal	<i>autonomous lists</i>	national party branch	Extended national list	supported local list	independent local list
	<i>cartel lists</i>	national party cartel	local party cartel	localized cartel	Independent local cartel

Figure 1: DA-classification model for local lists.

National party branches are local chapters of national parties and experience the most interference from national party centres. *Extended national party branches* are also explicitly linked to a national party, however the distance towards the national party is larger and the local context is more influential. These lists are generally considered as national party branches, thus neglecting the explicit local reference. This local component is even more dominant for *supported local lists*, however still connected to a national party. *Independent local lists* have no links to a national party.

In the category of cartel lists, a *national party cartel* is a nationally agreed upon pre-electoral alliance between two or more local branches of national parties. A *local party cartel* similarly is a joint list of two or more national party branches, however with a clear local angle; the local cartel decision is taken by the local party branches and not nationally determined. A *localized cartel* still involves local branches of national parties, but the local component is more prevailing and the influence from national parties less obvious. The respective cartel partners however are clearly discernible, organized actors (in contrast to individual independent candidates on autonomous local lists). An *independent local cartel* finally is a purely local variant of a pre-electoral alliance, in which the respective cartel partners have no links at all to any national party.

4. Methodological choices

To determine the occurrence of the different types of local lists in Flanders, all Flemish local lists that have participated at the 2006 and/or 2012 communal elections were situated in the DA-classification model. Decisional autonomy was operationalized as the absence / presence of explicit or implicit links to national parties (vertical decisional autonomy) and to other local political actors (horizontal decisional autonomy). Explicit links can straightforwardly be inferred from the name and list number under which the local candidate lists participated in the elections. This information is publicly available in the electronic election database on the website of the Flemish Agency for Internal Affairs⁴. Determining the presence of implicit links is by definition more demanding and requires an individual analysis of the local lists concerned. We decided on a content analysis of local news coverage to determine the existence of these links since it can be assumed that local voters and local journalists are familiar with implicit links. Consequently, all media-reports on individual local lists, published in the local editions of national newspapers during the 6 months preceding the local elections concerned (8 October 2006 and 14

⁴ www.vlaanderenkiest.be

October 2012) were analyzed. These media reports are publicly accessible through the media-database mediargus⁵. Additionally, the websites of the local lists and national parties proved a valuable source for information concerning implicit connections to national parties. Table 2 gives an overview of the allocation rules applied to assign the local candidate lists in the DA typology.

	Name	List number	representation in media reports and/or websites as ...
National party cartel	Combination of two or more national party branches	National list number	A cooperation between party branches who also cooperate at national level
Local party cartel	Combination of two or more national party branches	National or local list number	A cooperation between party branches who don't cooperate at national level
localized cartel	local component in the name; no or partial national reference	National or local list number	A cooperation between separate and identifiable partners of which at least one national party branch
local cartel	Combination of two or more local partners; no national reference	Local list number	an alliance between separate and identifiable local partners
National party branch	National party name; no local reference	National list number	A national party branch
Extended national party list	National party name, supplemented with local reference	National list number	A national party branch, supplemented with non-organized independent actors
supported local list	Local name; no reference to national party	Local list number	A political group, closely linked to and supported by a national party (branch)
independent local list	Local name; no reference to national party	Local list number	An autonomous and independent political group

Table 2: allocation rules to assign local candidate lists in the DA typology

As a rule, individual links of candidates to national parties were disregarded, only considering collective links of the candidate list. Indeed local candidate lists do not only represent a group of candidates, but are composed of a number of individuals with their own supra-local political preferences. Several

⁵ www.mediargus.be

persons on a local list can adhere to one (or more) specific national party(ies), while this does not necessarily implicate that the local list as an entity has links to these parties. In case of doubt, protagonists of the local lists were contacted by telephone to clarify the decisional autonomy of the aggregate candidate list.

Allocating all local candidate lists in the DA-classification model thus allowed a cross-sectional descriptive analysis of the differentiated load of local lists in Flanders at two specific points in time (the 2006 and 2012 communal elections). Additionally, the electoral results of the different types of local lists will be compared.

5. The occurrence of different types of local lists in Flanders

Allocating all Flemish local lists that participated at the 2006 and 2012 communal elections in the DA-typology allows us to nuance the basic distinction between national and local candidate lists. Since our focus is on the differentiated load underneath the broad flag of local (non-national) lists, the large group of non-national lists as presented in table 1 is subdivided in six types of non-national lists⁶, according to their horizontal and vertical decisional autonomy: extended national party branches, supported local lists, independent local lists, local party cartels, localized cartels and local cartels. Table 3 presents an overview the occurrence of the different types of non-national lists and their respective share within the general group of non-national lists. Table 4 illustrates the share of municipalities in which the different types of lists competed for votes in 2006 and 2012.

⁶ The two national types - national party branches and national party cartels – are not considered.

	pseudo-national		pseudo-local		local		
	Extended national party branches	Local party cartels	Localised cartels	Supported local lists	Local cartels	Independent local lists	
2006	n	35	63	118	28	5	204
	%	7,7%	13,9%	26,1%	6,2%	1,1%	45,0%
	%	21,6%		32,2%		46,1%	
2012	n	51	76	100	80	1	208
	%	9,9%	14,7%	19,4%	15,5%	0,2%	40,3%
	%	24,6%		34,9%		40,5%	

Table 3: Occurrence of different types of non-national lists at the local elections of 2006 and 2012.

	2006	2012
extended national party lists	11%	15,3%
Local party cartels	18,8%	23,7%
localized cartels	33,1%	29,2%
Supported local lists	7,8%	23,1%
Independent local lists	50,6%	51%

Table 4: Share of municipalities in which the different types of non-national lists are present

Independent local lists

As illustrated in table 3, in both elections less than half of the non-national candidate lists can really be interpreted as local, having no links at all to any national party. This share of independent lists decreased with 5 % from 2006 to 2012. This category of local lists contains local cartels as well as autonomous independent local lists. Local cartels occur very rarely in both electoral periods, therefore, in the latter analysis these two types are merged and local cartels are considered as independent local lists. In both elections independent local lists participate in about half of the municipalities.

Pseudo-local lists

The category of pseudo-local lists contains localized cartels and supported local lists. Both types have implicit and/or partial links to national parties. A localized cartel is an electoral alliance with a strong local component in its name and/or composition, however in which at least one national party branch is

still involved. Localized cartels are present in about 1/3th of the municipalities. Their share within the group of non-national lists decreased between 2006 and 2012 with more than 5%. A closer look at these lists reveals that localised cartels contain very diverse and often not obvious combinations of cartel partners⁷. The autonomous variants of the pseudo-local lists are the supported local lists. Their local name conceals the implicit links with a national party. In 2006, they occurred in about 7% of the communalities, while this type of list was much more common in 2012, participating in a quarter of the communalities. Consequently, their share within the group of non-national lists increased from 6,2% to 15,5%. The different traditional parties are found to support local lists, however for the Flemish liberal party (Open VLD) this is more often the case, a feature which becomes more outspoken in 2012.

Pseudo-national lists

Both the extended national party branches and the local party cartels explicitly refer to one or more national parties, while their name or composition equally contains a local component. These lists are therefore considered as pseudo-national. In 2006, 21,6% of all non-national lists belonged to this pseudo-national category. This share slightly increased to 24,6% in 2012. Both the share of extended national party branches and of local party cartels remained fairly stable between 2006 and 2012. In 2006 extended national lists were present in 11% of the communalities, about half of them linked to local branches of the Flemish liberal party Open VLD⁸. In 2012 they were present in slightly more communalities since also other traditional parties more often faced the voter with an extended list⁹. In both electoral periods the local party cartels consisted mainly of progressive alliances between local branches of the Flemish Socialist party¹⁰ and the Flemish Green party. These two left-wing parties are often considered as electoral communicating vessels. At national level, cartel deliberations have never materialized, however the local branches of these parties were given the freedom to deal with the local reality autonomously or jointly. In addition to these progressive alliances, also less obvious combinations occur¹¹. While most of the local party cartels prefer a national list number (often the number of the biggest partner), a minority of them favours a local list number.

⁷ Some examples (2012 elections): *Samen Anders* in Sint-Katelijne Waver (liberal party, socialist party and independents), *Lijst Burgemeester* in Affligem (Christian-democrat party, socialist party, green party and independents) *Tongeren Nu* (liberal party and Christian-democrat party), *Samen voor Kruibeke* (Green party, socialist party and liberal party), ...

⁸ For example: VLD plus in Maaseik, VLD Open in Zulte, VLD Gemeentebelangen in Kortenaak, VLD Maarkedal Leef in Maarkedal.

⁹ Samen SP.A in Dessel, CD&V plus in Zwalm, SP.A Pro in Kontich, Lijst van de Burgemeester – CD&V in Opwijk, Groen gangmaker in Boechout, ...

¹⁰ In 2006 often with SPIRIT

¹¹ Some examples from 2012: CD&V/Open VLD in Hove, CD&V/Groen in Ronse, SP.A/CD&V in Antwerpen, Open VLD/Groen in Mechelen.

6. The electoral results of the different types of local lists in Flanders

Looking at the electoral results of the different list types reveals that the group of independent local lists significantly differs from the other types of local lists. Table 5 illustrates the average vote percentages of the different types of local lists in both elections. The independent local lists have significant lower average vote percentages than the other types of local lists.

	2006		2012	
	average vote%	std deviation	average vote%	std deviation
extended national party lists	23,83	11,41	21,28	11,90
Local party cartels	20,00	11,11	21,65	13,20
localized cartels	26,51	15,31	27,25	16,52
Supported local lists	34,25	21,35	22,30	17,10
Independent local lists	16,91	16,73	13,78	16,31
Over all	21,45	16,45	19,63	16,47

Table 5: average vote share for the different list types in 2006 and 2012

Independent local lists obtain significantly less council seats than the other types of local lists, affecting the role of the respective types of local lists in council. Table 6 clearly illustrates that independent local lists more often are not represented in council, although no significant difference could be found between executive and legislative roles for those lists who are represented in council.

	2006			2012		
	coalition	opposition	no seats	coalition	opposition	no seats
extended national party lists	37,1%	60,0%	2,9%	41,20%	47,10%	11,80%
Local party cartels	34,9%	60,3%	4,8%	52,00%	45,30%	2,70%
localized cartels	34,7%	61,9%	3,4%	36,60%	59,40%	4,00%
Supported local lists	42,9%	53,6%	3,6%	40,00%	46,30%	13,80%
Independent local lists	26,3%	40,7%	33,0%	23,90%	32,50%	43,50%
Average	31,6%	51,2%	17,2%	34,70%	43,20%	22,10%

Table 6: council role of the different list types in 2006 and 2012

7. Conclusions

Local (or non-national) lists are generally considered as a homogeneous category, hence disregarding the enormous variety within this broad group. This common conception prevents a comprehensive understanding of this local political phenomenon by ignoring pseudo-local or pseudo-national candidate lists. Yet, the presence of local lists is often referred to as a counter-argument for the party politicisation or nationalization of local politics. Consequently, this article aimed to develop a more nuanced knowledge of the significance of local lists for local politics and their actual links to national parties.

To conceptualise local lists beyond the traditional dichotomy of local versus national lists, a contingent classification model was developed based on the horizontal and vertical decisional autonomy of candidate lists. This classification model identifies eight ideal types of local candidate lists, varying in their level of autonomy regarding national and local parties. Allocating Flemish local candidate lists in this model, revealed that less than half of the lists that participated in the 2006 and 2012 communal elections under a non-national name can actually be interpreted as totally independent from national parties. The majority of the Flemish non-national lists instead have partial or implicit links to national parties and therefore cannot be categorized as national. However, neither can they be defined as national since they also have a local reference in their name or composition. Consequently, they are situated somewhere in between the local and the national (pseudo-local or pseudo-national). An important part of these 'in-between' lists concerns cartel lists with a significant local component in their name or composition but in which national party branches are nevertheless involved (local party cartels or localized cartels). Another important part of those 'in-between' lists are extended national party branches and supported local lists which are linked to a national party, but assume a local profile to emphasize their focus on the local context.

The established occurrence of pseudo-local and pseudo-national lists does shed new light on the assumption that the presence of local lists offsets the increasing homogenization of national politics at communal level since an important part of the local lists is actually related to national political practices. Moreover, independent local lists succeed less often in getting represented in council, additionally diminishing the political relevance of independent local lists. These findings could lead us to conclude that the nationalization tendency is actually stronger than generally assumed. However, this inference would neglect the local references of these pseudo-national and pseudo-local lists and their

receptiveness of the local context, regardless of the links they uphold with national parties. Moreover, the data suggest that local branches of national parties enjoy a significant degree of autonomy to interact with the local context and respond to local pressures. These findings are consistent with the notion of strataarchical party structures: several authors have referred to the weakening hierarchical relationships between organizational entities of contemporary political parties and the increased autonomy these entities enjoy (Elsewhere Field, 1964, Mair, 1994, Carty, 2004 Bolleyer, 2011). Consequently – based on our research - we can neither conclude that a national party logic takes over the local political arena, nor that independent local lists counter the increased influence from national party politics. Instead, a significant share of local candidate lists seek to combine the best of both worlds, aiming to integrate local and national elements in varying ratio's.

A in-depth qualitative analysis of the decisional processes of the different types of local lists could reveal their motivations and clarify their strategic choices. Additionally, further analysis could expose the differentiated meaning of those types of local lists for local politics (differences in recruitment strategies, political style, internal organization, contribution to local democracy, ...).

Local lists in Flanders, Part 2

Vote-seeking, Office-seeking or Policy-seeking?

A qualitative analysis of local list's cost-benefit assessments.

1. Introduction: local lists' decisional autonomy

Local party systems in Western democracies are characterized by the presence of so-called independent candidate lists. These lists are generally considered as a homogeneous category and contrasted to national party branches, hence disregarding the enormous variety within this large group of local candidate lists. However political reality suggests that these independent local lists are not all as local as their name suggests but instead are related to national parties in varying degrees. In the first part of this paper we have advocated the need to differentiate local lists for empirical as well as theoretical purposes and developed a classification model based on local list's actual independence from national party politics. This classification model identified 8 ideal types of non-national lists varying in their level of decisional autonomy. A distinction was made between vertical decisional autonomy or the (freedom of interference) from national party centers and horizontal decisional autonomy or the (freedom of) interference from other local political actors. Subsequently, this DA-classification model has been applied to all Flemish local lists that have participated at the communal elections of 2006 and 2012 (Heyerick & Steyvers, 2013). This analysis revealed that less than half of the local lists in Flanders can actually be considered as independent. The majority of non-national lists in Flanders do have implicit or explicit links to national parties and therefore cannot be categorized as absolutely local. These non-local lists however do contain a local component and can neither be defined as national lists. An important part of them indeed concerns cartel lists involving national party branches as well as a significant local component in their name or composition (local party cartels and localized cartels). Another part of these lists concern extended national lists and supported local lists which are explicitly or implicitly linked to a national party but assume a local profile.

While the first part of this paper has established the occurrence of different types of local lists in Flanders, we are equally interested in their rationales and in the causal mechanisms influencing their strategic choices. This part aims to interpret and clarify the established variation within the large group

of local lists in Flanders. Based on a qualitative analysis of elite-interviews with protagonists of the different types of local lists the cost-benefit assessments relating to vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-seeking goals will be explored. In the subsequent conceptual section the theoretical framework will be presented, followed by a methodological section discussing the applied qualitative research design and methodological choices. A detailed results section presents the finding of the qualitative analysis and in the concluding section the results of this qualitative research are resumed and some suggestions for further research are made.

2. Conceptual framework: vote-seeking, office-seeking, policy-seeking

Political scientists often apply a rational-choice approach to analyze political parties and their competitive behavior. This approach assumes parties to be goal-oriented pursuing a limited set of clear objectives (Gunther, Montero & Linz, 2002). Parties were perceived as groups of politicians competing for public office (Downs, 1957). More recently the range of objectives pursued by politicians is broadened and a distinction is made between policy-seeking (maximizing policy impact), vote-seeking (maximizing the amount of votes) and office-seeking (maximizing control over private benefits of government participation) goals (Strom, 1990, Muller & Strom, 1999, Wolinetz, 2002). Harmel and Janda (1994) assert that each party has one of these goals as primary objective, while other authors claim that all three goals are valued and trade-offs are made between these different pursuits (Muller & Strom, 1999). Furthermore a distinction can be made between instrumental (a means to realize some other goal) and intrinsic (as an end in itself) goals pursued by political parties. Especially vote-seeking goals seem instrumental to achieve other objectives such as power or policy.

In her pioneering work on pre-electoral coalitions¹², Golder (2009) as well considers vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-seeking goals of parties and contends that pre-electoral coalitions are the result of a cost/benefit assessment relating to the different strategic goals of party leaders. She argues that political leaders weigh the electoral benefits versus the distributional costs (concessions on office and policy matters) associated with decisions to join forces and found that pre-electoral coalitions are more likely to form when the parties share similar ideological preferences and if the party system is

¹² Golder's concept of pre-electoral coalitions encloses a broad phenomenon of various national cooperation strategies between political actors (public promise to govern together, joint campaign, joint candidate list).

ideologically polarized, when the potential coalition size is large (but not too large) and between parties of similar size. Previous research suggests that Golder's findings concerning national alliances are not as such transposable to the local context in Flanders. The descriptive analysis of local lists in Flanders (Heyerick & Steyvers, 2013) revealed that a large part of the local cartel lists concerns ideologically distant partners (especially in case of localized cartels, but also some local party cartels). Hence, we can assume that specific local mechanisms are at stake when forming local cartel formulas and other types of local lists. Golder's rational choice approach however offers a valuable starting point for analyzing the motivations of local cartel types (local party cartel, localized cartel). Moreover, it offers a useful framework to examine the rationale behind the different types of autonomous or joint local lists as defined in the DA-classification model. Interpreting the cost-benefit considerations of these different types allows to uncover the local mechanisms at stake, clarifying their respective occurrence.

3. Methodological choices

Gaining insight in the cost-benefit assessments of local lists and examining their rationale requires a thorough comprehension of the party-internal decision processes and strategic choices. A qualitative comparative case-analysis seems the most appropriate approach for gaining detailed insight in these processes. Proceeding from Golder's assumptions that strategic choices (such as pre-electoral coalition formation) are the result of party leaders' costs/benefit assessment, we have analyzed the vote-, office- and policy-considerations of a selection of different types of local lists, based on in-depth elite-interviews with protagonists of these lists. These interviews provided us with detailed and rich information concerning their motivations and strategic choices and enabled to reveal the local mechanisms at play and clarify the occurrence of the different types of local lists.

The case-selection is based on a theory-driven sampling method with horizontal and vertical autonomy (type of local list) as theoretical selection criteria (Miles & Huberman, 1994)¹³. The sample was restricted to 19 non-national candidate lists¹⁴, aiming for sufficient representation of each type of candidate list to approach theoretical saturation :

¹³ In theory-driven sampling methods, the cases are selected based on theoretical assumptions. Generalisation towards the theoretical framework is aimed for, instead of statistical generalisation.

¹⁴ For confidentiality reasons the name of these lists are not mentioned.

Type of local list	selected cases
extended national lists	2
local party cartels	3
localized cartels	4
supported local lists	4
independent local lists	6

Most cases are situated in the Flemish province of east-Flanders for pragmatic consideration (accessibility) since the province to which the cases belong is assumed to be of limited theoretical relevance (and statistical generalization is not aspired in theory-driven sampling methods). Some cases in the provinces of Antwerp and West-Flanders were added, confirming the assumed theoretical irrelevance of province. Consequently, the person most suited for an in-depth interview on the internal party processes was selected for each case. This generally was the person who headed the list in 2006 or 2012.

Two independent series of data collection occurred. A first wave of interviews took place by the end of 2010 with a focus on independent local lists in the first electoral period (2006). The second phase of data collection took place by the end of 2012 focusing more on pseudo-national and pseudo-local lists, dealing with both electoral periods (2006 and 2012). While allocating local candidate lists in the DA-typology is a cross-sectional (time-bound) exercise, the in-depth interviews allowed a longitudinal approach with ample attention for the origins and evolutions of the lists. Several cases previously belonged to another category or considered to do so. Therefore the cases equally provided valuable information concerning other types of local lists than the one they were allocated to. This enormous amount of qualitative data was then reduced and structured, aided by the software programme NVivo, enabling a qualitative analysis.

4. Research results

In this section the results of the qualitative analysis will be presented, discussing the observed cost-benefit assessments for each type of non-national candidate list. These findings are illustrated with relevant citations from the interviews¹⁵.

Extended national lists

Extended national lists are candidate list with explicit reference to the national mother party, however complemented with a local element in its name. The sample includes 2 cases of extended national lists: one linked the Flemish Liberal party (Open VLD) and one linked to the Flemish Socialist party (SP.A). Both lists previously have run for local elections under their national name, but decided to include a local element in the name, thus becoming extended national lists.¹⁶

For both cases this strategic choice was principally motivated by vote-seeking considerations. In their quest for votes, they aimed to attract candidates with a high electoral potential to appeal to a broad array of voters. However, both report problems to elaborate a full candidate list because of the scarcity of local candidates. This is attributed to the decreased attractiveness of politics in general as well as to the increased fractionalization of the party system and accordingly an increased competition between parties for potential candidates. In their search for appropriate candidates to be included on the list, independent candidates - or even candidates associated to other parties – are valued for their ability to strengthen the electoral potential of the candidate lists. For these cases local list formation rather concerns recruiting (searching and convincing) than selecting candidates and in this process party membership seems a lesser requirement than potential candidates attractive force.

"it is not easy to convince candidates, politics is no hot item any more. [...] Moreover, we always had two parties competing in elections, while there are now four lists coming up and we all fish in the same pond. Associations only have so many board members" (liberal extended national party)

"We welcome independents on our list. It usually concerns people - and their voters - whom we can't reach otherwise. We also welcome action groups. [...] if they are willing to present themselves to the voter." (socialist extended national party)

¹⁵ The quotations are slightly adapted to increase readability without changing the content.

¹⁶ The liberal list eventually (after two elections as an extended national list) even dropped the national name in 2012 thus becoming a supported local list, while the social list faced the voter in 2012 again under a national name after one election as an extended national list.

This openness to non-party members is reflected by adding a local component to the national party label. However, notwithstanding this local reference, the national name and list number is equally valued by although this seems less the case for the liberal than for the socialist list. The latter considers the reference to their national mother party (SP.A) as beneficial for vote seeking and logistic purposes, since the national name and list number enables them to address the genuine socialist voter and to profit from national campaign material. The liberal extended list does consider the national party label rather as a vote-related cost because of the low popularity of the national party in that specific region. However the presence of a national mandatory in their ranks, incites them to (temporarily) uphold the national name¹⁷.

“we need the name SP.A, so we can profit from the national list number. It has several advantages such as the use of the national posters with the list number.” (socialist extended national party)

“In a village as ours, Open VLD is not that popular and it is not that easy to attract people [...]. But you can hardly change your name if you have a parliamentary in your midst. I mean you can't make it an open list or a municipal list if you have a parliamentary in the group” (liberal extended national party)

Office-seeking considerations seem less relevant for these cases to complement the national label with a local element. Both cases are opposition parties and seem relatively satisfied with their role in the opposition bank not demonstrating (at that time) strong office aspirations¹⁸.

“Yes, we can make useful contributions to the local policy from the opposition. We are not against everything, that wouldn't be right. Sometimes we have objections, but we frequently vote in favor.” (socialist extended national party)

“With the previous mayor an opposition role was not frustrating. He was really honest and actually considered our propositions.” (liberal extended national party)

Likewise, policy-seeking considerations seem less relevant in explaining the choice to become extended national lists. Both cases consider local policy decisions as very specific and managerial in nature, with limited ideological significance. Traditional party cleavages are perceived as having little relevance for the local level, while the personal dimension of policy is emphasized. According to the respondents local electoral programs are quite limited in scope, differing far less fundamentally from each other than national party programs.

¹⁷ When that national mandatory retired, the national name and list number were renounced and the list became a supported local lists.

¹⁸ The liberal lists was more office-oriented in the 2012 elections when they were less satisfied with a new mayor and the way he treated the opposition.

“Actually, local politics is about managing the community. Ideological colors are of little importance. In fact, local party programs are more or less the same, they have some different accents, but national politics doesn’t have a lot of impact. We never really tied ourselves to the national party program.” (liberal extended national party)

“I don’t think our SP.A people are very concerned with ideology. Local politics is more about knowing people, collective involvement in organizations, it’s something completely different.” (socialist extended national party)

We can conclude that the quest for electorally strong candidates and their supporters is the main motivation for the analyzed cases to extend their national list and include non-party members which is then reflected by adding a local element in the party’s name.

supported local lists

Supported local lists are autonomous candidate lists with a local name and list number, maintaining implicit links to a national party (branch). Four such lists were included in the sample. Two of them are linked to the Flemish Liberal party (Open VLD), one to the Flemish Socialist party (SP.A) and one to the Flemish Green party (Groen). One of these cases was founded from the beginning as a supported local list, while the others originally faced the voter as a national party branch, deciding later on to drop the explicit references to their mother party and adopt a local name.

The analysis suggests that the motivations to become a supported local list are quite similar to those of extended national lists, however differing from the latter in the costs that are ascribed to the national party label (vote-wise). Again, vote- and candidate-seeking considerations appear to be the most important motivation. All four analyzed cases have adopted a local name in their aim to attract candidates as well as voters and increase the electoral potential of the list. Especially the smaller opposition parties equally report difficulties to find sufficient adequate candidates for their list. However, also the bigger and more successful lists value independent candidates for their potential to attract voters and broaden the electoral profile of the list.

“We have noticed that it is not always easy to convince people to appear on a candidate list with a party political color. [...] We have chosen a local name [...] and that really did us no harm in the sense that we had less difficulties to find people from a progressive angle who are not actually party socialists, but who do support our program and our vision.” (socialist supported local list)

“I then transformed the lists by attracting new people: liberals and neutrals - people who didn’t want to confess to a party - and that’s why I have given it a new name.” (liberal supported local list)

In contrast to the extended national lists, the analyzed supported local lists considered the national party label as an important barrier for potential candidates as well as for potential voters. Three of the

four cases have been quite successful¹⁹ and are convinced that they would never have achieved the electoral successes they did under their national party name. Only for the Green case their localized profile (since 2006) did not change their limited electoral appeal.

"We are a liberal mark in a Christian-democrat bastion.[...]. If I would contest as an Open VLD list in that bastion, we would risk losing votes of those people who absolutely don't want to vote for a certain color. They vote for people, and that's very local." (liberal supported local list)

"We have participated several times as a green party branch and then we had one representative in council, but we always sensed that we had little impact, or most importantly that we - green guys - were a bridge to far for many voters, especially in a rural community like ours. That's why we decided to expand and change our name." (green supported local list)

Notwithstanding the local name of the analyzed cases, implicit links with the mother party are still obvious to the electorate and ensure that genuine party-members are not scared away. These implicit links to the national party follow direct (to the national party centre) as well as indirect (via the local party branch) paths. Three of the cases report links to the national party centre through local strongholds who are also active and renowned at the national political level (as parliamentarian or staff member). Furthermore these same lists are closely intertwined with the formal local party branches of their mother party, although a remarkable distinction is made between the local list and the local party. The former is responsible for local policy work— mainly determined by the executive mandatory's - while the latter is concerned with local party activities (selling membership cards, organize festivities, discuss supra-local politics, ...) and the link with supra-local politics. Although there is quite some personal overlap between the list and the party, the local party branch is considered subordinate to the representatives in local politics, the latter fostering their independence in local policy decisions.

"The local list only engages in local politics, I mean local policy implementation [...], while the local party branch also considers local problems but then passes these on to us. The local party is more concerned with Big politics; they talk about provincial or national politics, they organize a new year's reception, a blue aperitif for the party members[...] they don't really take decisions [..] it's not the right forum to take decisions. The list is because we have aldermen and councilors." (liberal supported local list)

"The functioning of the local party and the local list are strictly separated to prevent confusion for the citizen [...]. The local party will never take position about local policy. They consider strategic long-term issues and pass these on to the local mandatory's. [...] The local party branch gives authorization to the local list as well as a budget while the lists offers feed-back to the party " (socialist supported local list)

¹⁹ The two liberal lists were established in 1976 and 1982 and succeeded to form an absolute majority for several legislatures. The socialist case more recently decided to adopt a local profile (just prior to the 2006 elections) and has also been able to attract an increasing amount of voters, resulting in a leading role in the majority formation of 2012.

“There were thigh links to the national party and if they offered instructions, I never retained from reading them, but our local corner here, was our authority and sacred to us. [...] We have never asked permission to the national party. (liberal supported local list)

This distinction between local party and local list is not present for the Green supported list, which can be attributed to the restricted scope of both the party and the list. The Green supported list is the only case without executive functions, thus less urged to install mechanisms for labor division. For the Green case the links to the national party centre are considered beneficial mainly for logistic reasons (support for capacity building, campaign material, ...).

Vote-seeking objectives appear prior in the decision to eliminate explicit references to a national party and adopt a local profile as was the case for extended national lists. The selected cases do report office-seeking and policy-seeking objectives, however these seem not determinative in this strategic choice. As for extended national lists ideological concerns are limited and policy-seeking considerations receive a very personal interpretation.

“I have done a market research concerning the needs and problems in our commune and then I made a programme which we presented to the voter.” (liberal supported local list)

“ In local politics, you don’t take ideological decisions. Especially in a small communality.[...] I’ve been mayor for thirty years and I can’t say that I had to think on an ideological level once to take the right decisions.” (liberal supported local list)

We can conclude that vote-seeking and candidates-seeking considerations are the main motivation for the analyzed supported local lists as was the case for the extended national lists. The supported cases consider the national label principally as a cost and decided to omit this label and adopt a local name to illustrate their receptivity to the local context and attract candidates and voters who do not want to adhere to a national party or who are disconnected to national party politics in general. However, the implicit or explicit links to the national party are also valued for their ability to attract those candidates and voters who do feel related to the mother party and to receive personal and logistic support from local and national party echelons.

Local party cartels and localized cartels

Local party cartels have explicit references to the local parties concerned, although their composition is locally determined. Localized cartels have an even stronger local component in their name and composition with only partial or implicit links to national parties. Both types of pre-electoral alliances will be dealt with simultaneously in this section, since the analysis revealed that the local mechanisms

stimulating them are very similar. The sample consists of three local party cartels²⁰ and four localized cartels. In addition to these cases, some of the autonomous lists in our sample have considered cartel formation in the past and their arguments are equally taken into account for this analysis.

Vote-seeking objectives again seems an absolute priority for the analyzed cases. As for the autonomous cases discussed above, cartel lists equally aim to compose a balanced candidate list with a high electoral potential to appeal to a broad array of voters. Visible and engaged candidates are a prized but scarce asset and competition between parties for these candidates is fierce. While extended national lists and supported local list compensate this lack of electorally strong candidates by including independents on the list, cartel lists do so by joining forces with other local parties. In doing so the different partners decrease the amount of required candidates from within their own ranks. Although larger (governing) parties have less problems to find enough candidates, they consider the involvement of other parties with a complementary electoral profile - often yet complemented with independent candidates - as beneficial for its ability to increase the electoral potential of the list. Distributional costs related to places on the lists are limited for most cases since the availability of candidates is also limited, although some personal resistance can occur.

"From the moment you stick your head above the corn field, they see your potential and try to haul you in. That's politics, and often successful. As a governing party it is easy to capture new people." (independent candidate on a local party cartel)

"Honestly, 23 names on a list is no longer possible. That's the advantage of forming a list with three parties and some independents [...]. You can all forward your best people and come to a balanced mix to score with as a team." (big liberal partner in a localized cartel)

"They figured that we had to join forces because filling a list autonomously is difficult.[...] Our group as well has to search for people to fill up the list. That's even the case for the bigger parties." (independent partner in localized cartel)

In contrast to Golder's findings, ideological proximity between local cartel partners seems to play a limited role for the analyzed cases. Local policy is hardly associated to national politics and national political cleavages are again perceived as irrelevant to the local political arena. Consequently, as for the autonomous lists discussed above, policy-seeking considerations appear to play a limited role in explaining local cartel formation, while the importance of individual personalities in local politics comes

²⁰ We haven't selected progressive cartels (between local Social-democrat parties (SP.A) and a local Green parties (Groen) nor Flemish cartels (between local Christian-democrat parties (CD&V) and local Flemish-regionalist parties (N-VA) since these have been extensively studied by Verthé and Deschouwer (2011), who established that the principal motives for these cartels to renounce their autonomous character are securing office and - for small parties - securing survival.

up prominently in the interviews. Consequently, the policy-seeking dimension of local lists should rather be interpreted as the aim to maximize personal policy preferences on local policy decisions than maximizing the ideological impact. Moreover, the ideological proximity of potential cartel partners seems of lesser importance in local cartel considerations, while personal proximity and past cooperation experiences are considered decisive.

"I really think that there's not much substantive difference (between local parties). [...]. Electoral programs don't differ a lot from one another, merely different accents, or maybe a slightly different interpretation. In fact, local politics is about persons." (former localized cartel partner)

"if you play the game on an ideological level, (the cartel) will fail within the shortest time, but that's not our intention, is it. I always say: 'building a cycling path: is that liberal or social-democrat?'" (liberal partner in localized cartel)

"If you don't get along with the persons, you obviously cannot form a cartel, simply to be the biggest, that's clear." (local party cartel)

In contrast to the autonomous cases described above, office-seeking considerations also seem crucial in explaining local cartel formation. The interviews clearly demonstrate that the local cartel partners of different sizes are very oriented towards government participation. Local policy initiative in Flanders is dominated by the executive and the strongly anchored divide between opposition and majority is perceived to confine policy influence from the opposition benches. The respondents largely agree that government participation is crucial to have any (personal) impact on local policy since the possibility to influence local policy decisions from the opposition banks is very limited - if not non-existent.

"Nobody likes to identify with a party in the opposition, especially on the local level [...]. You may be able to shift commas and accents from the opposition banks, and sometimes you propose something and a year later you see in the paper that the majority has implemented your point with much trumpet blast." (localized cartel)

"If we wouldn't have formed a cartel, we might have obtained maybe five seats, or four. Then we could have sit by and watch how things went around here, but now we will be in power for 18 years." (liberal partner in localized cartel)

"The objective of the cartel list was to secure our position and deliver the mayor" (liberal partner in local party cartel)

The analysis equally confirms Verthé & Deschouwer's (2011) findings that institutional features are taken into account when considering cartel formation. In Belgium, council seats are distributed using the Imperiali quota and although this allocation system is based on the principle of proportional representation, proportionality is less perfect than in the system D'Hondt, which is applied for supra-local elections in Belgium. In fact the Imperiali-system installs an implicit threshold²¹ making it harder for small parties to get represented in council and favoring larger parties. For small parties a party cartel is

²¹ This electoral threshold depends on the amount of council seats to be distributed. In the smallest communalities this threshold can reach 20% of the votes, while in the big cities in Belgium the threshold is a about 1%.

considered to offer more certainty to surpass this threshold while larger partners can recover potentially lost votes and attain proportionally more council seats.

"Groen has a younger electorate than the CD&V en we saw some potential in that [...] Forming a cartel offers the benefit that no votes are lost" (Christian democrat local party cartel partner)

'From a simple mathematical point of view we cannot exclude talking to the SP.A for in politics 2+2 is five, so we might then be able to join a majority' (supported local list, considering cartel formation)

"Neither the VU nor the SP.A had a representative in council. Simply because of the electoral system we'd better join forces because it increases our chances of having elected representatives" (small localized cartel)

As suggested by both Golder (2006) and Verthé & Deschouwer (2011), the analysis also reveals that the local party system is equally taken into account when considering local cartel formation, however not in Golder's terms of ideological polarization, but in terms of its fractionalization. Local lists seem to estimate the odds of governance participation based on the strength of the competition within the local party system. A weak and fractionalized competition is considered to increase the likelihood of autonomous government participation. In that case cartel formation becomes less attractive, while a strong competitor is assumed to reduce the opportunity to participate in government thus stimulating cartel formation. Large parties seem therefore less inclined to form a cartel in a context of increased fractionalization, while increased fractionalization does encourage smaller parties to form cartel lists.

"With 7 parties at the start in what is after all only a small village, [...] I already know what the coalition will be in 2012. It will be SP.A and CD&V again. They might lose 1 or 2 seats, but they will still have a sufficient majority to govern " (independent local list, considering a cartel)

"6 years ago, the power-balance was stable. The cartel SP.A – GROEN then had exactly 2 votes less than the CD&V list, so we were well matched. We therefore sought reinforcement to remain the largest party." (local party cartel)

In addition to these vote- and office-related costs/benefit assessments associated with local cartel formation, individual distributional cost/benefit assessments are made and potential personal drawbacks can generate resistance against cartel formation. Indeed, a cartel implies arrangements about the distribution of positions on the list as well as about the distribution of executive mandates (in case the alliance succeeds to become part of the majority). If these agreements are in conflict with personal ambitions, internal resistance can hamper cartel formation.

"All of a sudden, we were forming a cartel and so there was a great shift (on the list). I was promised a specific position, and I had to drop only one place, but there was someone who had to give in six places, so they really had some explanation to do" (liberal local party cartel partner)

"It is delicate. Obviously, a cartel requires concessions regarding mandates. That was difficult for people with more votes than the Green representative who became Alderman." (Christian-democrat local party cartel partner)

We can conclude that vote-seeking and candidate-seeking considerations are equally important for local cartel lists. Joining forces with other parties can increase the complementarity of the candidates and the electoral potential of the list. In addition to these vote-seeking considerations office-seeking aspirations play a determinant role in local cartel formation. The decision to form a cartel is incited by the ambition to play a (dominant) role in council and especially in local government. Thereby, institutional and party system characteristics are taken into account. The Imperiali system for seat distribution installs an implicit electoral threshold detrimental to small parties and benefits larger constellations, thus inciting local political actors to join forces. Particularly in case of strong competition combined efforts are required to compete at equal value. Since ideological cleavages are perceived as irrelevant for local politics and individual influences are considered important, policy-seeking is rather related to maximizing personal impact on local policy than ideological impact. Consequently concessions on policy matters are limited and personal proximity, rather than ideological proximity determines the compatibility of potential cartel partners.

Independent local lists

Six cases of independent local lists are included in the sample. Their origins and motivations are much more diverse than was the case for the other types of local lists discussed. Two of the cases can be considered as a splinter group of local party branches, founded by dissident local politicians who's personal ambitions (concerning executive mandate or place on the list) came in conflict with the party's strategy. Consequently, these politicians decided to reengage in local politics on their own terms. They gathered some people in their support, submitted a candidate list and elaborated an electoral program containing their personal points of interests. Originally the main aim was to collect the required votes (vote-seeking) and realize their personal office-seeking political ambitions independently.

"I then decided to show them what we actually are capable of. Within a few months I started up a candidate list, addressed people, elaborated a programme. The common thread is the human dimension, That's what I consider very important." (independent splinter group of a Local Christian Democrat party)

"The political microbe continued to itch and we wanted to reengage in local politics. (As former representatives for VLD) we first approached the VLD, but they didn't want us on their list, and so we decided to start our own party." (independent splinter group of a local Liberal party)

Although other people became involved, the personal imprint of the founders remained significant. Both cases are concerned with policy, however from a purely local angle with great awareness for the authenticity of their communality.

"Our work only concerns local politics, community problems, improvements concerning us." (independent splinter group of a local Liberal party)

"Our goal is the authenticity of our communality and being politically active, not for its own sake, but to do something for the citizens here." (independent splinter group of a Local Christian Democrat party)

A third independent case equally originated in a national party branch, but cannot be considered as a splinter group. It concerns a list named after the mayor who was initially elected on a VU-list (former Flemish-national party). As a mayor, his personal popularity grew while the national party's popularity decreased and by omitting the national name and adopting a person's name, the list first became a supported local list. Later on the national mother party ceased to exist, while the mayor's list remained successful and proceeded independently. This independent stance was perceived beneficial for vote- and office-related goals. The principal motivation was to gain enough votes to preserve the mayoral office and being able to govern autonomously, without interference from national party centers. Policy goals are equated with personal preferences, thus closely related to office-goals.

"One always chooses the path of least resistance [...] The VU did no longer appeal to people, but the person in charge did [...] People voted for the mayor [...] As a mayor you have to be able to govern with your heart and soul, in freedom and with authority." (independent mayor's list)

The fourth independent local list in our sample is a continuation of a longstanding localist tradition in the communality concerned. Local lists have played a dominant role there, traditionally delivering the mayor. This localist dimension continued to play an important role in the local party system until now²². Again, the main ambition of this list was to retain office and govern independently from national party political logics, in function of the locality.

" We wanted to determine ourselves how our municipality, its development, its future looks like, not imposed from Brussels.[...] We have developed our own vision: we wanted to preserve the valuable identity of our municipality [...], maintain in control over the local government and keep a healthy financial structure " (independent local list)

The two last cases in the sample did not emanate out of traditional local council politics, but emanated out of civil society. They have been established by a group of engaged individuals sharing a general indignation over the established local political culture. They consider mainstream local politics as arbitrary and undemocratic, merely concerned with individual and party interests. Their main goal is to

²² In most localities this localist tradition weakened after the communal fusions of 1976.

propose a democratic party-political alternative. Their local character is emphasized, because again traditional cleavages are deemed irrelevant for local politics and traditional party political interests are thought to constrain local policy processes.

"We started out by the end of the 1980s because we were dissatisfied with established local politics. We gathered several people from local organizations such as the women's movement, 11.11.11, Oxfam, the peace movement, VAKA" (independent local party)

"At the local level you don't decide on social politics or employment politics. That's all decided at the federal or regional level. Then, how left or right is a speed limit in a local street, or a zebra-crossing or the construction of a sports centre? It all has little to do with traditional left-right cleavages" (independent local list)

We can conclude that personal cost-benefit basements predominate in explaining the occurrence of independent local lists. The local electoral system in Flanders is highly permissive in terms of candidacy, the costs for submitting a candidate list being very low²³. Individual vote-seeking, office-seeking or policy-seeking ambitions thus easily result in the establishment of a candidate lists. The analyzed independent cases share a concern for a purely local approach of local politics, without interference from party political logics. Their independence from national political parties is considered beneficial for vote-seeking (people are assumed to vote for individuals), policy-seeking (pure local focus) or office-seeking (independent local decision making) goals in varying degrees. However some of the cases also report electoral costs and organizational problems associated with their independent profile. Especially the smaller independent parties experience difficulties to compete electorally with traditional parties who profit from the national name recognition as well as financial and logistic support from the mother party.

5. Conclusion

A qualitative comparative case-analysis of 19 non-national lists allowed to examine the vote-related, office-related and policy-related cost/ benefit assessments made by the protagonists of the selected cases. This analysis offered valuable insights in their motives and strategic considerations allowing to reveal the local mechanisms at play clarifying the existence of the different types of local lists.

The research results support the fundamental distinction between intrinsic and instrumental goals of local lists. All analyzed cases are essentially local vote-seeking actors. They are a tool for local political

²³ Anyone can propose a list with one or more candidates, which then has to be submitted by a resigning councillor or by a certain (limited) number of voters.

actors to attract as many votes as possible in communal elections. However, the aspired electoral results are not so much a goal in itself but an important lever for other - office- or policy-related objectives.

These vote-seeking goals –closely related with candidate-seeking goals - proved paramount in clarifying the occurrence of extended national lists as well as supported local lists. These vote- and candidate seeking considerations equally play an important role in the analyzed local cartel lists, although for these joint lists office-seeking aspirations predominate to clarify their existence. Contextual factors influencing the odds of government participation are thereby considered such as the strength of the competition in the local party system and the Imperiali system for seat distribution. Policy-seeking considerations in the other hand seem less relevant to explain the occurrence of the different types of local lists. All types of analyzed lists agree that ideology is of limited importance in local policy. Local politics is considered as managerial in nature, determined by individual executive politicians. Personal policy preferences and a focus on local issues are more important than ideological preferences in policy objectives. For independent local lists this focus on local issues is even more explicit, considering the absence of national party influence as beneficial for independent local policy decisions. Consequently, policy-seeking objectives are closely linked to office-seeking objectives, both concerning the maximalization of individual preferences in local policy decisions.

Although the research results are based on a limited sample of 19 cases, we assume that other local lists in Flanders result from similar local mechanisms and follow the same logic. We feel confident that the theoretical research results can be generalized to other local lists in Flanders and potentially to local lists in similar settings.

Based on these research results, the DA-classification model can be adjusted. In this model 6 different types of non--national lists are distinguished. However, the qualitative analysis reveals that the causal mechanisms resulting in supported local lists and extended national lists are quite similar, as is also the case for the causal mechanisms resulting in the two types of cartel lists (local party cartels and localized cartels). Consequently, the DA-typology could be modified, merging the similar types of local candidate lists. This would result in a restricted typology of four types of local candidate lists, differentiating between national party branches, localized party branches (merging extended national lists and supported local lists), local cartel lists (merging local party cartels and localized cartels) and independent local lists.

Revealing the local mechanisms to clarify the existence of different types of local lists is one thing. Further research is needed to confirm the relevance of the applied differentiation of local lists based on their decisional autonomy by identifying the differentiated consequences for local politics (differences in recruitment strategies, political style, internal organization, contribution to local democracy, ...)

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