Mimicry or Meltdown?
On the Greening of Local New Politics Parties.
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Abstract

By scrutinizing a specific type of local lists - interpreted as a local variant of 'New Politics Parties' - this paper aims to give an initial impetus to understanding the internal variations concealed by the all-purpose denominator of local lists. Local New Politics Parties are identified as local policy-seeking parties based on a grassroots democratic and post-material values. Based on a qualitative analysis of three local New Politics Parties their common characteristics, developments and strategies are analysed and clarified. These small parties' quest for political relevance urges them to adopt office-seeking objectives, also implying a moderation of their profile and a move towards mainstream parties. In response to the increasing organizational costs of public office, as well as to societal changes local New Politics Parties are compelled to look for cooperation formulas with other political actors in the form of local cartels or by affiliating with a national (green) party.

Key words
Local Parties, Local Politics, New Politics Parties, Party politics, Green Parties.

1. Introduction

Independent local lists play a significant role in European local politics (Reiser & Holtmann; 2008). Belgium is no exception to this with local lists competing in a vast majority of municipalities. In the most recent local elections of 2006 local lists received about 20% of the votes in Flanders and 25 % in Wallonia with similar figures for their share of seats. Furthermore local list have been an important factor in the formation of local government coalitions in Belgium (Steyvers et al, 2009).

However these figures give us no clue on the different types of local lists and consequently their differentiated consequences for local politics. The common denominator 'local lists' indeed covers a highly varied content, ranging from hidden national lists, to genuine local parties with several appearances in between (mayor lists, local cartels, one-issue parties, ...). In an attempt to conceptualize this internal variation Steyvers et al. (2009) developed a classification scheme based on nationalization and partisanship (NAPA-model). Yet this model lacks appropriate data to substantiate these theoretical assumptions for empirical research on local lists is still nascent. Moreover scarce academic research on local lists generally takes a quantitative perspective leaving little scope for qualitative nuance.

Understanding the internal variation of local lists and the differentiated consequences for local politics requires an in-depth comprehension of their genesis and developments. Yet, the closed character of these party-internal processes and the barriers for providing detailed information pose a methodological challenge. A qualitative approach based on elite-interviews appears to be the most appropriate methodology for studying these internal and politically sensitive processes.

This paper is part of a broader PhD research into the differentiated meaning of local lists. During a first explorative phase a series of qualitative interviews with party-elites from local lists was conducted to uncover their political realities. An initial analysis of these explorative interviews unambiguously revealed a distinct sub-group of local lists based on shared content and style. It concerns rather small parties opposing the established local political culture in which individual and party interests are perceived to prevail. These parties stress the need for a different way of conducting politics with a discourse based on public interest and democratic participation processes. Given the obvious similarities with New Politics Parties as comprehensively described by several authors (Müller-Rommel, 1989; Poguntke, 1989; Ignazi, 1996) these local lists can be interpreted as local New Politics Parties.

These exploratory findings brought us to further elaborate on the specific nature of local New Politics parties. Three cases have been selected for detailed analysis of the origins, characteristics, impacts and developments of this type of local lists as well as their consequences for the local political realm.

This paper will start by elaborating on a theoretical framework for analyzing local lists. This framework seeks to combine the NAPA model as suggested by Steyvers et Al. (2008) with existing theories on New Politics Parties (Müller-Rommel, 1989; Poguntke, 1989; Ignazi,

1996), adding some additional dimensions adopted from party literature (Pederson, 1982; Fiers, 1989; Katz & Mair, 1995; Wollinetz, 2008). Subsequently the three selected cases are described and analysed. In chapter four the occurrence of local New politics Parties as a specific type of local lists and their characteristics are discussed.. To conclude we open the discussion concerning their meaning for the local political realm and raise some suggestions for further research.

2. Conceptual framework for analyzing local New Politics Parties

New Politics Parties

Explorative research on the internal variation of local lists has revealed a specific type of local lists which can be identified as a local variant of 'New Politics Parties'. New Politics Parties originated in the eighties as a response to the need for more participation and a different way of conducting politics (Müller-Rommel, 1989; Poguntke, 1989). Ignazi describes the origins of New Politics Parties as follows: "*Dissatisfaction with the 'traditional' internal mechanisms of the mass parties, with their bureaucratization, with the unresponsiveness of their leaders, with the insignificant role of individual members, with the absence of a sense of community, all pushed a portion of active, young, well-educated citizens to look for a different locus for expressing their wills. The demand for more instruments, more channels and more means of participating by a citizenry animated by the civic virtue of democratically influencing the decision-making process is at the basis of the development of these new parties*" (Ignazi, 1996, p. 554). Moreover Ignazi argues New Politics Parties are a reaction to the waning capacity of traditional parties to exert their expressive function and to canalize the demands of the citizenry into policy programmes[1]. Since activists from social movements play an important role in the development of New Politics Parties Frankland, Lucardie en Rihoux (2008) refer to them as 'amateur-activists parties'.

According to Poguntke & Scarrow (1996) New Politics Parties could also be interpreted as 'anti-party parties' given their anti-party discourse. However, at the same they warn for the lack of subtlety of this concept. Dissatisfaction with political parties and the resulting anti-party discourse can have distinct backgrounds and connotations. An accurate understanding of the specific nature and in particular the normative structure of anti-party discourses is crucial for interpreting their meaning and their potentially (de)stabilizing impact on democracy. Poguntke (1996) distinguishes between general anti-party arguments (rejecting principally that politics should be based on competition between political parties) and specific anti-party arguments (rejecting specific parties or party systems) the latter being more moderate since they don't question political parties as institution, but only the way in which specific parties or party systems function.

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[1] Ignazi argues that not only New Politics Parties, but also the recent extreme-right parties are the outcome of identical structural circumstances. They both offer a different answer to the crisis of the expressive function of parties

Applying this distinction indicates that New Politics Parties should be interpreted as specific anti-party parties. Due to inadequate performance of traditional parties and unsatisfactory internal democratic rules, they aim for a better performance of the democratic system without questioning party-forms as such (Ignazio, 1996). They don't doubt the democratic fundamentals of political parties and indeed join the party-political game as a functional equivalent of traditional parties.

Local lists

Local lists are generally identified by legal or nominal criteria, depending on the local context. Both criteria oppose local lists to local divisions of national parties, the latter serving as point of reference. Reiser and Holtmann (2008) suggest a minimal definition requiring local lists to have a focus on one and only one local jurisdiction and to be independent of national (or supra-local) parties. Simultaneously they leave no doubt that this definition conceals the vast internal variation within local lists. Steyvers et al. (2008) also point to the assumed heterogeneity underneath the common denominator of local lists in a Belgian context and suggest conceptual refinement by introducing two dimensions blurring somewhat the supposed distinction between local lists and national parties (figure 1). The first dimension in Steyvers' (2008) NAPA-model classifies local lists according to their actual independence of national parties. A local name can indeed disguise more or less strong relations with a national party, as also suggested by Ackaert (2006, p 105-108). Therefore Steyvers et al. (2008) perceive the dichotomy between local lists and local divisions of national parties as a continuum with genuine local lists and national party branches on the far ends with several manifestations of pseudo-local phenomena in between (hidden branches of national parties, national factions, local cartels, …).

Criterion	Classification							
Name	*National*	*Local*						
Substance	*National*	*Pseudo-local*				*Local*		
Components	Branch national party	Non-national name	National factions	Cartel national parties	Cartel national and local parties	Local party	Single issue	Constituency of independents
		Denationalisation ⟶				Departisation ⟶		

Figure 1.: The NAPA-model of the local party system (Steyvers et Al., 2008)

The second dimension introduced by the NAPA-model is the degree to which local lists behave as political parties and fulfil the functions generally accorded to political parties (partisanship) (Steyvers et al, 2008). Again the authors perceive a partisanship-continuum. On the one end we find local lists serving as functional equivalents of national party branches behaving as genuine local parties. The other end situates local lists who merely apply a party-

like form as electoral device to gain representative power without performing any societal functions (constituency of independents).

Local new Politics Parties are identified as a specific type of local list based on shared content and style and not on the degree of nationalisation and partisanship, however they can be interpreted as 'local parties' in the NAPA-model and further analysis will provide evidence for interpreting the nationalisation and partisanship dimension. After all the use of a local label is also a strategic instrument prompted by a variety of possible motives. The mere choice to face the voter under a local name reflects a desire to denationalize or to dissociate themselves more or less explicitly from traditional parties.

Political parties

Analysing local lists' degree of partisanship is a complex matter since political parties are multifaceted subjects. Some additional concepts from party literature will be added to our framework concerning local lists' as functional equivalents of political parties.

Fiers' (1998) concept of party-functions will be used for examining the extent to which local lists behave as political parties. He classifies party-functions into three main groups: programmatic (policy proposals), positional (recruitment and selection) and civil (communication with citizens) functions.

Organizational aspects and internal power relations can be analysed by looking at the different organizational faces and their respective roles referring to Katz and Mair's (1993) differentiation between the Party in Central Office, the Party on the Ground and the Party in Public Office.

Concerning the strategic goals of local lists a distinction is made between policy-seeking (maximizing policy impact), vote-seeking (maximizing the amount of votes) and office-seeking parties (maximizing control over private benefits of government participation) (Müller and Strom, 1999; Wolinetz, 2008). Müller and Strom (1999) also indicated the difference between instrumental and intrinsic values of strategic goals pursued by political parties.

Furthermore local lists should not only be studied as separate entities, their patterns of cooperation and competition should be considered as well. How do they relate to other (national and local) parties and what impact do they have on the local party system. Traditional literature (Sartori, 2005; Caramani, 2007) distinguishes between one-party systems, predominant party-systems (several parties, of which only one dominates government), two-party systems (two big parties alternating government) and multiparty systems (several parties negotiating varying coalitions). Multiparty systems can be moderate (centripetal competition) or polarized (centrifugal competition) with bipolar systems combining elements of multi- and two-party systems with opposing coalitions being the important players.

Dynamic perspective

Given the presumed path-dependency of local lists' characteristics a dynamic perspective should be used. Therefore we introduce a lifecycle approach, as suggested by Pederson (1982). Pederson (1982, p8) depicts the evolution of political parties by means of 4 crucial thresholds, determining the succeeding stages parties go through, starting with their naissance and ending with their disappearance, also involving the possibility to return to a previous stage. The subsequent phases of a party's lifecycle are *declaration (*declaring the will to participate in elections), *authorization* (meeting all legal requirements to propose candidates), *representation* (winning seats) and *relevance* (having influence). The latter phase is the most difficult to interpret and can be defined narrowly (governing relevance), but also more broadly adding blackmail potential to mere coalition potential of parties (Sartori, 2005). Blackmail potential refers to the power of opposition parties to intimidate coalition parties and influence the direction of party competition.

Local New Politics Parties

By combing theories on New Politics Parties, local lists and political parties we have developed a theoretical framework for studying local New Politics Parties. Similar to their national counterparts local New Politics Parties consider grassroots democracy and participation as a prerequisite for conducting politics. Moreover these parties stress the need for evidence-based policy-making, based on public interests and post-material values. They position themselves as outsiders by opposing the traditional parties. However, since their policy-seeking orientation it can be assumed that they will come to aspire to government participation at a certain point in time. Analogous to the presumption that new (green) parties are likely to drop their outsider status to become acceptable potential coalition partners (Poguntke, 2002; Rihoux, 2006; Bolleyer, 2008), this anticipatory adaptation could also be expected for local New Politics Parties, having repercussions on their functioning as an organisation and their relations with other political actors in the party system. Adaptation would imply tempering anti-establishment rhetoric and shifting the programmatic profile to the centre, thus more and more resembling mainstream parties. However a meltdown could also be anticipated. Several authors pointed out the electoral risks of anti-cartel parties losing their credibility by becoming part of the once loathed establishment (Katz & Mair, 2002; Bélanger).

3. Three cases explored

3.1 Methodological approach

The results described in this paper are based on the qualitative analysis of three cases. These cases were selected from a broader sample[2] of local lists drawn in the context of an exploration of the internal variation and meaning of local lists for local politics. A first qualitative analysis of this initial sample revealed local New Politics Parties as a specific sub-type of local lists based on shared contend and style. This observation led us to further examine this specific type of local lists.

The following three cases were selected for qualitative analysis[3] based on in-depth interviews with party-elites and content analysis of party documents.

- GLIM: Goed Leven in Malle (Good Living in Malle)
- GPS: Groen Progressief Sociaal Stekene (Green Progressive Social Stekene)
- ZAP: Zottegems alternatieve ploeg (Alternative team of Zottegem)

The interviews were conducted by the end of 2010, were then transcribed and analyzed qualitatively with the software programme NVivo.

Successively the cases' lifecycle, the functions they perform and their implications for the local party systems will be described.

3.2 Goed Leven In Malle (GLIM)

'…we experienced that people felt a need, that they didn't know the channels to the local council, where decisions were made based on power positions and not on knowledge or expertise… That really was a basic need: the lack of participation and also the complete absence of environmental policy, it really was a waste field.' (Lowie Van Doninck, council member, GLIM)

3.2.1 Lifecycle

Declaration: By the end of the eighties, a group of young engaged people active in Malle's[4] local associational life (new social movement) founded GRIM (Group on Participation and environment) because they were dissatisfied with local policy. Malle had been governed for decades by a Christian-Democratic majority (CVP) and GRIM denounced the self-evidence of that power position and its perceived excrescences (inertia, arrogance, corruption). In particular GRIM argued for more citizen involvement and more consideration of

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[2] The initial selection was based on estimated variation and contained 7 local lists. This selection proved to be less divers than expected, demonstrating the difficulty to assess internal variation based on superficial (nominal) criteria.
[3] A forth case of a local New Politics Party ('Vanonderuit' from Mechelen) was not retained in the final selection for in-depth analysis because this local list has not been able to surpass the electoral coefficient and have candidates elected.
[4] Malle is an urbanized rural municipality with 14608 inhabitants.

environmental themes on the local policy agenda.

Authorization: GRIM was founded in the build-up to the local elections of 1988. The initiators searched for moral support and were able to gather sufficient sympathizers for submitting a candidate list.

Representation: GRIM could promptly send two representatives to the council with 11,5% of the votes. From the opposition chairs the council members focussed on participation and environmental topics. That first legislature GRIM was able to mature and though still firmly anchored in associational life, they outgrew their left-progressive profile by integrating sympathising people from broader civil society circles (youth movement, employee organizations, …). The subsequent elections (1994) a broadened candidate list was proposed and GRIM doubled its representatives to 4.

Relevance: Considering the 1994 election results, GRIM together with the VLD-DBM cartel (DBM = Democratic Movement Malle, another local list in Malle) could break the dominance of the CVP and form an alternative government coalition (DBM providing the mayor). GRIM's opposition experience and expertise was eagerly valued by their coalition partners who had little political experience and very limited policy propositions. GRIM was able to put a substantive stamp on local policy during the next 6 years providing a dominant contribution to the coalition's policy programme[5], two alderman and the president of the social department. The next elections (2000) however GRIM lost 1 seat which was attributed to a charismatic and present mayor outshining their aldermen. This electoral loss made them no longer mathematically required to form a coalition but DBM included them nevertheless as surplus partner in their coalition to secure a local counterweight to the nationally organized CD&V[6]. GRIM provided 1 alderman as well as the president of the local social service, thus maintaining obvious relevance. That period reflections were made on their name which was supposed to have a negative and old-fashioned undertone. Just prior to the 2006 elections GRIM decided to change into GLIM (Good Living in Malle) thereby sharpening their independent and positive profile and appealing to a broader public. This new look did not generate the aspired results, partly attributed to the national profile of some individual candidates combined with a growth in protest votes for the extreme-right party Vlaams Belang. Only two candidates got elected and GLIM returned to opposition seats, once more facing the relevance threshold.

Recently GLIM is confronted with a decline of active members (illness, deceased, moved, ...) and insufficient flow-through of new members weakening the core-group of party members. To compensate this decline of the indispensable Party on the Ground, strategic solutions are needed. GLIM hesitantly decided to abandon its local profile and to affiliate with the ideologically close national green party (GROEN!). The professional national Party in Central Office will assume the party functions (organization, coordination, communication) necessary for continuation of local political action. Moreover, the local group also considers

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[5] GRIM's comprehensive policy programme was mainly adopted by the other coalition partners, who lacked elaborated policy proposals of their own.
[6] The DBM-VLD cartel was abandoned due to profiling conflicts. The Christian Democrats (renamed CD&V) re-entered local government in Malle to compensate the VLD exit.

forming a cartel with the local socialists (sp.a), equally balancing on the verge of the relevance threshold with only one elected representative.

3.2.2   Functions

From the beginning programmatic functions were of prior concern for GRIM. Participation and environmental issues constitute the ideological basis of the party programme. Since their participation in government, social issues were added. Grassroots democracy and evidence-based council work (contrary to existing arbitrariness) have been the guiding principles for GRIM/GLIM's. GRIM/GLIM is dedicated to upward input from party members and an open debate culture with a low participation threshold. No formal membership rules exist; everybody interested is invited to join internal decision procedures, resulting in a very fluid Party on the Ground. GRIM/GLIM's approach to programmatic functions however slightly changed during government participation with a shift in focus from long-term profiling issues to short-term implementation issues.

This grassroots democratic philosophy is equally important in delivering political personnel. Formal party positions (executive board, board president, treasurer, secretary) are filled in by an open General Assembly but this Party in Central Office is first and foremost dependent on the voluntary candidacy of active members. Recruitment is thus more important than selection. Board meetings are in general accessible for all members, however a more pragmatic interpretation of this grassroots principle was applied in times of government participation when closed board meetings were less uncommon, still the mutual understanding of confidence between members and board was fundamental. Similarly compiling candidate lists and attributing political mandates (party in public office) happens by consultation. When elected, representatives are assisted in their mandate by the core group of active members who not only provide content input, but also strategic instructions. The Party in Public Office is thus coordinated and guided by the Party on the Ground, which converges with the Party in Central Office. The position of the party in public office became more substantial in times of government participation which widened the distance between Party in Public Office (especially the alderman) and Party on the Ground.

Civil functions are less central to GRIM/GLIM, attributed to personal characteristics, preference for programmatic issues and lack of resources. Initially festivities were organized on a regular basis for providing the much needed financial resources for basic operational activities. These events also had an important socializing and integrative function by offering visibility to the party and its political issues. Yet the increasing number of mandates uplifted the financial capacities (increasing contributions) and reduced the need for profit-making activities. An important source of local embedment consequently faded away. During the wealthy times of public office a party leaflet was distributed a few times a year, but since the return to opposition seats the frequency of communication is lowered to only one folder every two years.

3.2.3 Implications for the local party system

In 1994 GRIM played an important role in changing the party system by breaking down the established predominant system in which the CVP had had a majority for centuries. A moderate pluralist party system came into place. The local party system will alter again in the next elections as a result of GLIM's decision to face the voter as a local division of GROEN! In a cartel with sp.a. The party system will change not so much in numerical terms, for affiliating with GROEN should offer the local group new possibilities for meeting the representation threshold – but especially in terms of an increasing nationalization of the local party system.

3.3 Groen Progressief Sociaal Stekene (GPS)

'I always say: I have a text writer, I have a producer and in the local council I am but the actor'
(Jan Van Remoortel, council member, GPS)

3.3.1 Lifecycle

Declaration: By the end of the seventies a group of young people – a lot of them active in Flemish-catholic associational life - founded a local political movement named "De Wakkere Burger" (the Alert Citizen) in Stekene[7]. This movement was first of all concerned with participation and local democratization and aimed to put pressure on existing local political structures.

Authorization: Part of this political movement was adopted by traditional parties by integrating militants on existing candidate lists. The other part judged the democratising niche to be insufficiently incorporated by traditional parties en opted for a new alternative list. They sought affiliation with the national ecologist party and faced the voter in 1982 as a local division of Agalev.

Representation: A vote share of 5,3% in 1982 was not sufficient to have candidates elected and it was not until 2000 that the candidate list of Agalev-Stekene won a first seat in council with a 7,2% vote share.

Relevance: Any coalition potential was basically non-existent with only one council member (notwithstanding the fact that GPS had been used during coalition negotiations to put pressure on potential government partners). Similarly GPS's blackmail potential was rather restricted. Because of this limited relevance, a local cartel with sp.a was considered in the build-up to the council elections of 2006. However, after thorough internal discussion the local group decided not to and to face the voter under own steam. At the same time they decided to open up and localize by cutting the link with Groen! (former AGALEV). A new name - GPS Stekene (Green Progressive Social Stekene) – was assumed to emphasize a local and independent profile in order to attract independent candidates. Notwithstanding this localization, informal ties with the national party remained important for logistic support (capacity building, financing of printed matter). The broadened profile did not have the

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[7] Stekene is a rural municipality with 16809 inhabitants.

anticipated results and in 2006 GPS had to settle again for one elected candidate, maintaining the relevance question unanswered. With the 2012 elections in mind the possibility of a local cartel with Sp.a is for a second time considered, hoping to increase policy relevance.

3.3.2 Functions

For GPS As well programmatic functions are the most important, the main subject of oppositional work being the manner of local policy making. GPS's discourse is directed against the arbitrariness of mainstream politics and the lack of participation possibilities. GPS argues that advisory bodies are neglected or manipulated, political opposition is not taken seriously and local positions are abused by the local elite to advantage own kith and kin. Objectifying and substantiating policy decisions are deemed essential. Opposition work is mainly reactive; Policy decisions are judged on meeting GPS's ideological priorities: participation and democracy, but also environment, culture, mobility. Due to a limited Party in Public Office (only 1 opposition council member) and the high degree of technicality of council files and policy decisions, little capacity is at hand for suggesting proactively policy alternatives. By acting as a thorn in one's side GPS aims to increase its blackmail potential and put pressure on existing policymakers. With limited success however due to a strong anchored divide between majority and opposition. The local government reproaches GPS an unconstructive attitude and a hindering effect on policymaking and attempted to neutralize GPS by offering an executive position to the one and only council member.

Positional functions are first of all limited to recruiting sympathisers to figure on the candidate list or to participate in internal structures. The Party on the Ground is easily accessible and not formally organized, but very involved with council work. In practice only a limited group of active members gather at regular basis to decide on the strategic and content lines and organize activities. In election times, the core group can fall back on a larger group of supporters who are willing to assist in campaigning activities, but don't wish to be intensively involved in the party's everyday work. Political positions (Party in Public Office) are (is) very time-consuming and little sought after. Selection conflicts therefore are rather rare. The tasks and responsibilities of the council member are relieved by the highly esteemed input of the core group and cooperation with locale civil society organizations for developing council files. This vast range of duties for the core group requires a big engagement of active members and GPS as well is confronted with limited flow-through of new people, pressuring the viability of GPS.

Because of inadequate financial resources, communication with society (civil functions) is limited. Although GROEN! is willing to support GPS for the production of party leaflets, election campaigns are rather moderate and even amateurish, making it difficult to compete with bigger parties who have more campaigning resources.

3.3.2 Implications for the local party system

By opting for a local profile in 2006, GPS has contributed to a localization of Stekene's party system (in nominal terms). 4 candidate lists out of 7 faced the voter with a local name.

Furthermore GPS (and the preceding local Agalev-division) has had little impact on the institutionalized two-party system. The two big political parties (CD&V and Gemeentebelangen) experience little pressure from the fractionalized opposition. Moreover they consider GPS as an irritating and delaying factor. their limited relevance impels GPS to consider forming a cartel. By cooperating with Sp.a they hope for a greater blackmail or even coalition potential, for 1 + 1 can be 3 in the Imperiali-system. Depending on their electoral results this cartel could indeed make one of the two big traditional parties redundant and yet drastically change the local party system.

3.4 Zottegems Alternatieve Ploeg (ZAP)

"… we are what you could call a grassroots democratic movement, everybody has an equal say, whether you have been a council member for years, or the party's president. That's because we have no party structure … Therefore we are not a party, we are more like a team, a kind of anarchistic collective in which everybody interested can participate. Positioning this as left or right, no, that's very difficult, democratic however yes …" (Tom Carnewal, council member ZAP)

3.3.1 Lifecycle

Declaration: Zap was established in the second half of the nineties by a group of people from different settings (a lot of them independent but also some ex-politicians from Volksunie and Agalev) sharing a general indignation over the political inertia resulting from Zottegem's[8] bipolar party system[9]. This initiating group outlined a charter for better local policymaking in Zottegem, based on the principles of independence, environment, grassroots democracy, youth, culture and consideration for formally independent municipalities.

Authorization: Based on this charter, supporters were sought and found to submit a candidate list for the local elections of 2000.

Representation: With a vote share of 10,2% in 2000, ZAP acquired two seats in local council. In the subsequent elections of 2006 several candidates backed out to stand (again) for a national list: former N-VA candidates joined CD&V, while greens decided to face the voter with a separate GROEN!-list. In the end ZAP experienced little damage of this increased fractionalization of the opposition and had two candidates elected again.

Relevance: With only 2 council members in opposition, ZAP has to seek relevance in its blackmail potential. By behaving as a 'thorn in the side' they seek to introduce democratic and post-material values in local policy. Yet, in order to strengthen its coalition relevance, ZAP aspires to form a local cartel with other smaller political parties. Limiting the oppositions discord could make it possible to rupture the established party system and establish an alternative majority.

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[8] Zottegem is a centre municipality with 24877 inhabitants.
[9] Despite being the largest party, sp.a had been in opposition for two legislatures due to the other two traditional parties cvp and pvv, connecting their fate. Their policy was little coherent, and consequently continuously dashed by the frustrated sp.a.

3.4.1 Functions

Programmatic functions are of prior concern for ZAP. From the very beginning they intended to propose a democratic alternative for the rooted chasm between opposition and majority. The ideological charter remained the programmatic base. Policy decisions and alternative propositions are evaluated by the charter's principles. Basically ZAP argues that local policy should be based on public interest and framed by a coherent, long-term vision.

Even more then the two previous cases, internal organization is based on grassroots democratic principles, welcoming everybody to join discussions and participate in the decision processes. Again thus the Party on the Ground constitutes the heart of the party steering the restricted Party in Public Office. Because of the few representatives and the enormous amount of council files, bottom-up input from active members is crucial for the quality of their work. Being a small party, ZAP has little financial resources and no professional Party in Central Office. A Board is appointed, but the General Assembly takes all decisions and is freely accessible.

Since the limited positions in Public and Central office (only 2 council members), the positional functions are mainly concerned with recruiting and preserving volunteer members. The vast engagement needed from the core group makes it difficult to keep active members motivated. ZAP anticipates that this positional function and the selection aspect in particular, will become more important in case of majority participation. ZAP's grassroots ground rules prescribe that even then selection will occur by a process of internal consultation.

For fulfilling its civil functions, ZAP tries to assure a certain embedment in local society with limited resources. They mainly use electronic means for distributing information about council work (website, electronic newsletter, network sites). Moreover twice a year a profitable social event is organized (cheese and wine, tapas) which underlines municipal presence.

3.3.3 Implications for the local party system

ZAP explicitly denies to be a party, on organizational and ideological grounds. First of all their internal decision making structures are deemed fundamentally different than in traditional parties in which a small group has decisional power. Moreover they argue not to have the ideological straitjacket and associated rank and file which confine traditional parties. But even though ZAP opposes party politics, they act as functional equivalent for local parties fulfilling similar functions. The impact of ZAP in the party system in Zottegem has been rather constricted. However their presence and electoral success modified the local party system from a rigid bipolar system to a more segmented plural party system, yet without much impact on the governmental context. In 2012 ZAP aspires to force an innovation of the local party system by arranging an opposition cartel and cracking the established majority of CD&V and Open-VLD.

4   Local New Politics Parties (NPP's) dissected.

The three cases unambiguously allowed to distinguish local New Politics parties as a particular type of local lists. In the following section we will elaborate on the specific nature of this type of local lists by first concentrating on their particular content and style. Subsequently the nationalisation and partisanship dimension of these local parties will be interpreted.

4.1   Content and style

New political cleavages

Local New Politics Parties are built upon the central concept of democracy determining their programmatic profile as well as their internal structure. They have extra-parliamentary origins, initiated by a small group of intellectual and engaged people who felt dissatisfied with established policy making and proposed a democratic party-political alternative. The initiators often have roots in local civil society, however also a party background is not uncommon (principally VU, sp.a and Groen!). Classic ideological cleavages are deemed irrelevant and a new democratic versus undemocratic cleavage is introduced in local politics. Local New Politics Parties contend that local policy should be based on democratic processes and founded on a policy vision taking the public interest as departure point. On top of this democratic cleavage some new issues are highlighted such as environment, housing, youth, poverty. They take a post-material stance opposed to established material ideologies of the government cartel. Furthermore local New Politics Parties often defend smaller formerly independent communities who risk receiving less attention from centralistic government.

"in first instance we mainly focused on participation, making our community more democratic and we also continued to stress environmental issues mainly with environmental planning policy, and then the whole social aspect has entered our work, focussing more on poverty alleviation and senior policy as important spearheads" (Lowie Van Doninck, council member GLIM)

Democratic organisation

This particular focus on democratic principles translates into democratic organization structures. Local New Politics Parties distinguish themselves from traditional parties by the role played by party members[10]. Every supporter or interested citizen is welcome to participate in internal discussions. However a limited core group of active party members gathers on a regular basis to set out the content and strategic lines of the party and to organize activities. The support of this core group is indispensable for the work of the few councillors who also maintain contacts with civil society to strengthen their council files. In election times the core group can rely on a broader undercurrent of sympathizers implementing campaigning activities. Therefore the Party on the Ground is a rather fluid compilation of more or less involved supporters performing a dominant role in the party. The active

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[10] The notion of 'party member' can be broadened to the citizen in general since a formal member structure does not exist and thresholds for participation to internal discussions are very low.

members not only steer the Party in Public Office, they also assume several organization, coordination and communication tasks since an official Party in Central Office is absent due to the small-scale nature and lack of financial recourses (no subsidies).

" For some time we worked with real members. However that was quite an administrative burden every year again and so we switched to a mere list of sympathizers which we adapted every now and again. We then contacted the people on that list when we organized something or needed help"
(Lowie Van Doninck, council member GLIM)

Policy-seeking objectives

Local New Politics parties in first instance can be interpreted as (instrumental) vote-seeking parties. Like all other political actors they aim to win as much votes as possible when participating in elections. Election campaigns are elaborated to promote their programme and candidates and to convince the voter. Due to limited resources they experience difficulties to compete with traditional parties who can use the contributions from well-paid executive functions and/or financial and logistic resources from the national mother-party to set up big campaigns. Fundamentally however local New Politics Parties are policy-seeking parties aiming to introduce their priorities in local policy. Maximizing vote share is instrumental to the intrinsic policy seeking goal as depicted in figure 1.
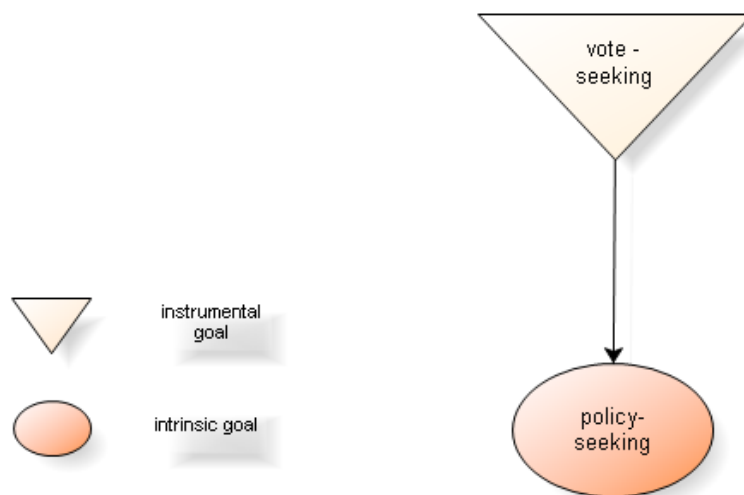

Figure 1: Strategic goal of local new Politics parties.

The analyses enables us to refine this interpretation of instrumental and intrinsic goals. The data suggest an alteration of instrumental goals depending on the parties experiences in local politics and thus the course of their lifecycle. The figure below illustrates a path-dependency model of local New Politics Parties' strategic goals based on Pedersen's life cycle approach (1982).
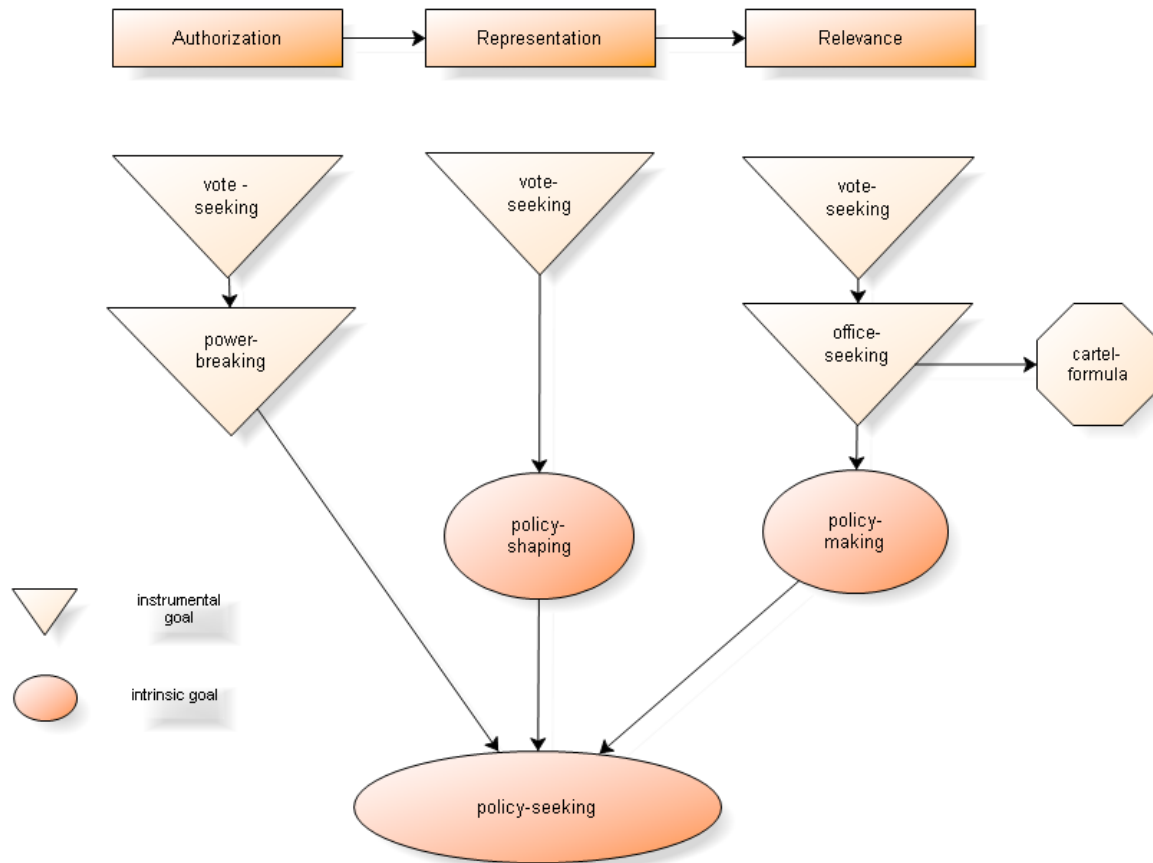
Figure 2: Path-dependency model explaining shifts in strategic goals of local New Politics Parties

Local New Politics Parties competing in elections for the first time aim to break up the established party system and existing power structures by offering a substantive alternative. 'Power breaking' is introduced in this model as instrumental objective in view of local New Politics parties' policy seeking goals. Once having representatives elected in council (representation) they mainly concentrate on their blackmail potential as anti-establishment parties and initially demonstrate little governmental ambitions. Participation in majority however gets esteemed higher after some time in opposition, since legislative initiative is dominated by the executive in parliamentary systems and policy influence of opposition parties remains limited (Bolleyer, 2008). This model therefore nuances the intrinsic policy-seeking dimension by differentiating between policy-shaping objectives (touching up policy) and policy-making objectives (co-designing policy). After some time local New Politics Parties' council members consider their situation to be inadequate for realizing their policy-shaping objectives. Feelings of frustration bring them to adjust their strategic goals from policy-shaping to policy-making. However, policy-making requires government mandates. Local New Politics parties therefore orient themselves more and more to office-seeking goals in order to gain access to executive power. Again the office-seeking objectives should be interpreted as instrumental goals. Local New Politics Parties in essence remain policy-seeking parties considering access to government as a means for having bigger impact on local policy. Since electoral legislation favours bigger parties, this office-seeking objectives

stimulates local New Politics Parties to form cartels, a tendency which will be discussed in more detail further on.

"I am a real opposition man, I love to give comment and indicate stuff, but if I would be a good policy man? I think that would fit me less, but indeed the aim is to change things. Just yesterday, I had a discussion on 'slow roads', that's another workshop I followed, you can't imagine what kind of answers they give. So then you would be able to realize things like that, right" (Jan Van Remoortel, council member GPS)

4.2   Partisanship and nationalisation

Partisanship: different but the same

"ZAP is an alternative for rusted traditional parties for whom governing is equal to preparing the next elections, and not for serving public interest" (ZAP Charter)

Local New Politics Parties oppose themselves to mainstream parties at the local level and employ a specific discourse questioning the existing local party system and more in particular the established political culture. Not the democratic principle of political parties is mistrusted but critics concern the primacy of individual and party concerns of the political elite. They strongly denounce the personal and pork barrel character of local politics. These anti-party sentiments are also fed by the absence of bottom-up processes for policy making. According to local new Politics parties mainstream policy is arbitrary (ill-founded) and undemocratic. Local new politics parties thus can be interpreted as specific anti party-system parties (Poguntke, 1996). Following Katz and Mair (1995; 2002) they can also be interpreted as anti-cartel parties, reacting against a local variety of the cartelization trend in which political parties increasingly resemble each other (electorally, programmatically, in their goals, their style, …) and cooperate to promote shared interests in terms of government potential and the resulting financial benefits. However, despite their anti-establishment character, they present themselves as functional equivalents of local divisions of national parties and perform similar functions. They should thus be interpreted as political parties, but they show different accents. Katz and Mair (1995, 2002) have described the evolution of traditional parties into 'cartel parties' characterised by a dominant role for the Party in Public Office, an increasing distance to party members and a decline of the representative function. As opposed to this evolution of traditional parties, local New Politics Parties show a dominance of the members and a significant concern for the representative role with a focus on grassroots democratic principles. Local New Politics Parties are rather small (mostly opposition) parties with a limited Party in Public Office and a non-professional Party in Central Office, based on voluntary engagement of active members. Positional functions (assigning positions within the party) consequently are rather limited while Katz and Mair (2005) demonstrated the importance of this function in traditional cartel parties. Local embedment and civil functions are important to local New Politics Parties however they lack resources to invest in a sustained local presence.

Local new politics parties thus walk a thin line between opposing themselves to traditional parties and aiming to fit in and be part of the party political game. Moreover we witness their

distinguishing characteristics fainting somewhat in times of government participation. Pragmatic considerations then lead them to act more and more like their counterparts.

> " *Political success also urges you to modify your political ideas somewhat, to make room for new things more in the direction of the centre*" (Lowie Van Doninck, council member, GLIM)

localisation

Basically local New Politics Parties can be interpreted as independent from national parties. They assume a local and independent profile, mainly resulting from the perceived irrelevance of classic left-right divides in a local context. Yet informal or individual links with national parties are not uncommon. The electoral horizon of local political elites is not restricted to the local context and political preferences, as well as political networks beyond their locality are likely. Pragmatic motives (see beyond) can incite local new Politics parties to tighten these informal links at the expense of their independent profile and probably their electoral success[11].

Mimicry or meltdown?

Local New Politics Parties are confronted with two fundamental problems threatening their survival. Firstly they continuously balance on the verge of political relevance and have to fight a constant battle to increase their relevance. Due to their relative limited electoral weight[12] coalition potential remains restricted (local New Politics Parties are generally opposition parties) and relevance has to come from their capacity to put pressure on the policy-making process (blackmail potential). Local contextual factors could put them in a position of holding the balance and being involved in coalition negotiations, but these circumstances are mostly coincidental.

A second fundamental problem confronting local New Politics parties is a decline of the crucial Party on the Ground. Despite their numerical weakness, council members of local New Politics Parties have an ambitious policy-seeking agenda. They are focused on substance and attach great importance to well-founded policy making. Yet, the amount and the increasing complexity of council work, together with the limited access to information from government makes the small local New Politics Parties dependent of external input. Since a professional Party in Central Office is absent, council members need to rely on the Party on the Ground which takes care of strategic, content-related and organizing support for their representatives in council. These tasks however require a serious engagement and time-investment from party members. The loss of some veterans (illness, deceases, movements, ...) as well as an insufficient flow-through of new members[13] causes the required engagement to become ever more rare and local New Politics Parties experiencing ever more problems to keep an active core group up and running. This tendency is attributed to a changing societal

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[11] Interviewed party-elites ascribe a larger electoral appeal to local lists with independent profile.
[12] The studied cases generally fluctuate around a vote-share of 10%. Only GRIM could count on a bigger vote-share in their heydays (17%) and was included in the coalition.
[13] Despite local New Politics Parties' popularity with younger age-cohorts.

context and a new conception of political engagement, an argument supported by the hypothesis of post-modern citizenship (Dejaeghere, Y. & Hooghe M.; 2006) stating that the 'monitorial citizen' is still keeping an eye on the political processes, however without making structural use of classic participation channels such as political parties.

Confronted with these two challenges, local New Politics Parties are forced to find strategic solutions guaranteeing their continued existence. As illustrated in Figure 3 the observed coping strategies contain particular forms of collaboration with national or local parties resulting in a shift to the left on the nationalisation and/or partisanship dimension of the NAPA-model and thus a rapprochement to traditional parties.
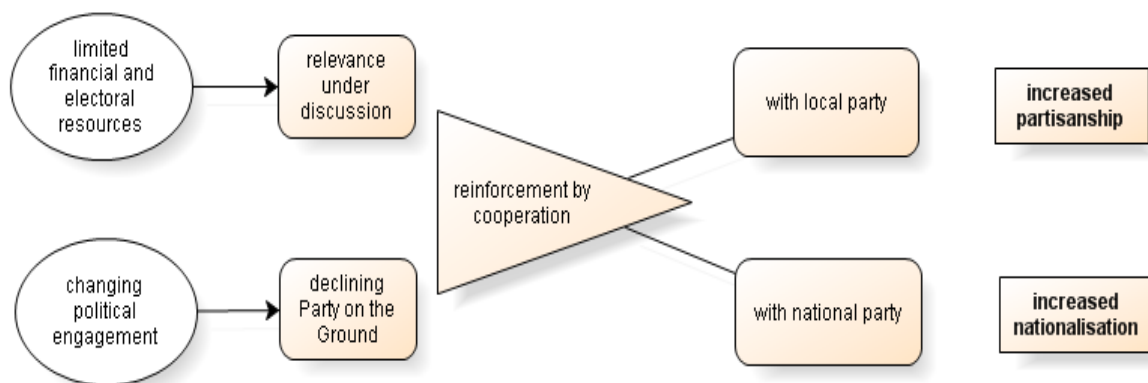

Figure 3: challenges and coping-strategies of local New Politics Parties

Local New Politics Parties can opt for local collaboration with other parties to strengthen their coalition potential and relevance[14]. The choice for cooperation with local political actors can be explained by the increased office-seeking ambitions combined with the institutional context (Imperiali, favouring bigger parties or constellations) and limited resources to compete with traditional parties. Joining a cartel also implies giving up part of your independence, however since the shift towards more office-seeking oriented goals, the possibility of government participation is anticipated, including the need for making concessions to other majority parties. Ideological adjacent parties are evident potential partners but also more distant parties are considered (ZAP aims for a cartel with Groen! as well as N-VA and open-VLD).

"When forming part of a majority you will not be alone as well and if I sit there with CD&V, I will also have to pour water by the wine and eventually we will have to come to a compromise which will hopefully be not too much of a freak and which will be defendable for all parties concerned. A bench of aldermen always acts in collegiality so speaking of a cartel list or a coalition doesn't make too much of a difference isn't it". (Tom Carnewal, council member, ZAP)

Secondly, in compensation for the declining Party on the Ground, local New Politics Parties can seek affiliation with an ideologically related national party. Since ecological parties have

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[14] all analyzed cases have decided on or were exploring a cartel formula in the run-up to the 2012 elections

their origins in the same democratization niche and likewise stress the importance of participation processes and post-material issues (Frankland, Lucardie en Rihoux, 2008), Groen! appears to be a logic choice for affiliation, as demonstrated by the case studies[15]. Nationalisation means that the national Party in Central Office can offer the much needed logistic and financial support to the local group. Exceptionally the local name and a certain independency can be sustained (cfr. GPS Stekene) but in most cases affiliation signifies conversion into a local division of the national party (cfr. GLIM, Malle). This also means (partly) abandoning its independence and singularity, including the anticipated negative electoral consequences. This coping strategy is perceived as a sheer necessity and only reluctantly chosen for in order to avoid a meltdown.

"The coming elections we stand as Groen!... In a local party you have to work very hard, you have to write statutes, assure revenues, make leaflets, folders in which you tell what you and we were very good in that … And then why are we switching now, just because of a lack of man power and insufficient flow-through of younger people to put up the same thing, be involved in politics in the same way. It's a pure necessity" (Lowie Van Doninck, council member, GLIM)

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[15] Two of the three case studies sought affiliation with GROEN!, but this strategy could also be possible with other national parties at the left.

4 Conclusions

Based on an in-depth study of three cases this paper argues the existence of local New Politics Parties as a specific type of local lists and searches for explanatory factors to clarify its origins, features and developments.

Local New Politics parties are characterized by their focus on participation and grass-roots democracy as an ideological as well as an organizational project, introducing a new (post-material) ideological cleavage in local politics. Local New Politics parties are basically policy-seeking parties aiming for a fundamental change in local policy. They can be interpreted as local anti-party-system parties due to their discourse against the established political culture in which individual and party interests are perceived to prevail. Initially they position themselves as political outsiders, challenging the established political system, however without questioning the concept of political parties.

The data confirms the hypothesis of anticipatory adaptation (Poguntke, 2002). A shift in instrumental strategic objectives of local New Politics parties can be observed as their lifecycle progresses. Political ambitions increases and mere policy-shaping objectives are replaced by policy-making objectives requiring government participation. In order to increase credibility as potential coalition partner (Deschouwer, 2008; Bolleyer, 2008) the initial anti-establishment status is fading and an approaching to traditional parties can be observed in the form of local cartel formulas or even affiliation with national parties.

However this mimicry is not only inspired by the new office-seeking objectives and reinforced by the legislative context. It should also be understood as an attempt to prevent a collapse. A specific feature of local New Politics Parties is their grassroots character. The active nucleus of voluntary members forms the heart of the party assuming most of the party functions. However the cases suggest the untenable nature of this intensive role for party members. Local New Politics Parties experience difficulties to find active members willing to invest time and energy to bear the organizational costs of legislative power. These findings contradict the conclusion of Frankland, Lucardie en Rihoux (2008) suggesting a professionalization of the Party in Public Office and the Party in Central Office who increasingly behave as traditional parties, while the Party on the Ground remains rooted in the amateur-activist model based on grass-roots democratic principles. The stability of the active role of party members is stressed as a result of activists' persistent claim for grassroots politics. At the local level we found no evidence for a sustained commitment to this kind of grassroots democracy. On the contrary party members seem to have lost their interest in this role. To compensate for this declining activism local New Politics Parties can opt for collaboration with other (national) parties having enough resources to assume the party functions. This option could be interpreted as a internal differentiation and professionalization of the head of the party as suggested by Frankland et al. (2008). The cases suggest Groen! being an obvious choice to affiliate with for local New Politics parties because the comparable ideological origins in grassroots democratic demands. These findings also suggests local new Politics parties being part of the territorial development of the national party Groen! however the case of ZAP, who has no links with the ecologist party

suggests this is not always the case. More detailed research into the prevalence of this development is needed for further conclusions.

The observed aim for cooperation with national and local political actors demonstrate an obvious mainstreaming of local New Politics Parties confirming the suggested tendency to moderate their anti-establishment profile (Poguntke, 2002; Rihoux, 2006; Bolleyer, 2008). However little evidence is found for the suggested moderation of programmatic profile while holding legislative power. Executive power on the contrary does imply a slack in the programmatic profile as well as in the organisational principle of consensual decision-making as illustrated by the case of GLIM. These observations also validate Bolleyer suggestion that the growing organisational costs of public office (especially executive) impels new parties to professionalize and institutionalise.

This paper has dealt with only one type of local lists and gives a first contribution to a better understanding of the meaning of the internal variation hidden under the general appellation of local lists. Obviously further research is needed - quantitative as well as qualitative - for revealing the meaning and evolutions of other types of local lists as well and to map their prevalence in Belgium and in comparative perspective.

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