

**Local lists in Flanders: peas in a pod or apples and oranges?
Refining the concept of local lists from a neo-institutional perspective.**

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Introduction

As in other Western democracies, local party systems in Belgium not only comprise local branches of national parties but also independent local lists. These local lists undoubtedly give a distinct place-bound flavour to the local party systems, but not in an unequivocal manner. Scholars agree that the common denominator of local lists covers a highly varied content, yet scientific knowledge of the different manifestations of local lists and their differentiated consequences for local politics is lacking. Academic research on local lists generally takes a theoretical or quantitative perspective opposing local lists to national party-branches. However, this approach leaves little scope for empirical differentiation and qualitative nuance. Hence, Steyvers et al. (2009) proposed a theoretical classification model nuancing the supposed contradistinction between independent local lists and branches of national parties by differentiating local lists based on their actual independence of national parties and the extent to which they should be considered as partisan. Notwithstanding the theoretical value of this NAPA-model (nationalization-partisanship), its actual applicability for classification purposes is limited since measurable indicators are lacking.

This paper is innovative in its aim to develop a practicable typology of local lists as an instrument for deepening our understanding of this multifarious local phenomenon. Proceeding from the NAPA-model and integrating a neo-institutional perspective, four institutionalization dimensions of local lists will be elaborated and concretized, resulting in a twofold institutionalization typology. The first part of this typology classifies local lists based on their decisional autonomy, while the second part considers the internal organizational characteristics of local lists. Subsequently, the practicability of this model is tested by applying it to a selection of ten Flemish local lists. A qualitative analyses of these cases, based on elite-interviews, allowed us to allocate them to a specific ideal-type in both parts of the institutionalization typology.

Conceptualizing local lists

1. Nationalization and Partisanship

Independent local lists are a common and growing phenomenon in Western democracies. Still, empirical research on local lists is nascent and generally takes a quantitative perspective. In their aim to highlight the relevance of these local political actors, Reiser and Holtmann (2008) provide an overview of theoretical and empirical research on local lists in Europe. For comparative purposes, they suggests a minimal definition for local lists based on 2 criteria related to their local/national character: 1) their focus on one and only one local jurisdiction and 2) their (nominal) independency of national (or supra-local) parties. Although these (and other) authors are well aware of the vast internal variation concealed by this definition, methodological concerns impel them to deal with local lists as a homogenous category and contrast them to local divisions of national parties. This minimalist approach is valuable for developing and integrating elementary knowledge on local lists as an aggregation, but inhibits profound analysis of the internal differentiation within this broad category. Furthermore it neglects specific national contexts enabling specific manifestations of local lists.

Steyvers et al. (2008) similarly point to the assumed heterogeneity of local lists in a Belgian context and suggest conceptual refinement. In their NAPA-model (Nationalisation – Partisanship), they introduce two analytical dimensions to differentiate local lists (figure 1). The first dimension classifies local lists according to their actual - and not mere nominal - independence of national parties (nationalisation). Indeed, a local name can disguise more or less strong relations with a national party, as also suggested by Ackaert (2006, p 105-108). Steyvers et al. (2008) perceive the dichotomy between local lists and local branches of national parties as a continuum with genuine local lists and national party branches on the two far ends with several manifestations of pseudo-local phenomena in between. The second dimension introduced by the NAPA-model classifies local lists according to the degree to which they behave as political parties and fulfil the functions generally accorded to them (partisanship). Again the authors perceive a partisanship-continuum. On the one end we find local lists behaving as genuine local parties, thus serving as functional equivalents of national party branches. The other end situates local lists that merely apply a party-like form as electoral device to gain representative power without performing any societal functions (constituency of independents).

Criterion	Classification							
Name	<i>National</i>		<i>Local</i>					
Substance	<i>National</i>		<i>Pseudo-local</i>				<i>Local</i>	
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: NAPA-model for classifying local lists (Steyvers et Al., 2008)

Notwithstanding the theoretical relevance of the dimensions introduced by the NAPA-model, it lacks appropriate indicators and empirical data to substantiate the underlying theoretical assumptions. Consequently, in what follows, we will further elaborate on the nationalization and partisanship dimension by relating them to the concept of institutionalization.

2. Institutionalization

Political institutionalization was first described by Samuel Huntington as ‘*the process by which organizations and procedures acquire value and stability*’ (Huntington, 1968, p.394). Since then several authors have used the concept of party institutionalization, generally focussing on national parties in a comparative perspective (Crotty, 1968, Janda, 1980; Panebianco, 1988; Levitsky, 1998) and more recently also on new democratizing countries (Levitsky, 2001; Randall & Svasand, 2002; Basedau & Stroh; 2008). Randal & Svasand (2002) critically explored existing literature on party institutionalization and identified the different dimensions considered in

literature. Thereupon, they suggested to understand institutionalization as “*the process by which the party becomes established in terms both of integrated patterns of behaviour and of attitudes, or culture*” (Randal & Svasand, 2002, 12), differentiating between a structural and an attitudinal component of party institutionalization. In addition, they distinguish between internal and externally related aspects of this concept. Based on these insights and from a democratizing perspective, Randal & Svasand propose the following analytical model, identifying four components of party institutionalization (Figure 2).

	Internal	External
Structural	Systemness	Decisional autonomy
Attitudinal	Value infusion	Reification

Figure 2: Dimensions of party institutionalisation (Randal & Svansand, 2002, p.13)

Returning to the NAPA-model for classifying local lists and confronting it with the concept of party institutionalization reveals quite some common ground. Indeed, the nationalization dimension - or actual independence from national parties - can be related to decisional autonomy of local lists, while the partisanship dimension can be related to the internal organizational components of institutionalization (systemness and value infusion). Consequently, the concept of party institutionalization proves valuable for analyzing and classifying local lists. Hence, in what follows we will further on decisional autonomy, systemness and value infusion as relevant components of institutionalization of local lists and translate them into practicable indicators for classification purposes.

3. From nationalization to decisional autonomy

Decisional autonomy as structural, external component of party institutionalization is defined by Randal & Svasand as ‘*the freedom from interference in determining its own policies and strategies*’ (Randal & Svansand, 2002, p.14). Applying this component to local lists, decisional autonomy is relevant in two directions, which can be interpreted as vertical and horizontal autonomy. Vertical autonomy relates to the freedom of interference from national parties and is thus closely linked to the nationalization dimension of the NAPA-model. Horizontal autonomy on the other hand refers to the freedom of interference from other local political actors. This latter interpretation of decisional autonomy is especially relevant in a Belgian context where local cartels are a common phenomenon, equally restricting the decisional autonomy of local parties.

3.1 Vertical autonomy

Local lists are generally interpreted as *independent* local lists – thus neglecting the pseudo-local variants, while the presence of the latter is often implicitly recognized. Moreover, the presence of these local lists is an important argument in the academic discussion on nationalisation and party politicisation. Political scientists generally agree on a historic nationalisation tendency, referring to the increasing homogenisation of national politics in Western democracies (Caramani, 1996, 2004). There is less academic agreement on the local implications of this nationalisation

tendency. Rokkan (1966) introduced the concept of party politicisation referring to ‘(the) *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). According to Rokkan, this party politicisation process would result in completely nationalized local party-systems, independent (non-partisan) elements being eliminated. Indeed, a number of studies give indications for a constantly increasing party politicisation of local politics (Bäck, 2003; Aars & Ringkjøb, 2005; Kjaer & Elklit, 2009). However, other researchers contradict this absolute end-state of politicisation by pointing to the recent revival of local lists in many European countries (Reiser & Holtmann (eds.), 2008). Also in Belgium national parties do play an important role in local politics, but no clear evidence could be found for a systematic nationalisation of the local party political offer and/or result, with local lists remaining an important feature of Belgian local party systems (Wille & Deschouwer, 2007).

However, the assumption that local lists can conceal more or less strong links to national parties puts the academic discussion on party politicisation in another perspective, implying that the localist dimension of local politics actually tends to quasi-national practices. There is no evidence however on the prevalence of pseudo-local phenomena, but local lists as well as national parties can benefit from such links. National parties aspire maximum presence at the local level, because this provides them with valuable political resources, such as funding, activist recruitment, party image, media exposure, preservation of member loyalty and linkage to society (Pedahzur & Brichta in Kjaer & Elklit, 2009, p.340). Local lists then again could benefit from national support (financial, personnel, logistic, ...) in a competitive local environment with limited resources of their own (Heyerick & Steyvers, 2011). Notwithstanding these potential political benefits of linking local and national political actors, a local and independent profile can also be valued for several reasons. Marcel Boogers (2008) indicates four motives for taking an independent position 1) it allows a distinct focus on local issues; 2) the perceived irrelevance of national party politics for local issues and the interpretation of local politics as pragmatic and factual; 3) dissatisfaction with national party politics; and 4) independence of national political trends. We can add to this list more personal motives, often resulting from party-internal conflicts.

While the NAPA-model differentiates between national, local and pseudo-local lists to reckon with the possible presence of more or less hidden links to national parties, we will further differentiate between local lists without any links to national parties, local lists with explicit links to national parties and local lists with implicit or partial links to national parties. To determine these links, we can refer to Bolleyer (2011) who analyzed the hierarchical elements in stratarchical parties. She considers central conflict resolution, central control over fiscal resources and top-down communication as principal connections between a party centre and its organizational units. This distinction between strategic, financial and logistic links between components of a political party is equally relevant for determining the presence of links between local lists and national parties.

3.2 *Horizontal autonomy*

A local list’s decisional autonomy could also be constrained by horizontal interference from other local actors. This is especially the case in the Belgian context where the presence of local lists is to a certain extent attributed to the increased attractiveness of local cartel formulas induced by the fractionalisation of the party political offer, combined with the institutionally

embedded advantage for bigger political groupings (council seat distribution based on the Imperiali method) (Deschouwer, 1996). Verthé and Deschouwer (2011) use the term *pre-electoral alliances* to refer to these “*agreement[s] between parties to form a joint list or present joint candidates to the voters*” (Verthé & Deschouwer, 2011, 4) and identify costs and benefits of these local cartels. They argue that parties opt for a pre-electoral alliance to reduce electoral risks and secure office or even survival (for small parties). This potential benefits however come with a considerable cost since a joint list implies renouncing individual recognisability as well as decisional autonomy. After all, joining forces for electoral purposes requires agreements on a variety of aspects (joint programmatic profile, campaigning, candidate selection, list formation, cooperation,...) and consequently limits the decisional freedom of the partners involved.

Considering the horizontal autonomy of local lists, two categories of local lists can be distinguished: cartel lists and autonomous lists. Local cartel lists (or pre-electoral alliances) in which two or more local political actors join forces in a specific and time-bound electoral context. The respective cartel partners remain clearly discernible (thus differing from a merge) and agreements are made to determine the conditions of this cooperation. Autonomous local lists on the other hand face the voter individually under own power.

3.3 Indicators

We have thus disentangled decisional autonomy of local lists in horizontal and vertical autonomy. Determining the autonomous character of local lists requires measurable indicators. Two indicators have been selected for measuring vertical autonomy: 1) local or national name/list number and 2) presence of logistic, financial or strategic support from a national party. Horizontal autonomy is measured by the presence of a pre-electoral alliance. Table 1 outlines the criteria for allocating local lists to the respective categories on the two autonomy dimensions .

Autonomy		Indicators
vertical	<i>Explicit</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - national list number and national (reference in) name - presence of logistic, financial and / or strategic support from a (or more) national party
	<i>implicit (partial)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - local list number and local (component in) name - presence of logistic, financial and / or strategic support from a (or more) national party
	<i>None</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - local name and list number - absence of logistic, financial or strategic support from any national party
horizontal	<i>cartel list</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - local list representing a pre-electoral alliance between two or more groups of candidates
	<i>autonomous list</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - local list representing an autonomous group of candidates

Table 1: indicators for measuring decisional autonomy of local lists

4. From partisanship to systemness and coherence

The NAPA model identifies *partisanship* as a crucial dimension for differentiating local lists. Partisanship is understood as “*the extent to which a given list is fulfilling the functions that are usually associated with parties beyond serving as a mere constituency such as representative linkage, interest articulation, aggregation, collective goal formulation, socialisation, mobilisation, elite formation, recruitment and the organisation of government.*” (Steyvers et al., 2008, p.174). Thus, numerous functional aspects of party life are cited, however, without specifying clear criteria to determine a local list’s actual degree of partisanship. Indeed, analysing local lists’ degree of partisanship is a complex matter, as illustrated by the variety of perspectives assumed by scholars studying political parties. Generally, a particular focus on a specific aspect of political parties is assumed: their electorate, their functions, their governmental performances, their competitive behaviour, Since Katz and Mair’s work on change and adaptation in party organizations in western democracies in 1994, a neo-institutional approach is regaining importance, considering parties as organizations, taking account of their formal as well as cultural organizational characteristics.

We will also adopt this neo-institutional approach for understanding the partisanship character of local lists. Following Randall and Svasand (2008) partisanship is interpreted as the internal dimension of the institutionalization concept. These authors subdivide this internal dimension into *systemness* and *value infusion*. The former refers to the increasing scope, density and regularity of the interactions within the party, while the latter indicates the members’ identification with and commitment to the party. Basedau & Stroh (2008) built on these notions of systemness and value infusion, however defining them as *level of organization* and *coherence*. In the following we will refer to systemness and coherence as respectively the structural and the attitudinal component of the institutionalization characteristics of local lists.

On both criteria two categories are distinguished: local lists with high or low systemness and local lists with strong or weak coherence. *Systemness* of local lists is interpreted as the presence of explicit formalized party organs with clear and differentiated competences. Local lists with high systemness have differentiated party organs with separate competences and formal procedures to organise interactions between the party organs. Local lists with low systemness gather their people informally, without having formalized party organs with differentiated competences.

The *coherence* of local lists concerns the sense of belonging of the group-members and the presence (or absence) of internal conflicts. Local lists with strong coherence demonstrate a deep sense of belonging: the persons involved have a common conception of the *raison d’être* of the local lists and strongly identify themselves with the common goal. Differences in opinion are accepted and debated and decisions are generally taken in consensus. Local lists with weak coherence assemble a group of people with few common reference points besides individual interests, thus lacking a real sense of belonging. Conflicts occur more regularly and conflict management is hierarchically organized.

We have interpreted the partisanship character of local lists as the combination of two internal institutionalization components: systemness and coherence. Subsequently, we selected 4 indicators to measure these criteria. The systemness of local lists is established by assessing the presence of 1) a formal membership structure and 2) a formal and regularly meeting board with

clear and differentiated competences. Coherence of local lists is measured by 1) the absence of conflicts and 2) the openness of the decision-making process. The criteria for allocating local lists to the respective categories of systemness and coherence are outlined in table 2.

Partisanship		Indicators
systemness	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - presence of a formal paying membership structure - presence of a formal board with clear and differentiated competences, holding regular meetings.
	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - absence of a formal paying membership structure - absence of a formal board with clear and differentiated competences, holding regular meetings.
coherence	Strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - absence of conflicts - open culture of debate, differences in opinion are welcomed, group decisions are generally taken in consensus
	Weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - presence of conflicts - absence of debating culture, differences of opinion are suppressed and decisions are taken by the (office-holding) elite

Table 2: Indicators to measure partisanship

Two models for classifying local lists.

So far we have related the 2 NAPA-dimensions (Nationalization and Partisanship) to the concept of party institutionalization and disentangled them into 4 criteria relevant for classifying local lists: vertical autonomy, horizontal autonomy, systemness and coherence. Combining all four criteria in one classification model is inexpedient and would impede analytical clarity. However the institutionalization criteria can be combined in pairs, resulting in a dual institutionalization typology. The first part of this typology is based on local lists' decisional autonomy and takes account of vertical as well as horizontal autonomy, while the second part is based on the organizational party-characteristics of local lists, combining systemness and coherence.

Autonomy		vertical		
		<i>explicit</i>	<i>implicit (partial)</i>	<i>None</i>
horizontal	<i>cartel list</i>	party cartel	localized cartel	local cartel
	<i>autonomous list</i>	national party branch	supported local list	independent local list

Figure 3: autonomy model for classifying local lists.

Partisanship		systemness	
		<i>high</i>	<i>low</i>
coherence	<i>strong</i>	local party	local group
	<i>weak</i>	dispersed local party	constituency of independents

Figure 4: Partisanship model for classifying local lists.

The autonomy model (figure 3) identifies three types of local cartel lists and three types of autonomous local lists, varying in their level of autonomy towards national party politics. A *party cartel* is a pre-electoral alliance between two or more local branches of national parties. The respective links between the cartel partners and national parties are explicit and reflected in the name of the cartel list. In a *localized cartel*, the links to national parties are less obvious, because they are implicit or only partial. These cartel lists have a local component in their composition and/or name. A *local cartel* is a absolute local variant of a pre-electoral alliance. The respective partners have no links at all to any national party.

In the category of autonomous list, *independent local lists* are those local lists without any links to a national party, while a *supported local list* has implicit strategic, financial or logistic links to a national party, which are not visible at first sight and concealed by a local name. A *national party branch* at last has obvious or explicit links to a national party, also reflected in its name.

The partisanship model (figure 4) identifies 4 types of local lists. A *local party* is characterized by high systemness and strong coherence. The operation of the party is well structured with clearly differentiated party organs and competences. The persons involved have a common local project and strongly identify with the list. A *dispersed local party* has similar structural characteristics, but internal cohesion is weak. Candidates have little common reference points besides individual interests. A *local group* demonstrates low systemness - lacking a formal division of labour – but high coherence with a strong sense of belonging. This is reflected in the organizational culture with conflicts being rare, differences in opinion openly debated and decisions generally taken in consensus. A *constituency of independents* to end with is a local list displaying low systemness and weak coherence. These local lists serve as vehicle for individual political ambitions. It concerns a motley mishmash of people with no mutual coherence or shared vision on local politics. Beyond elections times, representatives of the list focus on their own mandate, with no interaction between the candidates .

Applying the autonomy and partisanship model

1. Methods

The two classification models developed above and the corresponding typologies were developed as a practicable tool for classifying local lists. Its analytical relevance therefore depends on their actual classification capabilities. In this section we will test the practicability of the autonomy and partisanship model for classifying local lists by measuring the relevant characteristics of a selection of cases in order to allocate them into the respective typologies.

Ten local lists were arbitrarily selected and qualitatively analyzed, based on elite-interviews. Since our main focus concerns independent local lists, we restricted the selection to local lists which participated in the 2006 local elections under a local name and non-national list-number, thus neglecting the local party branches. However, we included one local lists that did participate under a national list-number, but with a customized name. The electronic election database of the Flemish Agency for Internal Affairs responsible for the organisation of the elections Information, offers information on the local name and list number of candidate lists. This database demonstrates that more than 300 lists participated in Flanders in the 2006 local elections under a non-national list-number. For convenience reasons the selection of cases was restricted the selection to the provinces of East-Flanders and Antwerp.

The following ten local lists were selected:

local list	municipality
ABC (Anders, Beter, Concreter)	Lovendegem
DENERT	Kruibeke
GLIM (Goed Leven in Malle)	Malle
GPS (Groen Progressie Stekene)	Stekene
KLIK (Kalken en Laarne In de Kijker)	Laarne
MORTIER	Merelbeke
SAMBA (Samen Betrouwbaar	Zwalm

Actief)	
SP.A Samen voor Deinze	Deinze
VLD-CDO-GROEN!	Mechelen
ZAP (Zottegems alternatieve Ploeg)	Zottegem

For each case we then selected the person most suited for an in-depth interview on the 4 organizational criteria of the institutionalization model. We aimed for respondents with an overall and in-depth view on the origins and developments of the respective lists, which in most cases was the person who headed the list of candidates in 2006.

A first round of interviews was conducted by the end of 2010, a second round in the second half of 2011, resulting in more than 16 hours of audio material. All the interviews were then transcribed and analysed qualitatively with the software programme NVivo to determine the relevant characteristics of the cases and allocate them into the institutionalization typologies. The analysis will be illustrated with citations from the interviews¹.

However measuring internal partisanship characteristics of cartel lists poses a methodological difficulty, because systemness and coherence are individual organisational criteria. Distinct cartel partners can demonstrate varying degrees of internal institutionalization. Consequently, the analysis of systemness and coherence focuses on individual cartel partners in case of local cartel lists. Only the cartel partner interviewed is thus taken into account.

2. Measuring institutionalization criteria

2.1 Horizontal autonomy

Of the ten analyzed cases, two can be defined as local cartel lists: SAMBA in Zottegem en VLD-CDO-GROEN! in Mechelen. Both cases mention office-seeking motivations for choosing for this cooperation strategy. SAMBA is an electoral platform uniting four local branches of national parties who were at that time in opposition. Their common purpose was to offer an alternative for the established governing party. VLD - CDO – GROEN! concerns a local cartel in Mechelen combining two local branches of national parties complemented with some independent representatives. Their common goal was to continue the preceding governmental combination.

“I gathered people from CD&V (Christian-Democrat party), SP.A (Socialist party), Groen! (Green party) and also some from N-VA (the Flemish-Nationalist party) and after two months we had a complete election programme with those four parties” (SAMBA)

“The idea was to make a city list with the resigning mayor and aldermen [...] The message was: we govern the city today and we want to govern it tomorrow. “ (VLD-CDO-GROEN!)

The other eight cases can be defined as autonomous lists since they have faced the voter under own steam in the 2006 election. Remarkably however, five of them (GPS, GLIM, SP.A Samen voor Deinze, ZAP and ABC) have considered previously or are considering now to form a local cartel. The most cited motivation is the desire to rupture the established majority. However also

¹ De quotes were slightly reformulated to increase readability without changing the content.

disadvantages are considered such as difficulties for candidate selection and the electoral risk of losing its own identity.

“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 ...” (GPS)

“Preparing the 2006 elections, the idea came up to form a cartel because for decades now our communality has been ruled by Christian-democrats [...] and liberals [...] Initially it looked like we would form a list with all parties except for the governing ones, but some of them then dropped out.” (SP.A Samen voor deinze)

2.2 Vertical autonomy

Since the selection of cases was based on the local list’s non-national list number, the analysis concentrated on detecting implicit or partial links to a national party. The case selection included one deviant case of a local list that did face the voter under a national list-number thus having explicit links to a national party, however with localized name. SP.A Samen voor Deinze (SP.A together for deinze) is indeed a local branch of the national socialist party (SP.A), while the local modification of the party’s name reflects its efforts to integrate independent actors on the list. The party branch felt compelled to look beyond their own midst since they experienced difficulties to fill a complete candidate lists autonomously.

“In the past we always faced the voter as a branch of SP.A, but it wasn’t easy to compose a complete list [...]. We like having independents on our list: people whom we cannot reach otherwise, nor their voters. We also like having action committees on our list.” (SPA Samen voor Deinze)

Three of the analyzed cases have partial or implicit links with one (or more) national parties. The two cartels mentioned in the section above concern pre-electoral alliances between several party branches, complemented with some independents. The uncommon combination of party-branches as well as the involvement of independents reflects the place-bound context of these alliances. This local aspect is emphasized by adopting a local component in the cartel list’s name, illustrative for the implicit or partial links to national party politics. Although the name VLD-CDO-Groen! explicitly refers to the two national parties involved (VLD and Groen), the two dissident Christian Democratic aldermen of CDO (Independent Christian Democrats) represent the local component, also weakening the links to national party politics. In the case of SAMBA, the links to national party politics cannot be directly inferred from the local list’s name. However, it has always been clear for inhabitants/voters and (local) media which four parties were involved in this cartel list.

GPS is the only autonomous list in the selection of cases demonstrating implicit links to a national party. It used to be a local branch of the national Green party but prior to the 2006 elections, they adopted a local name aiming to attract independent candidates and voters. This localisation did not prevent them though from maintaining informal ties with their former national mother party. They kept relying on the national green party for logistic support in terms of capacity building and financing of printed matter.

“Our list is local, but the national party is like a rich aunt.” (GPS)

Six of the 10 analyzed cases have no links at all to any national party. They assume a local and independent disposition and point out various substantive, strategic and personal motives for this choice, such as the perceived irrelevance of traditional national cleavages, the desire to act autonomously (not being accountable to a national party), the preference for factual politics (local politicians addressing local problems close to the people) and personal rancour resulting from conflicts in other local parties.

“Local politics means governing based on factual knowledge [...] by local people who are familiar with the problems, while national politics occurs above the heads.”
(DENERT)

"the emphasis on not being attached to any party was important to us [...] because party ideologies are not very relevant for a communality as Lovendegem” (ABC)

2.3 Systemness

The analyses reveals four cases demonstrating high systemness of which the two analyzed cartel partners (Open VLD Mechelen and SP.A Zwalm). Also SP.A Samen voor Deinze and GLIM demonstrate high systemness with a formal membership structure and formal party organs with clearly defined roles.

“Each party in the cartel - or at least two – has its own separate branch committee, representatives, board members and members paying membership fees” (Open VLD Mechelen)

“ We have 165 paying members of which 16 are active in the executive board and several in our associations” (SP.A Samen voor Deinze)

“ We had a president, a secretary, a treasurer, an executive committee gathering each month and a general assembly were we got feed-back from different wings” (GLIM)

The six remaining lists in our sample demonstrate low systemness. Some of them have no party structures at all, while others do report having some official party organs, however without specified competences. In practice the different organs and their competences are not clearly differentiated, thus having no obvious relevance in organizing the local list's division of labour.

“ We have never used the word ‘party’. [...] A party suggests having members and membership cards, we did not have all that [...], we were just some people, having that idea and meeting regularly”(ABC)

“ We have an official board, a president, a treasurer, but no general assembly, we are a factual association. [...] The board does not meet separately: this actually coincides with the group meetings, we work in a very transparent way and everybody is included.”
(KLIK)

2.4 Coherence

Analyzing coherence of the selected lists reveals some methodological difficulties. This criterion refers to the attitudinal or cultural aspects of the organization, which is more difficult to measure.

We defined the presence of conflicts and the openness of the decision-making process as indicators to measure local list's coherence. The presence of conflicts indeed seems a relevant indication for weak coherence, however the absence of conflicts does not necessarily indicate high coherence. 3 cases demonstrate absence of conflicts, but a very closed decision-making process. MORTIER is a one-man's list consisting of only one person and thus by definition without conflicts, while DENERT and Open VLD Mechelen (cartel partner in VLD-CDO-Groen) are also rather personal lists, established to support the incumbent mayor. In both cases the mayor takes most decisions. The other candidates on the list mainly serve to support the mayor and his idea's. Conflicts are rare in these cases because the authority of the mayor is undisputed. It can be questioned if this lack of conflict is to be attributed to actual coherence in the group or rather the absence of a common goal and identity. Following Randall & Svasand who interpret value infusion as transcending instrumental incentives, we interpret these cases as having weak coherence.

“Bart is the mayor, he decides everything. He was also the one who negotiated the majority.” (Open VLD Mechelen)

“The list will disappear with me [...]. We are not a party, but a group of people [...] meaning the best for me and the communality.” (DENERT)

SP.A Zottegem and SP.A Samen voor Deinze also demonstrate weak coherence, reporting severe internal conflicts. The involvement of supra-local party instances for conflict mediation indicates the absence or the failure of a consensus seeking culture. Additionally, the list SP.A Samen voor Deinze includes several independents, formally refusing to identify with the *raison d'être* of that party and thus also indicative for low coherence.

“We had so much disagreement here, the situation was really blocked. The national party then send someone to solve things.” (SP.A Samen voor Deinze)

The five remaining local lists demonstrate a strong coherence. The activists strongly identify with the list and its project. They form a close group, with strong social ties. Conflicts are rare, while differences in opinion are not resisted but openly discussed with the aim of consensus building.

“We are very transparent, without secrets [...] We never vote, but we always reach a consensus while everybody can overtly express himself” (KLIK)

“The way we work, the enthusiasm, the dedication is tangible: to give one example, we issue a magazine every year and nobody has ever felt the need to profile himself or criticize another.” (MASSART)

This coherence of local lists proves the most difficult dimension to measure. The absence of conflicts is an insufficient indicator for determining strong coherence, although the presence of conflicts offers a valuable indication for weak coherence. The openness of the decision making culture seems to offer a better indication for measuring weak and strong coherence, however without considering the potentially strong, but intangible influence of strong individuals in the group.

2.4 Identifying types of local lists

The analysis of the cases and their qualification on the four criteria allows us to allocate them into the autonomy and partisanship typology, as illustrated in figure 5.

Applying the autonomy model reveals that the selection of cases consists of one national party branch, two localized cartels, one supported local list and six independent local list. No party cartels or local cartels occur in the selection.

Autonomy		vertical		
		<i>explicit</i>	<i>implicit (partial)</i>	<i>none</i>
horizontal	<i>cartel list</i>	<u>party cartel:</u> /	<u>localized cartel:</u> SAMBA, VLD-CDO-GROEN	<u>local cartel:</u> /
	<i>autonomous list</i>	<u>national party branch:</u> SPA - Samen voor Deinze	<u>supported local list:</u> GPS	<u>independent local list:</u> ABC, Denert, KLIK, GLIM, MORTIER, ZAP

Figure 5: The autonomy model applied on the case selection

The partisanship model provides us with one local party, three dispersed local parties, four local groups and two constituencies of independents (figure 6).

Partisanship		systemness	
		<i>high</i>	<i>low</i>
coherence	<i>strong</i>	<u>local party:</u> GLIM	<u>local group:</u> ABC, GPS, KLIK, ZAP
	<i>weak</i>	<u>Dispersed local party:</u> SP.A Samen voor Deinze, SP.A (Zottegem), Open VLD (Mechelen)	<u>constituency of independents:</u> Denert, Mortier

Figure 6: The partisanship model applied on the case selection

Conclusions

Examining the political phenomenon of local lists in first instance raises more questions than answers since the common denominator of local lists conceals an enormous internal variety. Consequently, developing in-depth academic understanding of local lists and their consequences for local politics requires relevant classification models to refine the broad concept of local lists allowing qualitative differentiation. In this paper we have developed such a classification model using a neo-institutional perspective. The party institutionalization concept was disentangled in its distinct components and adapted to the context of local lists. Four relevant criteria for classifying local lists were determined: vertical autonomy, horizontal autonomy, systemness and coherence. Consequently, for each dimension we defined relevant indicators and mutually excluding categories. These institutionalization criteria were then coupled in related pairs resulting in two middle-range typologies for classifying local lists. The autonomy model classifies local lists based on the links they have with other local and/or national political actors. The partisanship model is based on structural and cultural internal organizational aspects of local lists (systemness and coherence).

A qualitative analysis of a limited selection of ten local lists allowed us to assess the relevant characteristics of the cases and to allocate each case unambiguously to a specific type of local list in the two typologies. This exercise confirmed the practicability and relevance of the two models. The restricted selection of cases does not permit conclusions about the relations between the two typologies, however we can assume that most independent local lists have lower systemness than local lists with links to a national party(ies). Where the latter can adopt the organizational model of the related national party, no clear-cut template is available to independent local lists for organizing and structuring internal action and interaction. Furthermore we did only consider the systemness and coherence of individual cartel partners within a cartel lists, while it might also be interesting to reflect on the systemness and coherence of cartel lists in its totality.

Since the selection of cases is by no means representative no inferences can be made on the incidents of specific types of local lists. Quantitative research is needed to map the geographical dispersion of different types of local lists. Furthermore qualitative research is needed for clarifying the occurrence of these types as well as the dynamics. Our research suggests that horizontal autonomy of local lists is a very flexible dimension. With every upcoming election, local lists seem to consider the opportunities of a cartel formula.

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