

# THE POLITICS OF LOCAL WELFARE

HOW LOCAL POLITICAL ARENAS  
SHAPE DECENTRALISED SOCIAL  
POLICIES

HENRIETTE BARBARA BROEKEMA



## **The Politics of Local Welfare**

*How local political arenas shape decentralised social policies*

Henriette Barbara Broekema

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The Politics of Local Welfare  
*How local political arenas shape decentralised social policies*

De politiek van lokaal sociaal beleid  
*Hoe lokale politieke arena's lokaal sociaal beleid beïnvloeden*

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# 1

## Introduction



*“Municipalities are closer than central government to the local community. This means that they can provide care more effectively, with less bureaucracy and more cheaply”* (Overheid, 2021).

*“Municipalities are given a very wide policy discretion with regard to the concrete implementation of these decentralised facilities”* (Regeerakkoord VVD PvdA, 2012, p. 23).

*“Thanks to the Participation Act, municipalities can impose sanctions if someone does not want to provide something in return for welfare. The alderman of Amsterdam does not want that, that is his right. But I do it differently”* (M. Struijvenberg, alderman of the municipality of Rotterdam, 30 November 2017).<sup>1</sup>

*“Force and urgency don’t help. We are now setting up our own experiment, partly at the request of the city council. I prefer to get my good results with a friendly approach”* (A. Vliegthart, alderman of the municipality of Amsterdam, 30 November 2017).<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 THE DUTCH DECENTRALISATION ACTS

In the Dutch decentralised unitary state, there is an increasing dilemma in which municipalities are given the opportunity to steer policy, determine policy, and make financial choices regarding policy. In the shadow of the Great Recession of 2008 which put great pressure on the welfare state—and following a major decentralisation in 2015—Dutch municipalities became politically and administratively responsible for three social policy domains: youth care (Youth Care Act), care for the chronically ill and the elderly (Social Support Act), and employment and income (Participation Act) (Jans, 2015; Maarse & Jeurissen, 2016; Van Ginniken, 2015). This reform was justified by the argument that:

*“The transfer of a large number of tasks from the central government to municipalities allows for local tailoring and customisation, and allows for stronger citizen involvement. Municipalities can better coordinate the implementation of tasks, and thus do more with less money”* (Regeerakkoord VVD PvdA, 2012, p. 40).

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- 1 Dirks, B. & van Weezel, T.G. (30 november 2017). Twee steden, twee wethouders, twee visies op bijstand en armoede, *de Volkskrant*.
  - 2 Dirks, B. & van Weezel, T.G. (30 november 2017). Twee steden, twee wethouders, twee visies op bijstand en armoede, *de Volkskrant*.

To deal with these new responsibilities, “*the central government gives them [municipalities] wide discretion*” (Regeerakkoord VVD PvdA, 2012, p. 40). As such, municipalities are no longer merely considered an alternative place for governments to deliver decentralised welfare services, but are considered an independent layer of policy development, with political, administrative, and financial responsibilities (Ansell & Gingrich, 2003).

Following the policy theory (Denters, van Heffen & de Jong, 1999; Fleurke, Hulst & de Vries, 1997; Gilsing, 2009), decentralisation comprises two fundamental aspects: the efficiency argument and the participation argument. These two aspects are also endorsed in the coalition agreement (Regeerakkoord VVD-PvdA, 2012). In terms of efficiency, decentralisation could lead to more effective policy because it offers numerous and diverse possibilities for tailor-made solutions. In addition, the effectiveness of decentralisation in the social domain would also be determined by reinforcing the connections between the three tasks. This enables municipalities to improve and achieve better prevention, resulting in potential benefits for both client and social workers. In terms of participation, decentralisation is expected to narrow the distance between citizens and policy. On the one hand, local government is better informed about local issues and needs, and therefore able to make more careful policy considerations. On the other hand, the influence society has upon policy is greater, because the elected representatives of the people are actively involved in decision-making (van der Veer, Schalk & Gilsing, 2011).

However, Fleurke and colleagues (1997; Fleurke, Hulst & de Vries, 1997; Fleurke & Hulst, 2006; Fleurke & Willemse, 2004; 2006) have investigated the meaning of local autonomy after decentralisation, as well as the rhetoric surrounding decentralisation in general in the context of the Netherlands. These studies reveal that the initiative to decentralise does not only arise from the rhetoric of the efficiency argument and the participation argument, but that decentralisation is often intended to solve national-government problems, such as budget cuts, compartmentalisation, or bureaucratic red tape (Boogers, Schaap, van den Munckhof & Karsten, 2008; Council of State, 2009; Schrijver, 2015). This “centralistic intent” of decentralisation means that many evaluation studies indicate that various expectations regarding decentralisation have not been met in recent decades (Boogers & Reussing, 2018, p. 23). The decentralisation of 2015 was largely motivated by these central cutbacks. Municipalities received only 85 percent of the budget that the national government designated to finance these services up until that point.

This dissertation aims to understand the role of prominent stakeholders in local political arenas in the context of decentralised social policy. Because Dutch municipal authori-



ties acquired the legal responsibility to consider political preferences as much as local conditions when making important decentralised policy decisions (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2020), I assume that variation in policies can result from processes that take place in local political arenas. To understand how these local political arenas work, I use the political economy perspective on local social policies.

Traditionally, welfare state research was characterised by a theoretical separation between the economic theories of government policies and the pluralist theories of policymaking on the one hand (e.g. Culyer, 1973; Friedman, 1962; Hall, et al., 1975), and the functionalist theories of the welfare state on the other (e.g. Marshall, 1963; Myles & Quadagno, 2002; Wilensky & Lebaux, 1965). The economic theories revolve around explaining the immense diversity of social policies, whereas the functionalist theories revolve around explaining the growth and trends of social policies. Because of their insistence “*on either the objective or the subjective element in understanding human history in general and welfare developments in particular [...] neither can adequately grasp their interrelation in the historical process*” (Gough, 1979, p. 10). Moreover, ample studies show that welfare states are not only the inevitable product of large economic forces, nor can welfare states be explained solely by the power resource theory (Myles & Quadagno, 2002). Therefore, I chose to use the political economy perspective, which revolves around understanding politics and economics as integrally related in the shaping of welfare systems in capitalist countries (Gough, 1979; Pinto, 2018). This theory not only acknowledges that different factors might influence the welfare state design but also offers plausible explanations for how the design of welfare systems works. In the following section, I apply this political economy perspective to the local context of decentralised welfare systems.

## **1.2 THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE DECENTRALISED WELFARE STATE**

Over the last three decades, academic literature has become preoccupied with understanding the causes and consequences of decentralisation for the content and outcomes of policy, as decentralisation so clearly reveals the significance of political choices (Pierson, 2000). However, the role of the local political arena in the decentralisation is still a black box. Since understanding this local political arena is an important element in this dissertation, I first elaborate how I define the political arena of welfare systems in light of decentralisation, by making use of the political economy perspective of the welfare state.

Traditionally, welfare state mobilisation was correlated with affluence, suggesting that “*strong economies produce strong welfare states*” (Pierson, 1996, p. 143). The welfare state was not viewed as an integral part of national economies, but as a means to an end for the redistribution of income generated in a completely different sphere. To the extent that analysts perceived any linkage between welfare states and economies, the former were viewed as part of the protective reaction to the markets identified by Polanyi (1944) and described more elaborately in power resource theory in the 1980s (Esping-Andersen, 1985; 1990; Korpi, 1983; Stephens, 1979).

As the economic boom ended in the early 1970s, social programs faced mounting political challenges, resulting in the so-called retrenchment of the welfare state (Pierson, 1996). However, instead of looking for explanations in the study of social policy expansion—which was common prior to 1970—welfare retrenchment was seen as a distinctive process because the welfare state in general proved to be very resilient (Pierson, 1996, p. 144). Two fundamental reasons were given for this resilience. First, the policy goals of policymakers shifted from expansion to austerity, which created new political dynamics (Campbell, 2002; Vis, 2009). Second, as large public social programs were now a central part of the political landscape (Flora, 1983), dense interest-group networks and strong popular attachments to policies presented considerable obstacles to reform. These developments dictated new political strategies (Pierson, 1994). As a result, variation in the design and constellations of welfare systems were therefore viewed as the result of the new politics of the welfare state (Pierson, 1996, p. 143) and no longer simply as a reaction to economic developments (Pierson, 2000).

The focal point of this political economy of the welfare state is yet again changing, as more and more policies in western democratic countries—including those in the social domain—are becoming the full responsibility of local governments (Ansell & Gingrich, 2003; Barberis, Bergmark & Minas, 2010; Costa-Font & Greer, 2013; Hooghe, Marks & Schakel, 2010; Kazepov & Barberis, 2013; Rice, 2013). Examples of decentralised social policies include the *Local Social Policy Decree* in Belgium, the *Jobseekers’ Allowance* in the United Kingdom, and the *Prestazioni Assistenziali di Inclusione Sociale* in Italy. In other words, the Dutch decentralisation of the Youth Care, Social Support, and Participation Acts is not unique. These decentralisations are most often inspired by a combination of political, administrative, and financial arguments (Saltman & Bankauskaite, 2006). Political arguments involve debates about territorial politics, the allocation of power, and partisan or political issues (Hirschman, 1970). Administrative arguments revolve around heterogeneity, involving discussions about local circumstances, needs, and differences (Saltman & Bankauskaite, 2006). Finally, the financial arguments state that certain fund-raising and/or expenditure activities can be better performed by lower (re-

gional or municipal) levels of government because it can be performed more efficiently and therefore more cheaply (Ibid.).

Unlike changes in the political economy of the welfare state (Pierson, 2000), there is no grand theory that explains variation in the design and constellations of these decentralised welfare systems, despite the fact that “*more and more authors are beginning to apply the welfare regime concept at the regional and local level*” (Rice, 2013, p. 94). In other words, there is no single theory that explains how local governments deal with the different responsibilities after a decentralisation. Due to the lack of such a theory, it is difficult to explain why and when local governments decide to implement policy differently from their partner municipalities. In this dissertation I investigate how variation in local welfare systems that does arise, can be explained by the dynamics of the local political arena. To better understand these dynamics, I look at the most prominent players in the local political arena: citizens, political parties, and municipal policymaking bodies.

The traditional general systems theory assumes that policy design begins with the shaping of public opinion (Easton, 1957). Public opinion serves as the so-called input, which can be defined briefly as constituted by the demands made upon the political system by society (ibid.). This public opinion influences the views of political actors who might support the demands made by the public. When demands raised by political actors and the public are regarded as legitimate by the policy authority, municipal service bodies take measures and adopt policy (ibid.). Existing studies convincingly demonstrate that there is a correlation between the views of the population about social policy and the design of social policy (e.g. Brooks & Manza, 2006). However, there is much criticism of the general systems theory for being over-simplified. For example, Hobolt and Klemmensen (2008) demonstrate that policy responsiveness is not constant across welfare systems over time. What they and numerous authors after them show, is that the institutional and strategic context influences governments to respond to the public (Giddens, 1976; Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2008). As local governments become increasingly responsible for the implementation of social policies, the question arises as to whether local governments only respond to the local public or whether they too are influenced by institutional and strategic factors at the local level. These institutional and strategic factors could, for example, be local economic conditions, political ideology, or formal institutions. To find out how the dynamics of the local political arena contribute to variation in constellations of local welfare systems, the central research problem in this thesis is therefore formulated as follows: *How do key stakeholders in local political arenas shape decentralised social policies?*

## 1.3 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation contributes to the welfare systems literature because it is one of the first that transcends the bias towards national welfare systems and national conditions by instead focusing on local welfare attitudes, local political positions, local policies, and local conditions. Although more and more authors are starting to apply the concept of the welfare regime at the regional and local levels, little theory has focused specifically on the local political arena of the local welfare system. As a result, important theoretical challenges remain unresolved. These challenges range from examining variation in local social policies to the role of the local political arena and its actors in shaping this variation. The major theoretical contributions of this dissertation are therefore threefold.

### 1.3.1 Contribution 1: deconstructing the national bias in welfare system variation

The first contribution relates to the deconstruction of a national bias in the literature on variation in welfare systems. Social policy design was the exclusive domain of national governments in almost all European countries during the post-war 'golden age' of the welfare state (Cox, 2004; Taylor-Gooby, 1994; 2002). Inevitably, the first decades of social policy scholarship primarily focused on the national level, with Esping-Andersen's *Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) playing a crucial role. This vast body of research shows that welfare systems differ between countries and that this variation occurs on different dimensions (Arts & Gelissen, 2002; Bonoli & Kato, 2004; Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1999; Ferrera, 1996; Inglot, 2003; Kuitto, 2016; Titmuss, 1958). However, even though variation at the municipal or regional level in welfare systems is also a likely and often desirable outcome of decentralisation (Manor, 1999; Pollitt, Birchall & Putnam, 1998), national welfare typologies cannot be directly applied to municipal welfare systems.

To say something meaningful about designing local social policies, this dissertation explores variation in decentralised social policy by developing a framework to assess the variation in local welfare regimes. To do so, this dissertation presents a thorough review of the literature to identify the dimensions that are used in national welfare regime typologies, and the indicators employed to assess them. Subsequently, I identify potentially relevant dimensions for use when classifying local regimes: goals (those to be achieved by the social policies); responsibility-mix (the distribution of service-delivery tasks, distinguishing between horizontal and vertical co-responsibility); and coverage (who gets what and when, differentiating between population coverage and conditionality).

This framework contributes to the literature in various ways. First, it enables researchers to distinguish different types of local welfare regime, analyse their impact on a plethora of policy outcomes (e.g., performance, social inequality, legitimacy), and explain how these differences arise. Furthermore, the framework can be used in future studies that aim to compare and understand the development and implementation of local social policies within and across different countries, thereby creating insights for local policy-making as well (Auriat, 2008).

### **1.3.2 Contribution 2: the relation between actors in the local political arena**

One of the main persisting issues in the analysis of the policy process is how to combine knowledge about structural factors of the policy process with the internal dynamics of the political arena under study (Kasianiuk, 2015; Pollitt, Birchall & Putman, 2016). This dissertation contributes to the literature by addressing this puzzle in the context of decentralised social policies. Traditionally, for the internal dynamics of the political arena, actor-oriented frameworks have been central. These revolve around the role actors play and how actors relate to each other in the political arena (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). Two general actor-oriented views can be distinguished. These views are not mutually exclusive and can—or even should—complement each other when analysing the internal dynamics of the political arena.

First, the traditional general systems theory (Easton, 1957) argues that the design of social policy is correlated with individual and collective preferences (Brooks & Manza, 2006). This theory states that policy design begins with the shaping of public opinions (Easton, 1957). Political actors collect these public opinions and translate those opinions into political party positions on the matter. Policy authorities adopt these positions and translate them into real policies. This suggests that collective actors such as political parties or policymakers do not have isolated opinions, but that they represent the views of their source of legitimacy.

Another group of policy process theories argue that it is the interaction between members of the political community with diverging political goals and interests that shapes policies (Allison, 1971; Cohen, March & Olson, 1972; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Lindblom & Cohen, 1979). Different actors define their goals and the intended outcomes of the policy process; policies are the product of the interactions between actors who act based on their own intentions and interests (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000). Following this view, at different times, the most prominent actors in the political arena possess varying degrees of capability to influence the policy process.

This dissertation explores how insights from these two general actor-oriented views on the nature of policy processes apply to the local level of policymaking. To do so, the most prominent local political actors are identified: citizens, political parties, and municipal policymaking bodies. For each of these actors, this dissertation examines to what extent their preferences and positions reflect their source of legitimacy or their own interests. In addition, the interaction between the main actors and the capabilities of actors to influence the policy process and each other is explored. In doing so, this dissertation can explain where in the policy process—and by which actor(s)—variation in policy design arises, adding to the literature on the internal dynamics of local-level political arenas. Insights from this dissertation can also be used in future studies which aim to study the internal dynamics of the local political arena in other policy domains or beyond the Dutch case.

### **1.3.3 Contribution 3: structural context conditions in the local policy arena**

The third and final contribution focuses on the role of structural context conditions in the process of local policy design. In addition to the actor-oriented views, system-oriented views demonstrate that policy processes can be explained by factors impacting the political system understood as a whole (Kasianiuk, 2015; Sabatier, 2007). These factors may for example include socioeconomic conditions, public opinion, and political institutions (Sabatier, 2007). Although existing studies argue that popular welfare attitudes, political party positions, and policies vary because they are shaped by macro-contextual factors at the *national* level, cross-level variation in these variables on the *local* level receives insufficient attention. This dissertation tries to unravel this ‘black box’, by examining *which* and *how* context conditions affect the policy process in the local political arena.

I start here with the sociological literature focusing on popular welfare attitudes. Existing studies on attitudes towards national welfare systems argue that welfare attitudes are shaped by individual characteristics and macro-contextual factors (Svallfors, 2012; Van der Waal, et al., 2013). Due to the influence of these contextual factors, individuals with similar characteristics may have different welfare attitudes depending on their country of residence (Sevä, 2009). From this extensive body of literature, I use these insights to explore whether *local* circumstances also shape attitudes towards *local* welfare policies. I focus on the contextual factors that are frequently linked to welfare attitudes at the national level and could also be important for welfare attitudes at the local level: the local unemployment rate (Blekesaune, 2007; Blomberg & Kroll, 1999), the local political climate, the local share of non-Western ethnic minority citizens (Miller, 1978), and the local level of urbanisation (e.g., Davis, 1988; Scala & Johnson, 2017).

Furthermore, local conditions might not only affect individual preferences, but also collective and policy preferences. To assess this, I examine what determinants shape local political party positions and local policies themselves. Therefore, this dissertation uses insights from the institutional isomorphism (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983; George & Desmidt, 2014) and contingency theories (Donaldson, 1987; 2001). Institutional isomorphism theory suggests that coercive, normative and mimetic pressures might ‘force’ party representatives to hold like-minded ideas (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983; George, et al., 2018). In contrast, contingency theory claims that contextual characteristics are key drivers of organisational behaviour (Donaldson, 2001). These contingent determinants refer to pressures that originate from outside the control of the organisation (Donaldson, 1987). By applying these theories to the local rather than the national level, this dissertation studies which local conditions could be relevant in determining local political positions regarding social policy. It does so by focusing on three likely candidates: local population size (Bovens, 2007), local economic conditions (Budge & Farlie, 1983), and local political constellations (Boyne, et al., 2001).

Together, these theories—which have been proven numerous times to be valid at the national level—provide insights on policymaking at the local level. Hence, the purpose of this dissertation is to unravel how to combine knowledge about structural context factors with the internal dynamics of the local political arena to understand how key players at the local level design decentralised social policies. In doing so, this dissertation represents one of the first attempts to analyse interactions between different political actors—individual, collective, or organisational—within the political process and their structural environment at the local level, based on the initial assumption about the potentially equal importance of both in the local policy process.

## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To explore the local political arena in relation to decentralised local social policies, four research questions are posed. The first research question outlines the context for the main research problem and provides insight into how decentralised social policies could take shape. Decentralising policy authority could result in varying local welfare systems. To that end, I examined the literature on variation in national welfare systems, by collecting and analysing this literature in a systematic way, guided by the first research question: *how can national welfare regime typology dimensions be redeveloped to study local welfare systems (RQ1)?*

To investigate what may cause municipalities to vary on the local welfare regime dimensions arising from the literature review above, the empirical research questions that follow examine the role of three key actors in the local political arena: citizens (RQ2), political parties (RQ3), and municipal policymaking bodies (RQ4). Each research question examines the relation between one of these actors and relevant dimensions of the local welfare regimes framework in light of the institutional and environmental conditions in which the actors manoeuvre. In doing so, each research question provides part of the picture on how social policies are shaped by the local political arena.

Due to the initial public debates concerning possible disparities between municipalities in the Participation Act, the empirical chapters of this thesis focus on this Act in particular. The goal of the Participation Act is to assist as many people as possible, including those with limited labour capacity, in finding work, preferably with a regular employer (van Echtelt et al., 2019). Furthermore, the aim of this Act is to reduce benefit dependency. The emphasis is on activating individuals: focusing on what an individual can achieve, how they can fulfil their potential, how those abilities may be used in the workplace, and primarily how an individual can be motivated to get started in the first place (van Echtelt et al., 2019).

The second research question delves deeper into the relation between municipal-level economic, demographic, and political conditions and the first actor involved in the local political arena: local citizens. Because the public plays a large role in how the local political arena takes shape through political representation, part of the explanation of local social policy design can be found in how this actor shapes their attitudes towards these social policies. Studies on welfare attitudes show that attitudes do not arise in a vacuum, but that people are influenced by the cues derived from the environment in which they live. Applying these sociological insights on welfare attitudes, gained from studies on national or regional variation to the local level, this dissertation illustrates how citizens are affected in their opinion formation by local conditions in relation to decentralised local social policies. The focal point of the second research question is posed as follows: *do local circumstances shape welfare attitudes towards decentralised local social policies (RQ2)?*

The third research question presents a test of how local political parties may have contributed to variation in the design of municipal social policies. It examines whether local political party branches consider local circumstances when drafting their policy positions on decentralised social policies, or whether institutional pressures prevent local party branches positions from diverging from their national mother party. It does so by zooming in on one of the three decentralised domains: the Participation Act. The



following question is posed: *to what extent do Dutch local party branches' social policy positions deviate from their national mother party and local peer parties, and do local conditions explain this deviation (RQ3)?*

The last empirical research question explains how the composition of different municipal bodies (e.g., the civil service, Municipal Executive, town clerks, and city councillors) shape local social policies in a decentralised context. In general, this phase of policymaking entails three sub-stages: agenda-setting, formulation, and decision-making. There are different ideas about how each of these phases proceed. The aim of this section is to illustrate how local policies are developed in the context of the decentralised Participation Act to increase the understanding of how and why municipalities arrive at varying policies. In doing so, this research zooms in a little further on the Participation Act, by examining in particular how the conditionality and re-integration regulations have been developed. Therefore, the last empirical question of this dissertation is: *How do local conditions shape the policy-making process of social policies in Dutch municipalities after the decentralisation of the Participation Act in 2015 (RQ4)?*

## 1.5 METHODS AND DATA

This dissertation increases our understanding of the policy process at the local level by using a mixed-methods approach to solve the main research problem. No existing data were available to answer the questions of this dissertation. That is why I went to great lengths to compile all empirical data for each question myself. As shown in Table 1, these datasets represent a wide variety of data—both quantitative and qualitative, ranging from documents and questionnaires to interviews—which were retrieved in various ways.

The first research question identifies all the dimensions used to classify national welfare systems in order to design a local welfare regime typology. To do so, the first method I used was that of a thorough literature review of secondary sources. This approach has been adopted in earlier, widely cited research (e.g., Cooper, 2015; Rashman, Wither & Hartley, 2009; Voorberg, Bekkers & Tummers, 2015). The aim of this thorough review is to make the current body of knowledge on a topic more transparent in a reproducible way (Liberati, et al., 2009; Voorberg, Bekkers & Tummers, 2015). It attempts to collate theoretical and/or empirical evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria to answer a specific research question and uses a systematic coding method to minimise bias. In doing so, the results from the thorough review often provide reliable findings from which conclusions can be drawn (Liberati, et al., 2009). In this study, I employed a

**Table 1** Overview of data and analyses

Ch.	Question	Data	Analysis
2	<i>How can national welfare regime typology dimensions be redeveloped to study local welfare systems (RQ1)?</i>	1,155 scientific studies in journals and book chapters  477 policy documents for 3 Dutch municipalities	Systematic content analysis
3	<i>Do local circumstances shape welfare attitudes towards decentralised local social policies (RQ2)?</i>	Municipal-level data for all Dutch municipalities on unemployment rates, political climate, share of non-Western ethnic minorities and urbanisation  Questionnaire with tailor-made item (n=2,652)	Multilevel multinomial regression analyses
4	<i>To what extent do Dutch local party branches' social policy positions deviate from their national mother party and local peer parties, and do local conditions explain this deviation (RQ3)?</i>	Municipal-level data for 27 Dutch municipalities on population size, social benefit dependency and vote share for local independent parties  168 Local party manifestos (27 municipalities) and 8 national party manifestos	Content analysis  Linear regression analyses
5	<i>How do local conditions shape the policy-making process of social policies in Dutch municipalities after the decentralisation of the Participation Act in 2015 (RQ4)?</i>	95 policy documents in 4 municipalities  23 interviews in 4 municipalities	Content analysis  Comparative case study

systematic search strategy using Boolean combinations of important concepts such as [regime typologies] in three electronic databases: *Web of Science*, *Scopus*, and *Erasmus University Rotterdam's Library*. More than 1,100 scientific studies were collected. After excluding those that did not meet the eligibility criteria, 78 studies remained. To analyse the content of the remaining 78 studies, I adopted a six-step process of inductive coding inspired by Thomas (2006). Subsequently, after systematically coding and analysing this information, five overarching dimensions remained that provided the starting point for the formulation of the local welfare regime framework.

To explore the heuristic value of the proposed local framework, I conducted an initial investigation comparing variation along the dimensions of the model between three strategically selected municipalities: Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and Utrecht. More than 470 municipal and national documents were collected, ranging from regulations to policy rules. Subsequently, the qualitative content analysis of these documents demonstrates whether the policies designed by the three municipalities varied in relation to the three

dimensions from the local welfare regimes framework: goals, responsibility-mix, and coverage.

The second research question revolves around analysing how individual preferences towards these decentralised social policies are formed by individual- and context-level variables. To study this, I designed a tailor-made novel survey item to measure local welfare preferences. This survey item was then included in the *Dutch Local Election Studies 2018*, a representative survey for the Dutch population (Jansen & Denters, 2018), enabling statistical inference. It has been adopted in earlier, widely cited research on the comparative analysis of welfare state attitudes (e.g., Svallfors, 2012; van der Waal, et al., 2013). I appended municipal-level data to this survey data, which I retrieved from various sources on local economic, demographic, and political conditions. Multilevel multinomial logistic regression analysis was applied to study whether and how municipal conditions shape preferences regarding local welfare.

The third research question aims to understand whether local conditions explain the extent to which Dutch local party branches deviate from their national mother party and local peer parties when it comes to positions on the decentralised social policies. To investigate this, 27 municipalities were strategically selected. Subsequently, I compiled a dataset of 168 local party programs in addition to 8 national party programs, which were content-coded along the lines of two main topics: ‘topic presence’ and ‘position-taking’. The aim was to scrutinise the expectations that local political parties are more inclined to deviate in positions from each other and from their mother party under certain circumstances. Using regression analyses, I quantitatively linked the scores on topic presence and position taking to three municipality characteristics: population size, social benefit dependency, and vote share for local independent parties.

The final question revolves around understanding how different municipal bodies (e.g., the civil service, Municipal Executive, town clerks, and city councillors) shape local social policies. For this research question, I tried to map the sequential and situational interplay between local conditions and mechanisms which lead to specific local social policies. This method for comparative case studies is also known as Causal-Process Tracing (Blatter & Haverland, 2014), especially equipped for answering *how* and *why* questions on contemporary phenomena (Blatter & Haverland, 2012; Yin, 2009). Comparative case studies provide a rich and contextualised understanding of how the local political arena works (Yin, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 2006). I made a strategic selection of four ideal-typical municipalities that differ greatly in terms of the conditionality regulations in the Participation Act. Two sources of data were collected: I conducted 23 semi-structured in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of key stakeholders, and collected 95 policy docu-

ments, ranging from policy regulations and coalition agreements to council notes. Each interview lasted between one and two hours and was recorded and transcribed. For each case, the qualitative content analysis of these data showed which conditions affected policy development at different stages of the process and how these contributed to variation in the policies between municipalities.

## **1.6 SOCIETAL RELEVANCE**

### **1.6.1 For the public**

First, decentralisation has been introduced with, among other things, the promise of more customisation and a better fit between policy and local conditions. However, there is also much criticism of that assumption. This dissertation shows whether this assumption is tenable and what conditions govern its tenability. In doing so, this dissertation helps the public to investigate the black box of decentralisation, making it clear to citizens whether and how the promise of customisation can be fulfilled.

In addition to the previous point, this dissertation can help members of the public to understand how these social policy domains take shape at their municipality of residence, increasing their ability to make informed decisions in, for example, the next local elections. Especially given the increasing number of tasks to be decentralised in the near future (e.g., immigrant policies, Environmental Law), citizens need to understand how they can directly aid politicians in local governments by providing insights into important local circumstances and needs in order to improve local policy.

### **1.6.2 For local politicians and policymakers**

Second, decentralisation inevitably leads to variation. The pressure to adjust local policies to endogenous and exogenous factors that shape the policymaking processes is therefore of paramount importance. These pressures lead to a dilemma for politicians and policymakers to decide if and how much they want their policy design to fit these factors. This dissertation provides politicians and policymakers with insights into this dilemma, increasing their capacity to effectively navigate policy-decision trade-offs. Especially since these decentralised social policies impinge on nearly all other local policy areas that citizens deeply care about, such as education and public housing, the public is likely to have a strong opinion about their ideal social policy design. This dissertation provides insight into these collective preferences on the one hand, and the structural context conditions such as regionalisation, budgetary considerations, and economic circumstances on the other. This knowledge may help politicians and policymakers in their aim of creating the desired fit between local policies and local conditions. Moreover,

these lessons can be of great value for local policymaking now that even more policy fields such as immigration and Environmental Law are being decentralised.

## 1.7 OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION

The main research problem addressed in this dissertation is: *How do key stakeholders in local political arenas shape decentralised social policies?* To explore the local political arena in relation to decentralised local social policies, four studies are included. Each is described in a separate chapter. All four chapters are either under review, accepted for publication, or already published in SSCI listed international peer-reviewed journals.

Chapter 2 delves deeper into the first research question: *how can national welfare regime typology dimensions be redeveloped to study local welfare systems?* This chapter outlines the context for the main research problem and provides insight into how decentralised social policies could take shape. Chapter 2 finds that three dimensions are potentially relevant for classifying local welfare systems: (i) policy goals; (ii) policy coverage; and (iii) local responsibility mix. Using these insights, a local welfare regime framework has been developed for future studies into variation in local welfare systems

Chapter 3 delves deeper into the relation between municipal economic, demographic, and political conditions and the first actor involved in the local political arena: local citizens. Hence, the focal point of Chapter 3 is the second research question: *do local circumstances shape welfare attitudes towards decentralised local social policies?* By making use of survey data to which municipal-level data was appended, and then employing a multilevel multinomial regression analysis, the chapter finds that local worlds of welfare attitudes do exist along the lines of the framework dimensions, but that variation in preferences regarding those dimensions is not the result of municipal economic, demographic, or political conditions.

The third research question is answered in Chapter 4: *to what extent do Dutch local party branches' social policy positions deviate from their national mother party and local peer parties, and do local conditions explain this deviation?* This chapter presents a test of how the second main actor of the local political arena may have contributed to variation in the design of municipal social policies: local political parties. Based on an analysis of 168 local party manifestos in 27 municipalities, it finds that decentralised social policy positions addressed in local party manifestos reflect a process of institutional isomorphism. There is limited variation in the three aspects of the local welfare regimes framework.

The last empirical chapter, Chapter 5, focuses on the fourth research question: *how do local conditions shape the policy-making process of social policies in Dutch municipalities after the decentralisation of the Participation Act in 2015?* Based on a qualitative comparative case study of four Dutch municipalities, I argue that diverging regulations arise because policymakers aim for policies that fit the local political context but find themselves bounded by budgetary considerations and regionalisation. Furthermore, these attempts to diverge regulations mainly arise in the policy formulation phase, rather than the agenda-setting or decision-making phases.

Chapter 6, finally, takes stock of the findings from the previous chapters to formulate an answer to this dissertation's central research problem. In addition, it discusses these findings by reflecting on their limitations and their relevance to academia and society more widely.







# 3

## **Do local circumstances affect attitudes towards local social policies? Exploring the role of economic, political, and demographic conditions**

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore whether and how economic, political, and demographic municipal conditions shape citizens' attitudes regarding decentralised social policies. The authors analysed the 2018 wave of the Dutch Local Election Studies, which includes a novel survey item asking respondents whether they prefer local social policies to be primarily: (1) protection-based, (2) cohesion-building, or (3) activation-based. The authors appended context indicators to that survey and performed multilevel logistic regression analyses (1,913 respondents nested in 336 municipalities). At the individual level, these preferences are affected by gender, age, income, education, and political inclination, as expected. However, preferences towards local social policies are not shaped by local economic, demographic, or political conditions. The authors discuss the implications of these findings for future research. By using unique data, including a newly developed survey item, this study is the first to explore whether and how municipal conditions shape preferences regarding local welfare. Understanding those preferences is increasingly important as many Western European countries have decentralised swathes of social policies from the national to the local level in recent decades.

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Many Western European countries have decentralised swathes of social policies from the national to the local level in recent decades (Minas, et al., 2012), such as active labour market policies (Fuertes, et al., 2020; Jacobsson, et al., 2017), long-term care (Dijkhoff, 2014) and youth care (Skamnakis, 2016). Therefore, some of the responsibilities for welfare policy development and implementation have shifted from national to local levels of authority (Ansell & Gingrich, 2003; Kazepov & Barberis, 2013; Van Berkel, 2006). This decentralisation is often justified by pointing to a closer fit between policy measures on the one hand and, on the other, the variation in problems, circumstances, and popular preferences that these policies aim to address (Costa-Font & Greer, 2013). The assumption that local conditions affect welfare attitudes towards these new decentralised social policies, however, remains largely understudied.

Existing studies argue that welfare attitudes are shaped by macro-contextual factors, because people are influenced by the cues derived from the environment in which they live (Svallfors, 2012; Van der Waal, et al., 2013). As a result, the expectation is that individuals with similar characteristics may have different welfare attitudes depending on their country of residence (Sevä, 2009). This has been corroborated empirically in dozens of cross-national studies focusing on the role of context conditions – including welfare institutions, economic performance and political discourse – in shaping welfare attitudes (e.g., Gelissen, 2000; Larsen, 2008; Sevä, 2009). Consequently, a great deal is known about cross-national variations in welfare attitudes and how these can be explained. However, the same cannot be said about cross-local variations in welfare attitudes towards local welfare.

The limited number of studies that do assess how local context conditions shape welfare attitudes focus on attitudes towards the *national* welfare system, finding that economic conditions, political discourse, ethnic diversity, and urbanisation “*clearly do have an effect on the formation of people’s attitudes towards aspects of the [national] welfare system*” (Blomberg & Kroll, 1999, p. 331; cf. Sevä, 2009). We use those insights as a stepping-stone for exploring whether local circumstances also shape attitudes towards *local* welfare policies. We do this by focusing on the Dutch case, a pertinent example of large-scale decentralisation, where, in 2015, municipalities became authorised to set their own social welfare policy aims (Vermeulen, 2017).

Specifically, we ask: *Do local conditions shape welfare attitudes towards decentralised social policies?* Using a unique data set—the Dutch Local Election Studies 2018, which measured citizens’ orientations towards local welfare policies across 380 Dutch munic-

palities—our study is the first to explore whether local circumstances shape attitudes towards local welfare policies.

This study's primary aim is to address the apparent oversight of local welfare policy in research on welfare attitudes. In doing this, it makes two substantive contributions. First, it transcends a national bias by focusing on attitudes towards local social policies. Second, from a policy perspective, it seeks to shed light on political views at the local level, as Dutch municipal authorities acquired the legal responsibility to consider political preferences as much as local conditions when making important decentralised policy decisions (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2020).

The paper begins by introducing our tailor-made item for measuring attitudes towards decentralised social policies. Building on insights derived from earlier studies on welfare attitudes, we attempt to identify potentially relevant municipal conditions that may shape citizens' attitudes towards decentralised social policies. Four of these conditions guide our empirical analysis. We conclude with a critical reflection and discussion of the implications of our findings.

### **3.2 MEASURING ATTITUDES TOWARDS DECENTRALISED SOCIAL POLICIES**

To explore the impact of local circumstances on citizens' attitudes towards local social policies, we focus on the basic question: what type of *primary aim* of such policies do they prefer? The formulation of the response categories was inspired by research that focused on people's redistribution preferences and views of government responsibilities (e.g., Svallfors, 2004; Taylor-Gooby, 2001). Broadly speaking, these studies have identified three types of attitudes towards welfare: social-democratic, Christian-democratic, and liberal. Those with social-democratic attitudes support extensive state intervention and generous welfare arrangements (Staerke, et al., 2012; Svallfors, 2012; Taylor-Gooby, 2001). This support is weaker among those with Christian-democratic welfare attitudes, who prefer social cohesion and "*sources of [welfare] support conceived in a hierarchy of family, firm and state*" (Taylor-Gooby, 2001, p. 137). Respondents with liberal welfare attitudes, meanwhile, have the lowest levels of support for redistribution and state intervention, but the strongest for activation-based welfare policies (Staerke, et al., 2012; Svallfors, 2012).

Inspired by the three types of attitude mentioned earlier, we developed a new survey item to measure people's attitudes towards decentralised social policies. To fit this to

the local social policy context, we reformulated the type of item often used to measure citizens' attitudes towards the welfare responsibilities of national governments (for an overview of such items, see Svallfors, 2004, p. 124).<sup>8</sup> This question asked respondents what they believe should be the primary aim of local social policies, with the response categories discerning the social-democratic, Christian-democratic, and liberal takes on the issue. The social-democratic take on the primary aim of local social policy in this study was that citizens ought to be able to appeal to the municipality for problems as the primary (first and foremost) provider of protection for its citizens through policies (Kautto, 2002). Christian-democratic policies support the family and the gendered division of paid and unpaid labour, as well as emphasising the family and surrounding community as the primary social service provider (Seeleib-Kaiser, et al., 2005). To enhance this role of the family and community, the Christian-democratic take on the primary aim of local social policies in this study focused on cohesion-building through connecting members of the society. The liberal stance on welfare policies supports activation-based welfare policy aims (Staerke, et al., 2012; Svallfors, 2012). Therefore, the liberal take on the primary aim of local social policies advocated facilitating citizens to handle their problems themselves by means of activation. We describe the corresponding three types of policy aim as: (1) protection-based local social policies; (2) cohesion-building local social policies; and (3) activation-based local social policies.

In the next section, we theorise how citizens' attitudes towards decentralised local social policies are possibly shaped by municipal conditions.

### **3.3 HOW DO MUNICIPAL CONDITIONS SHAPE ATTITUDES TOWARDS DECENTRALISED SOCIAL POLICIES?**

At the individual level, the notion of self-interest implies that various characteristics that pose a greater-than-average risk for facing social or economic problems will influence attitudes towards the role of the state in welfare issues (Kangas, 1997). This needs to be accounted for in our analyses, which focused on exploring the role of local conditions in shaping those attitudes.

The general idea is that individuals are risk-averse and thus, when experiencing increasing vulnerability and facing greater risks of becoming dependent of the welfare system,

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8 Survey items on national governments' responsibilities are generally formulated as follows: "Should it be the government's responsibility to provide welfare type [x] to societal group [x]?" (For an overview of such items, see Svallfors, 2004, p. 124).

grow more supportive of intensified assistance and less supportive of individual responsibility (Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989). Such statements can be found in classical readings by Smith (1976) and Downs (1957), and numerous articles presented strong empirical support for these arguments (e.g., Blekesaune, 2007; Taylor-Gooby, 2001). Therefore, it is expected that women (Rantanen, et al., 2015), the less educated (Linos & West, 2003), the unemployed and people with low incomes (Bean & Papadakis, 1998) are more supportive of extensive welfare policies.

At the contextual level, informed by the wider welfare attitudes literature, we focus on four types of context to explore how citizen's attitudes towards decentralised social policies can be shaped by municipal conditions: (1) economic; (2) political; (3) ethnic; and (4) urbanisation.

### 3.3.1 Economic

One contextual factor frequently linked to welfare attitudes is economic circumstances and in particular the unemployment rate (e.g., Blekesaune, 2007; Blomberg & Kroll, 1999). These conditions can affect attitudes towards local welfare via two mechanisms: sociotropic concerns or self-interest.

According to the sociotropic mechanism, public concern for those in economically precarious positions is greater in areas that are doing worse economically (Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003). The underlying notion is that being confronted with unemployed friends, relatives or fellow local citizens on a regular basis breeds solidarity with them (Kiewiet & Lewis-Back, 2011). It is also believed that such sociotropic concerns breed higher levels of solidarity with the unemployed among the wider public (Staerkle, et al., 2012; Van Oorschot & Meuleman, 2012). If this is correct, the first expectation is that *the support for protection-based social policies is higher in municipalities with higher rates of unemployment*.

According to the self-interest mechanism, welfare attitudes are influenced differently by unemployment rates (Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003), as not everyone is affected equally by high unemployment and unemployment-related risks. As these risks vary between societal groups, already existing conflicting welfare interests are further reinforced where the unemployment rate is high. In other words, those in a poorer labour-market position have an even greater risk of becoming unemployed, while those who are unemployed face even worse job prospects (Blekesaune & Quadagno, 2003; Edlund, 2006). As a result, one would expect these people to favour protection-based social policies more in municipalities with high unemployment rates.

Those in a stronger labour-market position are likely to bear a higher financial burden in places that fare worse economically, as they are the people who, in the main, must contribute more to the welfare system (Hasenfeld & Rafferty, 1989). Consequently, this is likely to further reduce their already low support for protection-based social policies (Linos & West, 2003). In line with this argument, it might be expected that *the negative effect of income on support for protection-based social policies is stronger in municipalities with higher unemployment rates and that the positive effect of unemployment on support for protection-based social policies is stronger in municipalities with higher unemployment rates.*

### 3.3.2 Political

It is argued, and has been found, that attitudes and preferences are influenced by our interactions with those around us (Blomberg & Kroll, 1999; Miller, 1978). These interactions can both weaken and strengthen ideological differences, depending on how we respond to dissimilar others (Miller, 1978). Consequently, two mechanisms are discussed here: consensual and reactive (Miller, 1978).

The consensualism mechanism is derived from contact theory (Campbell, 2006), which suggests that contact between ideological and political adversaries produces dialogues. These dialogues, in turn, lead to information elaboration, mutual understanding, tolerance and, by extension, consensual tendencies (Miller, 1978). In other words, *“people are influenced towards agreement with their contacts, whether or not those contacts have similar characteristics to themselves”* (Miller, 1978, p. 265). Previous studies do indeed show that contact with political opponents breeds more agreement in terms of political ideology (e.g. Campbell, 2006). Using this insight as a stepping-stone for theorising about the role of local political climates in shaping welfare attitudes, we expect views on decentralised social policies to be influenced by the attitudes of the majority on these issues and that people are moved into agreement with each other. The first scenario, therefore, states that: *(1) non-social democrats are more in favour of protection-based local social policies in social-democratic municipalities; (2) non-Christian democrats are more in favour of cohesion-building local social policies in Christian-democratic municipalities; and (3) non-liberals are more in favour of activation-based local social policies in liberal municipalities.*

The reactive mechanism is derived from the group threat theory. In contrast to the consensualism mechanism, it assumes that people will be antagonised by confrontation with dissimilar others (Andrews, 2011; Miller, 1978; Scala & Johnson, 2017) and that frequent contact with political opponents will reinforce our ideological and political views (Andrews, 2011). In the *Big Sort*, for example, Bishop (2009) demonstrates that bringing

different groups together does not instantly foster mutual respect. On the contrary, political discussions can often lead to group polarisation. Glaser (1994) also found support for this threat theory, revealing that the larger the size of the ‘group’ threatening our views and resources, the stronger our beliefs become. With this in mind, the opposite can be expected with regard to the consensualism mechanism, hence: (1) *social democrats are more in favour of protection-based local social policies in non-social democratic municipalities; (2) Christian democrats are more in favour of cohesion-building local social policies in non-Christian democratic municipalities; and (3) liberals are more in favour of activation-based local social policies in non-liberal municipalities.*

### 3.3.3 Ethnic

The third contextual indicator that might affect citizens’ attitudes towards local social policies is ethnic diversity. In his article *E pluribus Unum*, Putnam proposes the constrict theory, arguing that such diversity in a residential setting reduces both in- and out-group solidarity (2007). As a result, those in ethnically diverse contexts tend to turn inwards, distrust people regardless of the colour of their skin and give less to charity, a phenomenon that Putnam calls ‘hunkering down’ (Gijssberts, et al., 2012; Putnam, 2007; Sturgis, et al., 2011). Given this ‘hunkering down’ thesis, it might be expected that views towards protection-based welfare policies are less positive when the share of ethnic minority residents is higher, as this makes people less willing to pay for social security in general. In other words, we expect *the support for protection-based local social policies to be lower in municipalities with a larger share of ethnic minority citizens.*

### 3.3.4 Urbanisation

The final contextual condition that may be relevant for the local welfare attitudes discussed here concerns the level of urbanisation (Kelly & Lobao, 2019; Sevä, 2009). Researchers argued more than 30 years ago that socialisation in rural areas affects attitudes in a different way to socialisation in urban areas (e.g. Davis, 1988; Scala & Johnson, 2017). Previous studies largely expected people living in rural areas to have more negative views towards welfare recipients (Camasso & Moore, 1985). Generally, rural socialisation: (1) teaches people to have a high regard for self-reliance and a strong work ethic, instilling the idea that a precarious position in life is the result of personal shortcomings (Osgood, 1977); and (2) emphasises “*a sense of local responsibility for and control of the problem*” (Davis, 1988, p. 70). Socialisation in urban environments, however, leads to “*a greater tendency toward unconventional lifestyles, individualisation, and greater acceptance of stigmatised behaviour, less conservative attitudes, and more variance in family structure*” (Rank & Hirschl, 1993, p. 608). Consequently, those in urban areas are more inclined to support welfare policies that enable individual self-actualisation, irrespective of labour-market participation and family obligations (Blomberg &



Kroll, 1999). In line with this reasoning, we expect that: *higher levels of urbanisation will reduce support for activation-based local social policies.*

### 3.4 DATA AND METHODS

#### 3.4.1 Data set

We explore the aforementioned scenarios using multilevel modelling on a unique data set that combined individual-level data from the *Dutch Local Election Studies, 2018* (DLES2018), and municipal-level data retrieved from the various sources outlined further below. The DLES2018 data set was collected by the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel and administered by *CentERdata* (Tilburg University, the Netherlands). The LISS is a long-running panel which accesses high-quality, random samples drawn from the Dutch population by Statistics Netherlands (CBS). In our study, respondents aged 18 years and above were randomly selected in 2018. Of the 3,380 individuals chosen, 2,704 (80%) replied and 2,652 completed the survey. The DLES2018 includes respondents from all 380 Dutch municipalities (for more information on the survey, see: Jansen & Denters, 2018, pp. 60–61).

#### 3.4.2 Outcome measure

A three-category dependent variable—*local social policy preference*—indicates a respondent's preferred primary aim of local social policies. This question was introduced and posed as follows:

*Now we turn to a number of questions about municipal social policies, for example health care, tackling unemployment, and youth policy (...) We would like to know what you think about that. Social policy in my municipality must above all ensure that people....*

- (1) *Become more connected*
- (2) *Are better able to handle their problems themselves*
- (3) *Can appeal to the municipality for their problems.*<sup>9</sup>

#### 3.4.3 Variables measuring local conditions

The *unemployment rate* was included as a continuous variable and ranged in 2017 from 2.9% (municipality: *Kapelle*) to 9.2% (municipality: *Zevenaar*) (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten, 2018). This shows the unemployed labour force as a share of the labour force overall (unemployed and employed). This is the standard indicator

<sup>9</sup> For a more elaborate conceptual explanation, please consult “*measuring attitudes towards decentralised social policies*” on pp.54-55.

for measuring unemployment in the Netherlands, as applied by Statistics Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2019d).

In order to measure *political climate*, we identified three types of municipality: social-democratic (n = 93); liberal (n = 235); and Christian-democratic (n = 52). This was determined by the share of votes for parties with a social democratic [(1) = Socialist Party (SP); GreenLeft (GL); Labour Party (PvdA)], conservative [(2) = Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD); Democrats' 66 (D66)] or Christian-democratic [(3) = Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA); Christian Union (CU); Political Reformed Party (SGP)] economic agenda, respectively. These shares were calculated using the average of the votes in the 2012 and 2017 national elections (Kiesraad, 2012; 2017). For our analyses, we needed a categorical variable. Therefore, a municipality was coded as social-democratic (1), liberal (2), or Christian-democratic (3), when parties of one of those types cumulatively received a higher share of the votes than parties from the other two types. To optimise the validity, we chose to use vote shares during national, rather than local, elections, as turnout in the former is much higher than in the latter. Moreover, a substantial number of votes go to local parties during local elections (Boogers & Voerman, 2010). As the economic agendas of those local parties vary greatly across municipalities (Ibid.), ranging from very social-democratic to very liberal, votes cast for those parties are difficult to classify accurately.

The *share of non-Western ethnic minorities* in a municipality was used as a proxy for the degree of ethnic diversity, as there was no municipal-level indicator available for this. It should be noted that previous research has demonstrated that ethnic diversity and the share of non-Western ethnic minorities in an area affect social cohesion in a roughly similar way in the Netherlands (Gijssberts, van der Meer & Dagevos, 2012). In other words, they can largely be used interchangeably for the research problem at hand. The share of non-Western ethnic minorities is included in the Dutch Local Election Survey as an ordinal variable with three categories: (1) <3%; (2) 3-10%; and (3) >10%. According to Statistics Netherlands, a citizen is considered a non-Western ethnic minority member if at least one parent was born in an African, Latin American, or Asian (excluding Indonesia and Japan) country (Statistics Netherlands, 2019b; 2019c).

*Urbanisation* measures the number of addresses within a radius of 1 km, that is, 'address density' (Statistics Netherlands, 2019a), recalculated by Statistics Netherlands to a range of 1–5. The urbanisation scores of the municipalities in our data set in 2018 (Statistics Netherlands, 2019e) ranged from 1.0 (*Alphen-Chaam*, *Loppersum* and *Westerveld*) to 4.8 (*Amsterdam*). Consequently, we cover almost the entire range and included the five types of municipality according to their urbanisation level per km<sup>2</sup>, as discerned by Sta-

tistics Netherlands: (1) non-urban: fewer than 500 addresses; (2) small urban: 500–1,000 addresses; (3) moderate urban: 1,000–1,500 addresses; (4) strong urban: 1,500–2,500 addresses; (5) very strong urban: 2,500 or more addresses (Statistics Netherlands, 2019a).

### 3.4.4 Individual-level variables

The analysis included the individual-level variables needed to account for the notion of self-interest when exploring our scenarios, as well as those conventionally used as controls in studies on welfare attitudes. *Gender* was coded as male (0) and female (1). *Age* was measured in years. *Education level* indicated the highest level attained by the respondent according to the following three categories (based on the International Standard Classification of Education 2011; ISCED): (1) low = ‘lower than lower secondary’ and ‘lower secondary’; (2) medium = ‘lower tier secondary’, ‘upper tier secondary’ and ‘advanced vocational’; and (3) = ‘lower tertiary’ and ‘higher tertiary’.<sup>10</sup> *Employed* was coded as (1) and *unemployed* as (0), while *income* was measured as the combined net monthly incomes of all household members in Euros, ranging from 0 to 12,475 euros per month. *Vote choice* was categorised into four groups reflecting how the respondents voted during the 2017 national elections: (0) vote for other (i.e. non-social democratic, non-liberal and non-Christian democratic) party = Party for Freedom (PVV), Forum for Democracy (FvD), Senior party (50+), Party for the Animals (Pvd) and Think (Denk); (1) vote for liberal party = Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and Democrats’ 66 (D66); (2) vote for social-democratic party = Socialist Party (SP), GreenLeft (GL) and Labour Party (PvdA); or (3) vote for a Christian-democratic party = Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), Christian Union (CU) and Political Reformed Party (SGP).

Table 3.1 depicts the descriptive statistics of all the variables.

### 3.4.5 Modelling approach

As our respondents were nested in municipalities, we estimated a set of multilevel models to explore our ideas (Hox, 1998). Because all the expectations enabled us to simplify the three-category dependent variable into a dichotomous version, we can report our analyses as clearly as possible (i.e., a logistic, instead of a multinomial logistic, regression), improving the interpretability of our results.

<sup>10</sup> Estimating models 1–8 using a continuous variable instead of a categorical variable for level of education does not alter the results.

**Table 3.1** Descriptive variables

	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	<i>n</i>
<i>Dependent variable</i>					
Support for protective local social policies	0	1	0.45		2,654
Support for cohesion-building local social policies	0	1	0.21		2,654
Support for activating local social policies	0	1	0.33		2,654
<i>Individual-level variables</i>					
Gender (female)	0	1	0.53		2,703
Age	18	100	52.9	17.50	2,703
Employed	0	1	0.49		2,696
Income	0	12,475	3.10	1.66	2,462
Education					
Low	0	1	0.26		2,697
Middle	0	1	0.34		2,697
High	0	1	0.40		2,697
Vote choice					
Vote for social-democratic party	0	1	0.31		2,145
Vote for Christian-democratic party	0	1	0.19		2,145
Vote for liberal party	0	1	0.33		2,145
Vote for other party	0	1	0.18		2,145
<i>Municipal-level variables</i>					
Unemployment rate	2.9	9.2	4.87	1.17	2,730
Political climate					
Social-democratic	0	1	0.40		2,730
Christian-democratic	0	1	0.08		2,730
Liberal	0	1	0.53		2,730
Share of non-Western ethnic minorities					
<3%	0	1	0.11		2,682
3-10%	0	1	0.40		2,682
>10%	0	1	0.49		2,682
Urbanisation	1	4.78	3.18	1.07	2,730

Source: Dutch Local Election Studies, 2018 (own calculations).

### 3.5 RESULTS

Our independent variable—local social policy preferences—clearly indicates that the preferences regarding the type of local social policy varied among the respondents. Option 3 had the most support among our respondents (i.e., 44% favoured protection-based local social policies), followed by option 2 (31% preferred activation-based local social policies) and option 1 (21% favoured cohesion-building local social policies).

In advance of assessing whether municipal factors shaped the local social policy preferences of local citizens, we first explored whether conventional individual-level factors in welfare-attitude research affected those preferences as expected. Model 1 in Table 3.2 therefore includes the individual-level control variables. The results were largely in accordance with earlier research (e.g., Van Oorschot, 2000; 2006): Model 1 indicates a preference for protection-based local social policies over activation-based and cohesion-building versions, and this was stronger among females (cf. Gelissen, 2000), the elderly (cf. Van Oorschot, 2000), those on lower incomes (cf. Bean & Papadakis, 1998) and the less educated (cf. Linos & West, 2003). Surprisingly, the unemployed did not favour protection-based local social policies over activation-based or cohesion-building ones.

We then explored if the scenarios on the context conditions found support in the data. Model 2 indicates that there was municipal-level variation over and above individual-level variation in *local social policy preferences*. In other words, preferences pertaining to local social policies, as measured by our novel survey item, are not only determined by individual-level characteristics such as age and gender, but also by municipal conditions. In what follows, we are the first to scrutinise whether the types of conditions described in the literature – which have generally been found to shape attitudes towards national welfare – are also relevant in determining attitudes towards local welfare.

Models 2 and 3 address our scenarios about the impact of local economic conditions on attitudes towards local welfare, namely that high unemployment rates shape local social policy preferences according to the sociotropic or self-interest mechanisms. Model 2 clearly demonstrates that the former finds no evidence: support for protection-based local social policies was not higher in municipalities with high unemployment rates. To ease interpretation, and as recommended (cf. Brambor, et al., 2006), we provide a graphic representation of the interaction effects of the unemployment rate with income (Figure 3.1) and employment status (Figure 3.2). Figures 3.1 and 3.2 show that the self-interest mechanism was also not at play: a high rate of unemployment did not exacerbate the difference between the economically well off (high incomes and employed) and the economically weak (low incomes and unemployed) in terms of support for protection-based local social policies over activation-based or cohesion-building versions.<sup>11</sup> This means that we did not find support for the scenario that local economic conditions might be relevant for attitudes towards local welfare.

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11 A robustness check that estimated the interaction terms Unemployment rate\*Employed and Unemployment rate\*Income simultaneously did not yield substantially different results compared to models 2 and 3. These analyses are available upon request.

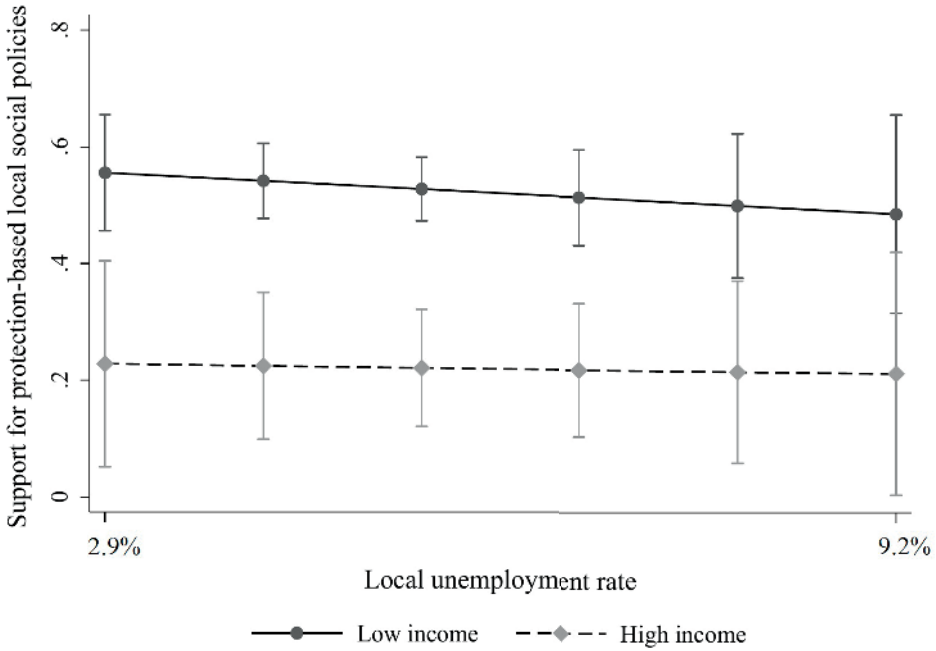
**Table 3.2** Multilevel logistic regression analyses of 1,913 citizens in 336 Dutch municipalities in 2018, with the dependent variable 'local social policy preferences' (entries are log-odds regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
<i>Local social policy preferences</i>	<i>Protection-based</i>	<i>Protection-based</i>	<i>Protection-based</i>	<i>Protection-based</i>	<i>Cohesion-building</i>	<i>Activation-based</i>	<i>Protection-based</i>	<i>Activation-based</i>
Constant	-.319 (.286)	-.128 (.400)	.150 (.527)	-.847 (.500)	-.951 (.630)	-.156 (.526)	-.268 (.407)	-.710 (.571)
<i>Individual-level variables</i>								
Female	.257* (.105)	.271* (.115)	.280* (.118)	.236* (.126)	.076 (.133)	-.317* (.128)	.286* (.115)	-.316* (.127)
Age	.012** (.004)	.012** (.004)	.012** (.004)	.016** (.004)	-.008 (.005)	-.011* (.005)	.012** (.004)	-.011* (.005)
Employed	.023 (.122)	.036 (.134)	-.391 (.485)	-.023 (.153)	.059 (.168)	-.001 (.137)	.046 (.135)	-.003 (.137)
Income	-.116*** (.035)	-.121*** (.033)	-.136 (.109)	-.133** (.043)	-.017 (.041)	.143** (.041)	-.123*** (.033)	.139*** (.040)
Education Low								
Middle	-.228 (.137)	-.256 (.166)	-.271 (.172)	-.171 (.176)	.277 (.195)	-.005 (.191)	-.257 (.168)	-.001 (.189)
High	-.570*** (.137)	-.598*** (.147)	-.638*** (.153)	-.495** (.158)	.141 (.183)	.448* (.193)	-.588*** (.148)	.445* (.194)
Vote choice								
Social-democratic party				.235 (.260)	.148 (.239)	-.764** (.234)		-.758** (.233)
Christian-democratic party				-.256 (.252)	.394 (.272)	-.594* (.274)		.210 (.190)
Liberal party				-.003 (.202)	-.156 (.229)	-.035 (.242)		.545** (.192)
<i>Municipal-level variables</i>								
Unemployment rate		-.045 (.052)	.091 (.093)	.108 (.068)	-.089 (.074)	-.014 (.076)	.013 (.059)	-.030 (.080)
Municipal political climate								
Social-democratic political climate				-.404 (.266)				
Christian-democratic political climate					.132 (.824)			-.124 (.258)
Liberal political climate						-.424 (.248)		-.164 (.142)
Share of non-Western ethnic minorities								
3-10%				-.003 (.204)	.128 (.326)	-.105 (.200)	-.045 (.177)	-.125 (.231)

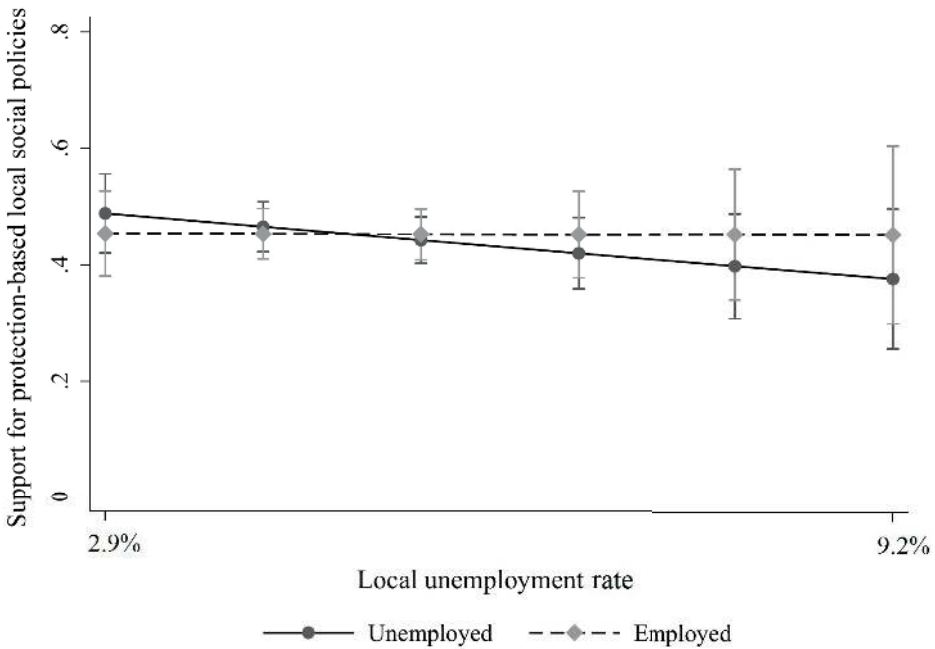
	Model 1 Protection- based	Model 2 Protection- based	Model 3 Protection- based	Model 4 Protection- based	Model 5 Cohesion- building	Model 6 Activation- based	Model 7 Protection- based	Model 8 Activation- based
<i>Local social policy preferences</i>								
>10%				-.298 (.227)	.145 (.351)	.209 (.238)	-.272 (.193)	.184 (.351)
Urbanity							.012 (.115)	
<i>Cross-level interactions</i>								
Unemployment rate x employment		-.081 (.096)						
Unemployment rate x income		-.003 (.019)						
Left political climate x left-wing voting			.239 (.372)					
Left political climate x Christian-democratic voting			-.507 (.396)					
Left political climate x liberal voting			.048 (.298)					
Christian political climate x left-wing voting				-1.023 (1.105)				
Christian political climate x Christian-democratic voting				-.071 (.908)				
Christian political climate x liberal voting				-.139 (1.108)	.530 (.336)			
Liberal political climate x left-wing voting					.557 (.368)			
Liberal political climate x Christian-democratic voting					.160 (.322)			
Liberal political climate x liberal voting								
<i>Random effects</i>								
Municipal-level variance	.204 (.079)	.172 (.078)	.151 (.092)	.356 (.248)	.180 (.077)	.197 (.078)	.179 (.077)	
Log-likelihood	-1592.71	-1583.55	-1578.21	-1159.59	-886.80	-1090.66	-1571.63	-1092.74
<i>n</i> individual	1,913	1,913	1,913	1,913	1,913	1,913	1,913	1,913
<i>n</i> municipality	336	336	336	336	336	336	336	336

Notes: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-sided).

Reference categories: Female (ref. = Male); Employed (ref. = Unemployed); Education (ref. = Low); Vote choice model 5 (ref. = social-democratic party); Vote choice model 6 (ref. = Christian-democratic party); Vote choice models 7 and 8 (ref. = liberal party); Share of non-Western ethnic minorities (ref. = <3%); Municipal political climate model 5 (ref. = social-democratic political climate); Municipal political climate model 6 (Christian-democratic political climate); Municipal political climate models 7 and 8 (ref. = Liberal political climate).



**Figure 3.1** The relationship between income and support for protection-based local social policies by unemployment rate. The error bars depict 95% confidence intervals.

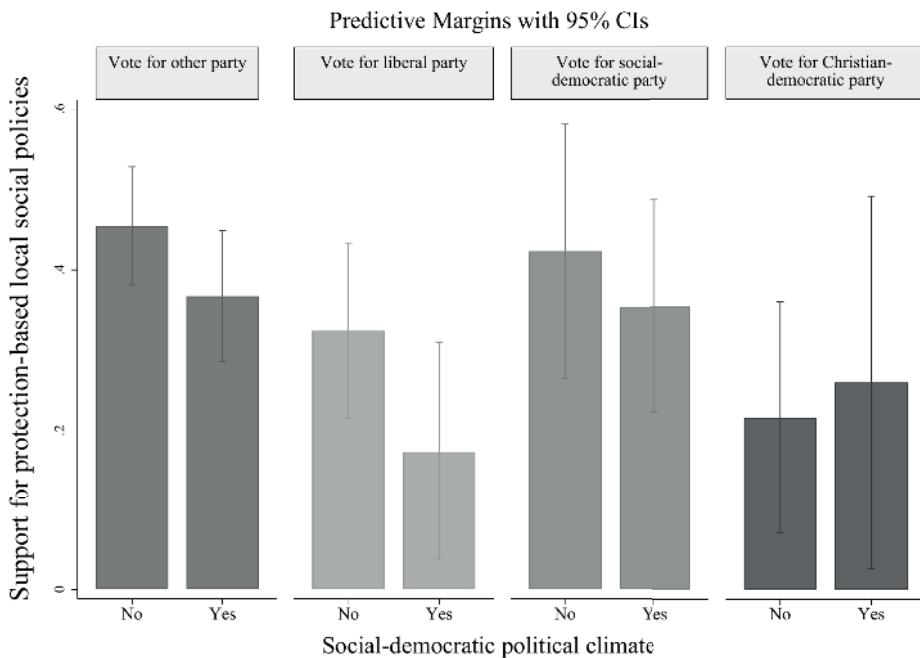


**Figure 3.2** The relationship between employment and support for protection-based local social policies by unemployment rate. The error bars depict 95% confidence intervals.

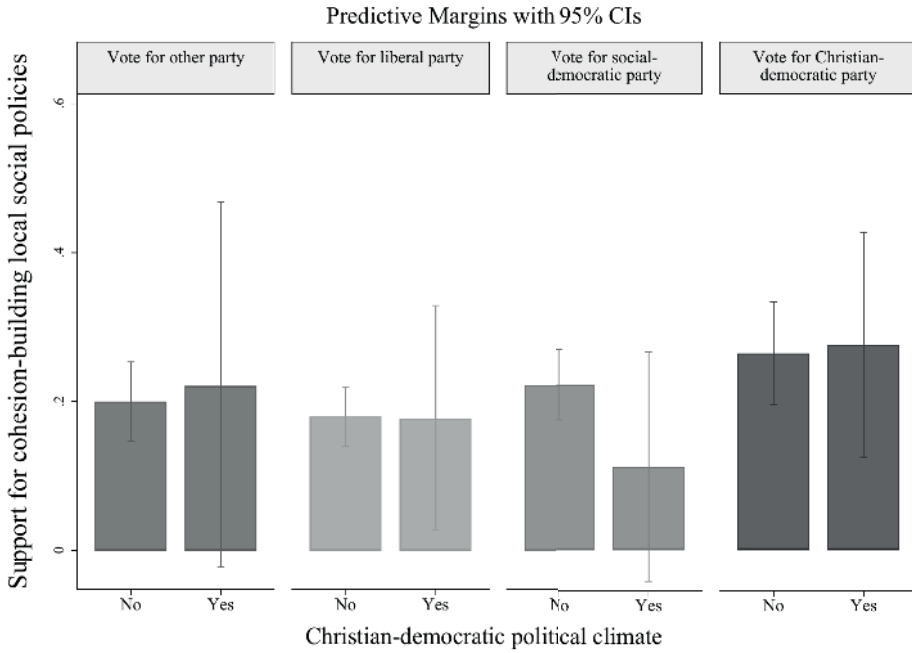


Models 4, 5, and 6 explored the scenarios of the influence of the local political climate, which assumed that the local political climate might shape inhabitants' local social policy preferences via the consensualism or reactive mechanisms. Surprisingly, all three models indicated that neither of the scenarios found support in the data: the interaction effects of political climate with vote choice on local social policy preferences were not significant. To aid interpretation, we depict the central findings of Models 5–7 in Figures 3.3–3.5. The error bars in all these cases convincingly demonstrate that the local political climate did not affect the relationship between vote choice and preferences towards local social policies.

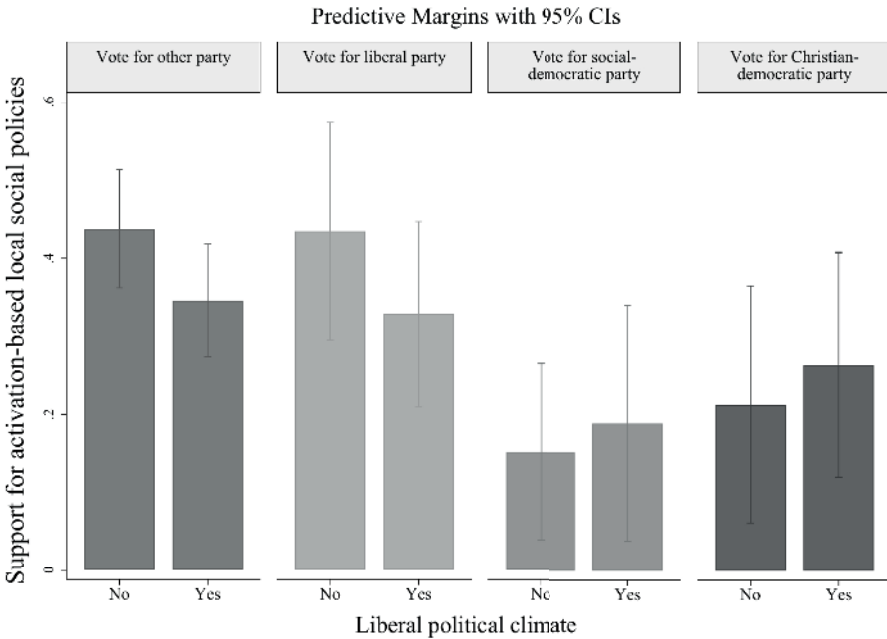
Figure 3.3 shows that non-social democrats are not more likely to support protection-based local social policies when they live in a municipality with a social-democratic political climate; nor do social democrats favour these policies more in municipalities with a non-social-democratic political climate. Similarly, Figure 3.4 shows that those who do not vote for Christian-democratic parties are also no more likely to support cohesion-building local social policies when they live in a municipality with a Christian-democratic political climate, nor are those who vote for Christian-democratic parties in municipalities with a non-Christian-democratic political climate. Figure 3.5 demonstrates that both



**Figure 3.3** The relationship between vote choice and support for protection-based local social policies, by social-democratic political climate.



**Figure 3.4** The relationship between vote choice and support for cohesion-building local social policies, by Christian-democratic political climate.



**Figure 3.5** The relationship between vote choice and support for activation-based local social policies, by liberal political climate.

non-liberals and liberals are likewise no more in favour of activation-based local social policies in municipalities with a liberal, or non-liberal, political climate, respectively. Overall, neither the consensualism nor the reactive mechanism seem to play a role in shaping attitudes towards local social policies in the Dutch context.

Model 7 estimated the effect of a municipality's share of non-Western ethnic minority residents on local social policy preferences. Although this effect was in the expected direction, it was too weak to achieve statistical significance, meaning that we found no evidence to support the scenario that the share of non-Western ethnic minorities might affect attitudes towards local welfare. Finally, Model 8 estimated whether inhabitants of rural municipalities were more supportive of activation-based local social policies, as we had expected based on ideas suggesting that urban socialisation leads to more individualistic explanations for economic hardship. Yet, again, this proved not to be the case. The effect of urbanity was far from significant. Our sixth scenario, therefore, also finds no support in the data. By no means can we therefore say that local attitudes towards municipal social policies vary according to the economic, demographic, political or urban local context conditions.<sup>12</sup> What we can say, however, is that these attitudes do vary according to individual-level characteristics, presenting new support for the self-interest theory also being applicable to the local level of governance.

### 3.5 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore whether and how attitudes towards decentralised local social policies are shaped by municipal conditions. This is an important issue, given the trend in many Western countries of decentralising social policies from national to local authorities. The existing literature focuses on national welfare attitudes, and so we are the first to assess attitudes towards local welfare. To do this, we developed a novel survey item through which we assessed whether people prefer (1) protection-based, (2) cohesion-building, or (3) activation-based local social policies. This was included in the 2018 wave of the Dutch Local Election Studies. By combining that survey with municipal-level data from various sources, we were able to answer the question: *How do local conditions shape welfare attitudes towards decentralised social policies?* Informed by a large body of welfare-state literature, we focused on the following local conditions: (1) the unemployment rate; (2) the political climate; (3) the share of non-Western ethnic minority citizens; and (4) the level of urbanisation.

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12 Estimating Models 5 (protection-based), 6 (cohesion-building) and 8 (activation-based) with all independent variables does not lead to a different conclusion.

Surprisingly, our study suggests that none of these conditions shape preferences towards local social policies in addition to the standard individual-level characteristics of gender, age, income, and level of education. Unlike the ‘self-interest’ and ‘sociotropic’ notions, unemployment rates do not have an impact on those preferences. Likewise, living in a municipality where one’s political adversaries are dominant does not shape one’s preferences towards such policies according to the consensualism (informed by contact theory) and reactive mechanisms (informed by group threat theory). Contrary to Putnam’s theory of ‘hunkering down’ (2007), the share of non-Western ethnic minorities does not reduce support for protection-based local social policies. Finally, we also found no evidence to support the idea that attitudes may be influenced by socialisation in rural or urban regions: inhabitants of rural areas are not more supportive of activation-based local social policies.

In summary, while preferences towards local social policies clearly vary across individuals and municipalities, it has been shown that they are not shaped by the ‘usual suspects’ among the context conditions.

Given the aforementioned, from a citizen’s perspective, there does not seem to be a strong case for decentralising social policies, or at least not for tailoring those policies to local conditions. That said, by taking our study’s characteristics into account, we suggest that there are at least four reasons for this unexpected finding.

The first and most obvious reason is our focus on the Dutch case, as determined by the availability of unique survey data across all municipalities on citizens’ preferences towards local social policies. This provided a strict test of our hypotheses: local conditions are less likely to vary in the Netherlands and are thus not expected to have as strong an effect as in larger countries such as the United States, Germany or the United Kingdom. This could, for instance, be the reason why Blomberg and Kroll (1999) and Sevä (2009) found that local conditions do matter for welfare attitudes in Finland and Sweden, although it should be noted that their focus was on attitudes towards national welfare arrangements. Their findings imply that future studies on how local characteristics shape attitudes towards local welfare are more likely to find context effects if the focus is on countries larger than the Netherlands.

Secondly, when determining which context conditions to include in our study, we self-evidently relied on empirical research on welfare attitudes. As previous studies have demonstrated that unemployment rates, the share of immigrants or ethnic minorities, the political climate and the level of urbanisation are relevant for national welfare attitudes, we expected them to also be applicable to attitudes towards local social poli-

cies. This, however, was not the case, which suggests that other municipal conditions may be more relevant in this regard. For example, regional cultures (cf. Van der Waal & Houtman, 2011), or regional differences in religious denominations (cf. Jaime-Castillo, et al., 2016), could be relevant. Also, our theoretical scenarios were rather general, while actual scenarios might be more conditional, especially in case of counterarguments such as the consensualism and reactive mechanisms. The absent effect of the political climate in our analysis might very well be the net result of those two mechanisms being at play for different subsets of the population. In addition, more concrete policy-related elements, such as satisfaction with, or the effectiveness of, specific policies, may be more relevant for attitudes towards local social policies than the ideological differences across municipalities in our focus (cf. Van Oorschot & Meuleman, 2012). This is for future research to uncover.

Lastly, in the specific case of our test of the hunkering down hypothesis, we had to rely on a very crude measure due to data limitations. While a measure of the precise municipal share of non-Western ethnic minorities would be ideal, the best measure available is a crude, three-category version, which may have underestimated this effect. Furthermore, the literature offers a counterargument to Putnam's (2007) hunkering down thesis, claiming that a higher level of ethnic diversity may increase the (perceived) risk of income loss. This, in turn, may result in higher support for protection-based welfare policies, known as the compensation effect (Eger & Breznau, 2017; Finseraas, 2008). In cases of the positive compensation effect and negative hunkering-down effect both being at play (for different subsets of citizens), they would have cancelled each other out in our analyses.

Needless to say, where the multilevel modelling approach used in this study provides a clear picture of the relevance of individual and contextual variables, alternative methodological approaches, especially more qualitative ones, could provide more insights into the hows and whys of our findings. Research in this sense is clearly called for.

Overall, this is the first study to explore whether preferences towards local social policies are shaped by local context conditions. While local worlds of welfare do exist in the Dutch case—preferences towards local social policies clearly vary across municipalities—the various context conditions conventionally used in welfare-attitude research cannot account for that pattern. Future studies could explore and uncover alternative explanations for the existence of local worlds of welfare attitudes.



# 4

## **Principals or Puppets? Analysing Variation in Local Political Parties' Social Policy Positions**

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Principals or puppets? Analysing variation in local political parties' social policy  
positions. *Acta Politica*, 56(3), 456-476.

## ABSTRACT

The decentralisation of policy responsibilities from the national to the local level in the domain of social policies is meant to facilitate a better fit to local conditions, and, consequently, inspire local variation in social policy positions. This article examines two questions: (1) to what extent do Dutch local party branches' social policy positions deviate from their national mother party and local peer parties and (2) do local conditions explain this deviation? To answer these questions, we developed a dataset including 168 local party manifestos from 27 strategically selected municipalities and 8 national party manifestos. Our analyses show limited deviation in local parties' positions compared to their national mother party and other local branches of their national mother party. This suggests that the social policies addressed in the party manifestos of local parties seem to reflect a process of institutional isomorphism. Furthermore, the limited deviation that does exist in local parties' social policy positions is not convincingly higher in municipalities (1) that are smaller, (2) that have higher social benefit dependency, or (3) that have high vote shares for local independent challengers. This is contrary to what can be expected based on the contingency theory.



## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

National governments often justify decentralisation by pointing to a tighter fit between policy measures and the problems those policies aim to address (Costa-Font & Greer, 2013, p. 6). In line with this approach, it can be argued that local parties are better equipped to tailor policies to local needs as they are better informed about local circumstances (Boogers & Voerman, 2010; Clark, 2004). Consequently, considering the variation in needs and circumstances across municipalities, deviation in social policy positions from national parties is expected. This resembles the so-called contingency theory (Donaldson, 2001), claiming that a misfit with local conditions inspires the feedback needed to fine-tune policies to local conditions. With the widespread trend towards decentralisation of social policy responsibilities and the devolution of authorities from national to local governments (Borghi & van Berkel, 2007; de Vries, 2000; Falletti, 2005), local branches, instead of national political parties, become responsible for developing social policies.

However, adjustments to local circumstances could generate tensions between their role as political players in the local arena on the one hand, and as representatives of their national mother party's ideology on the other (Geser, 1999). Moreover, insights from institutional isomorphism theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) suggest that local deviations in social policy positions are not self-evident. Various institutional pressures exist in the type of complex organisational environments in which local political party branches must operate (Boogers & Voerman, 2010). More specifically, pressures to align with the central party's preferences may hamper the adjustments to local circumstances that local party branches try to make. As such, institutional pressures could hamper achieving the desired fine-tuning of decentralised social policies to local conditions.

The 2015 decentralisation of the Participation Act in the Netherlands (for a more elaborate description see: Dijkhoff, 2014), provides a good opportunity to examine whether decentralisation of social policy leads to the desired local political fine-tuning or not. The Participation Act "*obliges municipalities to provide social welfare services, such as mediation, training, and subsidised employment*", as well as "*income support for less than fully disabled persons who have no employment history (as opposed to former employees)*" (Vermeulen, 2017, p. 128).

Our main research questions are twofold: (1) *to what extent do Dutch local party branches' social policy positions deviate from their national mother parties and local peer parties, and (2) do local conditions explain this deviation?*

As decentralisation is still in its early stage, we focus on local party manifestos drawn up for local elections to answer these questions, as these are the documents in which local variation will first manifest itself. The production of local party manifestos has been viewed as *the* indicator of party politicisation of local governments (Ashworth, 2000; Jones, 1975). “*These manifestos outline policies that parties will enact once elected to legislative or executive office*” (Lowe, et al., 2011, p. 124). Using party manifestos allows us to examine whether local party branches operate as local ‘principals’ or national ‘puppets’ in determining their positions concerning the new social policy responsibilities. We also think that, despite the one-policy and one-country focus in this research, our findings could provide relevant insights for other types of decentralised policies, and for the politics of decentralising social policies from national to local governments in other countries.

We developed a unique data set to answer our research questions. It includes relevant information on local party manifestos for more than two dozen strategically selected Dutch municipalities that vary on important aspects, e.g., population size, social benefit dependency, political constellation, and region (e.g., Breeman, et al., 2015). We followed a widely used technique (cf. Cole, 2005; Gross & Jankowski, 2018) to systematically code and analyse the social policy positions reported in those manifestos. The dataset contains 168 manifestos of local party branches, in addition to national party manifestos from the eight largest political parties.

The constitutional design of the Netherlands is a decentralised unitary system in which each of 380 municipalities has its own democratic legitimacy (Andeweg & Irwin, 2005; Breeman, et al., 2015). All municipal councils are directly elected every four years on a fixed day. Whilst the electoral support for *independent* local parties has increased, local party *branches* still make up the lion’s share of local electoral support in the Netherlands (Boogers & Voerman, 2010).

This article is structured as follows: Section 4.2 explores the literature on institutional isomorphism and contingency theory to find theoretical scenarios for how social policy positions are likely to be determined by local parties. Section 4.3 outlines the data and methods used. Section 4.4 presents the results, and, in Section 4.5, we discuss the implications of our findings.

## 4.2 LOCAL PARTIES' SOCIAL POLICY POSITIONS: CONTINGENCY VERSUS INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES

Two specific theories inform scenarios for local party behaviour pertaining to the decentralisation of social policies. Institutional isomorphism theory emphasises considerations that would 'force' local party branches to follow their national mother parties, while contingency theory points to conditions that would 'force' local parties to adapt social policies to local conditions.

### 4.2.1 Institutional isomorphism

The desire to adapt to local conditions might not be as self-evident for local party branches as it seems (Boogers & Voerman, 2010). Since political parties represent specific ideologies and normative viewpoints, local party representatives will generally hold like-minded ideas. Accordingly, a situation can arise in which the social policy positioning of national parties and their local branches shows a strong resemblance, regardless of differences in local conditions.

Institutional isomorphism theory suggests that three specific institutional pressures are key drivers of public organisation behaviour and design in their quest for legitimacy: coercive, normative, and mimetic (George & Desmidt, 2014). Coercive pressures reflect the imposition of organisational patterns by the authority on which organisations depend. Normative pressures are associated with adopting patterns or norms which are considered appropriate. Finally, mimetic pressures result in adopting patterns of—supposedly—successful organisations (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983). Due to one or more of these pressures, a situation of so-called 'institutional isomorphism' emerges; a situation where all organisations look rather similar (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983; George, et al., 2018).

At least two sources of isomorphism may lead to congruent positions among local party branches. First, the ideological congruence of local party branches with their national mother party can inspire normative isomorphism. Shared values will, in this scenario, translate into similar social policy positions. Second, national party offices can inspire coercive isomorphism by facilitating the drafting of local party manifestos, for example through organising meetings and supplying information, and sometimes even templates (cf. George & Desmidt, 2014; Ashworth, et al., 2007). Which specific form of isomorphism is possibly in play cannot be inferred from the available data, but generally isomorphism theory tells us to expect that *local branches from the same national mother party adopt similar social policy positions in their manifestos.*

### 4.2.2 Contingency theory

Contingency theory claims that contextual characteristics are key drivers of organisational behaviour (Donaldson, 2001). Contingency determinants refer to pressures that originate from outside the control of the organisation, such as economic developments (Donaldson, 1987). Previous research using contingency theory reveals that organisations adapt their structures to create a ‘fit’ between the organisational characteristics and context conditions (Donaldson, 2001; George & Desmidt, 2014). As argued by Donaldson (2001, p. 12), “*structural change occurs in response to contingency change and is triggered by the feedback effect from low performance caused by misfit*”. This feedback effect resonates with the basic assumption of policy decentralisation: local politicians and policymakers have a better view of the specific conditions that a given policy aims to address. This implies that the positions of local branches of national parties may differ from the ideological position of their mother party to create a better fit with local conditions: “*if local parties wish to participate in local government, they must adopt policies relevant to the community they aspire to represent*” (Clark, 2004, pp. 40-41). Various local conditions could be relevant in determining local policies (Geser, 1999), but for the aim of this research—determining national-local position deviation rather than the ideological positioning of parties through time (e.g., Adams, et al., 2004; 2009)—we focus on three likely candidates: population size, dependency on social benefits, and the salience of local independent parties.

Population size is possibly relevant in the delegation of sovereignty from voters to popular representatives (Bovens, 2007). We suggest that the accountability mechanism associated with this sovereignty is more salient in municipalities with a smaller population size than in municipalities with a larger population size, as politicians in the former operate more closely to citizens. Consequently, they are more likely to be held accountable than politicians in municipalities with a larger population size. Therefore, it can be expected that local party branches in smaller municipalities are more likely to modify their manifesto in line with local circumstances (cf. Stoker, 1991). Consequently, we expect that: *deviation in social policy positions from the national mother party and local peer parties occurs more often in municipalities with a smaller population size.*

Based on the party competition theory (Budge & Farlie, 1983), the importance of a topic could also be influential for social policy development. Therefore, the second context condition that is possibly relevant is the share of citizens depending on social benefits. High shares lead to more pressure on local parties to address this social problem and, thus, to tailor their social policy positions to local conditions. Pogorelis and colleagues have already demonstrated something similar for local elections in Scotland and England (2005). In short, we expect that *deviation in social policy positions from the national*

*mother party and local peer parties occurs more often in municipalities with higher levels of social benefit dependency.*

We assume that the third context condition relevant for local party behaviour is the salience of independent local parties. Independent parties can play a distinctive role in local politics as they have no ties with national parties. They can clearly focus on local issues and are “*said to be more responsive than local party branches to local issues*” (Boogers & Voerman, 2010, p. 78). This representation of local issues would pose no threat for local party branches if local independent parties were marginal players, as was roughly the case until the 1990s. However, their large upswing since then has created anxiety among local party branches. In line with the threat mechanism theory, we expect that the salience of local independent challengers could increase the (perceived) risk that local party branches might lose seats in the next election (Boyne, et al., 2001). Consequently, local party branches facing strong competition from local independent parties feel more inclined to modify their manifesto to local circumstances. Hence, we expect that *deviation in social policy positions from the national mother party and local peer parties occurs more often in municipalities where independent local parties receive high vote shares.*

## 4.3 DATA AND METHODS

A dataset with Dutch local party manifestos does not yet exist. Therefore, we went to great lengths to develop one that contains all necessary information needed to empirically scrutinise the expectations outlined above. Our dataset allowed us to examine *if* variation in local social policy positions existed, and if so, *whether* this variation was patterned in line with the contingency theory. To achieve this, we measured social policy positions in two ways: ‘topic presence’ and ‘position-taking’.

### 4.3.1 Case selection and coding

First, we followed Van de Bovenkamp and Vollaard (2017) in strategically selecting municipalities that contrasted in characteristics.<sup>13</sup> Following the selection process of Andeweg and Irwin (2005), Breeman et al (2015), and Van de Waart and Brouwer (2015), we selected nine small, nine medium, and nine large municipalities that showed substantial variation in social benefit dependency, political constellation at the time of the

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13 The selected municipalities are: Aalsmeer, Achtkarspelen, Almere, Alphen, Amersfoort, Barneveld, Boxmeer, Deventer, Ede, Haarlem, Heerenveen, Kampen, Kerkrade, Lansingerland, Nijmegen, Nissewaard, Nunspeet, Rijssen-Holten, Roosendaal, Veenendaal, Velsen, Venlo, Vught, Wageningen, Wassenaar, Westland, and Zwolle.

manifesto development, and the region of the Netherlands in which they are located.<sup>14</sup> This brought the total number of municipalities in our dataset to 27.

The party manifestos of the eight largest national parties and their local branches in the selected municipalities were used to determine Participation Act positions. Considering that not all parties participated in local elections in each selected municipality and that some manifestos were unavailable, in total, 8 national and 168 local party manifestos were collected and analysed.<sup>15</sup> Appendix A4.1 shows which party manifestos are included in our analyses. After intensively reading the position statements of national political parties on the Participation Act, and multiple discussions in face-to-face meetings between the authors of this manuscript, we developed a coding scheme with a predefined format for analysing the local branches. The inductively developed coding scheme can be found in Table 4.1.

We first found seven regularly occurring main topics and identified whether these were mentioned in a particular manifesto or not: (1) Decentralisation of the Participation Act, (2) Welfare fraud, (3) Participation jobs,<sup>16</sup> (4) Conditionality, (5) Reintegration trajectories, (6) Compulsory job applications, and (7) Welfare experiments. We then discerned 30 subtopics within the seven main topics that covered a range of relevant issues concerning the Participation Act. For example: Do parties address decentralisation in their manifesto? To whom do they assign responsibility for the implementation? Is some performance required in return for receiving benefits? And what should be done about welfare fraud? With this codebook, we determined the ‘social policy positions’ of local political party branches.

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14 Size: 9 small-sized municipalities = 25.000-50.000 inhabitants; 9 medium-sized municipalities = 50.000-100.000 inhabitants; 9 large-sized municipalities = >150.000 inhabitants (the smallest municipalities are consequently not included in our dataset (100-25,000 inhabitants)). Social benefit dependency: 9 low social benefit dependency municipalities = <4.8%; 9 medium social benefit dependency municipalities = 4.8-5.5%; 9 high social benefit dependency municipalities = >5.5%. Political constellation is determined by the relative relevance of the following three party families in the municipalities: 9 economically leftist municipalities (i.e. with high vote shares for the Socialist Party (SP), Labour Party (PvdA), and GreenLeft (GL)); 9 Christian municipalities (i.e. with high vote shares for Christian-Democratic Appeal (CDA), Christen Union (CU), and Reformed Political Party (SGP)); 9 economically conservative municipalities (i.e. with high vote shares for People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and Democrats ’66 (D66)).

15 As depicted Appendix A4.1, 168 local branches participated in the local elections. Initially, 155 manifestos could be retrieved from the internet. To collect the twelve missing manifestos, we contacted the local branches. In total, five missing manifestos were collected via e-mail communication. Seven local branches (D66 Nunspeet, D66-GL-PvdA Boxmeer, PvdA Rijssen-Holten, SP Kampen, VVD Deventer, SP Alphen aan den Rijn, and SP Venlo) did not respond to the e-mail and are, as a result, missing from the dataset.

16 Participation jobs are customised for those far removed from the labour market. They aim to increase work experience and the likelihood of finding non-subsidised employment (Participation Act, 2003, p. 10a lid 5).

**Table 4.1** Codebook Participation Act

Nr	Item	Topic presence	Code				
			No	Yes			
	Main Topic	Subtopics	A	B	C	D	
1	Decentralisation P-Act	Goal P-Act	NM	Full participation	Work & prevention	Both	
2		Responsibility P-Act	NM	Government	Government & private sector	-	
3	Welfare fraud	Fraud is theft	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
4		Fraud should be tackled	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
5		Fraud means measures/ punishment	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
6		Distinguish between fraud & mistakes	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
7		Prevent instead of punish fraud	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
8		Participation jobs	In need for more P-Jobs	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-
9			In need for more sheltered jobs	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-
10	Responsibility Participation-Jobs		NM	Government	Private sector	Both	
11		How: by cooperative corporation	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
12		How: by social return	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
13		How: by private sector activation by municipality	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
14		Role municipality: setting example	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
15		Role municipality: support companies	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
16	Conditionality	Conditional performance required	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
17		Shorten benefits if unfulfilled	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
18		Conditionality should fit personal circumstances & exceptions	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
19		Conditionality = mean to activate	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
20		Conditionality = reciprocal	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	
21		Conditionality may not oust paid work	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-	

22	Reintegration trajectories	Goal reintegration trajectory	NM	Full participation	Work & prevention	Both
23		Focus reintegration trajectory = training	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-
24		Alternative trajectories are welcome	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-
25		Responsibility Individual vs Municipality in reintegration trajectory	NM	Individual large role	Municipality large role	Municipality supports individual
26		Municipality should deliver custom made help	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-
27	Compulsory job applications	Shorten benefits if CJA (Compulsory Job Applications) unfulfilled	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-
28		CJA knows exceptions	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-
29	Welfare experiments	Proponent basic income experiments	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-
30		Proponent Rule free assistance experiments	NM	Proponent	Opponent	-

\*NM = not mentioned

### 4.3.2 Operationalisation

The ‘social policy positions’ of local political party branches consist of two elements: ‘topic presence’ and ‘position-taking’ on the Participation Act. Following Breeman and colleagues (2015), *topic presence* measures the share of manifestos that pay attention to a main topic or subtopic for each of the eight political parties included. As such, topic presence was used to measure whether political parties deviate in topic presence per subtopic from: (1) their national mother party, or (2) fellow local branches from the same national mother party in other municipalities. It is thus based on discerning manifestos with code ‘no’ on a given subtopic from manifestos with code ‘yes’ (see Table 4.1). Code ‘no’ represents party manifestos that did not present a position on a given subtopic, whereas code ‘yes’ represents party manifestos that did present a position. Two types of deviation in topic presence were discerned: (1) local versus national deviation and (2) local versus local deviation.

*Local versus national topic presence deviation* measures the share of subtopics local branches (i.e., local manifestos) deviate on from the mother party. Local party branches deviated from the national mother party if one emphasised a subtopic, while the other one did not. *Local versus local topic presence deviation* indicates the share of subtopics local branches deviate on from what the majority of other local branches from the



same party report (fifty percent of the local branches plus 1).<sup>17</sup> This means that there is a dichotomy in terms of the local-level majority's topic presence: either the majority addresses a topic, or it does not. Local party branches *deviated* from the majority of local branches of their own party if *the former emphasised a subtopic, while the latter did not, or vice versa*.

The second element of social policy positions is *position-taking*. It measures whether local political parties have a different position on a subtopic than: (1) their national mother party, or (2) their local party peers (other local branches of the same national mother party). As depicted in Table 4.1, 26 of the 30 subtopics have three code options: no position (code A), position B, position C. The remaining four subtopics have four code options. A party deviates from its mother party or local majority if its code deviates from the code of the mother party or local majority. For example, a local party claims to be in favour of basic income experiments (row 29: code B), whereas the national mother party or most fellow local branches of the party claim(s) to be opposed to this idea (code C).

*Local versus national position-taking deviation* is measured in the exact same way as the measurement of local versus national topic presence outlined above. *Local versus local position-taking deviation* is measured as the share of subtopics local branches deviate on from the majority of other local branches of their own party.

To scrutinise our expectations, we linked deviation in topic presence and position-taking to three municipality characteristics: *population size*, *social benefit dependency*, and *vote share for local independent parties*. Population size ranged from 26,055 (Wassenaar) to 200,914 (Almere); this being the number of inhabitants in 2017 (Statistics Netherlands, 2017a).

*Social benefit dependency* is measured by means of the score of a municipality on a composite indicator—ranging from 3.5 (Lansingerland) to 8.9 percent (Kerkrade)—comprising three items. The first item measures the *unemployment rate* per municipality and ranged from 4.2 percent (Barneveld) to 8.3 percent (Almere) of the labour force in 2017 (Statistics Netherlands, 2017b). The second item measures the share of inhabitants relying on welfare (*bijstand*) between 2016 and 2017, and ranged from 1.3 percent (Almere) to 6.7 percent (Nijmegen) (Association of Dutch Municipalities, 2018). The third item measures the share of inhabitants relying on a disability pensions (*arbeidsongeschiktheiduitkering*), and ranged from 3.8 percent (Lansingerland) to 13.8 percent (Kerkrade)

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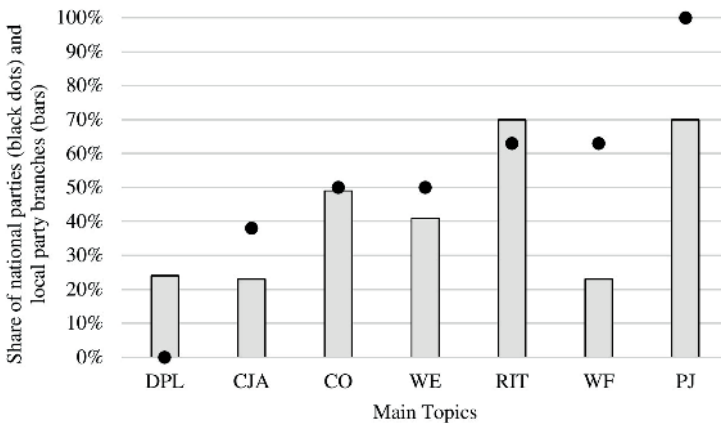
17 Central parties vary in the number of participating local branches (ranging van 9 to 27), resulting in varying majorities. For example, CU's majority is 11 local branches, whereas CDA's majority is 14 local branches.

in 2016 (Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport, 2016). The three items form a reliable scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.781$ ), with an explained variance of 74.4 per cent and factor loadings ranging from 0.77 (reliance on disability pensions) to 0.88 (unemployment rate) to 0.93 (reliance on welfare) respectively.

*Vote share for local independent parties* ranges from 11 percent (Kampen) to 52 percent (Westland) and is based on the average of the vote shares in the 2010 and 2014 local elections (Kiesraad, 2009; 2010; 2013; 2014a; 2014b).

## 4.4 RESULTS

We present our findings on social policy positions in three steps. First, we discuss whether we observe similarity or deviation in topic presence. This is followed by an exploration of the associations between *topic presence* deviation on the one hand and the local conditions of population size, social benefit dependency, and share of votes for local independent parties, on the other. Finally, we explore the association between *position-taking* deviation and those local conditions.



**Figure 4.1** General topic presence per main topic. Horizontal axis: Main topics DPA Decentralisation of the Participation Act, CO conditionality, RIT reintegration trajectories, CJA compulsory job applications, WF welfare fraud, PJ participation jobs, WE welfare experiments.

### 4.4.1 Topic presence

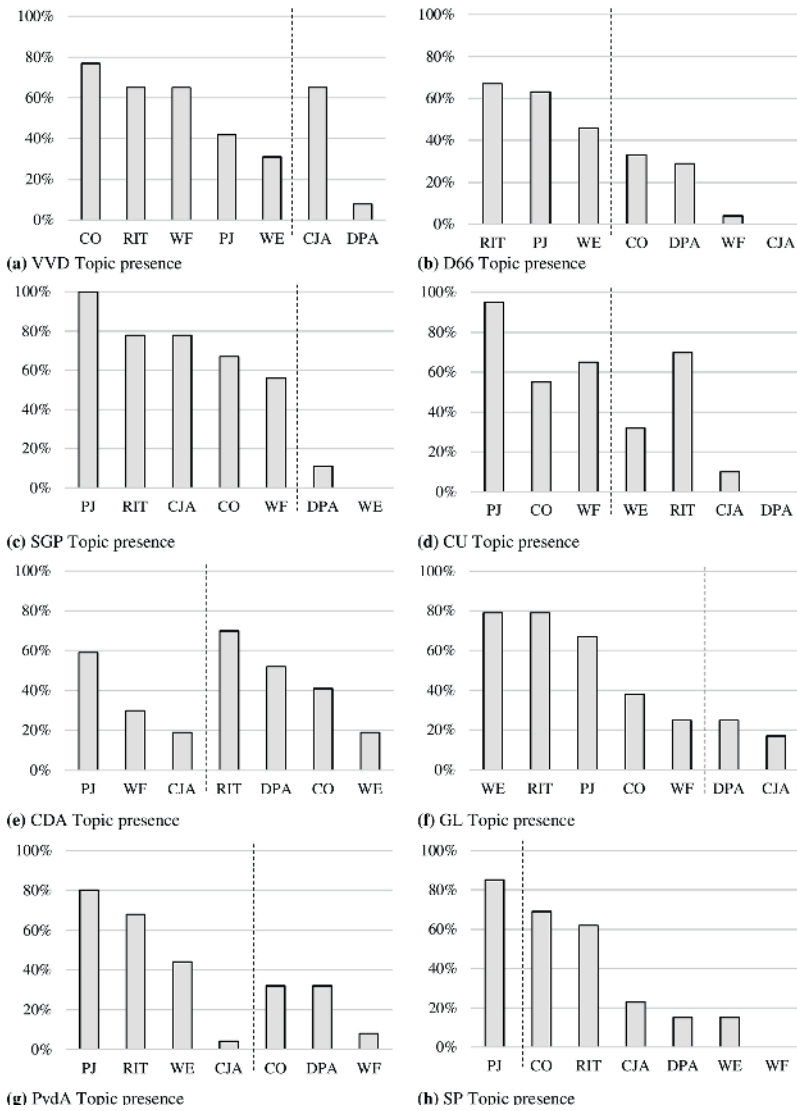
Figure 4.1 demonstrates topic presence for all parties on the main Participation Act topics (determined by addressing at least one of its subtopics). The order of the topics is determined by the topic presence in national party manifestos.

Figure 4.1 signals two clear patterns. First, although almost all manifestos pay attention to some aspects of the Participation Act (88%), we see that, if the data is disaggregated into main topics, both at the national (black dots) and local (bars) level, the attention paid to any of the topics is rather low. Tellingly, on average, each main topic is emphasised by less than 50 percent of the national parties. This percentage is even lower for the local branches (43%).

Second, there seems to be an association between the presence of the main Participation Act topics in national and local manifestos. Topics that are addressed most at the national level, ‘Participation Jobs’ (100%) and ‘Reintegration Trajectories’ (63%), are also addressed most in local manifestos (respectively, 70% and 70%). Attention paid to the ‘Decentralisation of the Participation Act’ (national: 0%; local: 24%) and ‘Compulsory Job Applications’ (national: 38%; local: 23%) are relatively low at both levels. Finally, in sharp contrast to the national level (63%), local manifestos hardly stress ‘Welfare Fraud’ (23%).

Figure 4.2 shows the similarity in topic presence between national party manifestos and local party manifestos *per party*. Of course, this means that, at the national level, topic presence is a dichotomy: a given party addresses a certain topic or does not. We ordered the topics on the horizontal axis as follows: the topics addressed in a national-level manifesto are depicted to the left, while those not addressed are depicted to the right. The bars, again, depict the share of local manifestos that addressed a certain topic. The order of the topics is determined by the topic presence in local party manifestos.

Three clear patterns arise from Figure 4.2. The first two concern the *local versus national* topic presence, whereas the final pattern concerns the *local versus local* topic presence. First, the association between national and local topic presence proves stronger when the data is analysed *per party* (Figure 4.2) than in *general* (Figure 4.1). For almost all parties considered, topics addressed in national party manifestos are more often also addressed in local manifesto than topics unaddressed in national party manifestos, and vice versa. However, the strength of this association between national and local topic presence seems to vary across parties. The strongest relationship can be found in the Reformed Political Party (SGP): topics (not) addressed in the national manifesto are (not) addressed by nearly all local SGP branches (Figure 4.2c). The Christian-Democratic Appeal (CDA), on the other hand, shows the weakest relationship: its branches less often address topics addressed by the national party than topics unaddressed by the national party (Figure 4.2e).



**Figure 4.2** Local versus national and local versus local topic presence per party. Horizontal axis: Main topics DPA Decentralisation of the Participation Act, CO conditionality, RIT reintegration trajectories, CJA compulsory job applications, WF welfare fraud, PJ participation jobs, WE welfare experiments. Bars: Percentage of local party branches addressing the main topic in their manifesto. Dotted line: left from line are topics addressed by the mother party, right from the line are topics not addressed by the mother party.

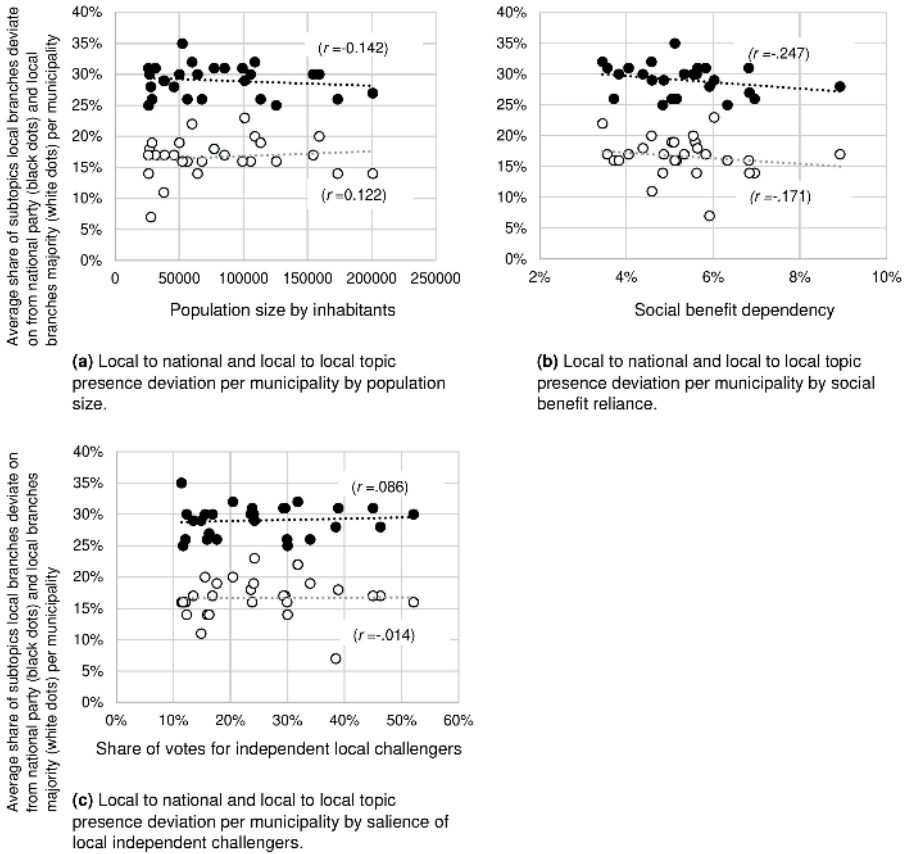
Second, notwithstanding these associations, a limited number of local branches also *deviate* from their national party manifestos in terms of topic presence. For example, ‘Compulsory Job Applications’ is a relevant topic for local People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) branches, whereas the mother party does not mention it. The Labour Party (PvdA), on the other hand, shows the exact opposite situation: ‘Compulsory Job Applications’ is addressed by the national party, but is barely mentioned by her local branches.

Now we turn to the analysis of ‘local versus local topic presence’. By focusing solely on the bars, we observe that local branches not only show strong resemblance in topic presence to their national party, but also to their party peers. Local branches completely agree on topic presence, if the share of local branches addressing a main topic is either 0 percent (no local branch addresses the topic) or 100 percent (all local branches address the topic). As an illustration, the local Socialist Party (SP) branches show strong similarities in topic presence. Topics are either addressed by more than 60 percent or less than 20 percent of the local branches. For example, ‘Participation Jobs’ is addressed by 85 percent of the local SP branches, whereas ‘Welfare Experiments’ only by one of the local SP branches (Figure 4.2h).

Thus, the general patterns reveal strong resemblance in topic presence, both for *local versus national* topic presence and for *local versus local* topic presence within a party. Hence, institutional isomorphism seems to be in play in the formulation of social policy positions by local party branches. However, to some extent, we also observe deviation in topic presence. The next section explores whether this can be linked to local conditions.

#### **4.4.2 Topic presence deviation by local conditions**

The observation that there is some topic presence deviation leads to the follow-up question: under which circumstances do local party branches deviate? Here, we will scrutinise our central expectations that in smaller municipalities, in municipalities with higher levels of social benefit dependency, and in municipalities with higher shares of votes for local independent challenger parties, both local versus national topic presence deviation and local versus local topic presence deviation will be higher. The limited statistical power accompanying a dataset of 27 cases makes focusing on levels of significance not informative, and we will consequently merely focus on the size and direction of the regression coefficient for the theoretical interpretation of our findings.



**Figure 4.3** Topic presence deviation by population size (a), social benefit dependency (b), and votes for local independent challenger parties (c)

Figure 4.3a demonstrates the relationship between population size and both types of topic presence deviation. Each dot depicts topic presence deviation per municipality. The black dots represent the average share of subtopics local branches deviate on from their national party in terms of topic presence per municipality (e.g., a score of 30% means that in a municipality, local branches, on average, deviate on 9 out of the 30 subtopics from their mother party). The white dots represent the share of subtopics that local branches deviate on from the majority of their party peers per municipality (e.g., a score of 7% means that in this municipality, local branches on average deviate on 2 out of the 30 subtopics from the majority of their party peers).

Figure 4.3a suggests two things. First, there is a relationship between local versus national topic presence deviation and population size. This relationship is in the expected direction: local party branches in smaller municipalities are more likely to diverge in

terms of topic presence from their mother party than local party branches in larger municipalities. This coincides with the contingency scenario. Second, the relationship between local versus local position-taking deviation is in the opposite direction than expected. In other words, party branches in municipalities with a larger population size are *more* likely to diverge from their peer parties' topic presence than party branches in municipalities with a smaller population size. Thus, the local versus local topic presence deviation findings are contrary to what was expected and, as such, are not in line with our interpretation of the contingency theory scenario.

Figure 4.3b portrays the results for social benefit dependency and shows that the relationship between such dependency and local versus national and local versus local topic presence deviation is not in the expected direction. Party branches in municipalities with higher social benefit dependency are less—not more—likely to diverge from their mother party and peer parties in terms of topic presence. In short, the relationship between social benefit dependency and local variation in topic presence deviation is also contrary to the contingency scenario.

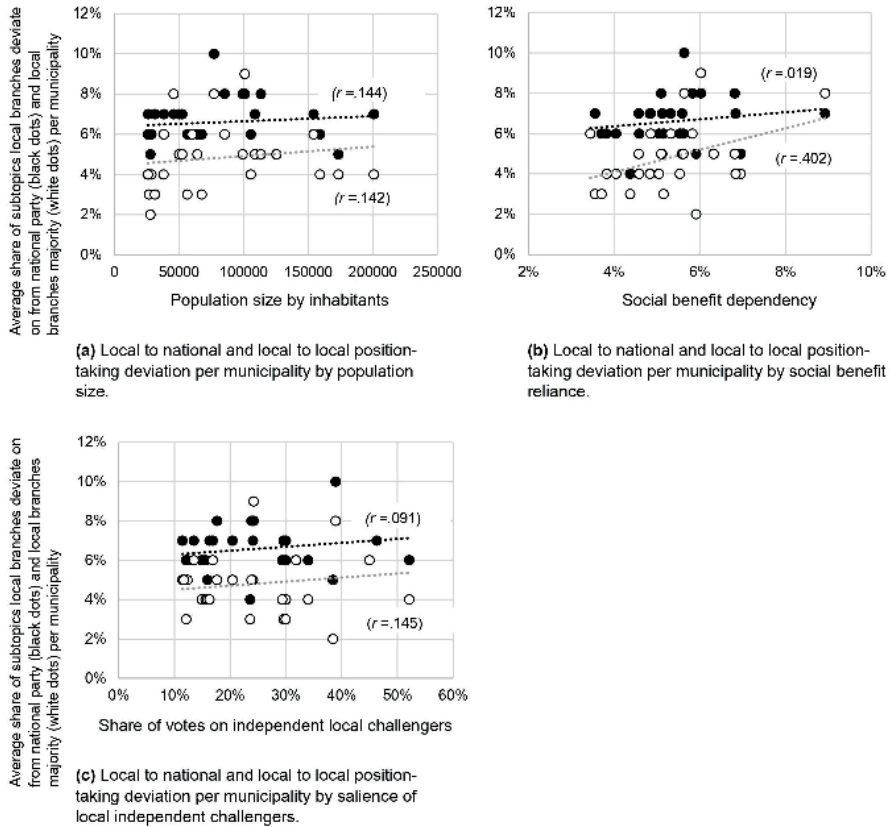
Finally, Figure 4.3c depicts the relationship between the share of votes for local independent challengers and both types of topic presence deviation. Although the relationship between local versus national topic presence deviation and that support for independent parties is in the expected direction, we consider it too weak to convincingly corroborate the expectation that local party branches deviate more in municipalities with a larger share votes for local independent challengers. Similarly, the relationship between local versus local topic presence deviation and the share of votes for local independent challengers is far too weak to be interpreted in accordance with the contingency scenario.

All in all, most findings clearly demonstrate that deviation in topic presence does not vary across municipalities in the way that contingency theory predicts. At least, not in the case of the contingencies of social benefit dependency and the salience of local party challengers. Only the population size associates with topic presence deviation according to the contingency theory scenario. Even then, this is only in the case of local to national topic presence deviation, and marginally so at that.

#### **4.4.3 Position-taking deviation by local conditions**

In addition to choosing whether to focus on a specific topic, local political parties can also differ from their mother party, as well as from most other local branches of their own party, in the position they take on a specific topic. This is measured by means of *position-taking*. As outlined in the operationalisation section above, we apply the same analyses on *local versus national position-taking deviation* and *local versus local*

position-taking deviation as we did for topic presence deviation. Therefore, we first analyse whether we observe deviation in position-taking and, subsequently, explore whether the observed deviation is related to municipal conditions. We merely depict the relationships between the two types of deviation and the local conditions, as these provide all the necessary information (Figure 4.4a-c).



**Figure 4.4** Position-taking deviation by population size (a), social benefit dependency (b), and votes for local independent challenger parties (c)

Position-taking deviation proves to be low: local versus national position-taking ranges from 4 to 10%, and local versus local position-taking ranges from 2 to 9% (Y-axes). This low level of deviation in position-taking should be considered when analysing its relationship with possible predictors.

Figure 4.4a shows the relationship between both types of social position-taking deviation and population size that are not in line with the contingency theory scenario, i.e.,



we observe more deviation in municipalities with a larger population size. Figure 4.4b contrarily reports findings that are in line with that scenario. Especially local versus local position-taking deviation seems to be strongly related to social benefit dependency. Hence, local party branches are more likely to diverge from their mother or peer parties in municipalities in which this dependency is higher. The relationships reported in Figure 4.4c are also in accordance with the contingency theory scenario: local party branches are more likely to diverge in position-taking from their mother, and especially their local peer parties, in municipalities where the share of votes for local independent parties is higher.

Overall, three out of the six patterns depicted in Figure 4.3 and four out of the six depicted in Figure 4.4 can be interpreted according to the contingency theory scenario. However, only one of the seven relationships in accordance with that scenario is substantial in strength: local to local position taking deviation by social benefit dependency. In sum, there is very limited evidence that local parties, generally, aim to tailor their social policies to local conditions, at least not to the three municipal conditions that we focused on.<sup>18</sup>

## 4.5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we addressed two questions. *To what extent do Dutch local party branches' social policy positions deviate from their national mother party and local peer parties? And do local conditions explain this deviation?* To answer these questions, we strategically selected 27 Dutch municipalities, and subsequently created a dataset of 168 local party manifestos and 8 national party manifestos, all from 2018. Even though we searched for maximum variation in relevant municipal conditions, we observed that topic presence and, especially, position-taking in local party branches manifestos are (still) strongly associated with the topic presence and position-taking of the national mother party and peer local branches.

As far as local party branches do deviate, it can hardly be interpreted according to the contingency theory scenario. We do not see that, generally, deviation is larger in municipalities that are smaller, that have higher levels of dependency on social benefits, or that have higher vote shares for independent local challengers. The only relationship convincingly in line with that scenario is that, in the limited cases in which local party

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18 Multivariate regressions including all three municipality characteristics did not produce substantially different results. Analyses are available upon request.

branches do deviate from the local party branches' majority, it occurs in municipalities with higher dependency on social benefits. Additionally, in the case of the relationship between population size and deviation, it might be that the findings are suppressed by the mechanism that allows local party branches in larger municipalities to have the power and the resources to act more independently from their mother parties than in smaller municipalities. Overall, the social policies addressed in the party manifestos of local parties seem to reflect institutional isomorphism more than adaptation to local contingencies.

There are at least two ways in which institutional isomorphism could have played a role in this: (1) normative isomorphism, i.e., the similarities reflect correspondence in normative viewpoints and party ideology, and (2) coercive isomorphism, i.e., they reflect imposition by the mother party. The first way is more in line with previous findings that the ideological bases of parties are good predictors for local party positions, even in times of decentralisation (Pogorelis, et al., 2005). The second way may be informed by the existence of the so-called 'basic party programs' (*basis verkiesprogramma's*). These are drawn up by the national mother party as an example for local party branches to use in drafting their manifestos. This support might, however, result in copying and pasting this basic program and only adjusting the bare minimum to make it fit the local circumstances. However, it is beyond the scope of this research to determine how institutional isomorphism could have played a role in drafting the party manifestos of local party branches.

Besides the role of institutional isomorphism, it might be that local conditions are hardly related to local party positions on social policies, in accordance with the contingency theory scenario, because local elections are determined by national as opposed to local issues. "*Local election results overwhelmingly reflect national swings of opinion for or against the incumbent government*" (Stoker, 1991, p. 52). Institutional differences could also play a role. These might, for instance, account for why Pogorelis and colleagues (2005) found that poor economic conditions prompted position deviation in Scotland and Wales, while, in our study, higher levels of dependency on social benefits did not. Future research focusing on similar questions but other institutional settings than the Netherlands could shed more light on this. Moreover, party characteristics could be more relevant than municipal characteristics for local party positions on social policies; for instance, whether there is inclusive or exclusive internal party democracy as described by Lehrer (2012).

Two other reasons could also account for our finding that deviation in topic presence and position-taking on social policies by local party branches is minimal. First, despite

our focus on the first stage in local policy development following the decentralisation (party manifestos, instead of coalition agreements or policymaking), it could be that our analyses came too soon to detect contingency pressures. This would imply that local variation in social policy positions has yet to materialise. Second, it might be that it already materialised, but remained hidden from view because of our focus on manifestos. One the one hand, the party manifesto “*should be the first source of policies for a newly elected government*” (Ashworth, 2000, p. 13; cf. Hofferbert & Budge, 1992). On the other hand, we cannot rule out the possibility that our central finding reflects discrepancy with actual positions pursued during policy discussions in local government. Future research could shed light on the empirical merits of these two interpretations of our unexpected results.

Furthermore, the limitations of this study need to be considered. Firstly, this study aimed to investigate whether the local political arena can be considered as an independent entity, but focused specifically on local political party branches. This resulted in a lack of attention paid to the role of local independent parties. Secondly, we solely focused on the Netherlands. Consequently, our conclusions might be idiosyncratic. We do not know how far our findings travel beyond the Dutch case; perhaps policy decentralisation in other countries has actually led to substantial policy variation across municipalities, as contingency theory predicts. Thirdly, the smallest type of municipality is not included in our dataset, while including such municipalities might alter the results. Also, we recognise that local circumstances other than population size, social benefit dependency, and the salience of local independent challengers might be relevant for determining policy variation across municipalities. Moreover, because a relevant dataset does not exist, we had to compose one ourselves by strategically selecting a sub-set of Dutch municipalities. It is, of course, possible that another sub-set would lead to different results. Finally, future research may complement the study of manifestos with in-depth interviews with local politicians to research how local manifestos are drawn up. This could reveal whether, and how, institutional isomorphism plays a role.

Finally, to the best of our knowledge, we are the first researchers to provide an extensive empirical analysis on the relationship between national mother parties and local party branches in the process of social policy decentralisation. Our analysis of the Dutch case indicates that, four years after decentralisation, local party branches still largely operate as puppets instead of principals in formulating social policies. We caveat this with an important footnote that the inevitable limitations of data and time warrant care in drawing conclusions that are too far-reaching in this matter.



# 6

## Conclusion



## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

As a result of devolution, municipalities in western democratic countries increasingly get the opportunity to steer policy, determine policy and make financial choices regarding policy. This dissertation explored the role prominent stakeholders in local political arenas play in the development of local social policy. Therefore, the main research question in this dissertation was: *How do key stakeholders in local political arenas shape decentralised social policies?*

This chapter formulates the main conclusions of this thesis. First, Section 6.2 presents the findings of each empirical chapter. Section 6.3 connects the conclusions from the four research questions to formulate an answer to the main research problem. Subsequently, Section 6.4 discusses the main additions to the literature by addressing the three theoretical contributions that were identified in the introduction. Section 6.5 presents the limitations of this thesis and—informed by these limitations—offers recommendations for future research. Lastly, Section 6.6 discusses the societal relevance.

## 6.2 PIECES OF THE PUZZLE: THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This section presents the answers to the four research questions posed in the introduction of this dissertation. The research questions followed the logic of the political economy perspective, which revolves around understanding politics and economics as integrally related in the shaping of the welfare systems in capitalist countries (Gough, 1979; Pinto, 2018).

### 6.2.1 Setting the stage for the local political arena: variation in local welfare regimes (RQ1)

Variation at the municipal or regional level is a likely and often desirable outcome of decentralisation (Manor, 1999; Pollitt, Birchall & Putnam, 1998). However, a national focus still dominates research on welfare regimes. To investigate how local social policies can vary, Chapter 2 took a first step towards developing a local welfare regime framework. The first research question was therefore: *How can national welfare regime typology dimensions be redeveloped to study local welfare systems?*

To design a local welfare systems framework, Chapter 2 used insights from the literature on national welfare regimes and three Dutch case studies (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht). These insights enabled us to propose a fine-grained *local welfare regime framework* centred around the following three dimensions: (1) policy goals; (2)

responsibility-mix; and (3) policy coverage. This local welfare regime framework can be used to identify local welfare regimes within and across different countries, which is essential for comparative local welfare research. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the context for the research problem of this dissertation: to explore the local political arena in relation to decentralised local social policies.

### **6.2.2 Attitudes towards local social policies (RQ2)**

Existing studies argue that attitudes or preferences towards the welfare of citizens are shaped by macro-contextual factors, because people are influenced by the cues derived from the environment in which they live (Svallfors, 2012; van der Waal et al., 2013). The assumption that *local* conditions can also affect welfare attitudes towards these newly decentralised *local* social policies, however, remains understudied. To understand how citizens' preferences are shaped in the local political arena, Chapter 3 focused on the research question: *Do local circumstances shape welfare attitudes towards decentralised local social policies?*

Informed by Chapter 2, this chapter developed a unique novel survey item through which I assessed whether people prefer (1) protection-based, (2) cohesion-building, or (3) activation-based local social policies. This novel survey item was included in the 2018 wave of the *Dutch Local Election Studies*, which included respondents from all 380 Dutch municipalities (DLES, 2018). I appended context indicators to the survey data and performed multilevel logistic regression analyses (1,913 respondents nested in 336 municipalities).

The analyses indicated that preferences regarding the type of local social policy varied among respondents. Option 3 had the most support among the respondents (i.e., 44% favoured protection-based local social policies), followed by option 2 (31% preferred activation-based local social policies) and option 1 (21% favoured cohesion-building local social policies). Furthermore, the analysis presented municipal-level variation over and above individual-level variation in local social policy preferences. As expected, gender, age, income, education, and political inclination affect these preferences at the individual level. However, preferences towards local social policies are not shaped by the 'usual suspects' among local context conditions: economic, demographic and political factors. This finding suggests that other municipal conditions may be more relevant in this regard.

### **6.2.3 Local political party positions on social policies (RQ3)**

Moving forward from variation in local policy preferences, Chapter 4 focused on variation in local political party positions. Various institutional pressures exist in the type of complex organisational environments in which local political party branches must operate (Boogers & Voerman, 2010). As a result, the adjustment of decentralised local social policies to local circumstances could generate tensions between their role as po-



litical players in the local arena on the one hand, and as representatives of their national mother party's ideology on the other (Geser, 1999). The decentralised Participation Act offers a good opportunity to examine whether decentralisation of social policy leads to the desired local political fine-tuning or not. Chapter 4 specifically examined: *To what extent do Dutch local party branches' social policy positions deviate from their national mother party and local peer parties, and do local conditions explain this deviation?*

To answer these questions, I developed a dataset including 168 local party manifestos from 27 strategically selected municipalities and 8 national party manifestos. These manifestos were content-coded along the line of two main topics: 'topic presence' and 'position-taking' on the Participation Act. Subsequently, the scores on topic presence and position taking were quantitatively linked to three municipal characteristics, conducting regression analyses. The analyses showed limited deviation in local parties' positions compared to their national mother party and other local branches of their national mother party. This suggests that the social policies addressed in the party manifestos of local parties seem to reflect a process of institutional isomorphism. Furthermore, the limited deviation that does exist in local parties' social policy positions is not convincingly larger in municipalities (1) that are smaller, (2) that have higher social benefit dependency, or (3) that have high vote shares for local independent challengers. This is contrary to what can be expected based on the contingency theory.

#### **6.2.4 Policy choices in local social policies (RQ4)**

Finally, one of the arguments in favour of decentralising the social policies to the municipal level was that local authorities would be better able to tailor policies to local circumstances and needs. There are multiple indications of limited variation between localities in the implementation of many of the new social policy tasks (Broekema, Fenger & van der Waal, 2020; Nijdam, 2020). However, there are two parts of the Participation Act where municipalities *do* tend to use this discretion: conditionality regulations—what recipients must do in return for welfare—and re-integration regulations—whether and how recipients should return to the labour market (Inspectie SZW, 2015; Limburg, 2015; NOS, 2018). The final empirical chapter examines: *How do local conditions shape the policy-making process of social policies in Dutch municipalities after the decentralisation of the Participation Act in 2015?*

Given the limited empirical knowledge about decentralised local policy development and the lack of empirical data, a comparative multi-case study design was most appropriate to answer the research question. I made a strategic selection of four ideal-typical municipalities that differed in terms of conditionality regulations. Subsequently, two types of method were employed: (1) semi-structured in-depth interviews with a purpo-

sive sample of key stakeholders and (2) policy document analyses, ranging from policy regulations and coalition agreements to council notes. I used the data analysis software ATLAS.ti to code and iteratively compare the transcripts from the interviews and key documents, whilst being sensitive to theoretical insights (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

The qualitative comparative case study suggests that diverging regulations do not arise because of processes in the agenda-setting or decision-making phase. Instead, variation in regulations arises in the formulation phase of policy development as the path-dependent structure of a highly institutionalised policy field interacts with organisational determinants. During formulation, the local political context stimulates policymakers to vary in their policy proposals to create a ‘fit’ between the policy regulation and the dominant political ideology, but the available resources force policymakers to consider other alternatives. Because of this interaction, municipalities with similar political contexts but different resources may design varying policies, while at the same time, ideologically different municipalities’ policies can look alike if they have limited resources. Furthermore, variation due to political context or budgetary constraints may be bounded or increased by regional agreements on the design of local regulations.

### **6.3 PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER: ANSWERING THE MAIN RESEARCH PROBLEM**

By connecting the findings from the empirical chapters, this section formulates an answer to the central research problem: *How do key stakeholders in local political arenas shape decentralised social policies?* The main conclusion of this dissertation is that in designing social policies, local politicians and policymakers need to balance between local political contexts and multilevel institutional pressures. The strength of the multilevel institutional pressures leads to a limited degree of variation in the final policy design of the Participation Act in particular. The local circumstances that we included in the study play only a minor role in this regard. As a result, the argument that “*the transfer of a large number of tasks from the central government to municipalities allows for local tailoring and customisation, and allows for stronger citizen involvement*” (Regeerakkoord VVD PvdA, 2012, p. 40), turns out to be difficult to implement in practice.

An explanation for the lack of variation in the design of decentralised local social policies begins with residents’ influence on the local political arena being limited to their right to vote. Outside of elections, residents do not actively participate in discussions in the local political arena about policy formation even though they do have varying preferences.

In addition to this, local political party branches' social policy positions barely diverge from their national mother party or peer parties in other municipalities. These local party branches often use a template drawn up by their national mother party for formulating their positions in a local party manifesto. As a result, the views of the local branches of the same party are almost identical and the discussions in the local political arena are mainly inspired by national party ideology. Meanwhile, local circumstances and the policy preferences of citizens are hardly considered, even though these do differ between municipalities. Because the electoral support for local party branches of national parties still accounts for the lion's share of local electoral support in the Netherlands (Boogers & Voerman, 2010), there is slight variation in policy positions between municipalities with largely the same political ideological representation.

However, there is also variation between municipalities with an equivalent political context. According to local policymakers, this also has little to do with local circumstances. Of course, certain local circumstances lead to certain voting behaviour, and that voting behaviour has a direct influence on the composition of the local coalition, but variation in decentralised social policy is mainly a result of the institutional pressures experienced by local policymakers of regional agreements and national budget constraints. Because of this, the process of decentralised local social policy development remains largely a national affair. The assumption of policymakers and politicians that variation in local policies would result from processes that take place in local political arenas is therefore not confirmed. The results from this dissertation show that the shifts in the political debates about policy positions and policy design in local political arenas were not proportional to the shift of the social policy responsibility to the local level of governance.

These results are comparable to previous studies of the rhetoric behind Dutch decentralisations in the past (Fleurke, 1997; Fleurke, Hulst & de Vries, 1997; Fleurke & Hulst, 2006; Fleurke & Willemse, 2004; 2006). According to the policy theory (Denters, van Heffen & de Jong, 1999; Fleurke, Hulst & de Vries, 1997; Gilsing, 2009), this decentralisation was based on the principles of efficiency and participation. Furthermore, decentralisation was designed to decrease the high social expenditures of central government (Boogers & Reussing, 2018, p. 23). The results of this thesis illustrate that the latter goal in particular has been achieved.

## 6.4 THEORETICAL RELEVANCE

In this section, I discuss the implications of the empirical findings of this thesis for the three theoretical contributions that were identified in the introduction. First, I reflect

on the proposition that research is too nationally biased, considering the growing trend of decentralisation. I then discuss the theoretical implications for the knowledge of the local political arena as an independent entity. Finally, I reflect on the role of structural context conditions at the local level for decentralised policymaking.

#### **6.4.1 Deconstructing the national bias in welfare system variation**

To date, social policy research has been strongly nationally oriented. The first proposition of this thesis argued that because of the increasing trend of decentralisation of social policy domains, the national bias in social policy and welfare state research needed deconstruction. However, this dissertation shows that it is not only research on social policy that is nationally oriented. This also applies to the institutions within the local political arenas themselves. Citizens orient their preferences based on national more than local circumstances. Local political parties then orient themselves on the basis of national party positions more than on local circumstances. Finally, policymakers focus on finances and budgets that are determined nationally. This all results in little variation in the development of local social policy. Therefore, the national bias in research in the study of social policy is still rather suitable for the Dutch case of the decentralisation of the social domain from 2015. The emphasis on the national level seems to suffice for research into local policymaking, at least in the Dutch case.

It is not necessarily the case that this limited variation in the development of decentralised local social policy also applies in other political systems. The Netherlands is a decentralised unitary state. In such a system, the main policy power lies with the central government, but territorial units—such as provinces or municipalities—also have independent powers. It is remarkable that even in this decentralised unitary state there is little variation between municipalities, whereas Dutch municipalities have a relatively high degree of policy freedom compared to municipalities in a unitary state such as the United Kingdom, where power rests almost exclusively with the central government. Hence, even less variation can be expected in such municipalities.

#### **6.4.2 Independent functioning of local political arenas**

The second proposition in this dissertation was that the internal dynamics of local political arenas function as independent systems. Following the general systems theory (Easton, 1957), the idea was that in these independent systems, actors represent the views of their source of legitimacy (Brooks & Manza, 2006), and policy design is a result of the interaction between the most prominent actors in the local political arena (Allison, 1971; Cohen, March & Olson, 1972; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2000; Lindblom & Cohen, 1979). However, the findings of this thesis show that these local actors do not operate solely in a local but in a multilevel arena. On the one hand, residents play a marginal

role in the development of local social policy, except in terms of voting during local elections. On the other, because of the way local political parties are organised, their positions become nationally oriented. The same applies to how policy is formed by the civil service. This is a consequence of the actors' legitimacy, support, and resources to a considerable extent being embedded in the national system. On top of this, because the interaction between the local actors about policy preferences is also limited to formal lines of communication, the input, throughput, and output of the local political arena are not independent, but all strongly connected to the national level. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that, when it comes to decentralised local social policy, local political arenas hardly function as independent systems.

In addition to the theoretical implication described above, one of the main conclusions of this thesis was that lack of variation in local policy was partly due to national budget constraints. This would suggest that an increase in budget could lead to more variation in policy. Nonetheless, based on the finding that local political arenas are not independently functioning entities but are strongly linked to the national level because of their organisation, it is doubtful whether more budget really leads to more variation. Were that not to be the case, it would be an even stronger confirmation that local political arenas are not independent entities when it comes to the policy design of decentralised social policies.

#### **6.4.3 Structural context conditions in the local arena**

The final proposition of this thesis was that structural local context conditions should be included in research into the functioning of local political arenas. From the perspective of the contingency theory, certain local circumstances would force local governments to structure policy in a certain way. This would create a so-called fit between policy, local circumstances, and preferences. This mechanism has been repeatedly shown to exist in various studies of local governance. The most prominent local circumstances that could play a role are economic conditions in terms of welfare dependence, the demographic composition of the population, the dominant political ideology, and the size of the municipality's population. However, this dissertation shows that in the Dutch case of the decentralisation of the social domain, municipalities are remarkably similar in terms of policy, even though local conditions vary. The fact that municipalities are similar in policy is also referred to in theory as institutional isomorphism. In this case, this institutional isomorphism mainly originates from coercive and mimetic pressures. These coercive pressures arise for example from rules, agreements, and budget constraints set by the national government, because of which municipalities increasingly resemble the national government and, in line with that, resemble each other. At the same time, uncertainty, a lack of substantive knowledge or mutual agreements lead to

mimetic pressures, which causes municipalities to look at each other for supposedly ‘successful’ policy examples.

However, that does not mean that local-context factors do not matter. On the contrary, the same context factors that do not explain why policy varies between municipalities are crucial in determining the budget municipalities receive from the national government. This is due to the so-called allocation key. The financial allocation key has a dampening effect on the role that context conditions could play on local policy development. Municipalities with poor economic conditions and large groups of vulnerable residents must incur relatively high costs. Those municipalities would be encouraged to implement a strict policy to distribute these relatively high costs evenly over all cost items. However, because of the allocation key, these municipalities receive relatively abundant financial resources to cover those high costs compared to municipalities with good economic conditions. As a result, high-cost municipalities can implement policies that are similar to municipalities that have relatively good economic conditions and fewer vulnerable inhabitants. In other words: context matters. The effect of the distribution key on the role of context conditions that should be further investigated.

## **6.5 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

This thesis is the first that aims to understand the role of prominent stakeholders in local political arenas in decentralised social policy. Being the first, however, comes at a cost. This section addresses the main limitations that apply to the dissertation as a whole, as the limitations of the various sub-studies are discussed in the empirical chapters. Based on these limitations, I propose four avenues for future research.

First, the period studied in this thesis influences the results. Decentralisation is known for being a multi-year process. The empirical chapters in this thesis focused on the first five years after decentralisation. This may have contributed to the fact that there is not yet much variation in the policy we studied. Note, however, that the cases studied presented most-likely cases, where the largest variation was to be expected. In a similar vein, most empirical chapters take a snapshot of the process at a certain point in time in terms of preferences and positions. Now that we are moving further from the decentralisation of 2015, it becomes possible to conduct longitudinal research. This is the first suggestion for future research. Longitudinal research might show that although differences are small now, they are increasing in the long run.

The second limitation concerns the focus on the Participation Act to research how local actors shape decentralised social policies. Originally, this thesis focused on all three decentralised social domains for this question. Although this was possible for the first two empirical chapters (typology development and local social policy preferences), this turned out to be more difficult to achieve in terms of resources for the last two empirical chapters (political positions and policy development). Since the discussions on the implementation and design of the Participation Act were extensive right from the announcement of the decentralisation, variation in the policy development was expected in that domain. To investigate how the prominent stakeholders in local political arenas shape decentralised social policy and thereby contribute to policy variation, a domain was chosen where variation could be expected with some certainty. It therefore remains an empirical question as to how the other two decentralised social domains developed in the period studied in this dissertation fared, namely the Social Support Act and Youth Care Act. As a result, we do not know whether the Participation Act symbolises the entire decentralisation or whether the other two acts follow their own logic(s). This provides an immediate opportunity for future research to create a more solid base of evidence to answer that question. To do so, similar research methods as those used in this thesis can help solve this puzzle by studying how far these findings travel beyond the case of the Participation Act.

The third limitation is a consequence of the methodological and data collection choices made in this dissertation. Because this thesis is one of the first to study how the local political arena implements decentralised social policy authority, there were no datasets available on which to base the complete research. As a result, all data for each empirical chapter needed to be collected. Except for the analysis performed in Chapter 3, the analyses relied on strategically selected cases instead of large-scale representative ones. This enabled me to be the first to perform a systematic assessment of how key stakeholders in local political arenas shape decentralised social policies in the Netherlands, but negatively affected the robustness of the results. If large datasets at the local level do become available, further research could focus on the robustness of the results presented in this thesis. A selection of cases other than those analysed in the chapters of this thesis is not necessarily recommended for future comparative case studies. The strategic selection in empirical Chapters 2, 4, and 5 focused on those cases where the most variation was to be expected. With another selection of cases, the results are therefore likely to be even weaker than the results already found.

Finally, this thesis focused on social policy decentralisation in the Netherlands. As a result, we do not know whether the current findings are only related to the Dutch case, or whether other countries in which social policy is decentralised show comparable results.

The final suggestion for future research is therefore to study the process of decentralised social policymaking in other countries, and cross-nationally.

## **6.6 SOCIETAL RELEVANCE**

To conclude, based on this thesis, the following insights may be relevant for local citizens, politicians, and policymakers who aim to learn from this decentralisation or who face the decentralisation of other policy domains.

### **6.6.1 Local citizens**

The findings of this thesis provide the public with insights into the promise of more customisation and a better match between policy and local conditions and preferences through decentralisation. The decentralised local social policy does indeed vary between municipalities, albeit marginally. Nonetheless, this variation is hardly related to the policy preferences of residents. This is partly because local politicians do not translate these preferences into political positions. Also, decentralised social policy is only adapted to local conditions to a limited extent; policymaking in the local political arena is organised in such a way that it is strongly connected to the national level. Residents who do want policy to adapt better to local circumstances and preferences can use the insights from this thesis to better understand how the black box of the local political arena functions and where in the process they can exert influence to better align policy with preferences. As local policymakers primarily try to adjust policy to the preferences of the local political coalition, a first step would be to actively participate and contact local politicians. Above all, however, residents must understand that policy can and does vary little if the financial resources—provided by the national government—are insufficient.

### **6.6.2 Local politicians and policymakers**

This thesis shows that policymaking is a balancing act for both local politicians and local policymakers. Both residents and the national government form a source of legitimacy for local politicians and policymakers. This is not surprising. In practice, however, the legitimacy of the national government weighs more than local circumstances do. It is not just pertinent that local politicians and policymakers know how they are influenced. It is additionally significant that they comprehend that this implies that they—through no fault of their own—do not fulfil the promise of the decentralisation: namely, that policy is better suited to local conditions and preferences. Both local independent parties and local party branches should therefore be challenged before the upcoming elections to align their policy preferences more with local circumstances. Only then will preferences be truly translated into policy.



In addition to the above, this thesis shows that ‘more money’ does not solve all problems. At a system level, more financial resources can solve certain issues, but the fact that policy does not match preferences and circumstances is also partly the result of institutional characteristics within the organisation in which local politicians and policy-makers are located. The administrative process of decentralisation offers opportunities for the municipal council to steer in the social domain. Within the decentralised social domain, choices are to be made about policy goals, responsibilities, and policy coverage, but municipalities experience obstacles. The main issue is that these social policy choices are hardly the subject of public and political debate because municipal counselors are insufficiently aware of the policy space they have. As a result, local politicians look to the national level for policy elaborations. What does not help the councillors in this is that the Municipal Executive almost always submits unilateral proposals to the municipal council, which does not stimulate the council to discuss possible considerations (Raad voor Openbaar Bestuur, 2020). An important condition for the municipal council to be able to properly fulfil its guiding role in the future is that the municipal council takes a stronger position vis-à-vis the municipal executive. This requires councillors to delve into the legal space they have within the Social Support Act, Youth Act and Participation Act, but also to gain knowledge of the local circumstances and preferences of residents. Only then can the municipal council adapt policy to local conditions. For the Municipal Executive, this means submitting *various* well-considered, substantiated scenarios to the municipal council so that councillors can actually have a discussion.

### 6.6.3 National politicians

Finally, those who initiated the decentralisation in the first place, with the argument that “*the transfer of a large number of tasks from the central government to municipalities allows for local tailoring and customisation, and allows for stronger citizen involvement*” (Regeerakkoord VVD PvdA, 2012, p. 40), can also learn from this thesis. Based on the conclusions in this chapter, the promise of tailored policy has not yet been fulfilled, and national politicians should not overestimate the results of the decentralisation. This dissertation shows that there are all kinds of mechanisms entailing that local policy is less local than you might expect. As a result of this, national politicians must be careful with expectations about the effects of decentralisation in general (both in terms of efficiency and goal achievement). If the national government wants to be able to live up to higher expectations, it should pay more attention to the translation of the decentralised acts into practice, so that municipalities clearly know where they have freedom of choice and where their policy is limited by legal frameworks.



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# APPENDICES

## Appendices to Chapter 2

**Table A2.1** Full overview of national welfare regime typology dimensions

Dimension		
<i>Sub-dimensions</i>		
Indicators	Measurement concepts	Examples of how indicators are operationalised
1. Context		
<i>Political setting</i>		
Power distribution	· Political leftism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Share of left seats in parliament (Jaeger, 2009; Mosher, 2015).</li> <li>· Duration of politically left oriented coalition (in years) (Schroeder, 2009).</li> <li>· Parliamentary support for left oriented parties (in terms of votes) (Castles &amp; Mitchell, 1992).</li> </ul>
Political struggles	· Trade union density	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Trade union members (share of total labour force) (Castles &amp; Mitchell, 1992; Schroeder, 2009).</li> <li>· Average union density (Mosher, 2015).</li> <li>· Trade union strength (Jaeger, 2009).</li> <li>· Union protection scale from -1 scarce protection for full-time workers to +1 protection of all workers (Cinalli &amp; Giugni, 2013).</li> </ul>
	· Strength political tendencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Government portfolios held by political party (share of total portfolios) (Korpi, 2000).</li> <li>· Time government portfolios held by political party (share of time party is in government) (Korpi, 2000).</li> </ul>
Political institutions	· Institutionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Unitary versus federal structures (Castles &amp; McKinlay, 1979).</li> <li>· Corporatist power versus two party system (Kemeny, 2006).</li> <li>· Proportional representation versus plurality political systems (Manow, 2009/2014).</li> </ul>
	· Historical institutionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Not operationalised (Park &amp; Jung, 2009).</li> </ul>
	· Democratisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Parliamentary regimes versus non-parliamentary regimes (Abrahamson, 1999).</li> </ul>
<i>Economic setting</i>		
Development	· Economic development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· GDP per capita (Castles &amp; McKinlay, 1979).</li> <li>· GDP per capita at time of introduction first major social protection program (Manow, 2002).</li> </ul>
	· Economic situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Housing sector: integrated rental markets versus dualist rental system (Kemeny, 2006).</li> <li>· Open versus closed economy (Seekings, 2010).</li> <li>· Unemployment rates (share of total labour force) (Pfeifer, 2012).</li> </ul>

Dimension		
Industrialisation	· Industrialisation	· Not operationalised (Bonoli & Kato, 2004). · (1) Skills required (high, general, low). (2) Wage structures (heterogeneous or homogeneous). (3) Innovation development (radical or incremental). (4) Time horizon state focus (long-term or short-term) (Buhr & Stoy, 2015).
	· Sectoral cleavages	· (1) Number of service sector jobs. (2) Driver of the service sector employment (3) Quality of jobs (Buhr & Stoy, 2015). · Not operationalised (Manow, 2009). · Employment share in public sector, service sector, and manufacturing (Schroeder, 2009).
<i>Cultural setting</i>		
Religion	· Religious origins	· Not operationalised (Manow, 2002).
	· Religious composition population	· Share of population by religious denomination (Mosher, 2015).
Geography	· Geographic location	· Colonised or colonising country (Cousins, 1997). · Peripheral or central country (Abrahamson, 1999).
Culture & History	· Social cleavages	· Not operationalised (Castles & Mitchell, 1992).
	· Cultural values	· Countries clustered by shared languages and cultures (Cousins, 2005).
2. Goals		
<i>Values</i>		
Public & Policy values	· Nature of reality	· Ideology of poverty: (1) Scandinavian, Bismarck, Anglo-Saxon ideologies. (2) State last or first resort (Abrahamson, 1999). · Ideology of free or regulated market (Becker, 2000; Borsenberger, Fleury & Dickes, 2016). · Ideology of fight against poverty or poverty is natural (Becker, 2000). · State intervention minimal or optimal (Sainsbury, 1991). · Equality of outcome or equality of opportunity (Becker, 2000; Borsenberger, Fleury & Dickes, 2016). · Solidarity: family solidarity measured in scale on care for ageing parents, love and respect parents, duty of parents, and duty of children (Borsenberger, Fleury & Dickes, 2013).

Dimension		
<i>Aims</i>		
Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Productive, protective, cohesion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Training investment: (1) Government education spending (share of total public and mandatory private education spending). (2) Total public and mandatory private active labour market spending minus spending on employment services and administration minus spending on subsidised employment as share of total ALMP spending (Hudson &amp; Kuhner, 2009/2012).</li> <li>· Protection: Net replacement rates for long-term single unemployed with no children; earning average production worker wage after tax and including unemployment benefits, social assistance, family and housing benefits in the 60<sup>th</sup> month of benefit receipt (Hudson &amp; Kuhner, 2009; 2012).</li> </ul>
<i>Risks</i>		
Old vs New	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Old vs New</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· NSR: Indicators: corporatism; etatism using indicators of pension segmentation (conservative index); means tested poor relief spending; private pensions and health care spending as share of total respective spending (liberal index); average universalism; and average benefit equality (socialist index).</li> <li>· OSR: incidence of poverty among pensioners, unemployed, and prime age's workers; replacement rates pensioners (Ferragina, Seeleib-Kaiser &amp; Spreckelsen, 2015).</li> </ul>
Internal vs External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Internal vs External</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Not operationalised (Aidukaite, 2001).</li> </ul>
3. Responsibility		
<i>Empirical Welfare Mix</i>		
Welfare mix	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· In general, all actors</li> <li>· Market vs state</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Welfare mix (Esping-Andersen, 1990).</li> <li>· (1) Private providers, (2) Family, or (3) State (Buhr &amp; Stoy, 2015).</li> <li>· Responsibility distribution in (1) Financing (2) Service provision (3) or Regulation (Wendt, Frisina &amp; Rothgang, 2009).</li> <li>· (1) Public spending on social security, education, and ALMP (share of GDP). (2) Private insurance premia (share of GDP) (Powell &amp; Barrientos, 2004).</li> </ul>
State involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Residual vs solidary</li> <li>· Size of state</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Residual or important state in providing welfare services (Buhr &amp; Stoy, 2015; Rice, 2013/2015).</li> <li>· Aggregate state expenditures on social policy – welfare expenditures, family benefits, cash benefits, provision of good and services, and household transfers - by state (share of GDP) (Castles &amp; Mitchell, 1992; Kautto, 2002; Bambra, 2007a; Jaeger, 2009; Schroeder, 2009; Goodin &amp; Smitsman, 2000; Cousins 2005, and many more).</li> </ul>

Dimension		
Market involvement	· Size of market involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Private (health) care expenditure (share of total (health) care expenditures) (Schroeder, 2009).</li> <li>· Private health expenditures (share of GDP) &amp; private hospital beds (share of total bed stock) (Reibling, 2010).</li> <li>· Large or small role for private organisations (Sainsbury, 1991).</li> <li>· (1) Expenditure on old-age pension provision from mandatory public schemes (share of total expenditure old age pensions) (2) Old-age pension provisions from mandatory private schemes (share of total expenditure old age pensions) (3) Old-age pension provisions from voluntary private schemes (share of total expenditure old-age pensions). (Marcinkiewicz &amp; Chybalski, 2017).</li> </ul>
Family & third sector	· Size family & third sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Private out-of-pocket payments (share of total health financing) (Wendt, 2009, 2014).</li> </ul>
<i>Normative Welfare Mix</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Not operationalised (Abrahamson, 1999; Becker, 2000; Borsenberger, Fleury &amp; Dickes, 2013; Buhr &amp; Stoy, 2015; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Goodin &amp; Rein, 2001).</li> </ul>		
4. Coverage		
<i>Population coverage</i>		
Target vs Universal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Liberal vs Conservative</li> <li>· Universal vs Targeted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Not operationalised (Rice, 2013/2015).</li> <li>· Categorical variable: needs, contribution, belonging to occupational category, or citizenship (Abrahamson, 1999).</li> <li>· Universalism: everybody enjoys same rights and benefits, promotions of well-being and life chances, redistribution and elimination of poverty (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Sainsbury, 1991).</li> </ul>
	· Population covered	· Population covered (share of population) (Goodin & Smitsman, 2000; Reibling, 2010; Kangas, 1994; Danforth, 2014).
	· Beveridge vs Bismarck	· Social expenditures financed through contribution (share total expenditures) (Arts & Gelissen, 2002; Bonoli, 1997).
<i>Rules of entitlement</i>		
Eligibility criteria	· Conditionality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· (1) Sanctions scale for abusing unemployment system from -1 of strong and long sanctions to +1 short and light sanctions. (2) People receiving sanctions for abusing benefit systems (share of total number of abusing cases (Cinalli &amp; Giugni, 2013).</li> <li>· (1) Unconditional cash transfers, (2) Cash transfers are conditioned on work-related requirements and control measures (3) Unconditional cash transfers, conditional income supplements, and active measures (training, job search assistance) (Daigneault, 2014).</li> </ul>

Dimension		
	· Means/ needs/ fees/ citizen	· Means tested social transfers (share of total social transfers) (Schroeder, 2009). · Extension of coverage: Scale from -1 insider workers in a male breadwinner fashion to +1 completely open to non-standardised workers, youth and women returning to labour market (Cinalle & Giugni, 2013). · Rules of entitlement: employment, means-testing and/ or universal (Kostadinova, 2014; Toth, 2016, Park & Jung, 2009).
<i>Benefit principle</i>		
Principle	· Replacement rates	· Average net income replacement rate for fully ensured single worker with APW wage and couple with two children and one APW wage (Schroeder, 2009; Kangas, 1994; Danforth, 2014). · Rate compared with minimum/average salary and duration scale from -1 little amount en short duration to +1 Substantial amount for long duration (Cinalle & Giugni, 2013).
	· Benefit principle	· Extent to which social insurance benefits should replace lost income. Minimum benefit, flat-rate, equality to everyone, or previous earnings (Abrahamson, 1999).
5 Outcomes		
<i>Decommodification</i>		
Decommodification	· Decommodification	· Integrated analysis of (1) unemployment (1a) coverage (1b) replacement rates for single APW (1c) replacement rates for families (1d) qualifying period (1e) waiting period (1f) duration. (2) Sickness (2a) coverage (2b) replacement rate single APW (2c) replacement rate period (2d) qualifying period (2e) waiting period (2f) duration. (3) Pension (3a) coverage (3b) minimum/standard pension single person/couple replacement rate (3c) qualifying period, (3d) pension funding (employee to employer ratio) (measured in shares of total population) (As Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferragina, Seeleib-Kaiser & Tomlinson, 2013; Ferragina & Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011; Powell & Barrientos, 2015; Arts & Gelissen, 2002; Jaeger, 2009; Powell & Kim, 2014; Goodin & Smitsman, 2000). · Health decommodification: (1) household out of the pocket payments (share of total health expenditures) (2) population reporting difficulties in having basic medical needs met (share of total population) (3) population covered by health care financed by public means (share of total population) (Kawiorska, 2016).

Dimension		
	· Poverty & health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Social indicators: minimum wage, expenditures on social protection, life satisfaction, poverty, deprivations, income inequality, unemployment, and mortality rates (Aidukaite, 2011).</li> <li>· Poverty: households/children/elderly with disposable income below 50% of median household income (share of total population) (Danforth, 2014; Mitchell, 1992).</li> <li>· Health index: infant mortality rates, disability adjusted life expectancy, health adjusted life expectancy (Bambra, 2006).</li> </ul>
<i>Stratification</i>		
Stratification	· Stratification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Social status segregation maintenance, increase or decrease (Castles &amp; Mitchell, 1992; Esping-Andersen, 1990; Rice, 2015; Abrahamson, 1999; Powell &amp; Barrientos, 2015).</li> </ul>
	· Equalisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Gini-coefficient before and after taxation and redistribution policies (Castles &amp; Mitchell, 1992; Schroeder, 2009; Jaeger, 2009; Cousins, 2005; Goodin &amp; Smitsman, 2000; Ferragina, Seeleib-Kaiser &amp; Spreckelsen, 2016).</li> </ul>
<i>Defamilisation</i>		
Defamilisation	· Defamilisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· (1) Intensity of family welfare provision (share of aged living with children, unemployed youth living with parents as share of total, weekly unpaid hours of work for women) (2) Entity of welfare state services to families (measured as family service spending as share of GDP, public child care coverage, home-help coverage) (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferragina &amp; Seeleib-Kaiser, 2011).</li> <li>· (1) Total weeks leave (maternity, parental, childcare) (2) Average replacement rate (maternity, parental, childcare) (3) Allowance first child (4) Expenditure for family service per child aged 5 and below (share of GDP per capita) (Ferragina, Seeleib-Kaiser &amp; Tomlinson, 2013).</li> <li>· Female economic activity rate; Female employment status as employer (difference between male and female participation rate as employer, lower rate indicates higher proportion of women taking role as employer; female access to education (Bambra, 2007b; Saxonberg, 2013; Chau &amp; Yu, 2013; Yu, Chau &amp; Lee, 2015; Cho, 2014; Danforth, 2014; Korpi, 2000).</li> </ul>
	· Family equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) state protects women from markets or doesn't, (2) minimum or maximum gender discrimination, (3) state considers women as wives and mothers or as workers (Trifiletti, 1999).</li> </ul>

**Table A2.2** Systematic data collection strategy

Source	Search term			
	<i>Participation Act</i>		<i>Mandatory Civic Contribution</i>	
<i>Statistics Netherlands (CBS) / Statline</i>				
	Items	Potentially relevant	Items	Potentially relevant
New items	18	0	1	0
Datasets	59	0	6	0
Reports	15	0	0	0
<i>Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG) / waarstaatjegemeente.nl</i>				
	Items	Potentially relevant	Items	Potentially relevant
Datasets	1	1	0	0
	(1) <a href="https://www.waarstaatjegemeente.nl/dashboard/dashboard/zoekresultaat/?search=participatiewet">https://www.waarstaatjegemeente.nl/dashboard/dashboard/zoekresultaat/?search=participatiewet</a>			
<i>Municipality Amsterdam website</i>				
	Items	Potentially relevant	Items	Potentially relevant
Webpages and documents	17	2	5	0
	(1) <a href="https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/volg-beleid/werk-participatie/participatie/">https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/volg-beleid/werk-participatie/participatie/</a> (2) <a href="https://assets.amsterdam.nl/publish/pages/856994/koersbesluit_re-integratie_zoals_vastgesteld_in_gemeenteraad.pdf">https://assets.amsterdam.nl/publish/pages/856994/koersbesluit_re-integratie_zoals_vastgesteld_in_gemeenteraad.pdf</a>			
<i>Municipality Rotterdam website</i>				
	Items	Potentially relevant	Items	Potentially relevant
Webpages	14	3	7	2
	(1) <a href="https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/participatiewet/">https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/participatiewet/</a> (2) <a href="https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/mensenwerk/">https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/mensenwerk/</a> (3) <a href="https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/hogte-bijstandsuitkering/">https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/hogte-bijstandsuitkering/</a>		(1) <a href="https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/prestatie010/">https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/prestatie010/</a> (2) <a href="https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/reintegratie-ontwikkeling/">https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/reintegratie-ontwikkeling/</a>	
Documents	64	2	64	2
	(1) <a href="https://www.rotterdam.nl/nieuws/coalitieakkoord/Coalitieakkoord-2018-2022.pdf">https://www.rotterdam.nl/nieuws/coalitieakkoord/Coalitieakkoord-2018-2022.pdf</a> (2) <a href="https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/participatiewet/Folder-Participatiewet-voor-werkgevers.pdf">https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/participatiewet/Folder-Participatiewet-voor-werkgevers.pdf</a>		(1) <a href="https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/mensenwerk/ROTD-1914_BPW_Beleidskader.pdf">https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/mensenwerk/ROTD-1914_BPW_Beleidskader.pdf</a> (2) <a href="https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/mensenwerk/In-de-bijstand.pdf">https://www.rotterdam.nl/werken-leren/mensenwerk/In-de-bijstand.pdf</a>	
<i>Municipality Utrecht website</i>				
	Items	Potentially relevant	Items	Potentially relevant
Webpages and documents	7	3	3	0
	(1) <a href="https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0015703/2019-01-01#Hoofdstuk2">https://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0015703/2019-01-01#Hoofdstuk2</a> (2) <a href="https://online.ibabs.eu/ibabsapi/publicdownload.aspx?site=utrecht&amp;id=000066810">https://online.ibabs.eu/ibabsapi/publicdownload.aspx?site=utrecht&amp;id=000066810</a> (3) <a href="https://www.utrecht.nl/fileadmin/uploads/documenten/werk-en-inkomen/Uitwerkingsnota_Werken_aan_Werk.pdf">https://www.utrecht.nl/fileadmin/uploads/documenten/werk-en-inkomen/Uitwerkingsnota_Werken_aan_Werk.pdf</a>			

Source	Search term			
	<i>Participation Act</i>	<i>Mandatory Civic Contribution</i>		
<i>Central government websites (overheid.nl; decentrale.regelgeving.nl; zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl)</i>				
	Items	Potentially relevant	Items	Potentially relevant
Municipal ordinances and policy rules for Amsterdam	95	10	17	0
	(1) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-14999.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-14999.html</a> (2) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-37977.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-37977.html</a> (3) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-119619.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-119619.html</a> (4) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-112598.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-112598.html</a> (5) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2017-126832.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2017-126832.html</a> (6) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2018-282283.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2018-282283.html</a> (7) <a href="https://decentrale.regelgeving.overheid.nl/cvdr/xhtmloutput/Historie/Amsterdam/CVDR377485/CVDR377485_1.html">https://decentrale.regelgeving.overheid.nl/cvdr/xhtmloutput/Historie/Amsterdam/CVDR377485/CVDR377485_1.html</a> (8) <a href="https://assets.amsterdam.nl/publish/pages/565784/nadere_regels_bij_de_re-integratieverordening_participatiewet_geconsolideerde_tekst_per_2019-03-01.pdf">https://assets.amsterdam.nl/publish/pages/565784/nadere_regels_bij_de_re-integratieverordening_participatiewet_geconsolideerde_tekst_per_2019-03-01.pdf</a> (9) <a href="https://assets.amsterdam.nl/publish/pages/565784/verordening_tegenprestatie.pdf">https://assets.amsterdam.nl/publish/pages/565784/verordening_tegenprestatie.pdf</a> (10) <a href="https://assets.amsterdam.nl/publish/pages/565784/beleidsregels_participatiewet_ioaw_en_ioaz_vanaf_21_januari_2015.pdf">https://assets.amsterdam.nl/publish/pages/565784/beleidsregels_participatiewet_ioaw_en_ioaz_vanaf_21_januari_2015.pdf</a>			
	Search term			
Source	<i>Participation Act</i>		<i>Mandatory Civic Contribution</i>	
Municipal ordinances and policy rules for Rotterdam	107	13	23	0
	(1) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-25057.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-25057.html</a> (2) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-10753.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-10753.html</a> (3) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2016-92908.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2016-92908.html</a> (4) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2016-185969.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2016-185969.html</a> (5) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-130982.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2015-130982.html</a> (6) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2017-160516.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2017-160516.html</a> (7) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2017-160520.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2017-160520.html</a> (8) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2019-304108.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2019-304108.html</a> (9) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2019-304105.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2019-304105.html</a> (10) <a href="https://decentrale.regelgeving.overheid.nl/cvdr/xhtmloutput/Historie/Rotterdam/348678/348678_2.html">https://decentrale.regelgeving.overheid.nl/cvdr/xhtmloutput/Historie/Rotterdam/348678/348678_2.html</a> (11) <a href="https://decentrale.regelgeving.overheid.nl/cvdr/xhtmloutput/historie/Rotterdam/348721/348721_1.html">https://decentrale.regelgeving.overheid.nl/cvdr/xhtmloutput/historie/Rotterdam/348721/348721_1.html</a> (12) <a href="https://decentrale.regelgeving.overheid.nl/cvdr/PDFoutput/Actueel/Rotterdam/CVDR348721.pdf">https://decentrale.regelgeving.overheid.nl/cvdr/PDFoutput/Actueel/Rotterdam/CVDR348721.pdf</a> (13) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2016-92908.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2016-92908.html</a>			
Municipal ordinances and policy rules for Utrecht	45	5	9	0



Source	Search term	<i>Mandatory Civic Contribution</i>
	<i>Participation Act</i>	
	(1) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2018-17103.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2018-17103.html</a>	
	(2) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2018-24651.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2018-24651.html</a>	
	(3) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2018-271030.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2018-271030.html</a>	
	(4) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2019-45534.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2019-45534.html</a>	
	(5) <a href="https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2019-319569.html">https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/gmb-2019-319569.html</a>	

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## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER 4

### A4.1 Local Party Manifesto availability

		Party							
		SP	PvdA	GL	CDA	CU	SGP	D66	VVD
1	Vught	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
2	Nunspeet	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
3	Aalsmeer	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
4	Boxmeer	1	2	2	1	0	0	2	1
5	Rijssen-Holten	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
6	Wassenaar	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
7	Wageningen	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
8	Achtkarspelen	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1
9	Kerkrade	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
10	Velsen	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
11	Barneveld	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
12	Lansingerland	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
13	Heerenveen	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
14	Kampen	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
15	Roosendaal	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
16	Deventer	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	2
17	Veenendaal	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
18	Nissewaard	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
19	Amersfoort	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
20	Alphen aan den Rijn	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
21	Westland	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
22	Haarlem	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
23	Ede	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
24	Venlo	2	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
25	Nijmegen	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1
26	Zwolle	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
27	Almere	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1
	Total	13	25	24	27	20	9	24	26

0 = Not participating in local elections

1 = Participating in local elections and manifesto could be retrieved

2 = Participating in local elections but manifesto could not be retrieved

## SAMENVATTING

### Probleemstelling

Op 1 januari 2015 decentraliseert de centrale overheid een compleet pakket aan taken binnen het sociaal domein naar gemeenten. Deze decentralisatie betekende een majeure taakverzwaring voor gemeenten nu zij verantwoordelijk zijn voor de Jeugdzorg, de Wet maatschappelijke ondersteuning en de Participatiewet (Jans, 2015; Maarse & Jeurissen, 2016; Van Ginniken, 2015). De decentralisatie werd gerechtvaardigd door het argument dat:

*“Het overbrengen van een groot aantal taken van het Rijk naar gemeenten [...] meer maatwerk mogelijk [maakt] en het [...] de betrokkenheid van burgers [vergroot]. Gemeenten kunnen de uitvoering van de taken beter op elkaar afstemmen en zo meer doen voor minder geld”* (Regerakkoord VVD PvdA, 2012, p. 40).

Om deze doelen te bewerkstelligen *“biedt het Rijk hen ruime beleidsvrijheid”* (Regerakkoord VVD PvdA, 2012, p. 40). Als zodanig worden gemeenten niet langer louter beschouwd als een alternatieve plek voor overheden om gedecentraliseerd sociaal beleid voorzieningen te verlenen, maar worden ze beschouwd als een onafhankelijke laag van beleidsontwikkeling, met politieke, administratieve en financiële verantwoordelijkheden (Ansell & Gingrich, 2003). Deze verantwoordelijkheden in combinatie met beleidsvrijheid hebben ertoe geleid dat het gedecentraliseerde beleid per gemeente kan verschillen.

De traditionele algemene systeemtheorie gaat ervan uit dat beleidsontwerp begint bij de vorming van de publieke opinie (Easton, 1957). De publieke opinie dient als de zogenaamde input, die kort kan worden gedefinieerd als de eisen die de samenleving aan het politieke systeem stelt (Easton, 1957). Deze publieke opinie beïnvloedt de standpunten van politieke actoren die de eisen van het publiek zouden kunnen steunen. Wanneer eisen van politieke actoren en het publiek legitiem worden bevonden door de beleidsautoriteit, neemt de ambtenarij maatregelen en stelt beleid vast (Easton, 1957). Bestaande studies tonen overtuigend aan dat er een verband bestaat tussen de opvattingen van de bevolking over sociaal beleid en de vormgeving van sociaal beleid (bijv. Brooks & Manza, 2006).

Er is echter ook veel kritiek op de algemene systeemtheorie, omdat deze te algemeen is. Wat bijvoorbeeld Hobolt en Klemmensen (2008) en talrijke auteurs na hen laten zien, is dat de institutionele en strategische context overheden op nationaal niveau

beïnvloedt om in bepaalde mate te reageren op het publiek (Giddens, 1976; Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2008). Naarmate lokale overheden steeds meer verantwoordelijk worden voor de uitvoering van sociaal beleid, rijst de vraag of lokale overheden alleen reageren op het lokale publiek of dat ook zij worden beïnvloed door institutionele en strategische factoren. Om erachter te komen hoe de dynamiek van de lokale politieke arena bijdraagt aan de variatie in constellaties van lokaal sociaal beleid, is de centrale onderzoeksvraag in dit proefschrift daarom als volgt geformuleerd:

*Hoe geven cruciale actoren in lokale politieke arena's vorm aan gedecentraliseerd sociaal beleid?*

Om deze centrale onderzoeksvraag te kunnen beantwoorden en de dynamiek van de lokale politieke arena beter te begrijpen, worden vier deelvragen gesteld. De eerste deelvraag luidt als volgt: *Hoe kunnen de dimensies van nationale verzorgingsstaat typologieën worden her-ontwikkeld om lokaal sociaal beleid te analyseren (RQ1)?*

Om te onderzoeken wat gemeenten ertoe kan brengen te variëren op de dimensies van lokaal sociaal beleid, bestuderen de overige onderzoeksvragen de rol van de drie belangrijkste actoren in de lokale politieke arena: burgers (Hoofdstuk 3), politieke partijen (Hoofdstuk 4) en bestuurders en ambtenaren (Hoofdstuk 5). Elke deelvraag onderzoekt de relatie tussen een van deze actoren en relevante dimensies van lokaal sociaal beleid in het licht van de institutionele en omgevingscondities waarin de actoren manoeuvreren. Daarbij geeft elke onderzoeksvraag een deel van het beeld van hoe sociaal beleid wordt gevormd door de lokale politieke arena.

De tweede deelvraag gaat dieper in op de relatie tussen de economische, demografische en politieke omstandigheden op gemeentelijk niveau en de eerste actor die betrokken is bij de lokale politieke arena: lokale burgers: *Hoe bepalen lokale omstandigheden de opvattingen van inwoners over gedecentraliseerd sociaal beleid (RQ2)?*

De derde deelvraag presenteert een test van hoe lokale politieke partijen kunnen hebben bijgedragen aan variatie in het ontwerp van gemeentelijk sociaal beleid: *In hoeverre wijken de beleidsstandpunten rond de Participatiewet van lokale politieke partij afdelingen af van hun landelijke moederpartij en lokale zusterpartijen, en verklaren lokale omstandigheden deze afwijking (RQ3)?*

De laatste deelvraag legt uit hoe de samenstelling van verschillende gemeentelijke organen (bijv. ambtenaren, het college van burgemeester en wethouders, griffier en gemeenteraadsleden) het lokale sociale beleid in een decentrale context vormgeeft: *Hoe*

*geven lokale omstandigheden vorm aan het beleidsvormingsproces van sociaal beleid in Nederlandse gemeenten na de decentralisatie van de Participatiewet in 2015 (RQ4)?*

## Onderzoeksopzet

De vragen in dit proefschrift zijn beantwoord door middel van een gemengde methode benadering. Omdat er geen bestaande gegevens of datasets beschikbaar waren, heb ik alle empirische gegevens per vraag zelf verzameld. De verzamelde gegevens vertegenwoordigen een grote verscheidenheid aan informatie—zowel kwantitatief als kwalitatief—variërend van documenten en vragenlijsten tot diepte interviews. In totaal zijn bijna 750 documenten geanalyseerd, meer dan 20 interviews gevoerd en is een vragenlijst bij meer dan 1.900 burgers afgenomen.

## Antwoord op de onderzoeksvragen

De eerste deelvraag betrof de herontwikkeling van nationale verzorgingsstaat typologie dimensies om zo variatie lokaal sociaal beleid te kunnen onderzoeken. Daarmee werd in Hoofdstuk 2 een eerste stap gezet richting de ontwikkeling van een typologie van lokale verzorgingssystemen. Daarvoor werd gebruik gemaakt van inzichten uit de literatuur over nationale verzorgingsstaten door middel van een literatuurstudie van meer dan 1.100 wetenschappelijke boekhoofdstukken en artikelen, en drie Nederlandse casestudies (Amsterdam, Rotterdam en Utrecht). Deze inzichten stelden ons in staat om een nauwkeurig kader voor lokale verzorgingssystemen te ontwikkelen rond de volgende drie dimensies: (1) beleidsdoelen (*policy goals*); (2) verantwoordelijkheidsverdeling (*responsibility mix*); en (3) beleidsdekking (*policy coverage*). Dit kader kan worden gebruikt om verschillen in sociaal beleid binnen en tussen landen te identificeren. Vooral schetst dit hoofdstuk de context voor het onderzoeksprobleem van dit proefschrift: het verkennen van de lokale politieke arena in relatie tot gedecentraliseerd lokaal sociaal beleid.

Vanuit de theorie dat variatie in beleid het gevolg is van processen die plaatsvinden in de lokale politieke arena, werd de rol onderzocht van de drie belangrijkste actoren in de lokale politieke arena: burgers, politieke partijen, en bestuurders en ambtenaren. Om te begrijpen hoe de voorkeuren van burgers worden gevormd in de lokale politieke arena, werd in Hoofdstuk 3 een uniek onderzoeksitem ontwikkeld waarmee kon worden beoordeeld of mensen de voorkeur geven aan lokaal sociaal beleid gebaseerd op (1) bescherming (*protection-based*), (2) cohesie opbouwend (*cohesion-building*), of (3) activering (*action-based*). Dit nieuwe onderzoeksitem was opgenomen in de 2018-golf van het Nederlands Lokaal Kiezersonderzoek, die respondenten uit alle 380 Nederlandse gemeenten omvatte (DLES, 2018). Ik voegde contextindicatoren toe aan de onderzoeksgegevens en voerde logistische regressieanalyses op meerdere niveaus uit (1.913 respondenten genesteld in 336 gemeenten). Uit de analyses bleek dat de voorkeuren

met betrekking tot het type lokaal sociaal beleid onder de respondenten verschilden. Ook werd aangetoond dat voorkeuren worden beïnvloed door zowel individuele als context variabelen. Zoals verwacht, beïnvloeden geslacht, leeftijd, inkomen, opleidingsniveau en politieke voorkeur deze voorkeuren op individueel niveau. De voorkeuren voor lokaal sociaal beleid worden echter niet gevormd door de *'usual suspects'* onder lokale contextomstandigheden: economische, demografische en politieke factoren. Deze bevinding suggereert dat andere gemeentelijke factoren in dit verband wellicht relevanter zijn.

Voortgaand op variatie in lokale beleidsvoorkeuren, richtte de derde deelvraag zich in Hoofdstuk 4 op variatie in lokale politieke partijposities. Om deze vraag te beantwoorden heb ik een dataset ontwikkeld met 168 lokale partijprogramma's van 27 strategisch geselecteerde gemeenten en 8 landelijke partijprogramma's. De analyses lieten een beperkte afwijking zien in de standpunten van lokale partijen ten opzichte van hun landelijke moederpartij en andere lokale afdelingen van hun landelijke moederpartij. Dit suggereert dat het sociale beleid dat in de partijprogramma's van lokale partijen aan bod komt, een proces van institutioneel isomorfisme lijkt te weerspiegelen. Bovendien is de beperkte afwijking die er wel is in de sociale beleidsstandpunten van lokale partijen niet overtuigend groter in gemeenten (1) die kleiner zijn, (2) die een hogere uitkeringsafhankelijkheid hebben, of (3) die een hoog stemaandeel hebben voor lokale zelfstandige partijen. Dit in tegenstelling tot wat op grond van de contingentietheorie mag worden verwacht.

De laatste deelvraag betrof het proces van de beleidsontwikkeling door lokale ambtelijke organen zoals het college van Burgemeester en Wethouders, lokale coalitie en oppositiepartijen, griffiers en beleidsontwikkelaars. Ik heb een strategische selectie gemaakt van vier ideaaltypische gemeenten die sterk verschilden in verordeningen van de zogenoemde Tegenprestatie. Vervolgens zijn twee soorten methoden toegepast: (1) semigestructureerde diepte-interviews met een doelgerichte steekproef van belangrijke stakeholders en (2) analyses van beleidsdocumenten, variërend van beleidsregels en regeerakkoorden tot raadsnota's. De kwalitatieve vergelijkende cases studie suggereert dat divergerende regelgeving niet ontstaat door processen in de agenderings- of besluitvormingsfase. In plaats daarvan ontstaat variatie in regelgeving in de formuleringsfase van beleidsontwikkeling. Tijdens de formulering stimuleert de lokale politieke context beleidsmakers om te variëren in hun beleidsvoorstellen om een 'fit' te creëren tussen de beleidsregelgeving en de dominante politieke ideologie, maar de beschikbare middelen dwingen beleidsmakers om andere alternatieven te overwegen. Vanwege deze interactie kunnen gemeenten met vergelijkbare politieke contexten maar met verschillende middelen verschillend beleid ontwerpen, terwijl tegelijkertijd politiek



ideologisch verschillende gemeenten beleid hebben dat op elkaar kan lijken als ze over beperkte middelen beschikken. Bovendien kan variatie als gevolg van politieke context of budgettaire beperkingen worden beperkt of vergroot door regionale afspraken over de vormgeving van lokale regelgeving.

## Conclusie

Dit proefschrift concludeert dat lokale politici en beleidsmakers bij het ontwerpen van sociaal beleid een evenwicht moeten vinden tussen determinanten uit de lokale politieke context en institutionele druk. Zoals hierboven omschreven, proberen lokale bestuurders en ambtenaren beleid aan te passen naar de lokale politieke context. Hierin worden hun mogelijkheden echter beperkt doordat zij over beperkte middelen beschikken en/of deel uitmaken van regionale samenwerkingsverbanden waarin afspraken zijn over de gezamenlijke vormgeving van het lokaal sociaal beleid. Daarnaast leidt de kracht van institutionele druk, afkomstig van bijvoorbeeld de nationale of regionale overheden, tot een beperkte mate van variatie in met name de uiteindelijke beleidsvorm van de Participatiewet. De lokale omstandigheden die we in het onderzoek hebben meegenomen, spelen daarbij slechts een ondergeschikte rol. Hierdoor blijkt het argument dat *“het overbrengen van een groot aantal taken van het Rijk naar gemeenten [...] meer maatwerk mogelijk [maakt] en het [...] de betrokkenheid van burgers [vergroot]”* (Regeerakkoord VVD PvdA, 2012, p. 40), in de praktijk moeilijk uitvoerbaar is. Het proces van decentrale ontwikkeling van lokaal sociaal beleid blijft grotendeels een nationale aangelegenheid. De veronderstelling van beleidsmakers en politici dat variatie in lokaal beleid zou voortvloeien uit processen die plaatsvinden in lokale politieke arena's, wordt daarom niet bevestigd. De resultaten van dit proefschrift laten zien dat de politieke debatten over beleidsstandpunten en beleidsontwerp in de lokale politieke arena's niet evenredig mee verschuiven met de verschuiving van de verantwoordelijkheid voor sociaal beleid naar het lokale bestuursniveau.

## Discussie

De theoretische waarde van dit proefschrift is te onderscheiden in drie onderwerpen. De eerste centrale aanname in dit proefschrift was dat de interne dynamiek van lokale politieke arena's als onafhankelijk systeem functioneert. De bevindingen van dit proefschrift laten echter zien dat deze lokale actoren niet alleen in een lokale arena opereren, maar door meerdere niveaus worden beïnvloed. Dit is een gevolg van het feit dat de legitimiteit, het draagvlak en de middelen van de actoren voor een groot deel zijn ingebed in het nationale systeem. Op basis van deze bevindingen kan worden geconcludeerd dat, als het gaat om gedecentraliseerd lokaal sociaal beleid, lokale politieke arena's nauwelijks functioneren als onafhankelijke systemen.

De tweede centrale aanname van dit proefschrift was dat vanwege de toenemende trend van decentralisatie van sociale beleidsdomeinen, de focus op het nationale niveau in sociaal beleid en onderzoek naar de verzorgingsstaat moest worden gedeconstrueerd naar het lokale niveau. Dit omdat tot op heden onderzoek naar welvaartssystemen sterk nationaal georiënteerd is. De resultaten van dit proefschrift laten echter zien dat niet alleen onderzoek naar sociaal beleid nationaal georiënteerd is. Dit geldt ook voor de instituties binnen de lokale politieke arena's zelf zoals hierboven omschreven. Zeker in het geval van de Nederlandse decentralisatie is het gebruik van factoren uit de nationale context dus nog steeds gepast in wetenschappelijk onderzoek.

De laatste centrale aanname van dit proefschrift was dat structurele lokale contextcondities meegenomen zouden moeten worden in onderzoek naar het functioneren van lokale politieke arena's. Dit proefschrift laat echter zien dat in het Nederlandse geval van decentralisatie van het sociale domein, gemeenten opvallend veel op elkaar lijken qua beleid, ook al verschillen de lokale omstandigheden. Dat betekent echter niet dat lokale contextfactoren er niet toe doen. Integendeel, dezelfde contextfactoren die niet verklaren waarom het beleid verschilt tussen gemeenten, zijn cruciaal bij het bepalen van het budget dat gemeenten van de rijksoverheid ontvangen. Dit komt door de zogenaamde verdeelsleutel. De financiële verdeelsleutel heeft een dempend effect op de rol die contextomstandigheden kunnen spelen bij de lokale beleidsontwikkeling. Gemeenten met een slechte economische situatie en grote groepen kwetsbare inwoners moeten relatief hoge kosten maken. Die gemeenten zouden gestimuleerd worden om een strikt beleid te voeren om deze relatief hoge kosten gelijkmatig over alle kostenposten te verdelen. Door de verdeelsleutel ontvangen deze gemeenten echter relatief veel financiële middelen om die hoge kosten te dekken in vergelijking met gemeenten met goede economische omstandigheden. Daardoor kunnen 'dure' gemeenten beleid voeren dat vergelijkbaar is met gemeenten met relatief goede economische omstandigheden en weinig kwetsbare inwoners. Met andere woorden: context is belangrijk.

## SUMMARY

### Introduction

In the shadow of the Great Recession of 2008 which put great pressure on the welfare state—and following a major decentralisation in 2015—Dutch municipalities became politically and administratively responsible for three social policy domains: youth care (Youth Care Act), care for the chronically ill and the elderly (Social Support Act), and employment and income (Participation Act) (Jans, 2015; Maarse & Jeurissen, 2016; Van Ginniken, 2015). This reform was justified by the argument that:

*“The transfer of a large number of tasks from the central government to municipalities allows for local tailoring and customisation, and allows for stronger citizen involvement. Municipalities can better coordinate the implementation of tasks, and thus do more with less money”* (Regeerakkoord VVD PvdA, 2012, p. 40).

To deal with these new responsibilities, *“the central government gives them [municipalities] wide discretion”* (ibid., p. 40). As such, municipalities are no longer merely considered an alternative place for governments to deliver decentralised welfare services, but are considered an independent layer of policy development, with political, administrative, and financial responsibilities (Ansell & Gingrich, 2003). These responsibilities, combined with the policy discretion they bring, have the potential to lead to policy divergence between municipalities.

The traditional general systems theory assumes that policy design begins with the shaping of public opinion (Easton, 1957). Public opinion serves as the so-called input, which can be defined briefly as constituted by the demands made upon the political system by society (ibid.). This public opinion influences the views of political actors who might support the demands made by the public. When demands raised by political actors and the public are regarded as legitimate by the policy authority, municipal service bodies take measures and adopt policy (ibid.). Existing studies convincingly demonstrate that there is a correlation between the views of the population about social policy and the design of social policy (e.g., Brooks & Manza, 2006).

However, there is much criticism of the general systems theory for being over-simplified. For example, Hobolt and Klemmensen (2008) demonstrate that policy responsiveness is not constant across welfare systems over time. What they and numerous authors after them show is that the institutional and strategic context influences governments to respond to the public (Giddens, 1976; Hobolt & Klemmensen, 2008). As local governments

become increasingly responsible for the implementation of social policies, the question arises as to whether local governments only respond to the local public or whether they too are influenced by institutional and strategic factors at the local level. To find out how the dynamics of the local political arena contribute to variation in constellations of local social policy, the central research problem in this thesis is therefore formulated as follows:

*How do key stakeholders in local political arenas shape decentralised social policies?*

To answer this question and to explore the local political arena in relation to decentralised local social policies, four research questions are posed. The first research question is: *how can national welfare regime typology dimensions be redeveloped to study local welfare systems (RQ1)?*

To investigate what may cause municipalities to vary on the local welfare regime dimensions arising from the literature review above, the empirical research questions that follow examine the role of three key actors in the local political arena: citizens (RQ2), political parties (RQ3), and municipal policymaking bodies (RQ4). Each research question examines the relation between one of these actors and relevant dimensions of the local welfare regimes framework in light of the institutional and environmental conditions in which the actors manoeuvre. In doing so, each research question provides part of the picture on how social policies are shaped by the local political arena.

The second research question delves deeper into the relation between municipal-level economic, demographic, and political conditions and the first actor involved in the local political arena: *local citizens*. It asks: *do local circumstances shape welfare attitudes towards decentralised local social policies (RQ2)?*

The third research question presents a test of how local political parties may have contributed to variation in the design of municipal social policies: *to what extent do Dutch local party branches' social policy positions deviate from their national mother party and local peer parties, and do local conditions explain this deviation (RQ3)?*

The last empirical research question explains how the composition of different municipal bodies (e.g., the civil service, Municipal Executive, town clerks, and city councillors) shape local social policies in a decentralised context: *How do local conditions shape the policymaking process of social policies in Dutch municipalities after the decentralisation of the Participation Act in 2015 (RQ4)?*

## Research design

The questions in this thesis have been answered using a mixed method approach. Because no existing data or datasets were available, I collected all empirical data for each question myself. The data collected represents a wide variety of information—both quantitative and qualitative—ranging from documents and questionnaires to in-depth interviews. In total, almost 750 documents were analysed, more than 20 interviews were conducted, and a questionnaire was circulated with more than 1,900 citizens responding.

## Answering the research questions

The first research question aimed at a redevelopment of national welfare state typology dimensions to facilitate investigation into variation in local social policy. To take a first step towards the development of a local welfare system typology, Chapter 2 used insights from the literature on national welfare states via a literature review of more than 1,100 scientific book chapters and articles, and three Dutch case studies (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht). These insights enabled us to propose a fine-grained *local welfare regime framework* centred around the following three dimensions: (1) policy goals; (2) responsibility-mix; and (3) policy coverage. This local welfare regime framework can be used to identify local welfare regimes within and across different countries, which is essential for comparative local welfare research. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the context for the research problem of this dissertation: to explore the local political arena in relation to decentralised local social policies.

Based on the theory that variation in policy is the result of processes that take place in the local political arena, I examined the role of the three main actors in the local political arena: citizens, political parties, and administrators & officials. To understand how citizens' preferences are shaped in the local political arena, Chapter 3 developed a unique novel survey item which assessed whether people prefer (1) protection-based, (2) cohesion-building, or (3) activation-based local social policies. This novel survey item was included in the 2018 wave of the Dutch Local Election Studies, which included respondents from all 380 Dutch municipalities (DLES, 2018). I appended context indicators to the survey data and performed multilevel logistic regression analyses (1,913 respondents nested in 336 municipalities). The analyses indicated that preferences regarding the type of local social policy varied among respondents. Furthermore, the analysis presented municipal-level variation over and above individual-level variation in local social policy preferences. As expected, gender, age, income, education, and political inclination affect these preferences at the individual level. However, preferences towards local social policies are not shaped by the 'usual suspects' among local context

conditions: economic, demographic, and political factors. This finding suggests that other municipal conditions may be more relevant in this regard.

Building on variation in local policy preferences, the third research question, discussed in Chapter 4, focused on variation in local political party positions. To answer these questions, I developed a dataset including 168 local party manifestos from 27 strategically selected municipalities and 8 national party manifestos. The analyses showed limited deviation in local parties' positions compared to their national mother party and other local branches of their national mother party. This suggests that the social policies addressed in the party manifestos of local parties seem to reflect a process of institutional isomorphism. Furthermore, the limited deviation that does exist in local parties' social policy positions is not convincingly larger in municipalities (1) that are smaller, (2) that have higher social benefit dependency, or (3) that have high vote shares for local independent challengers. This is contrary to what can be expected based on the contingency theory.

The last research question concerned the process of policy development by different municipal bodies such as the civil service, Municipal Executive, town clerks, and city councillors. I made a strategic selection of four ideal-typical municipalities that differed in terms of conditionality regulations (*de Tegenprestatie*). Subsequently, two types of method were employed: (1) semi-structured in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of key stakeholders, and (2) policy document analyses, ranging from policy regulations and coalition agreements to council notes. The qualitative comparative case study suggests that diverging regulations do not arise because of processes in the agenda-setting or decision-making phase. Instead, variation in regulations arises in the formulation phase of policy development. During formulation, the local political context stimulates policymakers to vary in their policy proposals to create a 'fit' between the policy regulation and the dominant political ideology. However, the available resources force policymakers to consider other alternatives. Because of this interaction, municipalities with similar political contexts but different resources may design varying policies, while at the same time, ideologically different municipalities' policies can look alike if they have limited resources. Furthermore, variation due to political context or budgetary constraints may be bounded or increased by regional agreements on the design of local regulations.

## Conclusion

The main conclusion of this dissertation is that, in designing social policies, local politicians and policymakers need to balance between local political contexts and multilevel institutional pressures. As described above, local administrators and civil servants try

to adapt policy to the local political context. However, their options are limited because they have limited resources and/or are part of regional partnerships in which agreements have been made about the joint design of local social policy. In addition, the strength of the multilevel institutional pressures leads to a limited degree of variation in the final policy design of the Participation Act in particular. The local circumstances that we included in the study play only a minor role in this regard. As a result, the argument that “*the transfer of a large number of tasks from the central government to municipalities allows for local tailoring and customisation, and allows for stronger citizen involvement*” (Regeerakkoord VVD PvdA, 2012, p. 40), turns out to be difficult to implement in practice. Because of this, the process of decentralised local social policy development remains largely a national affair. The assumption of policymakers and politicians that variation in local policies would result from processes that take place in local political arenas is therefore not confirmed. The results from this dissertation show that the shifts in the political debates about policy positions and policy design in local political arenas were not proportional to the shift of the social policy responsibility to the local level of governance.

## Discussion

The theoretical value of this thesis is threefold. The first assumption in this dissertation was that the internal dynamics of local political arenas function as independent systems. However, the findings of this thesis show that these local actors do not operate solely in a local but in a multilevel arena. This is a consequence of the actors’ legitimacy, support, and resources to a considerable extent being embedded in the national system. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that, when it comes to decentralised local social policies, local political arenas hardly function as independent systems.

The second assumption of this thesis argued that because of the increasing trend of decentralisation of social policy domains, the national bias in social policy and welfare state research needed deconstruction. However, this dissertation shows that it is not only research on social policy that is nationally oriented. This also applies to the institutions within the local political arenas themselves. Therefore, the national bias in research in the study of social policy is still rather suitable for the Dutch case of the decentralisation of the social domain from 2015. The emphasis on the national level seems to suffice for research into local policymaking, at least in the Dutch case.

The final assumption of this dissertation was that structural local-context conditions should be included in research into the functioning of local political arenas. However, this dissertation shows that in the Dutch case of the decentralisation of the social domain, municipalities are remarkably similar in terms of policy, even though local conditions

vary. That does not mean that local-context factors do not matter. On the contrary, the same context factors that do not explain why policy varies between municipalities are crucial in determining the budget municipalities receive from the national government. This is due to the so-called allocation key. The financial allocation key has a dampening effect on the role that context conditions could play on local policy development. Municipalities with poor economic conditions and large groups of vulnerable residents must incur relatively high costs. Those municipalities would be encouraged to implement a strict policy to distribute these relatively high costs evenly over all cost items. However, because of the allocation key, these municipalities receive relatively abundant financial resources to cover those high costs compared to municipalities with good economic conditions. As a result, high-cost municipalities can implement policies that are similar to municipalities that have relatively good economic conditions and fewer vulnerable inhabitants. In other words: context matters.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Babs Broekema obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science and International Relations at Leiden University in 2015. While writing her master's thesis for the programme 'Public Administration Policy and Politics' at Erasmus University Rotterdam, she did an internship at the Municipality of Rotterdam for the Department of Social Development. After graduating in 2016, Babs worked briefly at a private high school in the Hague, before joining the Erasmus School of Social and Behavioural Sciences at the Erasmus University Rotterdam again, this time as a PhD candidate.

Her PhD project was part of the Research Excellence Initiative of 2015 called 'The State of Local Welfare'. The project focused on the consequence of the Dutch decentralisation of the social domain on three levels: micro, meso, and macro. This dissertation focused on the macro consequences for the public, local politics, and local policies. Babs presented her research at various national and international conferences, published her work in national and international peer-reviewed journals, and acted as a reviewer for academic journals. She was a member of the international academic network of the Social Policy Association. Babs completed several courses at the Erasmus Graduate School of Social and Behavioural Sciences (EGHS) and successfully completed the full Netherlands Institute of Governance (NIG) curriculum, thereby obtaining the first European EAPAA-accredited PhD diploma. In addition to her academic work directly related to her PhD programme, Babs was a co-author for an English book chapter, two Dutch academic journal articles, and two Dutch non-academic reports—one for the Ministry for Education, Culture and Science and one for the Ministry for the Interior and Kingdom Relations.

Over the last few years, Babs taught several courses for the Bachelor of Public Administration and Society, and the international master's Politics and Society. In addition, she supervised an intern and was a member of the graduation committee of more than ten master students. Next to her academic work, Babs was a member of the organising committee of the annual PhD Day at the Department of Public Administration and Society in 2017 and 2018, and co-author of a PhD handbook for new employees.

Since October 2020, Babs has been working as a researcher and consultant for local and regional governments at KokxDeVoogd in Utrecht, where she puts her insights and expertise from her PhD into practice.

## Professional development

- 2017 Formulating and Answering Research Questions, *NIG, Utrecht, the Netherlands*
- 2017 English Academic Writing for PhD candidates, *EGHS, Rotterdam, the Netherlands*
- 2018 Getting it published, *NIG, Utrecht, the Netherlands*
- 2018 Integrity and Social Responsibility in Research and Advice, *NIG, Utrecht, the Netherlands*
- 2019 Mixed Methods research: How to combine diverse quantitative and qualitative methods, *EGHS, Rotterdam, the Netherlands*
- 2019 Comparative Public Administration, *NIG/IDHEAP, Lausanne, Switzerland*
- 2019 Qualitative Interviewing, *EGHS, Rotterdam, the Netherlands*
- 2020 Responsible research data management, *EGHS, Rotterdam, the Netherlands*
- 2020 Governance during and after COVID-19, *NIG, Utrecht, the Netherlands*
- 2021 Classics in Public Administration and Political Science, *NIG, Utrecht, the Netherlands*
- 2021 Reflective Report and Portfolio for Professional Academic Skills, *NIG, Bodegraven, the Netherlands*

## Conferences

- 2017, June Politicologen Etmaal, *Leiden, the Netherlands*  
Paper Presentation
- 2017, September 15<sup>th</sup> ESPAnet 2017, *Lisbon, Portugal*  
Paper Presentation
- 2017, November NIG Annual work conference, *Maastricht, the Netherlands*  
Paper Presentation
- 2017, December PhD-Day DPAS, *Rotterdam, the Netherlands*  
Paper Presentation + member organisation committee
- 2018, January 7<sup>th</sup> ESPAnet NL-VL, *Rotterdam, the Netherlands*  
Moderator + member organisation committee
- 2018, June Politicologen Etmaal, *Leiden, the Netherlands*  
Paper Presentation
- 2018, July Social Policy Association, *York, United Kingdom*  
Paper Presentation
- 2018, November NIG Annual work conference, *The Hague, the Netherlands*  
Moderator + Panel co-organiser with Bas Denters & Menno Fenger
- 2019, January PhD-Day DPAS, *Rotterdam, the Netherlands*  
Paper Presentation + member organisation committee
- 2019, July Social Policy Association, *Durham, United Kingdom*  
Paper Presentation
- 2019, November NIG Annual work conference, *Amsterdam, the Netherlands*  
Moderator + Panel co-organiser with Bas Denters & Menno Fenger

## Publications

- 1 Steenvoorden, E.H., Broekema, H.B. & Van der Waal, J. (2017). Lokale verkiezingen: een lokaal of nationaal feest der democratie. *Bestuurswetenschappen*, (3), 28-50.
- 2 Van der Waal, J., Broekema, H.B. & Steenvoorden, E.H. (2017). Uitdagingen voor bestuur en politiek op gemeenteniveau: het burgerperspectief. *Bestuurswetenschappen*, (3), 51-66.

- 3 Broekema, H.B., Fenger, H.J.M. & Van der Waal, J. (2019). Decentralisatie en het Sociaal Domein in G. Jansen and B. Denters (2019) *Democratie Dichterbij Lokaal Kiezersonderzoek 2018*, Twente.
- 4 Fenger, H.J.M. & Broekema, B. (2019). From Welfare State to Participation Society in Heins, E., Rees, J., & Needham, C. (Eds) *Social Policy Review: Analysis and debate in social policy 2019* (pp. 101-124).
- 5 Fenger, H.J.M., Broekema, B., Korte, M., & Simonse, R. (2020). *De school in het dorp Westerbroek: Tussenevaluatie experiment*, Ministerie voor Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, Den Haag.
- 6 Broekema, H.B., Fenger, H.J.M., & Van der Waal, J. (2021): Principals or Puppets? Analysing Variation in Local Political Parties' Social Policy Positions, *Acta Politica*. 56(3), 456-476.
- 7 Broekema, H.B., Fenger, H.J.M., & van der Waal, J. (2021). Do local circumstances affect attitudes towards local social policies? Exploring the role of economic, political, and demographic conditions. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 41(9/10), 993-1011.

#### Under review

- 1 Broekema, H.B., Fenger, H.J.M., Steenvoorden, E.H., & Van der Waal, J. (2020). Towards developing a Local Welfare Regime Framework.
- 2 Broekema, H.B. (2021). Bounded by Budget: Exploring the Process of Policy Development in Dutch Municipalities after the Decentralisation of the Social Policy Domain in 2015

#### Other activities

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 2017      | Member Working group PhD-Handbook in cooperation with dr. Reinout van der Veer & dr. Ellen Minkman, <i>Rotterdam, the Netherlands</i><br>Writing & Developing of a handbook for new employees                       |
| 2017      | Member Working group PhD-Day DPAS in cooperation with dr. Reinout van der Veer & dr. Ellen Minkman, <i>Rotterdam, the Netherlands</i><br>Member of team organising the annual DPAS PhD conference (90 ps.)          |
| 2018      | 7 <sup>th</sup> ESPANet NL-VL Conference, in cooperation with prof. dr. Menno Fenger, <i>Rotterdam, the Netherlands</i><br>Member of organisation committee conference (100 ps.)                                    |
| 2018      | Career Day, <i>Rotterdam, the Netherlands</i><br>Full organisation of a career event for students of the MSc Politics & Society   |
| 2018      | Research Meeting DPAS in cooperation with dr. Alissa van Zijl, <i>Rotterdam, the Netherlands</i><br>Organisation & presentation of/at research meeting at DPAS  |
| 2018      | Research Meeting "Stuurgroep ESPANet NL-VL" Organisation in cooperation with prof. dr. Menno Fenger, <i>Rotterdam, the Netherlands</i>  |
| 2018-2019 | Member orking group PhD-Day DPAS in cooperation with dr. Reinout van der Veer & dr. Ellen Minkman, <i>Rotterdam, the Netherlands</i><br>Member of team organising the annual DPAS PhD conference (90 ps.)           |
| 2020      | Research Meeting "Stuurgroep ESPANet NL-VL" Organisation in cooperation with prof. dr. Trudie Knijn, <i>Utrecht, the Netherlands</i>  |
| 2020      | Member of working group organisation 25 <sup>th</sup> EUROLOC Summerschool in cooperation with NIG with prof. dr. Bas Denters and prof. dr. Hans Vollaard – cancelled due to Covid, <i>Utrecht, the Netherlands</i> |

