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From global to glocal

The changed lobbying game in the new world

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1. Introduction

In May 2016, a meeting was held between the EU Commissioner of Regional Policy (Corina Cretu) and representatives of European regions in Brussels¹. In this meeting the EU Commissioner explicitly called on German and Dutch regions to ally with the Commission in its attempt to modernize the EU regional policy. She emphasized the need for a simpler and more flexible regional policy, that should also be more effective when it comes to reaching goals. In the meeting, the Dutch municipalities pleaded for strengthening collaboration on the basis of trust instead of control. In her response the EU Commissioner indicated that not all member states possess an institutional setup that allows for the Commission to shift the focus from control to trust (Huis van de Nederlandse Provincies, 2016).

Although no member states are specifically mentioned, the signal of the Commission is clear: the regional policy has to be modernized, while emphasizing that the diversity in institutional setup of the member states and their regions does pose some obstacles in finding a generic approach that leads to a modernized regional policy.

The plea for modernization of EU regional policy does not come out of the blue. Also the present communication strategy of the Directorate General (DG) for Regional and Urban Policy signals a different approach from the EU institutions towards the role of local and regional authorities than before. In 2008 the DG for Regional and Urban Policy stated that the involvement of regions is necessary to achieve the goals of the EU as a whole (European Union, 2008, p. 1). The 2015 Communication Strategy of this DG starts to point out that 'investments through regional and urban policy are one of the most tangible and visible areas of EU action for citizens' (European Union, 2015, p. 2). Support for EU policy turned out to be a more prominent topic than before and it shifted the focus from 'regions as participants to reach a goal' to 'regions as participants to justify a goal'.

With the need for modernization on the political agenda, the question arises why this modernization is needed. And, following that exploration, how a new type of cooperation between the EU and the decentral authorities is taking shape. This paper addresses these topics. The paper starts with a brief overview of the different phases regional authorities have gone through finding their way in the EU multi-level and multi-actor governance network. Next, the paper addresses the challenges the EU faces in the present time and how this influences the cooperation between the different layers of government within the EU. The question why the

¹ <https://www.europadecentraal.nl/europese-ster/de-europese-ster-nr-828/#commissaris-cretu-rekent-op-nederlandse-bij-moderniseren-eu-regionaal-beleid>

need for modernization of regional policy has become prominent at this time is further explored. The paper concludes with a reflection on the meaning of these changes when it comes to the local and regional interest representation (the lobbying game) in Brussels.

2. Europe of the Regions: from past vision to new reality

In the 1990s many regions within the European Union embraced the concept of a *Europe of the Regions*. The absence of a clear definition of such an Europe (and the challenges involved), was not an obstacle for this concept to emerge and to obtain visionary proportions. Albeit not defined precisely, for the regions the concept radiated a message of regional influence on the EU process of policy- and decision-making. And the regions sure had reasons to welcome such a message. After all, the EU did acknowledge the role regions could play in creating a fully-fledged internal market, in which equalizing differences in prosperity between regions played a profound role.² In the years to come, other formal agreements entered the stage and strengthened the regional position in the European policy process. For example, with the ratification of the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) the principle of subsidiarity was formalized. Also Maastricht provided in more funding to contribute to regional goals. A few years later the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999) provided the Committee of the Regions of more policy-fields that are subject to the advisory role of the Committee. And thus again, at least on paper, regions were given a stronger position within the EU policy-making process.

In the following years, two different developments can be recognized. First, the involvement of regions in the European policy process was further strengthened. The Treaty of Lisbon (2009) was an important success in local and regional attempts to further strengthen their political positions (Guderjan, 2012, p. 111). This treaty further formalized the principle of subsidiary. Also 'Lisbon' lead to the implementation of consultation rounds by the European Commission, prior to the initiation of legislative proposals, in which local and regional interests are brought forward. Another indication of regional involvement is the, ever since the Single European Act, increased number of regional offices in Brussels (Moore, 2007, p. 3). Although the increasing number of representatives in Brussels does not directly lead to the conclusion that regions obtained influence, it does however show that regions do see opportunities and are willing to invest in an active role in the European arena.

² For example: Article 130a of the Single European Act states that: 'In particular the Community shall aim at reducing disparities between the various regions and de backwardness of the least-favored regions.'

The second development is that the concept of a Europe of the Regions seems to have fallen out of favour. Despite institutional changes and the increased activity of regional representatives, the encompassed vision of a powerful regional level within EU governance did not emerge. Elias (2008, p. 485) noticed that by the beginning of the new millennium, the 'hype' associated with Europe of the Regions had faded. Whatever images did exist of the concept, it seems that none of them had actually materialized (Jeffery, 2000), (Greenwood, 2003).

Some scholars have analysed the reasons why the envisioned Europe of the Regions did not emerge. For example, Hepburn (2008) who discusses the role of regions who used the imagery of a 'Europe of the Regions' to advance on their own specific agenda. Minority nationalist parties wanted to strengthen their territorial demands and made a link between European regional policy and self-determination. Otherwise, state-wide parties used the EU regional policy to strive for decentralization of competences, mostly based on economical motives. Either way, the regional goals did not match the more comprehensive vision of the EU: regional policy as an instrument to reduce regional economic differences and consequently promote the EU-cohesion policy. Hepburn concludes that many regions did not reach their goals and experienced this as an European neglect of regional interests. This, not surprisingly, led to more Euro-sceptical positions.

Keating (2008) argued that although the EU has not turned into a Europe of the Regions, territorial politics has shaped (and will continue to shape) the European Union for a long time to come. The visionary Europe of the Regions was always overblown. Keating drew the conclusion that this is just a matter of territorial and multi-level politics which already existed since a long time and also be with us for at least another quarter century (Keating, 2008, p. 635). Keating's observations put the regional activity in Brussels in a normalized perspective: regions became part of the European reality and are one of the many actors in the game of European multilevel politics (Jeffery, 2000), (Moore, 2007). Since the beginning of the new millennium, the regions have earned their place within the institutional structure of the EU. Regional authorities do not find themselves in a more or less 'privileged' position, as was envisioned in the Europe of the Regions, but have to act as one of the players within a multilevel- and multi-actor governance network. The focus shifted from *Europe of the Regions* to *Europeanization*.³

³ It is noted that *Europeanization* is a concept that knows a wide range of interpretations and underlying dimension (for more background on these dimensions see: Van Bever & Verhelst, 2013).

Acting within this multi-level and multi-actor governance network required for the regions to take the interests of the other actors into account (see also Kiers, 2014, pp. 2-8). So when making the strategic choices in their lobbying process, the regions also had to respond to economical and institutional dynamics that shape the European arena.

Did this change in positions also change the lobbying-game compared to the game that was going on in the 90s? Tatham concluded that such was not the case. He stated that 'The New Europe' led to the situation where the European regions, stemming from EU-10 and EU-15 countries alike, continued playing the same lobbying game, albeit in a much changed setting (Tatham, 2014, p. 343).⁴ Tatham noticed that, faced with a higher number of member states and stakeholders, the European Commission has *de facto* less time for specific regional topics (Tatham, 2014, p.356). By semi-structured interviews with Commission officials Tatham found that since the enlargement of the EU the region-specific queries are more likely to be heard by the Commission when these are being brought forward by a coalition of regional stakeholders or when they are expressed very early in the legislative process prior to Commission communication (see also: Swenden & Bolleyer, 2014, p. 392).

Another indication that the settings of the game had changed can be found in Bruszt (2008). Bruszt looked at the emergence of regionalism in the Central and East European countries and pointed out that the Commission changed its attitude towards subnational actors after 2002. He noticed that the commission stressed the weakness of regional administrative capacities and pushed the applicant countries towards centralized management. This conclusion is to a certain extent confirmed by the EU Commissioner on Regional Policy who, as mentioned before, indicated that not all member states possess an institutional setup that allows for centralized control to be substituted by trust (Huis van de Provincies, 2016). Reflecting on the wider range of member states, Bruszt found that (unlike the 1990s) the Commission did not have policies to strengthen the opportunities for subnational actors. He concluded that central governments are the clear winners of the new Structural Funds, as they control the majority of sectoral programmes. (Bruszt, 2008, pp. 616-617).

At this point, the preliminary conclusion is that the new millennium led to a new governance equilibrium. The settings of the game changed. Regional and local authorities

⁴ The term *New Europe* comprises the new dynamics of European integration since 2004. These dynamics include not only an enlarged and more heterogeneous Europe, but also an EU with a revised institutional set-up and a very different socio-economic context given the unprecedented magnitude of the fiscal crisis and its aftermath (Swenden & Bolleyer, 2014, p. 250).

became part of the system. Perhaps the call for a modernization of the EU-regional cooperation was fed by these developments. But more recent (global) problems gave this need to change an enormous impulse. De agenda-setting of the EU has changed to a large extent. And that affects the lobbying game more than ever, as is further explored in the following section.

3. The new world, a different game

3.1 Change of focus

The problems the EU is facing nowadays are of different proportions than before. For example: managing the refugee crisis, keeping the Union together after the Brexit and dealing with the aftermath of the financial crisis are problems of a worldwide scale. The European Commission explicitly focusses on these global issues. It is not by coincidence that the subtitle of the Commission Work Programme 2016 is called 'No time for business as usual'. In the Work programme the Commission clearly states that it focusses on 'the big things', 'do different things' and 'do things differently' (European Commission, 2015, p. 2). The Commission sets out ten priorities to be working on. Ten priorities that, for an important part, encompass big issues on a global scale.⁵ These global problems are prominent topics not only on the supranational and national agenda's. To be solved, these problems require efforts of all levels of authority. For example, when dealing with the refugee crisis, it is up to de local authorities to provide shelter and to deal with the different opinions that are present in the local community. Solving these global problems is not a matter of translating EU legislation downwards to national and regional levels anymore. And there is virtually no debat about the necessity to act on these topics. But there *is* debate about the way new policy should be implemented.

Such processes of decentralization (and the corresponding political tension) are not new to regional and local authorities. For example, very prominent in The Netherlands is the decentralization of a large part of the healthcare from the national government to the local authorities.⁶ Most local autohorites do agree that the implementation of these tasks are suited better at the local level than on the national level. But the political tension arises when budget-

⁵ For example, the priorities: a climate chance policy, a balanced free trade agreement with the US, an area of justice and fundamental rights (against terrorism), a new policy on migration and becoming a stronger global actor (European Commission, 2015).

⁶ The new tasks that municipalities have been given are: offering healthcare services to the elderly or chronically ill, helping local people find work or paying their benefit, providing youth care services.

cuts or affiliated political issues are at stake. For example, the Dutch national government stated that: *Municipalities must be properly equipped to take on these new responsibilities. By working together or merging, municipalities can strengthen their administrative capacity. Central government has given municipalities considerable freedom in deciding how to carry out their new tasks* (Government of The Netherlands, 2016). Even when there is agreement on the necessity of the decentralisation of the tasks, the connection that is made with ‘merging municipalities’ will (at least in The Netherlands) definitely lead to a political debate.

The EU finds itself in a comparable situation and the call from Commissioner Cretu is characterizing this situation. For the local and regional authorities probably do not doubt the necessity for the Commission to shift its agenda towards the global issues. But they most likely are not accepting extra tasks without a proper debate on how the EU facilitates them when it comes to the implementation of the policies.

3.2 The Pact of Amsterdam

The European Commission adopted a Communication in July 2014 and launched a public consultation round on the so called EU Urban Agenda (European Commission, 2014). The Commission points out that: *‘almost 70% of the EU population now live in urban areas. However, they are also home to some of our greatest challenges: economic, social, environmental and demographic, which are often interrelated. Europe’s cities are the engines of the European economy, providing jobs and services, and serve as hubs that catalyse creativity and innovation. That is why a growing number of voices – at EU, national and local level – argue that an EU Urban Agenda is needed so that cities can provide their expertise in developing and putting EU policies into practice and, in turn, that these are better adapted to urban realities’* (European Commission, 2016).

The consultation round generated a strong interest. As a result, the EU ministers responsible for urban matters agreed on the so called ‘Pact of Amsterdam’ on 30 May 2016 (EU Ministers of Urban Matters, 2016). This pact denotes an Urban Agenda for the EU, based on twelve priority themes.⁷ In the pact, the ministers point out that more than 70% of the European citizens live in urban areas. They state that urban areas therefore play a key role in pursuing the EU 2020 objectives and in solving the refugee crisis. Specifically, in the selection criteria for

⁷ The priority themes in the pact are: migrants and refugees, air quality, urban poverty, housing, circular economy, jobs and skills in the local economy, climate adaptation, energy transition, sustainable use of land and nature-based solutions, urban mobility, innovative and responsible public procurement.

establishing the list of priority themes, the ministers point out that the themes must address urban challenges as well as they have to promote the EU 2020 objectives.

With this pact the ministers take the first step towards a new kind of multilevel governance. The pact states that the ministers agree on 'partnerships' as being the key delivery mechanism within the Urban Agenda. And that the aim of the partnerships is to develop a multilevel and cross-sectoral governance approach in order to achieve the objectives. (EU Ministers of Urban Matters, 2016, p. 10). Furthermore, the ministers state that 'partnerships will not generate actions which result in new EU regulations and new or increased funding' (EU Ministers of Urban Matters, 2016, pp. ii, app.B).

And so the call for modernization is answered by the EU nation states. The ministers, following the Commission, put the big issues on the agenda. And with the Urban Agenda, a clear signal is made that these issues cannot be solved without the cooperation with local authorities. But also some restrictions with respect to regulations and funding are made. It is likely that such top-down restrictions affect the process of building the needed cross-level cooperation. The question arises how the decentral authorities are going to respond to this new situation and how the new settings affect the lobbying game.

4. Towards glocalization

Even in this new world, the lobbying game still will comprise the 'classical' game of local and regional authorities that try to obtain funding for their local and regional projects. Hence, the budget of the EU for regional policy (€ 351,8 billion over the period 2014-2020)⁸ is mainly still divided over the three familiar funds.⁹

But the game is changing. Global problems have entered the agenda. And these problems cannot be solved by the classic approach. Lobbying for funds or changes in legislation become less dominant when the, as the Commission puts it, big things are on the agenda. The EU and the nation states clearly envision a crucial role for the local authorities. To find their role in the arena where the global issues are on the agenda, is now the challenge for local authorities to face. The question is whether local authorities will get the facilities (in terms of time, money and implementation capacity) from the EU and the nation state in order to be able to carry out their tasks. The debate about the EU Urban Agenda to this point did not produce a clear form

⁸ Source: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/what/investment-policy

⁹ The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund (CF) and the European Social Fund (ESF).

of new governance structure. It is not clear who is in control when it comes to the implementation of new policies.

And so the debate about who is in control of the new agenda is started. For instance, take the contribution of Benjamin Barber to the debate. Barber points out that there can be little doubt about the decreasing functionality of nation states. As nation states will never be able to provide for peace, prosperity and sustainable economic growth. Nation states are too large for citizen participation to take shape and are too small to cope with the big global issues (Barber B. R., 2013). And although Barber's proposition to establish a worldwide Parliament of Mayors encounters some criticism for not being practically achievable (Herweijer, 2015), the main idea that local authorities are in charge in the process of solving global problems is definitely on the political agenda.

5. Lobbying in the glocal world

As pointed out in section 4 the lobbying strategies of regional and local authorities still will be based on the 'old' settings because of the budgets that are still divided over the familiar funds. But the urban agenda marks the beginning of changes in the EU regional policy. The agendas and priorities of the Commission changed due to the global and internal problems the EU is facing. The member states responded to these changes with the Pact of Amsterdam and the local authorities have to respond. Global and local grow towards each other. Global issues are solved at a local level. This phenomenon is often referred to as *glocalization* and is not new. Even in the 1980s, marketing strategies occurred for products to be globally distributed, but being fabricated for specific local requirements. In the 1990's Robertson further addressed glocalization as a sociological topic (Robertson, 1995). And now glocalization has entered the arena of EU regional policy.

But how do these changes affect the lobbying strategies of the cities? It can be expected that, as in the situation before the urban agenda, that the specific local interest and resources one possesses determine the lobbying strategy for an important part. We can look further into this by exploring three categories of characteristics of urban areas that will shape the lobbying strategy. These categories are not meant to give an exhaustive list of properties of the urban areas. They are chosen to be able to analyse the new situation in more detail at this point.

The categories of characteristics considered are: territorial, institutional and substantive properties. The next sections will explore in what way these properties may influence the lobbying strategy of the urban areas.

5.1 Territorial

The first category of characteristics that will shape the lobbying game within the context of glocalization are the territorial properties of the area involved. One territorial property that will influence the lobbying game is the size of the city involved. Large cities already have to deal with the 'big issues' like the refugee crisis and already possess administrative resources to do so. This can be an advantage over smaller cities that need more support from the central state to build an administrative organisation that can take up the new tasks. There is also a difference in effect of the implemented policy related to the size of the city. Many of the prioritized themes in the Pact of Amsterdam will have larger effects when these themes are implemented in larger cities (for example: air quality, jobs and skills in the local economy, climate adaption, urban mobility).

Are the EU and the central states primarily going to interact with the big cities? Or will there be sufficient support for smaller cities that enables them to also contribute to the implementation of the shared policies? The different sizes of the cities may thus lead to a different lobby strategy towards the EU and the central state.

This situation may also have further political consequences. For example, as already stated in section 3.1, the Dutch central government indicates that if municipalities do not have the administrative capacity to carry out their new tasks, merging of municipalities will come into the picture as a possible solution (Government of The Netherlands, 2016). Some municipalities already are themselves focussing on merging. Others will be fiercely opposed to such enlargement. How this situation will affect the lobbying game will be, for a major part, dependant on the local politicians.

To conclude the territorial properties, the interests of rural areas have to be mentioned. When the focus of the EU and the nation states is shifting towards the urban areas, what is going to happen with the interests of rural areas? In these areas addressing poverty and unemployment is often even more urgent than in urban areas. But the Pact of Amsterdam only prioritizes 'Urban poverty'. Also from a more positive viewpoint, the rural areas can contribute to the urban goals. For instance, within the prioritized theme 'Energy transition'. It is likely that the spaces needed for clean and environmental friendly types of energy production will be, for an important part, found in the rural areas. The pact of Amsterdam recognizes that some problems can only be solved regionally: *'A growing number of urban challenges are of a local nature, but require a wider territorial solution (including urban-rural linkages) and cooperation within functional urban areas. At the same time, urban solutions have the potential to lead to*

wider territorial benefits. Urban Authorities therefore need to cooperate within their functional areas and with their surrounding regions, connecting and reinforcing territorial and urban policies.' This means that the urban authority stays leading. Rural interest will have to reinforce the urban policies. Herweijer, reacting on the global parliament of majors as suggested by Barber (2013), also points out this problem. He indicates that Barbers suggestion to connect the rural areas to nodal central positioned municipalities will not be possible in many nation states (Herweijer, 2015, p. 39). We can conclude that the interest and importance of rural areas are acknowledged in the urban agenda. Cooperation between the different types of areas is brought forward as a requirement for reaching the challenges that require a larger territorial solution. But there is no clear vision on how exactly to shape the rural role in the process.

5.2 Institutional

A second category of characteristics that will shape the lobbying game in the context of glocalization involves the institutional properties of the local authority.

In the new situation the EU and the cities grow towards each other. Prioritised themes are shared on the agendas. The local authorities are expected to implement the European policies aimed at solving the big problems. But what does this implicate for the nation states? The analysis of Barber is clear on this point: the nation state becomes increasingly dysfunctional (Barber B. , 2015, p. 8). And to some extent central governments accelerate this process when decentralizing tasks themselves, in addition to the prioritized themes in the urban agenda.

And so the role of the central government changes. When the agenda is set on the EU-level and the implementation of the EU policies is decentralised to the level of local authorities, will the central government have responsibilities other than facilitating the cities in their tasks?

The way this facilitating role of the central government is actually taking shape in reality will be dependent on the institutional setup of the nation state involved. When local authorities already possess legislative powers and have resources themselves, the lobby strategy most likely will not be aimed strongly onto the central government. In nation states where local authorities face a strongly centralized system and do not have their own resources to some extent, the focus may shift to the central government. Being able to live up to the expectations of the urban agenda then will be more strongly dependent on the resources the local authority receives from the central government. In such situations, bypassing the nation state and trying to obtain the direct support on the EU level, will be back on the agenda just as it was in the beginning of the millennium (see also Keating & Hooghe, 2006, for more background on the subject of bypassing the nation state).

5.3 Substantive

A third category of characteristics are the substantive properties of the problems (themes) involved. The prioritized themes mentioned in the Pact of Amsterdam show much variety. For example: improving air quality, reduce poverty and making a digital transition are all listed as prioritized but also are very different in their nature. It is likely that local authorities will engage in strategic lobbying for those themes that are high on the local political agenda.

Cities who have to deal with unemployment as a local prioritized problem will perhaps not focus on the digital transition, but will be merely concerned about creating jobs and enforcing the growth of the local economy. Whilst other cities experience that economic (and population) growth may cause more mobility and more air pollution, which puts the problem of air quality higher on the local political agenda (for example the city of Utrecht, see: Gemeente Utrecht, 2014, p. 15). Local authorities may acknowledge the 'big problems' of the Commission. But the local lobby strategy will also enclose the local perception and local translation of these problems.

Seen from the viewpoint of the EU, the importance of the specific local interest is not different than before. The basis of the EU cohesion policy still is to reduce disparities between the various regions and the backwardness of the least-favoured regions (European Commission, 2016) and therefore the local differentiation in priorities does not change the lobbying game in itself. However, the problems cities are facing with the urban agenda are of a different scale than before. The goals address problems with an impact on a larger scale. Seen from this context, pursuing own specific goals still is important for local authorities when determining the lobby strategy. But more strongly than before these local preferences will have to fit into the larger picture of the urban agenda. This means that the lobby strategy will have to take into account that showing progress (or the possibilities for that progress) in both arenas, European and local, will become more important.

6. To conclude

In this paper we addressed the call from the Commission to modernize the European regional policy. The Commission focusses on the big themes that address problems on a global scale. The nation states responded with the Pact of Amsterdam in which these big themes are also addressed and the need for an urban agenda was further pointed out. This urban agenda focusses on the urban areas, for these are the areas that are vital in solving the problems addressed. Local authorities are faced with the responsibility of implementing the European

policies aimed at solving the big problems. Glocalization is the new lobbying context that local authorities are now facing.

How local authorities shape their lobby strategy in this process is in itself not different than before. It is the same game, albeit in a changed setting. But these settings can lead to a different strategy from local authorities. The specific territorial, institutional and substantive properties of the urban area involved will shape the lobbying process in the glocalized context. The EU and the nation states already have contributed to the discussion about the new cross-level cooperation that is emerging. It is now up to the local authorities to respond and adapt their lobbying strategy to this changing European and even global arena.

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