Sub-Municipal Units (SMU's)

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Up or down –scaling local government?

- Sub-national scale reforms all over Europe since the 1950s

- Lots of attention and initiatives to up-scaling local government (via municipal mergers, creating additional layers to take over local service delivery, intermunicipal cooperation, …)

- Repeatedly, upscaling LG drastically has triggered decisions and debate to down-scale again as well

Creating Sub-Municipal Units (SMU's)

- A classic solution in case a local government is not (perceived as) local anymore
- An organizational reform that enables
  - to bring decision-making processes closer to the citizens
  - to execute tasks in accordance with the specific needs of an area
- To this end, SMU's dispose over autonomy vis-à-vis local government

Hybrid in nature across and within European countries

- Created by local and/or central government?

- A mere city/urban versus a more country-wide/also rural reform?

- Variance in SMU powers, budget, services, … on the local scale?

- Similar as well as subordinate to local government in election and administration?

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	BELGIUM
Institutional basis	SMU's can be created by the council of eight cities with more than 100 000 inhabitants as foreseen in the Belgian Constitution
Number and size	9 districts in the port city of Antwerp, varying from less than 30 000 to more than 60 000 inhabitants
Powers and competencies	All Antwerp districts execute competencies in the fields of youth, culture and sports policy; senior policy; traffic policy; public works; festivities and communication
Election and administration	District and local government elections and organization are alike / a locally appointed secretary in every district

Small as more democratic?

- SMU's added value according to the Dahl-Tufte –dilemma (1973): large(r) units tend to be more effective providers of public services whilst small(er) ones tend to have more possibilities for citizens to participate in policy-making processes

- In practice, democratic legitimacy as the dominant rationale behind the SMU –reform

- But further SMU research is still quite limited in number, scope and focus

The Antwerp districts under study

- The democratic pros and cons in the early days of their creation
  - E.g. Van Assche (2002): how to reintroduce local government in a big city: the classic instrument of city decentralisation or the instrument of more deliberative democracy?
- Electoral trends and explanations throughout their life-time
  - E.g. Van Aelst e.a. (2013): Do voters vote for the same party at district and municipal level?
  - E.g. De Ceuninck e.a. (2013): Why did the Antwerp districts vote so differently?

The Antwerp districts under study

- Focus on reform evaluation more recently
  - E.g. De Peuter e.a. (2011): What can be said about the criteria that served to underpin this reform and that were used to judge its effects?
  - E.g. Van Dooren e.a. (2012): Did the districts fulfil the expectations of increasing democracy and efficiency? Why (not)?

- Primary document and discourse analysis, little field research so far

Time to find out more about the SMU's?

- The SMU's quest for more autonomy and competencies vis-à-vis local government: problem-led or opportunity-led?

- Understanding their role and stake in submunicipal governance e.g. with the rise of the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and the Special Assessment Districts (SADs)

- Their urban renewal and contribution to (amongst others) a more inclusive or enterpreneurial city?

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