

## 2 Political recruitment and career development of local councillors in Europe

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### 2.1 Introduction

Why do some people become and stay politicians while others do not? To gain an insight into this question one has to scrutinise the processes by which certain individuals enter, remain and move in office. In the literature on political science, these processes are usually framed by the concepts of political recruitment and career development. The answer to the initial question is related to notions such as the degree of openness of selection into the core of the political system and to whether or not who governs matters for attitudes and behaviour in office. These notions bear on more normative considerations such as: should political office provide a microcosm of society, or does professional responsiveness outweigh representation as the ultimate touchstone of contemporary local democracy? Hence, the importance of these concepts and their associated processes goes beyond mere descriptions of the pathway to office.

This chapter focuses on the recruitment and career development of local councillors in the 16 European countries studied in the context of the project *Municipal Assemblies in European Local Governance*. It starts with an overview of the literature conceiving recruitment and career development as a process with different phases. Subsequently, three different phases are discerned and elaborated on by presenting data for each of the countries included in the database: the social base of councillor recruitment, the activation, apprenticeship and election of the councillors and their career development. In line with the theoretical underpinnings, each phase is considered as a dynamic interaction between the supply of eligible candidates and the demands of selectors in the political system embedded in a structure of opportunities. To organise the characteristics under study in each phase, we discern two ideal-typical pathways to and in office, i.e. the layman mode and its professional counterpart (see below).

Although our database is the first to allow such a broad and comparative perspective, we still have to keep in mind two qualifications. First, the cross-sectional nature of the database does not allow scrutiny of longitudinal trends in recruitment and careers, though the existing literature might provide bench-

marks to which the current councillor profile in terms of recruitment and career development could be compared. Second, its focus on local councillors, i.e. those candidates who actually achieved elective office, narrows the scope of the recruitment process, leaving out those citizens who attempted to, but did not succeed in gaining political office at the local level.

This chapter is one of a number of new contributions on the theme of recruitment and career development.<sup>1</sup> The comparative findings in this chapter have been complemented with a series of articles that seeks to grasp additional (and often causal) mechanisms. In terms of the social base of political recruitment, Reynaert (2012) found that differences in the general pattern not only vary according to country classifications - to some extent municipal size and party affiliation matter as well. Verhelst and Kerrouche (2012) show that the next phase of the recruitment process, councillor activation and apprenticeship, is partly contingent on this social base. Still additional effects emerged from municipal size, ideology and councillor function. Aars, Offerdal and Rysavy (2012) examined the final phase, i.e. the political career. Disentangling the latter in three phases (pre-electoral, in-council and future ambitions), the authors suggest that careers do not develop according to a linear model of professionalisation. Rather they are shaped incrementally whilst varying per phase. Finally, the contribution of Steyvers and Verhelst (2012) seeks to answer the question: do recruitment and career matter for councillors' preferences for task importance? The authors indicate that there is no dichotomy between the preference for inward-looking tasks and outward-looking counterparts in practice. And even though effects of recruitment and career were found, they were embedded in the (supra)-local opportunity structure. Besides, the impact of recruitment and career is mediated by the daily experience of holding the councillor mandate. Hence, these contributions underline the importance of the broader cultural and structural setting in order to gain realistic insights in the proceedings and mechanisms of political recruitment and career.

## 2.2 *Theoretical framework: pathways to and in the council*

Political recruitment can be conceived as '...the process by which individuals are selected for inclusion among political elites' (Brady, Schlozman, and Verba 1999: 153). Political careers subsequently emerge as these individuals develop patterns of mobility between offices in the political realm (Marvick 1972). The

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1 See a special issue of the journal *Lex Localis – Journal of Local Self-Government* in 2012 (volume 10, number 1). Organised per phase of the recruitment process and subsequent career, the articles are part of the research project MAELG as well. In some cases, authors may have used slightly different operationalisations of the basic dataset.

following sections elaborate on the phases that comprise these processes. After setting our model of recruitment and career development, two ideal-types are introduced and discussed in a shifting structure of opportunities. The different dimensions of our model are summarised in table 2.1 and substantiated according to the characteristics of each ideal-type under study.

**Table 2.1: Layman & professional recruitment and career development**

<b>Ideal-type</b>	<b>Layman</b>	<b>Professional</b>
<b>Principles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representation, equality &amp; inclusiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Responsiveness, expertise &amp; exclusiveness</li> </ul>
<b>Process</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Permeable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funnel</li> </ul>
<b>Practices</b>		
<b>Recruitment</b>		
Social base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resembling pluralism/microcosm</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating isomorphism</li> </ul>
Political active stratum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult life experiences</li> <li>• Civic duty/issue motives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political families &amp; early life experiences</li> <li>• Partisan/program/career motives</li> <li>• Party political cocooning</li> </ul>
Political apprenticeship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local group/organised community life</li> </ul>	
Election	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local list</li> <li>• Civil society support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National list</li> <li>• Party political support</li> </ul>
<b>Career development</b>		
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free-time</li> <li>• No accumulation of mandates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Part/Full-time</li> <li>• Accumulation of mandates</li> </ul>
Scope	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discrete</li> <li>• Turnover</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Static/progressive</li> <li>• Stability</li> </ul>

### 2.3 *Inside the puzzle box: modelling recruitment and career development*

Prewitt (1969, 1970) offers a seminal conception of the recruitment process at the local level comparing it with a Chinese puzzle box: from the many eligibles various selection processes gradually filter out the few elected. Councillor selection first and foremost has a social base referring to the relatively higher political life chances of certain social strata. Political socialisation and mobilisation then carve out politically stratified counterparts by disproportionately providing political stimuli to certain individuals. They allow the orientation of the developed political capital towards elective office. Whilst the former tend towards the more general forms of participation and motivation, further selection and certification mechanisms emerge and function as political apprenticeships. The latter channel (and legitimise) existing political ambitions and institutionally ensure the flow of political talent and resources to fill elective office. This ultimately happens in the final stage of democratic elections.

Whilst some have criticised this model for being too deterministic in terms of sequences, exclusiveness and formalism (Barron, Crawley, and Wood, 1989) a more reformist interpretation (Norris 1997) leaves openness for divergent passages to power in stressing the dynamic interaction of candidates' supply and selectors' demand within divergent structures of opportunities while maintaining the underlying assumption of a gradual and funnel-like nature of the process.

Once recruited, the elected tend to develop a pattern of mobility in office often termed as a political career (Eulau et al. 1961). These careers evolve around two interrelated questions (Guérin and Kerrouche 2008). First, to what extent is the current mandate exclusive in terms of time and dedication (focus)? Second, from which perspective is the current mandate perceived in terms of duration and outlook (scope)?

#### *2.4 Layman and professional: two ideal-types of recruitment and career development*

Where the above has focused on the dimensions that are considered important in studying recruitment and career development, two ideal-types might help us to understand the nature and the form these dimensions may take in practice. As the latter can be highly varied and manifold, such ideal-types might help us to develop a framework for inquiry and conceptually organise our findings. Each ideal-type is characterised by a principle underlying recruitment and career development expressed in subsequent types of processes and practices that in combination lead to councillors as being conceived either as laymen or professionals.

By their very nature as ideal-type they will seldom be found in their purest form in the real world. In practice, councillors will most probably display characteristics of both types and will tend only to a limited, not always sequential and/or cumulative extent towards the one or the other. The types should thus be understood as poles on a continuum. We will argue below however, that a shift towards one of the ideal types might occur as a result of changes in the structure of opportunities for councillor recruitment and career development. Finally, such an analysis of course starts from the individual perspective and ignores the potential of differentiated patterns of recruitment and career development within the same council. These types offer critical frames of reference however, bearing in mind the consideration of the mandate of councillor as the base office in almost any local democracy.

The classic notion of the councillor is that of the layman or amateur-politician and it is one of the constituting elements in the genealogy of almost any type of local government (Mouritzen and Svvara 2002). This notion is based

on the principle of political equality: notwithstanding some formal criteria of eligibility, any fellow-citizen should be able to come forward as a candidate for political office. As such, emphasis is on the representative (and a specific form of the legislative) role of the councillor. Moreover, representation should be of an inclusive character (it should voice all relevant groups and/or interests in a society, i.e. the idea of a microcosm) and the recruitment process (including the subsequent career) is open. Politics should not be a separate sphere of society as moving in and out of the council chamber is relatively easy from almost any subfield of society (permeable). The council thus largely mirrors the locality it is to govern.

An alternative type is much more exclusive as it conceives politics as a profession, i.e. a pattern of conduct with area-specific standards and routines (Cotta and Best 2000). Chances for recruitment and career development are not equally distributed as individuals need to dispose of a pre-structured and specific set of characteristics to proceed to an elective office. Recruitment and career development are much more closed and funnel-like with fewer successful candidates in subsequent phases. Here, legislating does not so much centre around bringing different voices into the authoritative distribution of values. Rather it is considered as a matter of expertise. The latter is also necessary to hold the executive to account. As such and to a certain extent, representation gives way to responsiveness (Rao 2000).

With these principles and processes also come practices. In terms of the social base that underpins recruitment, laymen tend toward the resemblance model of representation. As the intention is to (proportionally) mirror the varied interests and groups that comprise society, councillors' social backgrounds should be a cross-section of the latter. Recruitment thus produces microcosmic representation driven by the politics of presence (Philips 1995). By contrast, in the professional type of councillor recruitment the social base is much more selective and isomorphic. Groups that dispose of characteristics that are facilitative for political recruitment are overrepresented among elected officials e.g. men, middle-aged, university educated people from the public sector or the so-called talking and brokerage professions (e.g. lawyer, teacher, business manager) and those with local roots (Budge and Farlie 1975; Eliassen and Pedersen 1978).

For laymen, socialisation and activation towards politics are more a matter of adult life experiences (e.g. as a result of involvement in associational life). The inculcation of political information, values and practices and the direction of one's own interest towards politics are not highly influenced or pre-structured by coming from a political family or the early life experiences of the future recruit (Prewitt 1965; Van Liefferinge and Steyvers 2008). Hence, the ideal-typical layman will often refer to their own candidacy for office in terms of a civic

duty and/or a specific issue for the constituency s/he is standing for. Professionals will tend to rationalise their candidacy in terms of party duty, ideological program and/or career motivations (Gordon 1979; Meadowcroft 2001).

Professionals also tend to follow a core route of apprenticeship into political functions that combine longstanding (governing) experiences in political parties with a previous career of other (manifest) elective mandates. For them political parties are an important apprenticeship and selection agent in terms of socialisation, visibility and filtering out candidates (Seligman 1961). As such parties comprise the politicised core of organized community life (Bochel and Denver 1983; Rallings et al. 2010). And although a position in the local council is often considered as a base office, the professional tends to have collected (previous) elective experience in other levels and mandates as well (hence using their political experience to claim a council mandate). Laymen on the other hand tend to be neophytes in politics who did not acquire experience in office beforehand. They go through apprenticeships in the functional equivalent of the professionals' political cocooning, i.e. local group life and/or non-partisan organised community life. From these apprenticeships it is no surprise that while laymen are likely to receive support from civil society (groups), professionals draw more on partisan actors for promotion. Consequently, laymen are also more likely to be elected on local lists (or as an independent) while their professional counterparts come from local branches of national political parties.

Once elected, laymen and professionals also develop different attitudes and patterns of conduct towards office. First of all in terms of focus, for laymen, taking-up office is a leisure-time activity usually combined with another (non-political) profession and as their sole political mandate. As the label suggests, professionals tend more towards the vocational conception of elected office which is taken up part-time (and often in combination with a political profession or one that at least is highly compatible with it) or even full-time (Black 1970; Guérin and Kerrouche 2008).

Secondly, career scopes also differ. Following Schlesinger's typology (1966) laymen tend towards discrete ambitions in not primarily and actively seeking re-election. As a result turnover in the legislature is high. Professionals alternatively try to develop professional continuity (static ambitions) or upward professional mobility (progressive ambitions) within the political realm. As a result, stability in office-holding characterises the legislature and/or dynamism is structured by the optimum occupation of the office under study for functioning as a stepping stone to a higher spot on the political ladder (manifest office).

### 2.5 *A shifting structure of opportunities? Between professionalisation and democratisation*

While empirical research should reveal the extent to which councillor recruitment and career development correspond with either the layman or professional model, we suggest that recent shifts in the structure of opportunities councillors ought to function in have provoked the growing importance of the latter ideal-type. Where such shifts in local government undoubtedly are manifold, two deserve special attention in terms of recruitment and careers.

The first would be the regime of multilevel governance in which contemporary European local governments are to function (Denters and Rose 2005). Vertically, this regime implies mutual dependencies between multiplying layers of government ultimately stemming from the alleged hollowing-out of the nation state. Evaporating state power condenses either on higher, often supranational levels like the EU. Alternatively, regionalisation and decentralisation both give rise to a meso-level of government as in the emergence of forms of new regionalism, including attempts to establish metropolitan or city regional governance. Horizontally, policy-making is opened up to the inclusion of non-state actors blurring the distinction between the public and the private sector (John 2001). This includes the quango-like autonomous (municipal) bodies, integrating the broad private sector in the (co-)production and/or -distribution of public services and/or alternative, narrow, ad hoc and more demanding forms of citizen participation. These macro evolutions might call for councillors that have more expertise by means of social background, (quasi-)governmental apprenticeships, full-time dedication to politics and/or careers within the political realm.

The second set of shifts would be those at the meso-level referring to the institutional and electoral context of local government. In relation to governance, it is often assumed that executive leadership is strengthened which provokes realignment of the council as a body of strategic direction and scrutiny, hence corresponding more to the responsive type (Steyvers et al. 2008). But also partisan-electoral shifts occur. Professional-electoral machines political parties tend to monopolise elections even at the local level (Copus 2004). At the same time, classic societal and programmatic functions of parties (the party on the ground) lost relevance to the advantage of the party in public and central office (Katz and Mair 1995). This might produce a recruitment and career development process that are much more self-referential and auto-reproductive, i.e. emphasising socialisation, activation and apprenticeship within the ranks of parties and public office. A subsequent electoral professionalisation both on the level of candidates and their parties might come on the other hand from factors such as media dominance, personalisation of politics and voter volatility.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that two important trends situated in the social base of councillor recruitment seem to contradict the growing predominance of professionalisation in its excluding conception. Both are based on the resemblance model of microcosmic representation. The first has a more longstanding tradition and/or is more actively pursued. It refers to the inclusion of women in elective office (either by gender quota or other measures – see Rao 2005). The second is more recent and/or efforts are often more passive. It refers to gradually giving up nationality as a precondition for eligibility. For instance in some countries, citizens from the EU (or even beyond) are allowed to stand for local office. Furthermore considering the vast mobility and migration of modern citizens, we might expect the number of local councillors with foreign roots to be mounting as well. These trends make us to expect a model of recruitment that in these terms is more open and equal (towards the layman model).

The next section proceeds with the empirical analysis of political recruitment and career in European local governance. Given the hypothesised emergence of professionalisation as the prevailing trend in recruitment and career, we take the professional ideal-type as the analytical point of reference in each phase.

## 2.6 *The social base of councillor recruitment*

Starting from our data, we analyse the social base of councillor recruitment on the basis of gender, age, education, profession, ethnicity and local roots in 16 countries. Over and above the general profile of the social base of councillor recruitment, we will look at country differences and particular outliers.

To be a man or not to be a man: that's our first question. As can be seen from table 2.2 the answer is quite simple. On average 70.7% of the local councillors in Europe are men. In Poland, Greece, Italy and Israel this figure is even higher than 80%. Women have more representatives in France and Sweden with respectively 'only' 54.6% and 57.1% of the councillor population consisting of men. The gender imbalance is an old wound on the political scene, and evidently still is. (Local) politics still is a male-dominated activity.

Our second variable is councillors' starting age.<sup>2</sup> Table 2.2 provides a clear picture of the average age of the councillor at the moment he/she started his/her first mandate as a councillor.

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2 The two original questions were 'How old are you?' (variable 1) and 'For how many years have you been councillor in total?' (variable 2). To have an idea of the age of the councillor at the beginning of his first mandate we subtracted variable 2 from variable 1. This calculation may not be completely accurate in all cases. Nevertheless, we only had this possibility to know more or less the age at the moment respondents became councillor, and it will give a good indication of their age at the start of their first mandate.



Table 2.2: The social base of councillor recruitment

Background	Country																
	AUS	BEL	CRO	CR	FRA	GER	GRE	ISR	ITA	NET	NOR	POL	SPA	SWE	SWI	UK	X(s)
<b>Gender</b>																	
Male	74.4	72.3	74.1	75.6	54.6	78.3	83.3	87.0	86.2	73.3	61.5	80.9	66.7	57.1	68.8	73.6	70.7
<b>Starting age</b>																	
Mean age	39.8 (9.0)	39.6 (11.0)	44.6 (11.6)	43.9 (9.8)	46.7 (11.2)	42.4 (10.4)	41.1 (8.5)	46.7 (9.7)	41.6 (11.4)	45.6 (10.1)	42.6 (11.7)	44.2 (10.8)	38.6 (9.8)	44.0 (11.4)	41.1 (10.9)	48.8 (11.9)	43.1 (11.1)
<b>Education</b>																	
University	30.5	67.8	58.3	69.0	71.8	54.0	65.1	84.4	48.9	66.7	65.5	66.0	77.0	47.1	58.7	72.2	60.6
<b>Profession</b>																	
Politician	0.3	3.2	1.7	2.3	1.0	0.3	0.4	4.1	0.8	0.9	0.8	1.9	2.9	1.4	0	0.6	1.1
Civil servant	19.1	11.9	9.0	5.7	19.2	19.1	29.1	12.2	11.8	18.5	20.5	11.0	19.6	15.9	19.6	13.4	16.5
Business mgr.	6.9	5.7	9.6	9.9	8.7	11.0	2.2	20.4	6.6	13.7	13.9	10.4	8.0	8.0	11.1	26.2	10.8
Teacher	8.6	13.5	13.6	18.3	12.2	3.7	12.1	8.2	9.7	11.2	11.6	21.4	14.7	8.5	10.1	13.2	11.2
Liberal prof.	5.8	7.3	5.6	13.0	7.0	16.3	23.3	12.2	19.2	6.0	5.1	5.2	12.0	8.8	7.8	11.6	10.0
Total	40.7	41.6	39.5	49.2	48.1	50.4	67.1	57.1	48.1	50.3	51.9	49.9	57.2	42.6	48.6	65.0	49.6
<b>Ethnicity</b>																	
National	85.3	91.8	85.3	89.4	82.6	93.4	94.5	9.9	96.8	92.0	92.7	93.5	97.0	86.3	78.5	87.1	88.1
<b>Local roots</b>																	
Years lived	28.8 (14.4)	30.2 (13.8)	37.6 (12.8)	32.2 (14.0)	21.8 (15.2)	27.6 (14.7)	30.6 (13.9)	26.8 (16.0)	30.3 (16.3)	24.5 (15.5)	25.8 (15.2)	34.0 (14.0)	26.7 (13.1)	23.9 (15.1)	22.0 (14.3)	23.9 (17.1)	26.4 (15.4)

We can see that this average age is 43.1 years. Moreover, we find that the average age is lowest in Spain (38.6), Belgium (39.6) and Austria (39.8) and highest in the United Kingdom (48.8), France (46.7), Israel (46.7) and the Netherlands (45.6). Including standard deviations confirms the middle-aged profile of this group.

Thus, our analysis hitherto confirms two classic stereotypes: women are far less present among local councillors and middle-aged people predominate. We now examine the (highest completed) educational level of councillors and the relationship between certain professions and a political mandate as councillor.

What is your highest completed level of education? As can be seen in table 2.2 it is obviously an advantage to have a university degree. 60.6% of the councillors had a university degree the moment they entered local politics. In some countries this is even more than 70% (France, United Kingdom and Spain) or 80% (Israel). The lowest figure is found in Austria (30.5%) - but also Sweden (47.1%) and Italy (48.9%) score below average.

Looking at the answers in the different countries to the question 'to which occupational category did you belong before your first mandate as a councillor', table 2.2 reveals many differences between the 5 categories which represent the typical talking or brokerage professions.

Our data show that 1.1% of our respondents were professional politicians (or the like, e.g. cabinet or party function) before their first mandate as a councillor. The highest number of such politicians is found in Israel (4.1%), Belgium (3.2%) and Spain (2.9%). For those councillors who were civil servants the average is 16.5% with the highest number in Greece (29.1%) and the lowest percentage in the Czech Republic (5.7%). The average across countries for business managers is 10.8% with the highest numbers in the United Kingdom (26.2%) and Israel (20.4%) and the lowest numbers in Greece (2.2%) and Belgium (5.7%). For teachers, the average percentage is 11.2% with the highest numbers in Poland (21.4%) and the Czech Republic (18.3%) and the lowest percentage in Germany (3.7%). Finally for the liberal professions (e.g. lawyer, doctor) with an overall average of 10%, the figures of Greece (23.3%) and Italy (19.2) are quite remarkable.

So generally, around half of the European councillor population (49.6%) comes from one of the selective talking or brokerage professions discussed above.<sup>3</sup> In Greece (67.1%), the UK (65%), Spain (57.2%) and Israel (57.1%), this professional selectivity is considerably higher than on average. The route to

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3 The overall frequency distribution of the other (not talking/brokerage) professions in the questionnaire is: engineer (8.1%), clerk (11.9%), shopkeeper (4.1%), labourer (5.5%), farmer/fisher (2.4%), student (5.1%), retired (1.6%), housewife/man (1.6%), other (10.1%).

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Egner, B.; Sweeting, D.; Klok, P.-J. (Eds.)

2013, X, 270 p. 37 illus., Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-658-01856-6