

MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE AND STRATEGIC PLANNING:

Supralocal governments influencing local circular economy adoption

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Cities have a key role to play in tackling climate change – here's why

EXPLAINERS

June 4, 2024

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STRATEGIC PLANNING

- Can improve performance of public sector organizations (George et al., 2019)
- Important to involve external stakeholders (George, 2017)
- SP literature has considered involvement of some external stakeholders (Vandersmissen & George, 2023):
 - Consultants
 - Clients
 - Donors

→ **Lack of research on involvement of other levels of governments in SP**

COVENANT OF MAYORS



- Gathers local governments committed to achieving European climate objectives
 - -40% greenhouse gas emissions by 2030
 - > 12.000 signatories
 - Requires the development of a Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan (SECAP) = local SP for climate change
 - > 200 'Covenant Territorial Coordinators': supralocal governments supporting local level
 - Stimulated smaller local governments to sign (Melica et al. 2018)
- **Lack of research considering supralocal governments (Melica et al. 2018)**

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

= *Reducing, reusing, recycling, and recovering materials in our economy (Kirchherr et al., 2017)*

- Priority in EU to become climate neutral (EC, 2019)
- Local governments key to implement (EC, 2020, Bellezoni et al., 2022)
- Local governments have started to adopt it (Bourdin & Jacquet, 2025)
- Requires systemic change from all stakeholders (all government levels) (Kirchherr et al., 2023)

→ **Lack of research on the multilevel governance context for adopting the CE**

MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE

- Governments across levels become more interconnected (e.g. European Union) (Marks, 1993)
- Also applied to other contexts and subnational level
- Can be used to study the actual making and implementation of public policy (Tortola, 2017)
- Multilevel governance framework by Homsy et al. (2019):
 1. Sanctioning and coordinating authority
 2. Framing co-benefits
 3. Provision of capacity
 4. Knowledge co-production
 5. Engagement of civil society

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

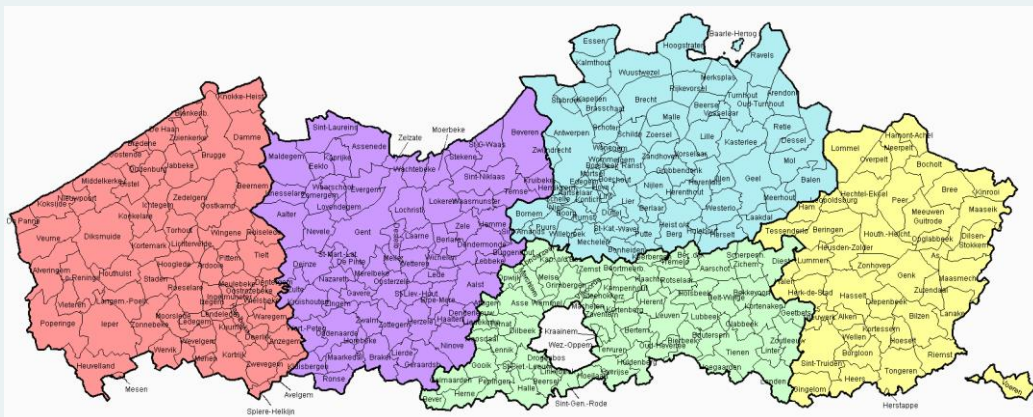
RQ 1: Do supralocal governments influence the adoption of the circular economy in local strategic planning for climate change?

RQ 2: If so, how do supralocal governments influence the local strategic planning?

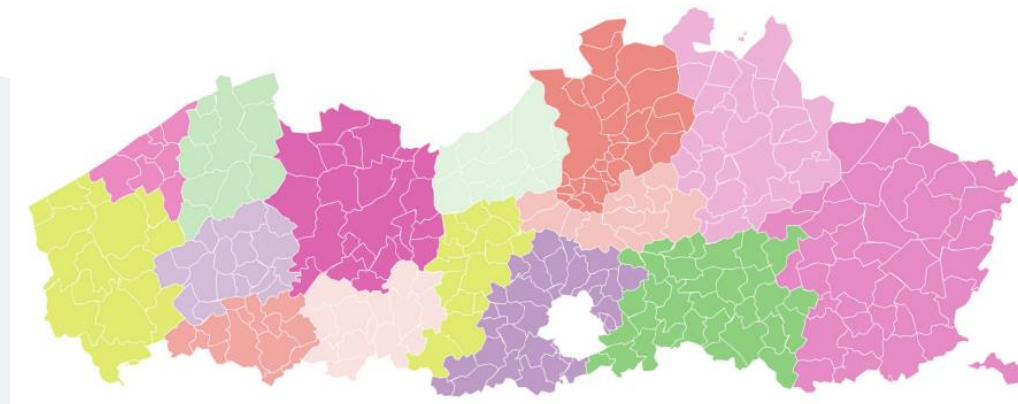
RESEARCH SETTING

- Flemish local governments
 - Flanders = northern, Dutch-speaking region of Belgium
 - 6.8 mln inhabitants
 - 285 municipalities

5 provinces



15 subregions



METHODOLOGY

1) Analysis of strategic plans

280/285 signed the covenant

262 strategic plans gathered (94%)

Average number of pages: 116

Published between 2017-2024

Searched for: “*circular economy*”* with NVivo

→ 3.231 references (in 85% of SECAPs)

→ Exported with narrow context

→ Frequency tables to determine similarities



METHODOLOGY

2) Interviews with involved supralocal governments

92% involved their supralocal governments

11 interviews with: (involved in 95% of the cases)

4 Provinces

7 Local Government Associations (LGAs)

→ Coding: Multilevel governance framework Homsy et al. (2019)



RESULTS

Table 1: supralocal governments involved

Province	LGA	Local governments supported	individual SECAPs	Shared SECAPs
Limburg	-	35	35	-
Antwerp	IGEMO	5	5	-
Antwerp	IGEAN	24	24	-
Antwerp	IOK	27	27	-
Flemish-Brabant	-	36	14	7
East-Flanders	Interwaas	11	-	1
East-Flanders	Solva	16	3	1
East-Flanders	/	26	26	-
-	WVI	36	8	4
-	Leiedal	13	-	1

RESULTS

Table 2: similarity analysis for each group of involved supralocal governments

Province	LGA	Total #refs.	Mean CE refs. (s.d.)	#Different refs.	#refs only used once	#refs. using top 25% most common refs
Limburg	-	428	12 (4)	34	16 (4%)	277 (65%)
Antwerp	IGEMO	62	12 (3)	30	15 (24%)	33 (53%)
Antwerp	IGEAN	266	11 (4)	75	59 (22%)	210 (79%)
Antwerp	IOK	127	5 (7)	40	27 (21%)	92 (72%)
Flemish-Brabant	-	871	24 (5)	89	43 (5%)	696 (80%)
East-Flanders	Interwaas	782	71 (1)	73	1 (1%)	198 (25%)
East-Flanders	Solva	19	1 (3)	16	13 (68%)	7 (37%)
East-Flanders	/	106	4 (3)	49	34 (32%)	66 (62%)
-	WVI	31	1 ()	12	5 (16%)	13 (42%)
-	Leiedal	22	2 (1)	2	0 (0%)	5,5 (25%)

RESULTS

5 ingredients of MLG (Homsey et al. 2019):

1. Sanctioning and coordinating government

- Principal: EU → determined structure
- Supervisor: supralocal governments → coordinated
- Agents: local governments

2. Framing of the co-benefits

- Supralocal governments convinced local governments to sign the covenant and adopt the CE

3. Provision of capacity

- Main reason for involvement of supralocal governments
- Supralocal governments: prepared context analysis, provided templates, facilitated process, wrote strategy, and support implementation

RESULTS

5 ingredients of MLG (Homsy et al. 2019):

4. **Knowledge co-production**

- Vertical: supralocal governments provided templates, guides, helped with reporting
- Horizontal: supralocal government facilitated learning networks and shared strategies

5. **Civil engagement**

- Facilitated by supralocal governments
- Often limited

CONCLUSIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS

Conclusions:

1. Supralocal governments did indeed influence the adoption of the CE in local SP
2. Supralocal governments influenced both the local SP content, process, and implementation

Contributions:

To theory: Influence of supralocal governments on local SP and importance of connecting SP and MLG literature

To research: usefulness of MLG as analytical tool to study SP

To practice:

- Shows how supralocal governments can support the adoption of the CE by local governments
- Understanding of the role of supralocal governments in local SP and providing local capacity
- Insights in how CE is used in climate action plans of Flemish local governments



Supralocal
governments

Local
Governments

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