

Regarding the three domains of research to which this paper aimed at contributing, our preliminary analyses indicate the following:

- Local coalition formation remains quite distinct to what is observed at the Belgian national level, as the number of majority situations (although decreasing) opens the door for the formation of single-party governments. However, interesting patterns were revealed amongst these majority situations in the two main regions: it is especially in Flanders that parties with a majority of seats invite other partners to join and therefore form oversized coalitions. The higher fragmentation of the Flemish party system and the necessity for the -usually dominant on the local scene- Christian-democrats to find relays with regional and national governments in which this party was excluded were pointed at as potential explanations. Notice also that for the first time an analysis of coalition formation at the local level evaluated the strength of the policy proximity factor. This revealed that in Wallonia in general local parties do end up in coalition with partners that are not those they perceive as closest to them in policy terms.

- The study of coalition formation at the local level allowed us to scrutinize factors that are not yet well (or not at all) considered in coalition theories, such as the frequency of pre-electoral talks and the strength of socio-psychological factors such as good personal relationships between leaders of different parties. As argued in this paper, where the process of coalition building is not formalized (like in Belgian local politics where formation is of a free-style type) and where there are no institutional instruments that allows for changes in government (nor anticipated elections) during the six-year mandate, parties have incentives to reduce uncertainty by engaging in pre-electoral bargaining. We have also argued that personal relationships may play a more important role at the local level than at higher levels of government because of the proximity and shared socialization of leaders of competing parties.

- Finally, this paper talks to the comparative study of local politics in general in its intention to gauge the effects of local party autonomy with regard to the formation of coalitions that respect the specificities of each commune's (local electoral trends, local issues on which competition is based, ideological position of local parties which may be quite different than the national one, etc.) democratic system. We also hypothesized that history (previous experiences in power) may take a greater role in contemporary coalition behavior because local party elites tend to stay at the helm for longer periods than national ones. Empirical analyses over the turnover of local party elites are therefore in order. So is research on local party internal democracy, which may also have a constraining effect in local parties' coalition strategies. In the present paper we probably did not rely on a valid indicator of intra-party democracy and therefore could not prove that it is indeed the case. Rather, our results may indicate that local parties that are well organized and less dependent on higher levels for the selection of candidates (are therefore more autonomous) tend to do better in coalition bargaining.