

Local politico-administrative relations revisited: reconnecting with a complex reality

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Abstract: This paper deals with politico-administrative relation on the local level, being the central focus of the author's PhD. The politico-administrative relation is at the heart of public administration itself and is a core process in any political organisation. The way this relation is structured has implications for every policy domain, and is important to both academics and practitioners. Despite the crucial importance of the topic and the absence of shared agreement in the literature, the attention in contemporary public administration research seems, surprisingly, to have somewhat diminished. Many evolutions have occurred since the main models in the literature were conceived. Over the past decades, the challenges facing local governments have grown significantly, especially so in urban environments. At the same time, local governments are increasingly seen as the solution to these problems.

The research question of this paper is: "What are the main gaps and challenges within the politico-administrative literature, for the study of contemporary local government?". The purpose of this paper is to revisit the theme of politico-administrative relations and provide a state of affairs, by presenting a critical literature review, using the snowball method. We will discuss the state of the literature, including its dominant models, as well as the most influential theories. Second, we will provide an overview of the evolutions in the way we look at and think about government, as this also impacts the way we regard politico-administrative relations.

Based on this analysis, we arrive at the main gaps and challenges in the literature for reconnecting with a complex reality. First, it will be important to take spatiotemporal and institutional context into account in future research, as well as connections to broader society and environment. In the literature, politico-administrative relations are often regarded as a purely internal phenomenon. Second, most of the dominant models are too static and normative to capture or approach reality. Models always represent a simplification of reality, however, empirical accounts should be able to relate to them. Third, we argue to take into account multiple actors, and recognise the existence of (policy) networks. The politico-administrative relation is ideally conceptualized as a multi-actor arrangement which involves different actors at both sides, with 'third parties' as a kind of actors that require additional attention. Fourth, sufficient attention should be paid to the specifications of local government, where the traditional role conceptions of local politicians are particularly challenged. Fifth, we put forward a future agenda for the research theme. Sixth, new and/or innovative methodological ways to approach the research theme are considered.

1. Local politico-administrative relations

Over the past decades, the challenges facing local governments have grown significantly, especially so in urban environments. These challenges include complex or “wicked” problems such as migration and integration, environmental issues and air quality, poverty and homelessness, urban planning and open space, or traffic and mobility. At the same time, local governments are increasingly seen as the solution to these problems, think of books such as *If mayors ruled the world?* by Benjamin Barber. Moreover, throughout the Western world, the local level of government enjoys the most confidence of citizens. How do local governments deal with these challenges? In this paper we set out to reconnect with the research topic of politico-administrative relations, using the snowball method as the technique for this review. The research question is: “What are the main gaps and challenges within the politico-administrative literature, for the study of contemporary local government?”. We will start this paper by discussing the state of the politico-administrative relations literature and its dominant models, as well as the most influential theories. Second, we will provide an overview of the evolutions in the way we look at and think about government, as this also impacts the way we regard politico-administrative relations. We will depart from classical public administration, and move forward through New Public Management and New Public Governance. Third, we aim to contribute to the literature by making up a state of affairs of the politico-administrative research theme discussing gaps, challenges, a future agenda and consider new and/or innovative methodological approaches.

Political-administrative relations became an issue once politicians and administrators came to be considered as distinct actors in the public realm and the emergence of public administration as an academic field of study in the late 1880s (Demir and Nyhan 2008, Lee and Raadschelders 2008, Demir 2009a, Overeem 2012, Jacobsen 2006, Svava 2006, Dasandi and Esteve 2017). Interaction between politicians and administrators is a core process in political organisations (Bækgaard 2011), it has been one of the most contestable topics in public administration for over a century, as widely shared agreement is missing in the literature (Demir 2009b, Denhardt and Baker 2018, Demir and Nyhan 2008, Demir 2009a). The politico-administrative relation is at the heart of public administration itself, and determines the division of work and the kind of relationship between elected officials and departments (Hondeghem and Steen 2013, Aubin and Brans 2018, Denhardt and Baker 2018). The topic continues to animate key debates today (Craft 2012, Demir and Nyhan 2008, Vancoppenolle, Noordegraaf and van der Steen 2011, Denhardt and Baker 2018), and is important to both academics and practitioners because it bears implications on the intellectual identity of the discipline as well as future development of public administration as a profession (Demir 2009a, Georgiou 2014, Dasandi and Esteve 2017). The discussion over whether public servants should be actively involved in the political process, whether they should advocate particular policies, and what standards their actions should be based on has been a source of controversy (Dasandi and Esteve 2017, Georgiou 2014, Sager and Rosser 2009). The quality of the policy making, the consistency between policy intent and the impact of policies when implemented, and the effectiveness, equity, and efficiency of the administrative process can all be affected by the nature of the interaction and relative influence of politicians and administrators (Svava 2006). Highlighting the importance of the relation between politics and administration, Waldo (Waldo 1987) wrote:

“Nothing is more central in thinking about public administration than the nature and interrelations of politics and administration. Nor are the nature and interrelations of politics and administration matters only for academic theorizing. What is more important in the day-today, year-to-year, decade-to-decade operation of government than the ways in which politics and administration are conceptualized, rationalized, and related one to the other”.

1.1. The origins: the politico-administrative dichotomy

One of the most important theoretical constructs in public administration is the politics-administration dichotomy. Politics and administration, in the dichotomy model, serve distinct purposes and should be

kept in each one's proper sphere (Demir and Nyhan 2008). Weber (Weber 1921) and Wilson (Wilson 1887) can be regarded as founding fathers of research on politico-administration, by creating the first modern conceptualisations of this relationship. Interestingly, Wilson and Weber use opposite motives, highlighting the tension and balancing between politics and administration. Weber argued that the political sphere is too weak to curb administrative power, and that it is the danger of *Beamtenherrschaft* (government by functionaries) that threatens government. Therefore, he insisted that it was essential that the administration stays out of politics (Weber 1921, Tahmasebi and Musavi 2011). Wilson, on the other hand, was concerned with both the corrupting and politicising interference of party organizations in administrative affairs. Therefore, he intended to shield the administration from political interference (Tahmasebi and Musavi 2011, Wilson 1887, Denhardt and Baker 2018). Both of them concluded with similar principles of bureaucracy and effective government.

Despite serious critiques, neither the theoretical utility nor the normative power of the dichotomy has totally disappeared over the past decades (Overeem 2006). Many public administration scholars use the concept of dichotomy as a foil to make clear the distinct features of their proposed alternative models. In fact, various conceptualizations have been positioned against the dichotomy in hopes of clarifying the "proposed alternative" or its unique contribution by drawing attention to the contrasts with the dichotomy (Demir 2009a). The New Public Management model (NPM), based on the dichotomy with roles ascribed to both spheres, is the most prominent example of the continuing influence.

However, there is little doubt that dichotomy has been thoroughly weakened and the search for alternative models that better capture the complex and differentiated interaction patterns of the two sets of actors has been ongoing for some time (Craft 2012, Demir 2009a). Scholars increasingly argued that the politics-administration dichotomy did not reflect the emerging reality of increasing civil service discretion and influence (Svara 1985, Svara 2001, Lee and Raadschelders 2008, Demir 2009b, Demir and Nyhan 2008, Demir 2009a). Vast amounts of empirical research have provided unequivocal evidence against the dichotomy view (Demir and Nyhan 2008, Demir and Reddick 2012, Carboni 2010, Svara 2006, Svara 2001). The notion of a clear separation of politics and administration is said to be a myth when analysing and conceptualizing the relationship between top civil servants and politicians (Grøn and Salomonsen 2019, Svara 2001), it lacks descriptive accuracy and entails particular normative inclinations (Demir 2009b). It was discredited as a theory for being "unfounded," "political metaphysics", "naive at best," "false," and more recently, "dead" (Demir and Nyhan 2008). Interestingly the same phenomenon or analysis - the rejection of the dichotomy - has led to different conclusions among administrative scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, the dichotomy was rejected in favour of a reinforcement of the legislature and the judiciary as well as a more representative administration to preserve the plurality of interests of American society. In contrast, the French rejection was aimed toward strengthening the executive and the administrative elite as guardians of the general interest. Ideas and values about public administration change according to different spatiotemporal contexts, highlighting the importance of context (Rosser and Mavrot 2017).

1.2. Past the dichotomy: the main models and theories

Roughly starting from the research of Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman (1981) a proliferation of politico-administrative models and typologies occurred. Many scholars and practitioners emphasised a more collaborative mode of policy making that accepts shared roles and reciprocal influence between elected officials and professional administrators (Demir and Reddick 2012, Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman 1981, Svara 1985, Jacobsen 2006). Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman (1981) described the gradual convergence between politicians' and administrators' roles as "*the bureaucratization of politics and the politicisation of bureaucracy*" (Aberbach et al. 1981, Hennau and Ackaert 2015). The goal of building conceptually sound, empirically verifiable, and normatively desirable models has engaged many scholars in an effort to explain the role of public administration in the policy process of a democratic government (Demir 2009b). The influential models on politico-administrative studies of this period continue to dominate the literature to this day, as well as influential theories that have enriched our view

on politico-administrative relations. We will discuss Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman's study; Lipsky's street-level bureaucrats; the typology of Peters; principal-agent theory; the complementarity model of Svava; and Hood's Public Service Bargains. Next we will discuss the evolutions of the way we think about government, starting with classic public administration, and followed by the paradigms New Public Management and New Public Governance. Of course, as these are all well-established models, theories and paradigms, it goes beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these in detail. We will limit ourselves to the essential characteristics, with focus on the aspects we retain for our further analysis.

Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman's study

The study of Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman (APR) (1981) was a milestone for the politico-administrative literature and roughly the start of a period of intensive research on the topic. The authors conducted research on a role-theoretical basis (Peters and Pierre 2008), this kind of research usually combines the (self) analysis of what civil servants and politicians contribute to the policy process, with a description of their opinions and socio-demographic characteristics. The APR study was the first to use survey methods and to advance empirically based theory (Lee and Raadschelders 2008), while also making use of interviews. The APR study certainly helped in defining this as a research topic in its own right and has had a large impact in terms of substantive focus and methodology (Lee and Raadschelders 2008).

Four images are outlined in the study, based on who does what in designing public policy. The authors assumed Image I and II as more descriptive of bureaucrats at lower levels, while considering Image III and IV as more illustrative of the higher levels. Interpreting their findings in light of the four images, the authors concluded that the civil servants' role had evolved from Image I to II and even III. They carefully voiced the potential for advancing toward Image IV (Aberbach et al. 1981, Lee and Raadschelders 2008). Moreover, they found that politicians only saw a certain role for civil servants and that politicians use a different framework in their policy work than civil servants. Politicians use an ideological framework, think more in distributive terms and in terms of conflicting interests and are more "forward looking". Civil servants are more concerned about whether something can be done and are working on more practical issues (Aberbach et al. 1981, Lee and Raadschelders 2008). Regarding the role of civil servants in policymaking, the authors found that bureaucrats were heavily involved in mediating and reconciling interests. In terms of interactions between politicians and bureaucrats, they distinguished three types: cabinet bureaucrats insulated from politics (the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Sweden), relatively frequent contacts (Germany and Italy), and interdependency (the United States) (Lee and Raadschelders 2008, Aberbach et al. 1981). U.S. civil servants played more political roles as advocates, policy entrepreneurs, and even partisans than their European colleagues, while American political officeholders were more active technicians than their European counterparts (Aberbach et al. 1981, Lee and Raadschelders 2008). This highlights the importance of taking spatiotemporal contexts into account. Indeed, it is important to understand the role of legacies, path dependency and mechanisms of emergence of new politico-administrative balances (Sootla, Peters and Connaughton 2006).

In a recent study by Baekgaard, Blom-Hansen and Serritzlew, conducted in multiple countries, 6 images of political-bureaucratic relations were created: Outsiders, the Skeptics, the Fatalists, the Unconcerned, the Insiders, and the Mainstreamers. The results suggest that politico-administrative relations vary more between and within political systems than studies such as APR suggest (Baekgaard, Blom-Hansen and Serritzlew 2020). The variation between political systems (e.g. executive board vs. sector-based model) includes different interaction patterns, indicating that institutional design matters (Bækgaard 2011)

What do we retain for our analysis? 1) The existence of cross country differences and importance of spatiotemporal contexts for politico-administrative relations on the national level; 2) Recent research adds variation within political systems on the local level, and the importance of institutional design; 3) Civil servants are involved in various ways and degrees in policy making

Lipsky's street-level bureaucrats

The theory of street-level bureaucrats, which appeared around the same time as the APR study, is not explicitly designed for politico-administrative relations, however, it has a profound impact. In the dichotomy, public administration is treated as a world on its own with values, rules and methods. The basic assumption is that “politics and administration work best as independent variables, capable of being improved in isolation without endangering or interfering with the other side” (Demir 2009a). This idea of separation has been challenged by authors emphasising extensive administrative involvement in all phases of the policy-making process. The polar extreme of the dichotomy, labelled “the political school”, finds separation neither possible nor desirable to achieve. Its proponents find that public administration is inherently political at both national and local levels, public administration plays a central role in the governance process. Lipsky argues in his classic book *Street-Level Bureaucracy*, that even street-level bureaucrats make policy when they implement it (Lipsky 1980). Public administrators should thus not confine their decisions and actions to mere implementation of policies (Demir 2009a). Lipsky showed how service workers find themselves amidst complex and contradictory demands and how they develop certain coping mechanisms (Colebatch, Hoppe and Noordegraaf 2010), they possess certain discretionary space (Tummers and Bekkers 2014). Lipsky’s study does not focus on policy formulation, but shows that choices are being made even at the implementation phase. Moreover, politicians are by no means the only point of contact for citizens, the administration has its own ties, especially on the local level.

Lipsky has shown that street-level bureaucrats influence policy in their own right. But of course, often several levels exist between the top management and the street level bureaucrat. A wide range of evidence shows that these levels all have the potential to influence policy making. Siegel (2020) points out that the informal (city) organisation is more complex, in that it recognises that real power is not distributed as neatly as the organisation chart would suggest (Siegel 2020). Van Dorp et al. (2018) conclude that local leadership does not have to be looked for exclusively within the formal leadership of a municipality. Not only the mayor, aldermen or CAO can show leadership, but also a determined middle manager, an enterprising leader of a social organization or even an enthusiastic citizen who knows how to organise support for certain plans in the neighbourhood. Local leadership is not vested in one person, it is distributed (van Dorp et al. 2018).

What do we retain for our analysis? 1) Not only top administrators are able to use influence or power, on all levels of government; 2) Recognition of complexity of the administrative sphere, including discretionary space and a connection to broader society; 3) The importance of the implementation phase of policies

The typology of Peters

Typologies of political-administrative relations allow for variation and potential reversal of traditional hierarchy between politics & administration (Craft 2012, Overeem 2012). Peters’ typology is one of the first and most known, based on multiple dimensions typically consisting of (a)symmetries of power, hierarchy, and distance/closeness or fusion/separation between politics and administration. Five different ideal models are outlined, based on modalities of the relationship: the formal/legal model; village life; functional village life; the adversarial model; and the administrative state (Peters 1987, Schreurs et al. 2011). These models are defined on the basis of five characteristics: the tone of interaction; the dominant partner; the mechanisms of conflict resolution; the style of the interaction; and impact on policy. Peters’ models mainly point to cross-national variation in relational distance between politicians and bureaucrats (Bach and Wegrich 2020).

The typology does not focus on role variations in the context of policy making, but is related to the ingrained balance of power between administrative and political elites. Peters’ typology is thus based on a structural relationship, which concentrates on the impact of structure and systemic variables on the patterns of interaction and power relations between politicians and civil servants (Peters and Pierre 2008). These system characteristics are not linked to a concrete policy process and will therefore not

change as quickly according to the context. This can be criticised as being simplistic and, due to a lack of concrete measurement instruments, to a large extent based on the intuition of the researcher. Therefore typologies like these often seem static and/or prosaic, missing depth and a systematic way of describing a model (Vallet and De Rynck 2006). These models in general describe ideal, extreme and unrealistic situations (Schreurs et al. 2011). More recent research has shown that interaction patterns may change over time (Jacobsen 2006).

What do we retain for our analysis? 1) The relation between politics and administration is multi-dimensional; 2) Structure and systemic characteristics influence interaction and power relations; 3) However, recent research has shown politico-administrative relations are dynamic and not set in stone

Principal-agent theory

Just like the theory of street-level bureaucrats, principal-agent theory was not developed explicitly for studying politico-administrative relations, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of the research theme. In essence, the principal-agent relationship, a special application of rational choice theory, is “governed by a contract specifying what the agent should do and what principal must do in return” (Waterman and Meier 1998, HaruṭĂ, Radu and Liviu 2009). The model assumes that an individual will always choose the most advantageous alternative for him or her and make choices aimed at maximizing his/her own use. The agents can be motivated by the public interest, or by their own narrow self-interests. Besides that, the agents enjoy an advantage over their political principals, as bureaucrats are assumed to have an informational and technical advantage over the politicians (HaruṭĂ et al. 2009, Waterman and Meier 1998, Niskanen 1971). For this reason, the model assumes that the political principals would have to monitor their agents in order to ensure the political control (HaruṭĂ et al. 2009). The politicians’ legitimacy rests in the power given to them by the citizens to make decisions on their behalf. However, the principal-agent model also leaves space to the politicians to pursue their self-interest in a way that can harm the public welfare, a situation described in the literature as the “political moral hazard” (HaruṭĂ et al. 2009, Knott and Miller 2008). The characteristics of and dynamic within the political sphere should be taken into account as well. This puts the unidirectional perspective of the principal-agent framework, which is limited to exploring ways to control the runaway agent – an assumption that has been challenged on both empirical and theoretical grounds, under pressure (Bach and Wegrich 2020, Pierre and Peters 2017).

Moreover, the principal-agent model tends to ignore the possible role of other non-hierarchical actors such as interest groups, the media and the public. Therefore, it regards the political-administrative relation bi-dimensional, ignoring the complexity of decision-making processes (HaruṭĂ et al. 2009). An additional confounding factor for the principal-agent view of the policy process is that there are more layers and connections between principals and agents, not just one relationship that can be singled out. Variables such as time and the degree of ‘habituation’ by actors to new roles and relationships bring into play historical, social and political dimensions that economic theories of delegation and principal-agent interaction exclude (Bach, Niklasson and Painter 2012)

What do we retain for our analysis? 1) Politico-administrative relations can also be studied on the micro-level, 1-on-1 basis; 2) However, such a bi-dimensional approach is a narrow view, which excludes multiple actors, factors and interconnectedness; 3) In particular the characteristics and dynamic within the political sphere should be included in the analysis; 4) Without taking historical, social and political dimensions into account, an incomplete view is created.

Svara’s model of complementarity

Svara’s complementarity model deserves special attention, having been developed for the local level, with its emphasises on ongoing interaction, shared responsibilities, and reciprocal influence (Demir and Reddick 2012, Svara 2001). Even its critics acknowledge that the model has emerged as the strongest alternative to dichotomistic approaches and has proven its utility for empirical studies of elites (Carboni 2010, Craft 2012, ‘t Hart 2002). The complementarity perspective is based on Svara’s dichotomy-duality

model, originating in the mid-1980s (Georgiou 2014, Carboni 2010, Svava 1985, Svava 2001). In the dichotomy-duality model, Svava outlines that responsibility for the extreme functions is largely dichotomized, meaning that mission is a predominant responsibility for the political executives while the leverage of the administration is greatest in the management functions. Yet in the policy and administration spheres, the activities are to a greater extent shared between political executives and civil servants (Svava 1985, Schreurs et al. 2011).

The complementarity model is one of reconciliation, meaning that he rejects the dichotomy and seeks to replace it by other relational concepts that are less antithetical (Craft 2012, Overeem 2012). This model understands the politico-administrative relations as consisting of both overlapping and separate activities and values (Demir & Nyhan, 2008; Demir, 2009; Svava, 1999, 2001, 2006a, 2006b). Svava observed that a strict separation of the two spheres was unproductive and that elected officials and administrators complement each other. The base for this typology is on the one hand administrative independency and on the other hand political control, both can be either low or high. As a consequence there are four possible outcomes of politico-administrative interactions. A situation of political dominance is present if simultaneously administrative independency is low, because of the close watch of the political executive on the administration and the strict instructions they offer, while obviously political control is high. The opposite is a situation of bureaucratic autonomy in which low political control and high administrative independence is present. Next, a situation of low political control and low bureaucratic independency is called the 'laissez-faire' or 'political impasse'. Lastly the situation of politico-administrative complementarity is present when both political control and administrative independence are high. It is a situation in which both political executives and civil servants are dominant because they have mutual respect: political executives have respect for the expertise and knowledge of the top civil servants and these civil servants in return have respect for political priorities and they are loyal (Svava 2001, Schreurs et al. 2011). Complementarity is based on the premise that elected officials and administrators join together in the common pursuit of sound governance (Svava 2001, Lee and Raadschelders 2008, Svava 1999), allowing significant administrative involvement in the policy-making process. In the opposite direction, elected officials should take part in a variety of administrative tasks that provide guidance to administrators, including policy implementation, administrative goal setting, and performance evaluation and improvement (Demir 2009b, Svava 2001, Demir and Reddick 2012). The local level might be unique and different than other levels of government, characterised by a very reciprocal influence between politics and administration (Svava 2006, Mouritzen and Svava 2002). Moreover, further research has shown that significant variation in politico-administrative relations may occur within one country, according to the local context (French 2005, Jacobsen 2006).

What do we retain for our analysis? 1) The relation between politics and administration includes overlapping activities and values and, moreover, these are dynamic; 2) In the ideal-type these activities and values complement each other, doing so it rejects the dichotomy; 3) Significant administrative involvement in policy making is desirable, as well as some political involvement in certain administrative tasks; 4) The local level is potentially very different than other levels, and significant variation can occur, even within one country.

Public Service Bargains

The 'public service bargain' (PSB) approach can be regarded as the most recent influential model of politico-administrative relations, it attempts to capture the complexity of the relation. Hood and Lodge describe politico-administrative relationships as implicit or explicit bargains or arrangements in which politicians gain some degree of loyalty and competency from civil servants, and civil servants gain a place in the government structure, responsibility and rewards (Hondegheem and Steen 2013, Hood and Lodge 2006). The PSB perspective is an important departure from the unidirectional perspective of the principal-agent framework (Bach and Wegrich 2020). The relationship between civil servants and politicians, arranged as a bargain, tends to follow a pattern of expectations on one side, and of roles performed, on the other. The expectations, an interpretation of civil society requests, come from the

political system. Top civil servants link public service to the political system, and offer diverse contributions depending on their expected role and professional identity. There are three bargain dimensions: reward, competency, and loyalty/responsibility (Bourgault and Van Dorpe 2013). Hood and Lodge distinguish between two large groups of bargains: the trustee-bargain and the agency-bargain. In the trustee bargain, civil servants act separately and defend the public interest. They are independent of the political elite. In the agency bargain, civil servants are mainly the direct agents of politicians and they carry out what politicians want (Hood and Lodge 2006). PSB is useful in that it recognises dynamism in the relation, and accounts for traditions and reforms. Moreover, Hondeghem and Steen pointed out that any bargain between political and administrative actors is preferably to be conceptualized as a multi-actor arrangement which involves different actors at both sides (Hondeghem and Steen 2013). We would like to argue that this is a useful remark that can and should be applied to the wider range of politico-administrative relation research.

What do we retain for our analysis? 1) It is possible to capture a significant degree of dynamism of the politico-administrative relation, based on several dimensions, hereby taking into account complexity (including traditions and reforms); 2) The politico-administrative relation should ideally be thought of as a multi-actor arrangement, in both administration and politics.

1.3. Evolutions in the way we think about government

The origins: Classic Public Administration

In analysing the evolutions in the way we think about government within the public administration literature, we depart from classic public administration. This model is characterized as "an administration under the formal control of the political leadership, based on a strictly hierarchical model of bureaucracy, staffed by permanent, neutral and anonymous civil servants, motivated only by the public interest, serving and governing party equally, and not contributing to policy but merely administering those policies decided by the politicians". It was established to run a state in a stable and predictable way in a relatively static environment (Katsamunska 2012). Weber and Wilson can be regarded as two of the main founding fathers of the classic public administration. Weberian bureaucracy consists of a hierarchically structured, professional, rule-bound, impersonal, meritocratic, appointed, and disciplined body of public servants with a specific set of competencies. Weber distinguished between the political leaders and the public servants: whereas the politicians had to prove themselves in the legislative and the electoral process and fulfil their duties with an ethic of responsibility, the administrators had to perform their administrative tasks neutrally and follow their political masters to the point of self-denial. Explicitly, Weber stated that "the passionate struggle for power is the politician's element, whereas the bureaucrat should strive to execute legal orders dutifully, without anger and passion – 'sine ira et studio'" (Weber 1921, Sager and Rosser 2009). An important dimension to this classical model of the public administration was added by Woodrow Wilson, who introduced the politics-administration dichotomy. In Wilson's words public administration is "the detailed and systematic execution of public law" and he believes there should be a strict separation of politics from administration because administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics and administrative questions are not political questions (Katsamunska 2012). Wilson intended to install a scientific, professional, meritocratic, clear-cut, rule-based, and therefore trustworthy bureaucracy (Sager and Rosser 2009, Wilson 1887). The function of politics is, as Wilson put it, "setting the task for administration" (Demir 2009b, Wilson 1887). The function of public administration, on the other hand, is neutral policy implementation, or as Goodnow stated "execution of the state will" (Goodnow 1900, Demir 2009b).

New Public Management (NPM)

New public management (NPM) is a paradigm that has been a major focus of the debate in the public management literature since the seminal contribution of Hood (Hood 1991, Hood 1995, Funck and Karlsson 2020). The NPM-inspired political-administrative model bears formal resemblance to the classical dichotomous model of political-administrative relations (Hennau and Ackaert 2015, Svava

2006), which Overeem classifies as a quasi-alternative to it (Overeem 2012). NPM tries to conceptualise the politico-administrative relationship, using the whole political system as the unit of analysis (Demir 2009a), with the literature largely dominated by an Anglo-Saxon perspective (Funck and Karlsson 2020). At the heart is a more economic approach to public administration, the idea is that the government must be organized in accordance with the market model and economic incentives must be built in to make the government function better. The basic values of New Public Management are summarized under the three Es: Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness. From the literature, it appears that NPM in practice has the capacity to change and confound neat descriptions, but from a practical perspective the intentions and justifications of the NPM reforms contain a certain ambiguity (Funck and Karlsson 2020). Inspired by the NPM-doctrines, a stricter separation between politics and administration on the local level has been pursued in countries as Italy, Germany, Finland, Sweden and Norway (Hennau and Ackaert 2015), while reforms were implemented at the supranational and of course national level as well (Klenk and Reiter 2019). The outcome or results of these reforms are however ambiguous and difficult to measure (Funck and Karlsson 2020, Hood and Dixon 2015, Hood and Dixon 2016, Pollitt and Dan 2011).

NPM is also connected to specialisation and the proliferation of agencies, or “agencification”, creating challenges for (interdepartmental) coordination (Hansen, Steen and Jong 2013). Formally, the main task of these agencies is usually some form of policy implementation (Bach et al. 2012, Verhoest et al. 2016). However, de facto bureaucratically autonomous agencies are able to sustain preferred policies through their administrative actions; they are capable of designing new policies according to their own preferences; they may fight for those policies in the public realm; and their actions may change the policy preferences of their “principals”, potentially with the result of new authoritative policy enactments (Bach et al. 2012).

What do we retain for our analysis? 1) Following the NPM paradigm market and private sector principles were introduced to varying degrees, at all levels of government; 2) NPM led to some unintended consequences such as “agencification”

New public Governance (NPG)

Whereas NPM still had some resemblance to the dichotomous model, concepts such as ‘governance’ reject the practical and conceptual distinction of a dichotomy and deconstruct such distinctions, seeking to fuse politics and administration (Craft 2012, Overeem 2012). The governance perspective shifts the focus from what happens within one administration to the interaction between multiple public and private actors (Craft 2012). These more or less new forms of governing evolve around participatory and networked processes based on interdependency, collaboration, and trust, and they focus on improving processes and outcomes in public policymaking and public service delivery in the light of increasing expectation and demands, and growing complexity and fragmentation (Torfing and Triantafillou 2013). The evolution towards networks is turning many theories of political-administrative relations upside down. After all, they are mainly made to understand the relationship within one administration or organisation. Doing so, the focus of local leaders went broadly from achieving organizational goals and delivering organizational performance, towards the focus of today's leaders aimed more on tackling social issues in a network context (van Dorp et al. 2018).

Some dysfunctions, partially as a result of New Public Management thinking, gradually became visible, such as fragmentation of the public sector. As with NPM, there seems to be no consistent theoretical or ideological framework supporting NPG. Yet we do find a cluster of principles, such as process and outcome focus, coordination, participation, and co-production, which are almost the inverse of those informing NPM. NPG entails an expansion of arenas for empowered participation, bringing together public and private actors in sustained interaction through which knowledge, resources, and ideas are exchanged and jointly owned new solutions are created (Torfing and Triantafillou 2013). The paradigm is based on a network approach and has a greater eye for inter-organisational issues (Osborne, Radnor and Nasi 2013), in a broad sense NPG regards the administrative system as imbedded in a larger political

system that constantly interacts with its external environment (Torfing and Triantafyllou 2013). NPG takes into account multi-level governance (collaboration with other levels of government) as well as multi-actor governance (collaboration with non-public actors) (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011). ‘Governance’ claims a broader, more inclusive approach than ‘government’ (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017). This implies that the relationship between government and other actors is shifting from a hierarchical relationship to a network relationship (Koppenjan, Koppenjan and Klijn 2004). Rigid organisational charts and job descriptions are being replaced by roles that emphasise social interaction (Siegel 2020).

Around the same time as NPG a phenomenon called ‘digital-era governance’ (DEG) also appeared, which is related to NPG in the sense that it also departs from the challenges of reintegration and needs-based holism. It is worth noting that DEG points towards the transformative power of IT and digitalisation as the solution (Dunleavy et al. 2006). More recently online processes, social media, cloud computing and apps development were added to these (Margetts and Dunleavy 2013).

What do we retain for our analysis? 1) NPG recognises networks and multi-actor settings, with a lot of attention for the external environment, including participation processes and the influence of other levels of government and non-public actors; 2) NPG is said to lead to a shift in focus, in the direction of tackling social issues and roles that emphasise social interaction; 3) NPG has attention for interdepartmental coordination and inter-organisational issues; 4) Digital era governance adds to this a focus on IT, digitalisation, and online processes (including social media)

2. A state of affairs: gaps, challenges, a future agenda and methodological considerations

In this paper, we set out to reconnect with the politico-administrative research theme, in light of the increasingly complex challenges contemporary local governments face. We have discussed the dominant models in the politico-administrative relations literature, along with theories and paradigms which significantly impact the way we regard the politico-administrative relation. Where does this leave us? In what follow we will discuss the main gaps and challenges in the literature, these should be taken into account in future research on politico-administrative relations. Furthermore a future agenda will be put forward, and new and/or innovative methodological approaches will be considered.

Firstly, it will be important to take spatiotemporal and institutional context into account in future research, as well as connections to broader society and environment. Politico-administrative relations do not operate in a void. In the literature, politico-administrative relations are often regarded as a purely internal phenomenon, as if a government exists disconnected from society. In this way the external relations of both the political and administrative spheres with the ‘outside world’, as well as contingency factors (Vallet and De Rynck 2006), are disregarded. Organisations or even citizens can influence the politico-administrative relationship, for example through participation processes. The main politico-administrative relations models are one or more decades old, which of course does not automatically make them less valuable, but in the meantime several evolutions in the political, social, and economic environments have occurred, making the governing of local communities very challenging. Depending on the specific context (including historical, social and political aspects) these evolutions can influence the politico-administrative relations in varying degrees. One might think of increasingly complex policy challenges for cities; attempts to approach these challenges in an integrated way; the introduction of task forces and more long term strategic planning; the growing presence of political advisers and strategic services; increasingly highly educated civil servants, with higher ambition than the traditional civil servant; increasingly assertive citizens and attention for citizen participation; increased party political competition, polarisation and voter volatility; mediatisation and the influence of social media; personification and/or presidentialisation of politics; austerity; populism and anti-elitism. All of these evolutions can be expected to increase the tension and pressure, the term “stress factors” could be used here, on the politico-administrative relation, and should thus be taken into account. We argue in this

paper to revisit the politico-administrative relation in a holistic manner, striving to capture influence originating from the broader environment and its actors, in order to capture a full picture.

Second, by proposing to expand the view and moving away from an internally focused bilateral perspective, we aim to do justice to the complexity and dynamism of contemporary local government. Most of the dominant models are too static and normative to capture or approach reality. Models always represent a simplification of reality, however, empirical accounts should be able to relate to them. The failure of practice to conform to the model is a weakness in the model, not in the practice. The challenges for, as well as pressure on local governments have increased, as policy issues have become more complex. This includes taking into account the dynamism across domains, as well as over time. This increasingly complex and dynamic context of policy making has rendered orthodox governance models less helpful than ever before (Demir and Reddick 2012). In this, institutional structure and systemic characteristics can influence interaction and power relations. There is not one administrative sphere, nor a uniform political sphere (Demir 2009b), nor a relation between them that remains stable over time and policy domains (Jacobsen 2006, Liguori, Sicilia and Steccolini 2009). Politico-administrative relations are not set in stone, and should be approached as such. It is no longer practical or useful to refer to “the bureaucracy” or the administration as a homogeneous organization that shares meaningful norms and values or even a common role conception (O’Connor, Knox and Janenova 2019). An administration consists of a variety of actors, depending on the context, with each an own dynamic and relation with the political sphere. It should be recognised that senior public servants live in a political world, this is especially so in local governments (Siegel 2020). Moreover, the characteristics and dynamic within the political sphere deserves attention in its own right, as this aspect usually receives little attention within politico-administrative models. The characteristics and dynamic of the political sphere influences the politico-administrative relation as well, think of political turbulence or the influence of the political party on local elected politicians, who do not operate as individuals in isolation. Moreover, attention should be paid for the implementation phase and the discretionary space within this phase.

Third, partially as a consequence of this increased complexity and the increasing expectations of citizens, local governments are urged to deal with issues in an integrated way, suggesting a shift from traditional bilateral politico-administrative modes, to those characterised by an influence of multiple actors (Haruta, Radu and Liviu 2009). There is consensus that in most instances decision makers find themselves in complex webs of advisory activity when it comes to policy making. There is widespread recognition that advisory governance arrangements typically involve a diversity of actors, including external ones (civil society, NGOs, think tanks,...). Hence, we argue to take into account multiple actors, and recognise the existence of (policy) networks. Especially complex issues such as environment, security or poverty cannot be tackled by one level of government, nor within one policy sector, nor without cooperation of third parties. These networks may include both non-public actors, as well as other levels of government. The need for cooperation and coordination also implies a shift of role competences for civil servants (Steen 2012). Within the administration, not only top administrators are able to use influence or power. Regarding research on public service bargains Hondeghe and Steen (2013) pointed out that any bargain between political and administrative actors is preferably to be conceptualized as a multi-actor arrangement which involves different actors at both sides. We would like to argue and assume that this can and should be applied to the wider range of politico-administrative relation research.

A particular kind of actors that we like to highlight in this light, as they can be expected to influence the relationship significantly, can be comprised by the term ‘third party’. The term ‘third party’ summarises all kinds of structurally employed advisors or assistants, next to the civil service who have a share in designing public policy and potentially influences the relationship between top officials and political executives (Schreurs et al. 2011). According to Hoppe and Jeliaskova, the turn to governance has elicited active resistance from political parties and elected politicians, resulting in a renewed drive for the primacy of politics. This renewed drive can be regarded as a defensive reflex against too much

stakeholders or citizen involvement in policy making, but also against the administration (Hoppe and Jeliaskova 2006). Changes in the governmental process that substantially expand political control and weaken administrative independence, weaken the dialogue between elected officials and administrators (Svara 2001). The potential threat these special advisers pose to civil service neutrality and impartiality are a cross-cutting theme in this body of scholarship (Shaw and Eichbaum 2015), with new actors engaging in politico-administrative interaction who may gain power at the expense of others (Bækgaard 2011). The main reasons for the growth in ministerial advisers (on the national level) include the aim to increase the political leadership's capacity to control the policy bureaucracy, the emergence of more complex policy problems, and permanent coverage by the news media on political executives (Bach and Wegrich 2020). All these developments, which are also expected to be present on the local level, create the need for political executives to surround themselves with 'personal loyalists' (Bach and Wegrich 2020, Hood and Lodge 2006). Regarding the relations between elected officials, advisers and civil servants, functional and dysfunctional relationships appear to coexist (Shaw and Eichbaum 2015). This is a key topic in contemporary research on politico-administrative relations, however, little attention has been paid to it on the local level. Capturing all the dimensions of interaction in the town hall is a complex endeavour (Navarro et al. 2018), yet ignoring a third party would exclude a presumably vital actor within politico-administrative relations.

Fourth, sufficient attention should be paid to the specifications of local government. The local level is potentially very different than the 'higher' levels (Vallet and De Rynck 2006). Many studies treat the relationship between local politics and administration as being a constant within one country, focusing on the influence of country-level determinants. Even when the focus is on the local level in the PA literature, the focus is often pointed at national differences (Mouritzen and Svara 2002), while the possibility that the relationship between politics and administration at the local level may also vary within one national context is toned down (Jacobsen 2006). The relatively small size of local authorities compared with other levels of decision-making means that local political and administrative actors are close to each other and to the social process (Hennau 2020, John, Baldersheim and Wollmann 2006). The daily contacts are much more intense and the political-administrative networks are therefore also of a different nature, relations are more personal. Especially at the local level, the traditional role conceptions of local politicians are challenged (Larsen 2005, Liguori et al. 2009, Hennau 2020), while local politics are characterised by a very reciprocal influence between politics and administration (Mouritzen and Svara 2002, Svara 2006, Jacobsen 2006, Hennau 2020).

Fifth, based on an analysis of recent politico-administrative literature, it is possible to provide an overview of research directions where interesting research is being conducted, and where further research seems promising and is thus recommended. These include roles and role expectations (Demir and Reddick 2012, Losada and Esteve 2018, Bækgaard et al. 2020, O'Connor, Knox and Janenova 2019); the role and influence of junior, mid-level civil servants (Lee and Raadschelders 2008); trust (Grøn and Salomonsen 2019, Haveri, Airaksinen and Paananen 2015, van Gils 2019, Hulst, Mafuru and Mpenzi 2015), loyalty (Graaf 2010), identity (Bourgault and Van Dorpe 2013, O'Connor et al. 2019), and values (Hartley and Manzie 2020, Lopdrup-Hjorth and Roelsgaard Obling 2019); the impact of formal organizational structure (Bækgaard 2011, Steyvers, Reynaert and Block 2010, Torfing, Bentzen and Winsvold 2020) and reform (Giauque, Resenterra and Siggen 2009, Schmidt 2019); the influence of third parties and policy advisers (Aubin and Brans 2018, Craft and Wilder 2017, Craft 2012, Aubin et al. 2017, Connaughton 2015, Connaughton 2017, De Visscher and Salomonsen 2013, Montigny and Jacob 2019); the concept 'complementarity' (Demir 2009b); administrative leadership in a political environment (Hartley and Manzie 2020, van Dorp and 't Hart 2019, Siegel 2020); integrative/collaborative leadership (t Hart, Braham and van Dorp 2016, Hartley and Manzie 2020); and specific domains such as HR (Boyne et al. 2010, Rattus and Randma-Liiv 2019).

Sixth, without claiming to be exhaustive, it is useful to consider new and/or innovative methods to use in future politico-administrative research. In order to revisit the politico-administrative relationship, and

reconnect to a complex reality, ‘getting close’ will be particularly crucial. A qualitative analysis provides the opportunity to analyse and interpret complex and non-numerical variables, such as the interpretations and motives behind an insider’s view. We argue that taking a step back with reality-congruent, meaningful observations is a necessary first step to engage in theory-development or adaptation. An inductive approach seems recommendable and useful (Vallet and De Rynck 2006). We recommend future research to adopt a discovery approach, in order to take a deep dive into the black box of politico-administrative relations, in order to investigate what takes place inside the machine room of government (Bach and Wegrich 2020). This approach departs from a logic of understanding and observation, striving to obtain large in-depth knowledge or high ‘case intimacy’ (Ragin et al. 2003), in order to take the complexity of the cases seriously (see e.g. Verweij and Gerrits 2015). An option is to reconstruct policy processes, and the politico-administrative relations behind it, by using (comparative) causal process tracing (Beach and Pedersen 2019, Beach and Rohlfing 2018) or, a bit less technical, by engaging in ‘comparative historical analysis’ (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2012). The aim then is to get ‘close’ and create narratives with a dense storyline, deep insights into the structures and motivations of (individual, collective or corporate) actors and a fine-grained picture of the critical moments. In case one would want to obtain an even closer view than is possible with reconstructions, a further option would be to engage in ethnography (Lee and Raadschelders 2008), using direct (participant or non-participant) observation. Political processes have rarely been studied this way. This approach can be based upon the study of writings, lectures, interview transcripts, and actions of civil servants and elected officeholders (Rhodes 2005). Realistic, meaningful observations might just be the key to rekindle attention for this crucial theme.

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