



CHAPTER 1

Introduction: A Policy-Focused Approach

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INTRODUCTION

This book aims to contribute to our theoretical and empirical understanding of comparative intergovernmental studies and public administration during a period of increasing political, social, and economic crises. These

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crises have meant that, over recent years, those involved with intergovernmental relationships (IGR) have had to cope with new challenges and manage often unprecedented tensions between levels of government. In particular, new and emergent issues have arrived on the political agenda. These issues create present or looming crises in government and wider society—such as over disease control (such as Covid-19), mass migration, and climate change. They pose new and complex governance challenges, and place strains on the political responsiveness, policymaking capacities, and operational capacities of existing European substate political-administrative institutions. These unprecedented challenges necessitate a critical examination of the prevailing assumptions that underpin contemporary studies on European substate government and intergovernmental relations (IGR). This book provides such an examination through applying a policy-focused approach (Hacker & Pierson, 2014). This approach departs from the conventional institutional-focused approach, prevalent in past comparative European intergovernmental relations studies, which seeks to explain contemporary IGR arrangements predominantly in terms of the persistent and dominant influence of political-institutional, structural legacies (e.g. Loughlin et al., 2011). In contrast, the policy-focused approach contends that the structures and processes of IGR are best understood by analysing how specific policy issues are navigated by actors.

The policy-focused approach begins from the assumption that how policy actors strive to wield ‘power for a particular substantive purpose’ shapes IGR (Hacker & Pierson, 2014, 643). Thus the actions of policy actors and changing IGR structures should be analysed in terms of how and why particular types of policy issue attract or involve the suppression of actors’ participation within a particular political arena. This approach builds upon Schattschneider’s (1960/1975) fundamental insights into the relationships between conflict dynamics and the organisation of territorial politics. It stresses how local government and IGR across Europe have to adapt to successive crises as new issues have surfaced on the political agenda. These issues pose new challenges in terms of the responsiveness and effectiveness of existing political-administrative institutions, necessitating an examination of the dominant assumptions underlying contemporary studies of European local government and IGR. Consequently, our policy-focused approach leads us to examine the contrasting ways in which particular policy issues shape, and are shaped by, IGR structures and processes.

Our Schattschneiderian starting-point is the assumption that powerful actors maintain their positions of power through their management of conflict: ‘All forms of political organization have a bias in favour of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because *organization is the mobilisation of bias*. Some issues are organized into politics while others are organized out’ (Schattschneider, 1975, 69; italics in original). Schattschneider’s key insight is that when new actors enter the political arena, their involvement changes the scope of conflict and, consequently, policy outcomes. Thus policy outcomes depend on the extent to which the powerful are able to manage participants and even exclude new participants, who are seeking divergent policy change, and include just their own actual or potential allies.

In this book we identify some recent issues which pose serious, and often unprecedented, policy challenges for actors at different territorial levels. In particular, the book asks whether, and to what extent, these issues create new political dynamics which affect the power balance embodied within countries’ vertical and horizontal dimensions of inter-governmental coordination. As the starting-point for comparison, we identify three types of IGR policy process—centralised, conflicted, and multi-layered policy processes—a taxonomy we originally identified in an earlier comparative study of IGR and Covid-19 across European countries (Bergström et al., 2022).

CENTRALISED POLICY PROCESS

A centralised policy process is characterised by central government dominance and the exclusion of substate governments from effective participation at the central level. It is widely acknowledged, in the IGR literature, that substate governments are seriously weakened if they lack (a) proper constitutional recognition and protection of their discretionary powers. But there is less recognition of the significance for the balance of power in IGR systems of (b) the rights of substate governments to territorial representation within the legislative and/or the executive branches of their national governments (note that Goldsmith and Page stress the significance of ‘access’ to the central government 2020, 1). (c) It is less often acknowledged that local governments’ capacity to mobilise politically to resist the centre depends on the political system. In particular, a two-party political system, based on social classes in a parliamentary democracy (such as in England), does have many strengths as a decisive governing

mechanism (Rosenbluth & Shapiro, 2018). But such entrenched party systems tend to strengthen central institutions and marginalise substate actors. Indeed the post-war growth of the two-party system in England has largely eliminated independent, non-partisan councillors within local government. Moreover, (d) local governments face greater collective action problems in organising against central governments, the greater the number of local governments and the more diverse their interests (Cigler, 2012; de Widt & Laffin, 2018).

The often acclaimed strengths of a centralised and two-party system—faster policy responses and coordinated, coherent policy responses across functional divisions—are attenuated to the extent that the subnational levels are denied effective access to the central political and bureaucratic elites, thus reducing the feedback information flows to these elites. Overly centralised policy processes, too, tend to lower incentives for central elites to consult locally and to seek local knowledge. The English central-local government relationship is a prime example of such a centralised policy process.

CONFLICTED POLICY PROCESS

A conflicted policy process is one characterised by contested and disorganised IGR in which even the rules of the game are uncertain and mutual distrust renders communication difficult between the central and devolved governments. Substate governments may have some rights of representation and consultation and some capacity to mobilise against the centre through political channels. However, if there are no agreed and effective conflict resolution mechanisms, such mobilisations tend to add to the disarray of IGR. Thus an IGR system may be devolved formally but lack vertical IGR pathways through which tensions can be resolved. As the current authors have stressed (Bergström et al., 2022), prolonged and unresolved conflicts are conducive to policy failure.

MULTI-LAYERED POLICY PROCESS

Multi-layered policy processes are characterised by limited conflict between the layers of government. Conflicts can generally be managed mutually as long as the power balance between the central/federal and the regional/local levels remains symmetrical. The key to sustaining this balance is for the substate levels to have formal access to, and rights of representation, in

the policy process at central/federal level, often through membership of a legislature, and that formalised IGR institutions exist to pre-empt or resolve conflict. The access and rights involve agreed rules of the game, particularly mutually accepted mechanisms of issue resolution, and are usually underpinned by substate governments having the capacity to lobby central policymakers. Consequently, actors at the central/federal level have to work within, and accept, a constitutional and administrative system in which interests at all governmental levels underpin a mutually accepted balance of power. Thus Bergström et al. (2022), in their review of how countries coped with Covid-19, concluded that countries whose IGR processes were predominantly multi-layered tended to take an orderly approach to coordinating crisis mitigation compared to those countries where IGR processes were centralised or conflicted. In other words, more equally balanced relationships tend to create incentives for both sides to prefer consensus to dissensus.

POLICY-FOCUSED APPROACH: NEW ISSUES AND CHANGING IGR PROCESSES

In exploring the policy-focused approach, the contributors were asked to reflect on four policy issues of contemporary relevance—the Covid-19 pandemic, migration, climate change, and digitalisation. All these issues have recently surfaced within contemporary European politics with some urgency. They raise politically, socially, and economically disruptive questions with implications for the role of devolved governments in policy formation and service provision. In particular, they pose pressing redistributive issues relating to potentially large transfers of resources between groups of people—Covid-19 (from the healthy to potentially sick), migration (from locally established citizens to new migrant arrivals), and climate change (inter-temporally, from present to future generations).

The contributing authors have been asked to respond to these three questions. Firstly, how have emerging, and potentially disruptive, issues been managed within the existing political-administrative IGR structures? These structures represent the institutional residues of the post-war development of the modern welfare state, built around the particular service delivery priorities involved in the construction of that state. However, as new issues have arrived on the political agenda, they present policymakers with pressing questions over the continued relevance and capacity of these legacy structures. At least some of these contemporary issues demand new

policy responses and even administrative redesigns which challenge existing administrative structures. Consequently, these cases show how policy-makers seek to adapt to the tensions between new issues and the structural legacies of the post-war welfare state.

Secondly, how far has the recent emergence, or re-emergence, of territorial politics changed IGR? Much of the literature on government in Europe stresses strengthening regional identities and the demand for greater autonomy for some regions (e.g. Keating, 2013). The logics of service delivery chains can be in tension with strong territorial identities. These tensions tend to make IGR processes more conflicted, especially during public health crises and worsening economic pressures. The question becomes: how are central governments responding to the new challenges to existing territorial coordination arrangements?

Thirdly, is the delivery of public services moving towards greater reliance on informal, network governance types of coordination mechanisms rather than that of traditional, bureaucratic coordination? In other words, are declining, formal IGR institutions being replaced by new, informal network governance systems (Anselm & Torfing, 2021, Chap. 1, Bergström et al., 2021; Denters & Rose, 2005; Rhodes, 2007)? The book will contribute to this debate over whether formal governmental institutions—at central, regional, and local levels—are losing their once dominant role in direct service provision to ‘self-organising’ networks.

The next section reviews the nine case study chapters, summarising their main points and the final section reviews the lessons learned.

ENGLISH CENTRAL-LOCAL RELATIONS AS A CENTRALISED POLICY PROCESS

The first chapter takes English local government as a single case given its value as a telling, paradigmatic case of a centralised government. England exemplifies a centralised policy process in which local governments are subject to very extensive, and also sporadic and often uncoordinated, central government supervision. The continued extension of tight central control reflects English local governments’ deficient constitutional protections, lack of significant access to and rights of representation within central government, severe collective action problems, and limited capacity to mobilise countervailing bargaining power against central policymakers. Indeed, the present right-wing Conservative government has been able to

severely cut local government spending during 13 years of austerity and intensified a re-engineering of the role of local government away from the post-war model of state service delivery, with no significant opposition.

Laffin and Diamond argue that this over-centralisation is producing the conditions for an existential crisis for local government in its traditional form. Successive Westminster central governments have failed to create a sustainable policy framework for central-local relations. Since 2010 the government has cut back on local government spending to a much greater degree than central government. This fiscal crisis has been compounded by a governing crisis as local governments are re-engineered away from their original, post-war high discretion role in welfare state service delivery towards a role closer to that of being simply agents of the centre. The third element of their existential crisis is a policy role crisis. Local authorities have lost significant parts of services and entire services through reorganisations, privatisation, and service shifts to the voluntary sector. Councils are left with fragmented powers and are becoming attenuated service delivery bureaucracies with a dwindling capacity to support a policy planning role. Moreover, the major cities and conurbations now have directly elected mayors, whose main rationale is sub-regional economic development. The policy and administrative relationships between these city mayors and the councils, within their city-region, remain poorly defined. Meanwhile, the peculiarities of the English political system continue to create a political system with a unique combination, in comparative terms, of strong incentives for government ministers to compete with supposedly ‘reputation-enhancing’ innovations and to ‘hypo-innovate,’ rather than build on existing institutions (Moran, 2003).

COVID-19 AND PUBLIC HEALTH

The Covid-19 pandemic proved to be a telling test of the state of IGR across countries and it sheds light on how IGR systems responded under pressure (Bergström et al., 2022). The speed and urgency of the public health response, which only marginal protest groups attempted to resist, over-rode institutional boundaries and administrative traditions across Europe. Baldersheim and Haug open the review of Covid-19 with their analysis of the five Nordic countries. Covid-19 placed these stable, well-established local governments under considerable strain. At least initially, the urgency of the crisis triggered a centralising response. The central or federal authorities struggled with uncertainties over the speed of

contagion, the need to make up time to compensate for their lack of preparedness and yet ensure equality of treatment across localities. Meanwhile, more ‘place-sensitive’ policies took a backseat. Significant differences emerged in the intergovernmental management of public health across the five countries. Finish and Norwegian municipalities enjoyed strong and independently exercised public health powers during the pandemic. In Denmark and Sweden the presence of regional authorities represented a further dimension, but as key providers in health delivery they already had more extensive powers than local authorities. In the initial phase, the Danish central government did centralise, taking over the powers of the regional health boards, but once the initial pandemic phase passed, central-local relations reverted to the previous, more multi-layered relationship. Notably, in Sweden central policymakers followed the unique Swedish non-interventionist approach which was strongly influenced by central government’s medical advice. Consequently, central policymakers did not fully engage with the devolved government structures until later into the pandemic. Iceland, given its small population size, necessarily ran a centralised delivery and policymaking system. Nonetheless, as Baldersheim and Haug argue, over the pandemic period, the shared Nordic traditions of political culture and public administration were re-asserted after the initial policy response. Accordingly, actors at all levels reverted to a more consultative and consensus-building style. Thus the dominant pattern was that of multi-layered governance or cooperative decentralisation.

In their account of Belgium during the COVID-19 crisis, Descamps and Smolders argue that Belgium’s history of political dissensus did not create a conflicted IGR policy process, contrary to what might have been expected. Indeed the initial response by the national political leadership was to centralise. They turned to the National Security Council, a body created to deal with national-level emergencies and, consequently, dominated by federal level ministers. However, as Descamps and Smolders stress, ministers abandoned this centralised process towards creating a multi-layered process, allowing greater local discretion. They used the NSC less and instead reinvigorated the Concertation Committee, a multi-lateral body of federal and regional ministers which previously had met largely on an ad hoc basis. At least partly through this body, the political elites from the various communities were able to reach a workable consensus to ensure a consistent and effective, national policy response that largely overcame the underlying institutional fragmentation.

Descamps and Smolders develop their argument that Belgium pursued a multi-layered process through an analysis of local government finance in Flanders. In its initial response to the pandemic, the Flanders government initially switched its funding model towards a greater reliance on conditional grants. However, during the pandemic it reverted to the previously, heavy reliance on a decentralised approach involving unconditional grants. A key reason for this reversion was regional policymakers' perception that local governments had responded effectively to the pandemic crisis so that tighter supervision of local government through conditionality had ceased to be necessary. Notably, both Belgium and the Nordic countries illustrate countries in which central policymakers initially asserted control but then loosened these controls, creating multi-layered processes, as they found they could achieve their public health objectives through maintaining a cross-governmental consensus on the policy response to Covid-19.

MIGRATION

Mass migration in many European countries has created new IGR strains. Yet, as Oehlert and Kuhlmann point out, no systematic, comparative research is yet available on the inter-administrative coordination of migrant services in multi-level IGR systems. Rather the focus has been predominantly on the political decision-makers and their relationships. Consequently, Oehlert and Kuhlmann examine how IGR in countries, with different administrative traditions, responded to mass migration given the need to develop a cross-cutting response as migrant integration failed to match with the existing division of services within established welfare state structures. Significantly, of course, local citizens tended to see migration as imposing costs on local administration with few counter-balancing benefits. Consequently, local elected and appointed officials have had to develop a policy narrative to justify their decisions in terms of a mix of altruism, expediency, and transience, and sometimes try to allocate blame to policymakers further up the IGR ladder.

Oehlert and Kuhlmann contrast the policy responses across France, Germany, and Sweden in terms of how the inter-administrative elements of IGR have shaped those relationships and underpinned an IGR power balance. All three countries, particularly Germany and Sweden, have faced comparable political and service provision pressures from the rapidly increasing numbers of asylum seekers arriving within their borders. In their analysis of the 2015–16 migration crisis and subsequent

developments, Oehlert and Kuhlmann argue that the underlying administrative traditions, baked into inter-administrative relations (IAR), underpinned a consistent IGR response despite the new political strains imposed by migration. Even so, with similarities to Baldersheim and Haug's findings in the Nordic countries on their Covid-19 response, Oehlert and Kuhlmann find that the intergovernmental approach in their three countries was characterised by a flexible, multi-layered process that allowed local governments adequate autonomy to provide supplementary services and otherwise support migrant integration. They detect few pressures towards policy instrument convergence. Rather the long-standing administrative traditions shaped the local policy response in the three countries—in France 'the Continental European Napoleonic,' in Germany 'the Continental Europe Federal,' and in Sweden 'the Nordic' administrative traditions (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2019). For example, the shift in recent years towards contractualisation as a policy instrument in French central-local relations (a partial break with traditional bureaucratic links) in practice was less centralising than it initially appeared. For it did allow local initiatives comparable to those occurring locally under the particular funding regimes of the German Länder. Moreover, local actors enjoyed significantly more local freedom of action than is often allowed for in administrative traditions theory. Even in traditionally statist France, the strong central state's policy response on migration permitted significant, informal flexibilities for municipalities around migration integration. But these flexibilities largely reflected established public administration traditions and bureaucratic-technocratic actors, which constrained the influence of central political actors. Meanwhile, Swedish municipalities have continued to be key players in integration management and to retain their reputation for high levels of autonomy (Ladner et al., 2019, 346), again often acting independently of central government.

Rauhut and Kettunen review the migrant integration experience in Sweden and Finland. Again they begin from the tension, identified earlier, between services structured around the post-war welfare state and the new imperatives required by migrant integration, particularly for a new, cross-cutting response. They identify a syndrome of overlapping and ill-defined service jurisdictions creating problems of 'too many cooks spoiling the broth.' They are referring to how the particular responsibilities for aspects of a new policy problem tended to become dispersed across several service boundaries, thus producing inter-service and intergovernmental conflicted policy processes. Coordination was weakened and pre-existing conflict

resolution procedures weakened. At the same time local authorities usually had difficulties in containing the escalating costs of resettling migrants. Consequently, central governments, as did the Finnish and Swedish governments, avoided making open-ended commitments to cover costs and use strategies, such as insisting on time limited expenditure, to cap the extent of costs falling on the central government. The subsequent financial burdens falling on local government tended to create, and exacerbate, redistributive issues between settled local populations and the newcomers, and so contributed to inter-community tensions. Thus, what had been a multi-layered process became a conflicted process.

Such tensions, based in perceptions of present and prospective redistribution, have led to political change. After the 2022 riots in Sweden against migrants, the centre-right coalition entered power and abandoned the once iconic Swedish multicultural project rooted in the Swedish Social Democratic tradition. Official tolerance of migrants has fallen and immigration controls have tightened. Similarly, Finland has limited immigration, again after a centre-right coalition entered power (in 2023). As Rauhut and Kettunen point out, these rightward political shifts, compounded by new austerity programmes, have disrupted local migrant language provision. In both countries, as central support was withdrawn, local governments were left to ration out migrant services, and determine how far and where to support migrant education with no central guidance amid falling, local voter support for migrant support services. Meanwhile, in both countries the central governments have resorted to input strategies to control how migrant education was funded—regulating funding through specifying resource inputs, such as funding particular language courses, rather than outcome measures such how many migrants achieve a workable language fluency. At the same time, services were further weakened as greater privatisation meant that the new contractors tended to skim off the more promising clients. Thus the relatively powerless municipalities were left with escalating costs, unhappy local taxpayers, and an unresponsive central government.

The story of the refugee crisis in Poland has been rather different. Crises are frequently revealing as actors are compelled to break out of the usual routine negotiations and consultations. Wojtowicz argues that both central and local governments showed considerable adaptability in the face of the refugee crisis when 2.5 million Ukrainians fled to Poland, fleeing the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Moreover, events in Poland challenged the expectation that a more centralised, top-down response would necessarily

be provoked by a crisis, particularly in a unitary state like Poland. Of course, too, in Poland effective local self-government had only emerged during the 1990s with a tripartite division of Poland into regions, municipalities, and counties. At the regional level, directly elected regional authorities work with centrally appointed governors (*voivodes*) who represent the central authorities at the regional level. Meanwhile, county- and municipal-level local governments are directly elected. Although after 2015 the right-wing Law and Justice Party (PiS) strengthened central control leading Poland to show the greatest reduction in the Local Autonomy Index score per country between 2015 and 2020 (Ladner et al., 2019).

Despite this growing centralisation, local governments did take the initiative, especially during the early months of the refugee crisis. The speed and the seriousness of the Ukrainian refugee crisis threatened a humanitarian catastrophe on the Poland-Ukrainian border. Rather than wait for instructions from central government, local authorities and the local representatives of the central agencies in the border areas took the initiative to provide emergency assistance. Even once central authorities had begun to organise their own response, their slowness and attachment to bureaucratic procedures meant that local authorities had to continue to improvise through collaboration with other local authorities and drawing on the more informal resources available in local civil societies. Even so central government's declaration of key, strategic central measures were important, such as clarifying the legal status of Ukrainians, providing free transport and medical care. But the central authorities, certainly during the early period of the crisis, were essentially responding to local and regional actors.

Before these events, it might have been anticipated that, given the weak, local administrative legacy under Communism, local authorities would have waited on central government to take the initiative or at least the regional level and the regional governor. Instead, in arguably an illustration of the potential for the emergence of local civil societies within Poland, local authorities and other local actors took the initiative in response to what had threatened to become a humanitarian crisis. Thus despite the centralised form of Polish public administration and tradition, at least during the early period of mass migration, IGR emerged as a multi-layered process rather than as the strongly centralised policy process which would have seemed the most likely response.

CLIMATE POLICY

Climate change, too, is an issue which cuts across existing governmental structures but, in contrast with migration, climate change lacks comparable urgency. Climate change is a longer-term, slowly developing crisis. Indeed the impact of climate change is only slowly becoming a tangible issue in terms of the potential disruption to human activities. Consequently, the case for climate change policy has to be made in terms of future consequences rather than present realities and costs—illustrating the particular, inter-temporal redistributive issues at stake in climate policy. Moreover, that case remains fiercely contested by many right-wing politicians and some business interests. Despite these challenges, inherent in the nature of climate change as an issue, Vellani and colleagues uncover significant policy developments and new strategies for change in both Berlin and Paris. In both cities, they show how the evolution of climate strategies has followed a similar trajectory—an initially centralised process, which then encountered resistance and/or indifference, and then a switch to a more multi-layered process. In both cases regional and city level policymakers concluded that overly centralised deliberative processes were counterproductive in climate policy—an emerging and potentially contentious policy area. Instead, they recognised the need for a more grassroots-based approach, given the pressing need to build support for climate policies at all levels, by providing incentives to participate for those at district rather than just at regional or city level.

However, resource constraints and intergovernmental imbalances constrained policymakers' scope for policy development. In Berlin few staff had been recruited at city and district levels with the necessary skills both to understand climate change and to promote wider participation, given the novelty of climate policies. The Paris *arrondissements* faced similar imbalances vis-à-vis Greater Paris and the Parisian Mayor. The proliferation of actors—with rights of access and participation—can be a great strength, especially in mobilising support for climate action, but too many such actors with their own specific interests within climate action can slow down implementation. Thus Vellani et al. conclude by stressing IGR in climate policy must be understood within the context of social action, civil society and the rights of participation held by business interests as well as climate activists.

DIGITALISATION

At first glance, digitalisation would seem to be a ‘technical’ issue, requiring expertise and a corporate planning response rather than a reworking of political-administrative IGR practices. However, in the next two chapters, Wehmeier and Torfs and Wayenberg show how digitalisation raises significant questions of power within IGR in Germany and Belgium—such as who should have access to information? and should the standardisation of work practices be limited to avoid increasing centralisation?

Wehmeier points to how the digitalisation of a country’s tax system is a political not just a technical problem. She points to how digitalisation creates pressures for increased standardisation and inter-operability across IGR intergovernmental boundaries, especially to hold down costs and reap the benefits of a nationwide digital system. Yet these pressures are often perceived, within devolved governments, as driven by a search for central control. Consequently, they threaten local discretion and identities even in a federal system, like the German one, where local discretion and identity are constitutionally protected. However, as Wehmeier emphasises, the federal-Länder relationship is more balanced than in other federal systems. Unusually, the German federal government is in a significantly resource-dependent relationship with the Länder. The larger Länder, in particular, have substantial organisational resources and a longer experience of developing digital capacities, unlike the federal government.

Even so, as Wehmeier argues, it became evident that achieving a nationwide government services digital programme required both effective national leadership and the active participation of the Länder. Consequently, as the programme developed, both sides had a strong interest in moving from, what had become, a conflicted to a multi-layered policy process. The multi-layered process was underpinned by a mechanism of ‘concentration without centralization.’ This meant that strategic and operational competencies were bundled in an institutionalised and legally regulated network for digitalisation (KONSENS) to oversee the standardisation required for a national digital infrastructure. As the name suggests, KONSENS operates on the basis of consensual decision-making, mirroring the German, federal-Länder decision-making style. Yet, as Wehmeier points out, the federal government has acquired a key residual power within this network arrangement. It can exercise the legal power, if necessary, to impose agreements on the Länder. However, to date this power has not been used.

In the Flemish context, Torfs and Wayenberg share Wehmeier's concerns over how digitalisation is best implemented in the IGR context and ask whether a Flemish version of 'concentration without centralisation' is possible. They doubt that on Flemish local governments' present trajectory they are likely to deliver on the promise of expanded digital government. The major problem, for Torfs and Wayenberg, is the small size of individual local governments in Belgium. Nevertheless, the evidence for a strong relationship between amalgamations and greater digitalisation is weak in Flanders. Even the recent wave of amalgamations in 2019 failed to create local governments large enough and resourced adequately to promote digitalisation effectively. Consequently, Torfs and Wayenberg ask whether new types of intergovernmental cooperation would be more effective in developing digital capacities than amalgamations. Even in local government systems with large organisational units, inter-municipal cooperation and central leadership remain critical in software development. Indeed most of their local government interviewees supported a more 'centralised' approach to digitalisation. They insisted that the Flemish regional government should provide stronger regional leadership in digital investment and software development if local governments' digital capacities were to be strengthened. They also stressed that the Flemish government should develop its procurement power in relation to software suppliers to hold down costs and obtain more effective software support.

CONCLUSIONS

This book takes a distinctive, policy-focused approach to IGR in analysing specific, crisis-driven policy problems rather than taking structures and traditions as a starting-point. These conclusions return to the three questions posed earlier. Firstly, how are those working in contemporary IGR structures adapting to emerging issues? A key theme here is the tension between emerging, and potentially disruptive, issues and the established political-administrative IGR structures and traditions—which remain essentially the institutional residues of the post-war development of the modern welfare state. Our analysis of the four issues illustrates how policymakers are seeking to adapt these structures in response to new issues. Public health crises, migration and climate change all pose issues of redistribution within society which are disruptive, or potentially so, and involve conflicts. Broadly our conclusions are that these structures have displayed

considerable resilience. We conclude that the evidence points to the policy processes which work most effectively are multi-layered rather than centralised or conflicted. The key factor in multi-layered processes is that sub-state actors have formalised rights of access and representation which constitute countervailing power in relation to the powerful actors in central or federal governments. Such formal and informal, central-local countervailing power is present in most of the countries studied; the telling exception is England, where councils have almost no formal or informal countervailing power. Consequently, it is not surprising that English local government now faces a looming existential crisis.

Secondly, how far have changing territorial politics affected IGR? These cases have not raised major issues of territorial identity or a politics of place except to some extent around migration issues. Central governments tend not to fully fund local integration policies for both financial and political reasons—politically to side-step questions of national and local identity as well as awkward issues arising from any perceived redistribution of resources towards new arrivals and away from existing populations. Thus local government actors can be left to manage the costs, both financially and socially, of mass migration. In climate policy, too, central government actors remain cautious over the costs and tend to limit themselves to general rather than specific policies. Such policies allow significant scope for local initiatives but raise questions over the future of such initiatives if they are unsupported by any national leadership.

Thirdly, the formal political-administrative IGR structures still remain crucial in structuring IGR processes. These cases do not support the neo-pluralist contention that major shifts towards network governance are reducing the significance of established governmental structures, with informal and consensus-based coordination becoming the dominant form of IGR. Only England provides some evidence for a marked shift towards a mixed economy with extra-governmental organisations, in the voluntary and private sectors, taking a significantly greater role in service delivery. Even so this mixed economy is best understood as an alternative system for the exercise of central power and central financial discipline rather than as a new networked model of how contemporary societies are governed. Indeed, our conclusion, in relation to the four issues, is that actors in formal governmental positions continue to play the crucial roles in responding to these new issues and in adapting existing structures.

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