

Policies and Power Plays

*Urban Government, Institutional Change, and the Hanseatic Kontor in Fifteenth-century Deventer**

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Abstract

Since the work of Oscar Gelderblom, city governments are increasingly acknowledged for their role in shaping economic institutions. This article aims to understand what informed their economic policies. It focuses on the fifteenth-century Deventer city government and its response to the relocation of the Hanse's permanent trading post (the *kontor*) from Bruges to Deventer in 1451/1452. By analyzing the government's economic policies in their economic and political context, I argue that they primarily reflect the local balance of power among different interest groups. All in all, when deciding on their economic policies, the government's major concern was to serve the economic interests of groups whose support it needed for remaining in power.

Introduction

Since the work of Oscar Gelderblom, historians increasingly consider late medieval and early modern city governments as important actors whose policies had a lasting impact on their city's economic institutions and

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fortunes.¹ City governments could shape their city's economic institutions or the economic 'rules of the game' through their policies. A government could, for example, design new legislation and invest in infrastructure in order to facilitate trade or introduce new tolls and taxes to suit their own rent-seeking. Although city governments' economic power is widely accepted, the rationale behind their policies remains subject to debate.² This article focuses on the case of Deventer as a welcome addition to a literature dominated by commercial metropolises. Deventer was a relatively small (around 3500-4000 inhabitants in the second half of the fourteenth century), yet supra-regional commercial center.³ Moreover, plans of the German Hanse to temporarily relocate its permanent trading post (the *kontor*) from Bruges to Deventer in 1451/1452 present a unique opportunity to study the Deventer city government's response to this temporary opportunity to improve its city's commercial status.

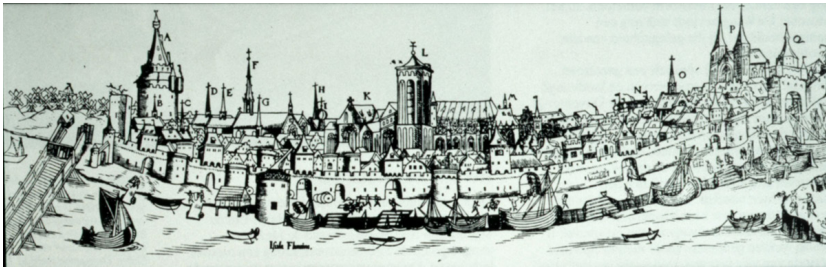


Illustration 1 Woodcut of the oldest known cityscape of Deventer c. 1552-1553

(source: Museum de Waag Deventer, inv. no. 0995.)

Within current scholarship there are broadly three approaches to the question what informed the economic policies of pre-modern city governments. The first argues that urban governments in principle aimed at rent-seeking and that only an external actor, either in the

1 Eva Brugger et al., 'Introduction into the study of markets', in: Ulla Kypta, Julia Bruch and Tanja Skambraks (eds), *Methods in premodern economic history. Case studies from the Holy Roman Empire, C.1300-C.1600* (Cham 2019) 121-122; Julia Bruch et al., 'Grand narratives in premodern economic history', in: Kypta, Bruch and Skambraks (eds), *Methods in premodern economic history*, 30; Oscar Gelderblom, *Cities of commerce. The institutional foundations of international trade in the Low Countries, 1250-1650* (Princeton 2013) 10.

2 Jeroen Puttevils, 'Waarom deden sommige handelssteden het zo goed? Een overzicht van het historisch onderzoek naar handel en instituties in Nederlandse en Europese steden, 1300-1800', *Stadsgeschiedenis* 10:1 (2015) 92-94.

3 J.F. Benders, *Bestuursstructuur en schriftcultuur. Een analyse van de bestuurlijke verschriftelijking in Deventer tot het eind van de 15^{de} eeuw* (Kampen 2004) 16, 399.

form of an organization of visiting merchants or a territorial lord could enforce reforms.⁴ Secondly, Gelderblom argues that the political and legal fragmentation of pre-modern Europe could encourage urban governments to pursue policies that stimulated trade. Political and legal fragmentation resulted in political and economic rivalries between cities exerting competitive pressure on their governments to obtain a more central position in European trading networks. Since merchants could switch to other trading places when they believed it to be in their interest, inter-urban competition prompted political elites to set aside their private interests in order to attract as much commerce to their cities as possible.⁵ Third, Bas van Bavel points to the power struggle between different interest groups within cities. Political elites would tend to opt for coercive rent-seeking unless prevented by a social balance of power both within and between cities which often resulted in institutions promoting flexible and open markets.⁶ Studying the motivations underlying the economic policies of city governments in the pre-modern Low Countries is notoriously difficult. As Thomas Max Safley points out in his review of Gelderblom's work, governments "pursued complex strategies for no less complex reasons, very few of which were recorded."⁷ This article does not aim to account for all of the Deventer city government's considerations but argues, in line with Van Bavel's approach, that the government adjusted its policies to the prevailing balance of power among local interest groups in order to retain its position of power.

The so-called Social Conflict View of institutional change is employed as the main theoretical framework. It is based on the work of the economists Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson and convincingly applied to pre-modern economic history by Sheilagh Ogilvie. It holds that institutions not only affect the efficiency of production and exchange, but also the distribution of resources.

4 Avner Greif, Paul Milgrom and Barry R. Weingast, 'Coordination, commitment, and enforcement. The case of the merchant guild', *The Journal of Political Economy* 102:4 (1994) 745-776; Stephan R. Epstein, *Freedom and growth. The rise of states and markets in Europe, 1300-1750* (London 2000) 165-166.

5 Gelderblom, *Cities of commerce*, 11-15.

6 Bas J.P. van Bavel, *Manors and markets. Economy and society in the Low Countries, 500-1600* (Oxford 2010) 232, 240, 393; Van Bavel takes this argument a step further in *The invisible hand? claiming that when economic elites acquired dominant political power they increasingly opted for rent-seeking eventually resulting in institutional sclerosis and economic decline*. Bas J.P. van Bavel, *The invisible hand? How market economies have emerged and declined since AD 500* (Oxford 2016) 20-21, 255-259.

7 Thomas Max Safley, 'Institutions and their discontents', *TSEG-The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 11:4 (2014) 65.

Consequently, since different interest groups typically disagree about how resources should be distributed, a social conflict exists on how institutions should be shaped.⁸ Faced with this social conflict, the Social Conflict View predicts political elites would opt for policies that secured their position of power. The interests they would eventually come to serve depended on political institutions or the local power plays' rules of the game.⁹ Crucially, the city government would pursue policies that strengthened or safeguarded its power, even if this entailed suboptimal economic outcomes for certain groups or even society in general.

Using a wide variety of sources, I study the government's policies and their background, asking which economic interests they served and in which political context they were formed. The city government's policies are primarily deduced from the municipal accounts and, concerning the relocation of the Hanseatic *kontor*, contextualized based on sources collected and published in the *Hanserecesse* and the *Hansisches Urkundenbuch*.¹⁰ Together with the guild book of the local cloth merchants' guild, the accounts and Hanseatic sources also provide most information on the Deventer citizens' economic interests.¹¹ Analysis of the political context, meanwhile, is based on the accounts as well as the city's book of ordinances (1448).¹² The first section introduces the case of Deventer and discusses its citizens' diverse and sometimes conflicting economic interests, identifying three main interest groups. The second section shows how the city government pursued rather ambivalent policies, trying to take all conflicting interests into account. In the final section, I show that the Deventer political institutions created a context

8 Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson, 'Institutions as a fundamental cause of long-run growth', in: Philippe Aghion and Steven N. Durlauf (eds), *Handbook of economic growth* I (Amsterdam 2005) 389-390; Sheilagh Ogilvie, "Whatever is, is right?" Economic institutions in pre-industrial Europe', *The Economic History Review* 60:4 (2007) 662; James A. Robinson, 'Elites and institutional persistence', in: Alice H. Amsden, Alisa DiCaprio and James A. Robinson (eds), *The role of elites in economic development* (Oxford 2012) 33.

9 Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson, 'Institutions as a fundamental cause', 390-391, 448

10 Goswin von der Ropp (ed.), *Hanserecesse von 1431-1476* (hereafter *HR*) vols. III-IV (Leipzig 1881, 1883); Walther Stein (ed.), *Hansisches Urkundenbuch* (hereafter *HUB*) vol. 8 (Leipzig 1899); Although scholars have recently pointed out that the selection criteria, terminology and structuring of the source in the *Hanserecesse* and the *Hansisches Urkundenbuch* are based on obsolete nineteenth-century conceptions of the Hanse as pendant to the German Empire, the content of the transcribed sources remains useful as no cases of forgery can be established: Carsten Jahnke, 'Die Reliquien jener grossartiger Bewegung. "Die Recesse und andere Akten der Hanse" sowie das "Hansische Urkundenbuch"', *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 137 (2019) 1-42; Angela Huang and Ulla Kypta, 'Ein neues Haus auf altem Fundament. Neue Trends in der Hanseforschung und die Nutzbarkeit der Rezessionen', *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 129 (2011) 213-229.

11 Historisch Centrum Overijssel (hereafter HCO), 0934, inventory number 27.

12 HCO, 0690, inv. no. 132-1.

in which the city government depended on the support of all interest groups identified in the first section. Within this political context, the government's ambivalent policies thus indicate that serving the interests of the groups on which it relied for its position of power was the government's major concern when planning its policies.

Deventer citizens and their economic interests

Fifteenth-century Deventer was a relatively small, yet flourishing city of commerce hosting five annual fairs.¹³ The city's strong point was its location on the crossroad of land routes and waterways connecting Flanders, Westphalia, Saxony, Frisia, Holland, Scandinavia, the Baltic, and the Rhineland (map 1). Job Weststrate describes Deventer as a gateway city that distributed a wide range of products to this supra-regional hinterland, while Bert Looper uses the analogy of a hinge around which an important part of the northern European economy revolved.¹⁴ During the annual fairs large numbers of merchants travelled from these regions to Deventer. Estimates based on toll revenues suggest that thousands of carts travelled over the road entering Deventer from the east alone. In the best year, between 5,328 and 8,880 carts must have crossed this road.¹⁵

Because the Deventer population had different ways of profiting from trade in their city, a constant conflict of interest simmered among the Deventer citizenry. Deventer citizens could profit by providing services to the merchants traveling to their city, such as housing, storage, or brokerage. It was in their interest to attract foreign merchants to the Deventer fairs as this increased the demand for their services.¹⁶ Citizens could also profit by actively transporting goods to and from Deventer and buying and

13 H. Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer I. Oorsprong en Middeleeuwen* (Zutphen 2010) 161, 240-241, 250-251; Job Weststrate, *In het kielzog van moderne markten. Handel en scheepvaart op de Rijn, Waal en IJssel, ca. 1360-1560* (Hilversum 2008) 170-176.

14 Weststrate, *In het kielzog*, 26; Bert Looper, 'De Nederlandse hanzesteden. Scharnieren in de Europese economie 1250-1550', in: Hanno Brand and Egge Knol (eds) *Koggen, kooplieden en kantoren* (Hilversum 2010) 118.

15 The numbers could have been even higher because some of the toll's revenues were spent on the salary and expenses of the collector, and only the remainder was recorded in the city's accounts. Moreover, toll exemptions are not accounted for: H.L. Janssen and A.D. Verlinde, *Holten, het bisschoppelijk kasteel de Waardenborg* (Amersfoort 1977) 28-29.

16 The term "foreign merchants" is used here to refer to those merchants that did not originate in Deventer or its immediate surroundings and were therefore in need of other services than merchants based in the IJssel city (such as housing, storage or brokerage). Moreover, these foreign merchants would not share in the toll-freedoms enjoyed by Deventer citizens.



Map 1 Map of the most important trade routes ca. 1450

(source: Bart Holterman (ed.), *Viabundus Pre-modern Street Map 1.1* (released 6-12-2021), <https://www.viabundus.eu/>)

selling goods at the Deventer markets. Attracting foreign merchants who competed with local traders would be in the interest of the service sector, though could be detrimental to the Deventer merchants and artisans. Finally, citizens could profit from the taxation of trade in their city through tax farming. These citizens would prefer economic policies that increased commercial activity regardless of whether it was conducted by foreign or local merchants. It is important to point out that these conflicting interests did not necessarily translate into actual organized interest groups as individuals could profit from trade in different ways. Still, a clear conflict of interests existed between the service sector, which preferred to attract foreign merchants, and the Deventer merchants who feared competition.¹⁷

According to Zeger Sneller, the service sector came to dominate the Deventer economy from the fourteenth century onward at the expense of active trading.¹⁸ Indeed, the houses surrounding the city's main market place (the *Brink*) were known for their large halls (*delen*) hosting inns

17 The distinction between active merchants and the service sector and their conflicting interests is based on the work of A.B. Hibbert, whereas the addition of the tax farmers as an additional category is based on a suggestion by Hanno Brand: A.B. Hibbert, 'The economic policies of towns', in: M.M. Postan, E.E. Rich, and E. Miller (eds), *The Cambridge economic history of Europe from the decline of the Roman Empire* (Cambridge 1963) 160-172.

18 Z.W. Sneller, *Deventer, die Stadt der Jahrmärkte* (Weimar 1936) 24-25, 33-34.

and artisan shops.¹⁹ The large number of beds and the presence of long tables, benches, and long chests mentioned in two late fifteenth-century probate inventories also indicate that Deventer citizens provided foreign merchants with storage, lodging, and food and drink.²⁰ In 1478, for example, a peddler hired a chest in one of these inns to store his merchandise.²¹ Furthermore, Deventer citizens also acted as their guests' brokers. In his late fifteenth-century accounts, a merchant from Hoorn states how "his" hosteller in Deventer still owed him money, indicating that the hosteller had sold some of his goods.²² Although precise numbers are unavailable, probably a large segment of the Deventer citizenry profited from providing services to foreign merchants.

Adding nuance to Sneller's claims, recent studies point out that Deventer citizens also continued to participate in active trade throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Deventer merchants were famous for their trade in stockfish bought in the Norwegian city of Bergen.²³ They also continued to sell Rhine wine in the Baltic throughout the sixteenth century. Since most Deventer merchants transported their goods on ships owned by skippers from Kampen or cities in Holland, they are not mentioned in toll registers, which only list the name of the skipper who paid the toll.²⁴ Using toll registers that do list the merchants' names, Jerem van Duijl shows that between 1540 and 1580, Deventer merchants managed around 25 percent of all Rhine wine exports through the Øresund.²⁵ Finally, citizens also traded in cloth. Already in the thirteenth century, Deventer merchants were united in a guild with its own guild roll.²⁶ The guild would develop into a cloth merchants' guild during the fifteenth century, as evidenced by its guild book.²⁷ Despite the importance of the service sector, Deventer citizens thus remained active traders throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

19 A.C.F. Koch, *Het Bergkwartier te Deventer. Huizenboek van een middeleeuwse stadswijk tot 1600* (Zutphen 1988) 23-24.

20 HCO, 0722, inv. no. 57, 180-182.

21 B. Dubbe, 'Het huisraad in het Oostnederlandse burgerwoonhuis in de late middeleeuwen', in: *Thuis in de late middeleeuwen. Het Nederlands burgerinterieur 1400-1535* (Zwolle 1980) 79.

22 Sneller, *Deventer*, 51-52.

23 Justyna Wubs-Mrozevicz, *Traders, ties and tensions. The interaction of Lübeckers, Overijsslers and Hollanders in late medieval Bergen* (Hilversum 2008) 48-50; Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer I*, 212; H. Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer. II. Nieuwe en nieuwste tijd* (Zutphen 2010) 405; F.C. Berkenvelder, *Zwolle als Hanzestad* (Zwolle 1983) 90.

24 J.J. van Duijl, 'Gevangen in het handelsnetwerk van de Hanze. De koopvaardij van de IJsselsteden in het Oostzeegebied in de zestiende eeuw', *Tijdschrift voor Zeegeschiedenis* 36:1 (2017) 3.

25 *Ibid.*, 2-3, 5-6.

26 H.R. van Ommeren (ed.), *De koopmansgilderol van Deventer, 1249-1387* (The Hague 1978).

27 HCO, 0934, inv. no. 27.

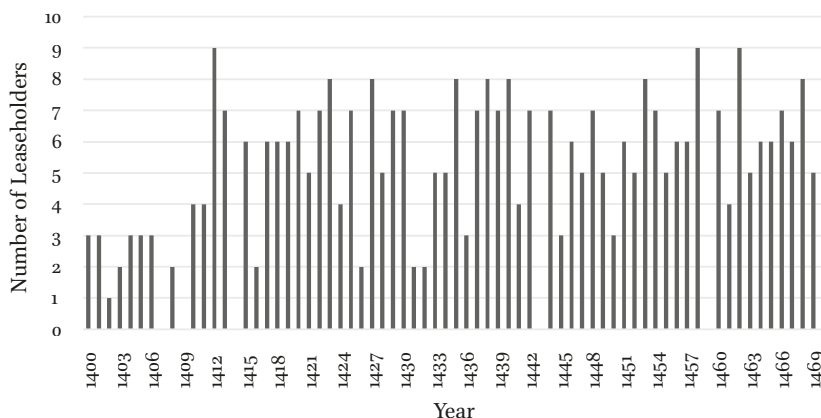


Figure 1 Graph showing the number of identified leaseholders per year
(sources: HCO, 0698, inv. nos. 11-25.)

The Deventer merchants also profited from trade in their hometown. Merchants transporting wine to the Baltic probably bought it at the Deventer fairs. Moreover, the statutes of the cloth merchants' guild show that the merchants relayed their focus from distant markets to the Deventer fairs. Whereas the 1300 statutes recorded in the guild roll regulate mutual aid in misfortune on the road, the fifteenth-century statutes in the guild book mainly regulate competition at the annual fairs.²⁸ Merchants trading in other commodities such as stockfish probably also sold their products at the Deventer fairs. It was far from unusual for local merchants to trade at fairs in their hometowns. As Blockmans calculated for thirteenth-century Ypres, out of 5,505 acts of transactions only 13.5 percent were delivered to foreign creditors. Most likely, the presence of local merchants was even more pronounced since they did not always need to formally record their transactions.²⁹ All in all, the service sector did not necessarily dominate the fifteenth-century Deventer economy as local merchants continued their businesses.

Finally, Deventer citizens could profit from the taxation of commerce in their city through tax farming. Taxing commerce was the government's ways of collecting revenues, but because the government leased out the collection of some of these revenues, its

28 H.R. van Ommeren, 'Inleiding', in: Van Ommeren (ed.), *De koopmansgilderol van Deventer*, 178; HCO, 0934, inv. no. 27, 3-5, 7-8.

29 Wim Blockmans, 'Fairs in Northern France and the Low Countries, 1200-1600', in: Markus A. Denzel (ed.) *Europäische Messeggeschichte 9.-19. Jahrhundert* (Cologne 2018) 118.

Leaseholds per individual	n. individuals	perc. individuals	n. leaseholds	perc. leaseholds
1	69	46%	69	19%
2	48	32%	96	27%
3-5	19	13%	72	20%
6-9	10	7%	72	20%
10>	4	3%	44	12%
Subtotal	150	100%	353	98%
Unclear			9	2%
Total	150	100%	362	100%

Figure 2 Table listing the number of individual tax farmers and the number of leaseholds they held between 1400 and 1470

(sources: HCO, 0698, inv. nos. 11-25.)

citizens could profit as well. The leaseholders or tax farmers profited when they managed to collect revenues that exceeded the lease price paid to the government.³⁰ Although the Deventer city government claimed revenues from diverse taxes and (mandatory) payments for services, only some of these can be identified as leaseholds based on the collectors' names recorded in the city's accounts. Figure 1 is based on a sample of identified leaseholds from the accounts covering the years between 1400 and 1470. The graph is far from even because revenues are not always recorded as leased out and sometimes not recorded at all.³¹ The general trend shows that during the first ten years no more than three individuals per year could profit from tax farming, while this number doubled after 1410.³² Between 1410 and 1470, an average of

30 Rudolf Bosch, *Stedelijke macht tussen overvloed en stagnatie. Stadsfinanciën, sociaal-politieke structuren en economie in het hertogdom Gelre, ca. 1350-1550* (Groningen 2019) 211-214.

31 The fact that the city government kept two complementary accounts each recording different revenues also meant that in those cases where only one of these accounts survive only a selection of revenues could be included.

32 Until 1404, only the revenues from the counting of merchandise (the *telambt*) were leased out. Afterward, a tax on the sale of cloth at inns followed. In 1412, the beer and wine excises were also leased out, while the *telambt* was replaced by revenues from the use of the city's scales in 1415. In 1418, revenues from the use of the city's crane were leased out, but the 1422 tax on the sale of cloth could no longer be identified as a leasehold. The excise on foreign beer was leased out in 1433, while only in 1440 could three revenues from the measuring of merchandise also be identified as leaseholds. One of these (the *wedemaat*) returned as a leasehold in 1457 and disappears in 1464. In 1467, the scales are not mentioned but the small scales (the *vederwaag*) are, as well as the *telambt* which reappears. Two years later not only the *vederwaag* and the *telambt* but also the scales are again leased out, for all three appear as leaseholds in 1470.

about six individuals per year could profit from leasing the collection of the city government's taxes.³³

As in other cities in the Low Countries, tax farming in Deventer was dominated by an elite. As Figure 2 shows, 78 percent of all leaseholders leased just 46 percent of all leaseholds, while ten percent of all leaseholders was responsible for almost a third of all leaseholds.³⁴ For Leiden, Hanno Brand reached a comparable conclusion, with almost 80 percent of all leaseholders holding little more than 38 of all leaseholds while just 5.7 percent of leaseholders held about a quarter.³⁵ Though not departing from the number of leaseholds but from the leaseholds' revenues, Marc Boone shows that the inequality characterizing tax farming was even more extreme in Ghent. During the first half of the fifteenth century, about 58 percent of tax farmers was responsible for just about four percent of revenues, while six percent of tax farmers brought in about half.³⁶ This finding might, in part, be due to Boone's method of using revenues, since the elite would probably focus on the more expensive leaseholds. Overall, inequality in tax farming appears to have been a general phenomenon.

The fact that an elite dominated tax farming in Deventer raises the question whether this elite was also the political elite. The accounts covering the years between 1400 and 1454 are useful for answering this question because they also list the names of the city's aldermen. The city government consisted of a bench of twelve aldermen and a council of twelve councillors. It is highly likely that the same individuals occupied both benches, practically alternating on a yearly basis.³⁷ The names of the aldermen thus provide a good proxy for the government in general. Comparing the names of the aldermen with the names of tax farmers shows that 14.8 percent of tax farmers also acted as aldermen during

33 The actual number of people profiting from tax farming was likely higher. On 81 occasions leaseholds were held by a leaseholder and his companions. I followed Marc Boone in counting companionships as one leaseholder under the name of the individual mentioned because the companions are unknown and the mentioned individual was clearly the most important member. Marc Boone, 'Triomferend privé-initiatief versus haperend overheidsoptreden?: Over pachters van indirecte belastingen in laatmiddeleeuwse steden', *Tijdschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis* 15:2 (1989) 124.

34 The fact that inequality appears slightly lower in Deventer than in Leiden is probably due to the fact that my sample period is smaller (1400-1470 compared with 1420-1510).

35 Hanno Brand, *Over macht en overwicht. Stedelijke elites in Leiden (1420-1510)* (Leuven 1996) 162.

36 Boone, 'Triomferend privé-initiatief', 125.

37 G.M. de Meyer and E.W.F. van den Elzen, 'Oligarchie, vloek of zegen? Het Deventer stadsbestuur omstreeks 1400', *Vereeniging tot beoefening van Overijssels Regt en Geschiedenis* (hereafter *VORG*), *Verslagen en mededelingen* 101 (1986) 6.

the first half of the fifteenth century.³⁸ Of the seventeen tax farmers who also served as aldermen, all except one leased no more than three leaseholds, while only a certain Henrick Puyssen leased seven. The overlap between the political elite and tax farmers in Deventer appears relatively small, although a direct comparison with Ghent and Leiden is difficult because I could only include the aldermen's names, while Boone and Brand could include other functionaries, too.

The economic interests of the city government's members were likely as diverse and conflicting as those of their citizens. This determination adds nuance to the previous claims of Weststrate and Slechte who argued that the Deventer city government aimed to stimulate commercial activity because its members profited from tax farming.³⁹ As demonstrated, however, the overlap between the city's aldermen and tax farmers was relatively small, suggesting the political elite's economic interests lay primarily elsewhere. Estimating the aldermen's involvement in the service sector is at present impossible due to a lack of information on their professions. Concerning active trade, a little more information is available. The last section compares the aldermen's family names with family names mentioned in the guild book and shows that though the government had close personal ties with the cloth merchant guild, it neither consisted solely or even predominantly of merchants. Like the Deventer citizenry at large, the city government's members probably also had diverse and, at times, conflicting economic interests.

The conflict of interest among Deventer citizenry became particularly clear when the Hanse decided to relocate its permanent trading post (*kontor*) from Bruges to Deventer. This decision was an extreme measure, aimed at putting pressure on Bruges' government, as well as the Burgundian dukes as its territorial lords, to provide better trading conditions. Since the thirteenth century, the *kontor* had been successfully relocated on five previous occasions.⁴⁰ Around the second half of the fifteenth century, Hanseatic representatives had started negotiations with Flemish authorities complaining about high tolls, excises, and other taxes as well as the capture, imprisonment, and banishment of Hanseatic merchants without warning.⁴¹ After the negotiations failed,

38 17 out of 115 leaseholders could be identified as aldermen.

39 Weststrate, *In het kielzog*, 170-173; Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer I*, 241.

40 Anke Greve, *Hansische Kaufleute, Hosteliers und Herbergen im Brügge des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main 2011) 133.

41 *HR III*, 252-253.

the assembly of Hanseatic cities known as the Hanseatic Diet decided on a new relocation and a concomitant boycott of Flanders.⁴²

A relocation, however, remained a complicated affair. Whether enough Hanseatic merchants followed the *kontor* to its new location depended on the cooperation among Hanseatic city governments. During the fourteenth century, the *kontor* had developed into a hierarchical organization with its own administration and statutes, but when its administration moved to a different city, it could no longer sanction members who continued trading in Bruges.⁴³ The Hanse, moreover, could not force the Hanseatic cities to punish recalcitrant merchants either, because it was above all a 'community of interest' of merchants and their cities. Sanctioning recalcitrant merchants outside the *kontor*'s sphere of influence was only possible when individual urban governments decided to coordinate their actions through the Hanseatic diets, in addition to adopting these diets' decisions in their bylaws.⁴⁴ In terms of the Social Conflict View of institutional change, it all came down to the individual city governments making the relocation work by changing their city's institutional framework, inevitably creating winners and losers and social conflict.

When the *kontor* relocated to Deventer in 1451/52, the Deventer government was forced to also choose winners and losers. The relocation could benefit the service sector and tax farmers because the Hanseatic merchants potentially increased commercial activity and demand for services. At least the city governments of Dordrecht and Bruges came

42 HR III, 650, 489-494; This area included the important Brabant market centers of Antwerp and Bergen op Zoom. Moreover, it was also the border of the boycotted area during the 1358 *kontor* relocation: Dietrich Poeck, 'Kontorverlegung als Mittel hansischer Diplomatie', in: Werner Pravacini (ed.), *Hansekaufleute in Brügge* (Frankfurt am Main 2000) 38.

43 Although the term *kontor* stems from the sixteenth century, it is generally used to refer to the community of Hanseatic merchants residing in Bruges: Justyna Wubs-Mrozevicz, 'De kantoren van de Hanze. Bergen, Brugge, London en Nowgorod', in: Brand and Knol (eds) *Koggen, kooplieden en kantoren*, 92; Volker Henn, 'Das Brügger Kontor', in: Jörgen Bracker and Volker Henn (eds), *Die Hanse. Lebenswirklichkeit und Mythos*, eds. (Lübeck 1999) 217-218.

44 Ulla Kypta, 'Hansegeschichte als Organisationsgeschichte versus Hansegeschichte als Wirtschaftsgeschichte. Anregungen für eine diskussionsfähige Hanseforschung', *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 134 (2016) 142-146; Carsten Jahnke, 'Die Hanse. Überlegungen zur Entwicklung des Hansebegriffes und der Hanse als Institution resp. Organisation', *Hansische Geschichtsblätter* 131 (2013) 26-32; Ulf Christian Ewert and Stephan Selzer, *Institutions of Hanseatic trade. Studies on the political economy of a medieval network organisation* (Frankfurt am Main 2016) 103-109; Selzer, *Die Mittelalterliche Hanse*, 56-57; Brand, 'De bestuurlijke slagkracht', 38-39; Wubs-Mrozevicz, 'The Hanse', 7; Ernst Pitz, *Bürgerreinigung und Städteeinung. Studien zur Verfassungsgeschichte der Hansestädte und der deutschen Hanse* (Cologne 2001) 418-420; Angelo Pichierie, *Die Hanse, Staat der Städte. Ein ökonomisches und politisches Modell der Städtevernetzung* (Opladen 2000) 63-80.

to that conclusion. In a letter dating 1451, the *kontor*'s administration explained that when rumors of the *kontor*'s relocation spread, the Bruges city government had begged them to return. Meanwhile, the Dordrecht government invited the Hansards with warm words. During previous relocations, Dordrecht had temporarily hosted the *kontor* and apparently this had served the city well, since this time its government promised even more "favorable, cordial and conducive" conditions.⁴⁵

Since Deventer itself was a Hanseatic city, the relocation was potentially detrimental for the Deventer merchants trading in Flemish cloth. To make the relocation work, the Hanseatic Diet decided that it would include a prohibition on all journeys to Flanders, as well as the trade with Flemish merchants and in Flemish products.⁴⁶ A prohibition on the sale of Flemish cloth in Deventer would have given Holland cloth merchants, who were already of immense importance for the Deventer fairs, the opportunity to take over the entire Deventer cloth trade. Although Holland cloth was not a perfect substitute for Flemish cloth, the temporary boycott would aggravate an already existing competition.⁴⁷ It is telling of the Deventer merchants' suffering that in different Hanseatic sources at least six Deventer merchants are suspected of having illegally traded in Flemish products. In one case, cloth is explicitly mentioned, while in three other cases the surnames of the merchants also resurface in the cloth merchants' book.⁴⁸ All in all, the relocation of the Hanseatic *kontor* from Bruges to Deventer brought to the fore an already existing conflict of interests: attracting merchants could be beneficial to the Deventer service sector and tax farmers, though detrimental to the city's (cloth) merchants.

The Deventer city government's economic policies: A hesitant compromise

The case of the *kontor*'s relocation provides an unique opportunity to study the logic underlying the Deventer city government's economic policies. Since Deventer was a Hanseatic city, its government was at

⁴⁵ HR IV, 9.

⁴⁶ HR III, 489-494.

⁴⁷ Poeck, 'Kontorverlegung', 51 Johann Hasler, *Dem ghemeynen copmanne der dutschen hense to Brugge in Vlaanderen: Hansische Diplomatie im Burgundischen Jahrhundert* (Kiel 2017) 14.

⁴⁸ HUB 8, 8, 117 (esp. concerning Flemish cloth), 252-254, 267-268; Although comparing names is difficult due to spelling variations, the following surnames could be identified: Van (N)Orten, Borre, Bovinck (or Bueving), HCO, 0934, inv. no. 27, 16-38.

least supposed to follow the Hanseatic assembly's decisions and enforce the Flanders boycott. Taking Gelderblom's hypothesis as our point of departure, moreover, it is interesting to see whether the government took the extra step of actively trying to attract the Hanseatic merchants to Deventer. Other city governments were quick to respond and generally willing to adapt their economic policies, as the above-mentioned examples of Bruges and Dordrecht show. Similarly, when the *kontor* left Deventer for Utrecht in 1452, the Utrecht city government, as well as the bishop as its territorial lord, provided safe-conducts and offered the Hanseatic merchants the same privileges they had enjoyed in Bruges.⁴⁹ Was the Deventer government as eager to attract the Hanseatic merchants? Did it at least follow the Hanseatic assemblies' decisions, or was even that too much to ask?

At first, although Deventer representatives had attended all major Hanseatic diets where the relocation was discussed, there are no indications they used these opportunities to lobby for relocating the *kontor* to their hometown. The only possible indication is the fact that at the 1450 diet in Lübeck, the Deventer representative Johan Marquard had taken a seat on the committee that worked out the relocation's details and ultimately chose Deventer as the *kontor's* temporary location.⁵⁰ Marquard's main purpose for visiting the diet, however, was to safeguard the interests of the Deventer merchants trading with Bergen. In 1447, the Hanseatic Diet had prohibited the freighting of non-Hanseatic ships which hurt the interests of Deventer merchants who regularly depended on the service of non-Hanseatic freighters.⁵¹ At a following diet in 1449, Marquard had obtained an exception for his city's merchants but on the explicit condition that it would only hold until the next diet.⁵² For Marquard, attending the 1450 Lübeck diet was crucial for safeguarding the interests of Deventer merchants, joining the commission deciding on the *kontor's* relocation had not been his main objective.

After the *kontor* had moved to Deventer it did not receive much support either. In 1451, at a Hanseatic diet in Utrecht, the *kontor's* location was scheduled to be discussed.⁵³ If the Deventer government truly aimed to keep the *kontor* in its city, it surely had to attend.

49 Leo Lensen and Willy H. Heitling, *De geschiedenis van de Hanze. Bloeiperiode langs de IJssel* (Deventer 1990) 165-166; Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer I*, 208.

50 HR III, 489-494.

51 Wubs-Mrozevicz, *Traders, ties and tensions*, 160; HR III, 194.

52 HR III, 412.

53 HR III, 491.

Surprisingly, the government only sent a representative after a formal request from the diet. This request, furthermore, did not even concern the *kontor's* relocation, but a long-standing dispute between Deventer and Wesel.⁵⁴ Similarly, after the issue of the *kontor's* privileges was addressed at the diet by the representatives of Prussian cities, the Deventer government only sent a copy of the German emperor's privilege for the Deventer annual fairs to Utrecht.⁵⁵ The emperor's privilege entailed that, like all merchants, the *kontor's* members could trade freely at the fairs. Yet it did not provide the *kontor* with exclusive rights. The Deventer government clearly fell short in this respect. In Bruges, the *kontor* had enjoyed extensive privileges, and when it moved to Utrecht in 1452, the Utrecht government proved equally willing to help out. It offered exemptions for the wine excise, the right to hold public gatherings, the recognition of the *kontor's* jurisdiction over its members, and the use of the city's jail for punishing insubordinate members.⁵⁶ Hence, even when the *kontor* already resided in Deventer, the city government did not take convincing action to keep it there.

For a surprisingly long time, the Deventer city government even refused outright to adhere to the common Hanseatic strategy necessary to enforce the relocation. To make the relocation work, cooperation among the Hanseatic city governments was imperative. The 1450 Lübeck diet had therefore decided that all Hanseatic city governments would proclaim the relocation's details on July 24. Although the deadline was later extended to the fourth of July, the first evidence of the Deventer city government following this strategy dates to September 1452, more than a year later.⁵⁷ It is impossible to verify when the Deventer government actually proclaimed the relocation's details because registers containing copies of public proclamations (the *buurspraak*) only survive for 1459 onward.⁵⁸ There is, however, strong evidence that it failed to do so, at least until September 1452. Only on September 11 of that year were messengers sent to Utrecht, Amsterdam, and Haarlem to warn merchants not to bring Flemish goods to Deventer.⁵⁹ Later that month, messengers travelled to Utrecht and Amersfoort bringing news of confiscations, indicating that the

54 HR III, 538; HCO, 0698, inv. no. 1.21c, fol. 8r.

55 HCO, 0698, inv. no. 1.21c, fol. 3v.

56 HUB 8, 151.

57 HR III, 489-494; HR III, 557.

58 Benders, *Bestuursstructuur en schriftcultuur*, 126-128.

59 HCO, 0698, inv. no. 1.21e, fol. 3v.

kontor's relocation and concomitant boycott were finally enforced.⁶⁰ It took the Deventer city government more than a year after the already extended deadline to adhere to the decisions made at the Hanseatic assemblies.

In the meantime, the government had fundamentally changed its attitude, switching from actively opposing the relocation to supporting it. In November 1451, at the instigation of the Cologne government, representatives of Hanseatic cities in Guelders and the Oversticht known as the Zuiderzee cities (including Deventer) met in Nijmegen. There, they composed a letter to Lübeck requesting a new diet to discuss, among other things, how the Flanders boycott could be eased.⁶¹ The Lübeck government called for a new diet at which the boycott was considerably relaxed.⁶² Thus, in June, representatives from Cologne and the Zuiderzee cities reconvened in Nijmegen to discuss whether they would now support the *kontor's* relocation.⁶³ In the end, they decided to continue their opposition and write another letter to Lübeck but this time not in the name of Zwolle and Deventer. Although it remains unclear why Zwolle is not mentioned, the Deventer city government had explicitly forbidden its representative to sign the letter.⁶⁴ So, around June 1452, the Deventer city government went from actively opposing the *kontor's* relocation to actively enforcing it.

Despite the Deventer city government's change of heart, Deventer would prove to be unfit as the *kontor's* host city. The *kontor's* administration expressed its worries most clearly in a letter to Danzig dating July 5, 1452. While the Deventer city government had just decided to no longer oppose the boycott necessary for the relocation, the *kontor's* administration was brutal in its dismissal of Deventer as a possible location. Apparently, the Hanseatic merchants did not heed the decisions of the Hanseatic diets and drew their own plans. Nobody wanted to visit Deventer, which the *kontor's* administration primarily attributed to pestilence and the insecure situation in the Veluwe and Betuwe regions. It, moreover, lamented that it was unable to exert justice over its members, but it is unclear whether this incapacity had to do with a lack of privileges or simply resulted from the fact that its members did not visit Deventer. Clearly desperate, the *kontor's* administration

60 HCO, 0698, inv. no. 1.21e, fol. 3v, 4r; *HUB* 8, 136-137.

61 *HR* IV, 20-31 esp. 27-28.

62 *HR* IV, 43-51.

63 *HR* IV, 62.

64 *HR* IV, 60-63.

requested a further transfer to Utrecht, which would eventually take place.⁶⁵ Current scholarship mentions multiple reasons for why the *kontor's* relocation to Deventer failed. Its effectiveness was undermined by coordination failures among Hanseatic cities and especially the opposition of Cologne, the Prussian and Zuiderzee cities, while the city's less favorable hinterland and geographical location rendered Deventer an unsuitable alternative for Bruges. Perhaps the pestilence was the straw that broke the camel's back. Finally, because the *kontor's* relocation was aimed at putting pressure not solely on Bruges but also on the duke of Burgundy as its territorial lord, the choice for Deventer was primarily informed by the fact that it was one of the few trading cities in the Low Countries not yet under Burgundian rule.⁶⁶ Here is not the place to assess the relative importance of each of these factors, but the present analysis suggests the city government's hesitant response could be included in the list.

Why did the Deventer city government suddenly decide to support the *kontor's* relocation in the summer of 1452, right when its city's shortcomings became most evident and most of the Zuiderzee cities continued their opposition? Although sources documenting the deliberations and decisions of the government's meetings have not survived, the account books suggest balancing its citizens' economic interests was the government's primary concern. In late May 1452, right before the second meeting of Cologne and the Zuiderzee cities in Nijmegen, two Deventer aldermen had discussed the state of their city's cloth industry with the city's merchants (*coepluden*).⁶⁷ In the same year, the government would invest a little more than 250 pounds (about 583 day wages of a master slater or about 1,167 day wages of an unskilled laborer) to recruit the necessary producers who could give the Deventer cloth industry a boost.⁶⁸ Although the money would flow to cloth producers rather than merchants, the preceding meeting with the city's merchants suggests it was primarily aimed at compensating the Deventer cloth merchants for their losses due to the Flanders blockade. Simultaneously with subsidizing the cloth industry, the city government supported the *kontor's* relocation, suggesting it had never

65 HR IV, 72-74.

66 Poeck, 'Kontorverlegung', 51-53; Hasler, 'Dem ghemeynen copmanne', 13-14, 16; Greve, *Hansische Kauffleute*, 149, 156-162, 160; J.H.A. Beuken, *De Hanze en Vlaanderen* (Maastricht 1950) 107; Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer I*, 206; Weststrate, *In het kielzog*, 171.

67 HCO, 0698, inv. no. 1.21e, fol. 2v.

68 HCO, 0698, inv. no. 1.21f, fol. 15v; The comparison is based on the day wages of a slater and his unskilled helper recorded in the 1452 account: HCO, 0698, inv. no. 1.21f, fol. 13r.

fundamentally been opposed to the relocation but mainly aimed to protect the city's cloth merchants.

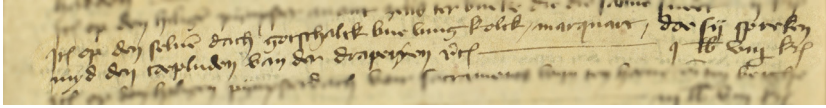


Illustration 2 Picture of the record from the 1452 account, testifying to the aldermen's discussion with the Deventer cloth producers

(source: HCO, 0698, inv. nos. 1.21e, fol. 2v.)⁶⁹

Compensating the Deventer merchants by investing in the city's cloth industry was not as far-fetched as it might seem. City governments in the eastern Low Countries such as Arnhem and Zutphen regularly subsidized cloth producers to move to their cities.⁷⁰ Furthermore, in 1440, the Deventer city government had already paid two cloth producers from Amsterdam 25 Rhenish guilders each when they moved to Deventer.⁷¹ This sum was quite a subsidy: 25 Rhenish guilders represented about 114 day wages of a master mason or 200 day wages of his unskilled helper.⁷² Crucially, the Deventer cloth industry was probably already relatively export-oriented or would at least become so during the sixteenth century. Based on early sixteenth-century Norwegian account books, Justyna Wubs-Mrozewicz shows that Deventer cloth was exported to Bergen on a large scale by merchants from Overijssel, Holland, and Lübeck. Despite being cheaper and most likely of inferior quality compared with its Holland counterpart, Deventer cloth appears to have been the predominant cloth transported to Bergen.⁷³ The Norwegian sources do not shed light on the fifteenth century, but the success of Deventer cloth in the next century testifies to its sales capacities. The government's strategy of investing in export-oriented cloth production in Deventer was thus a viable option for supporting its active merchants.

In the end, the Deventer government's response to the Hanseatic *kontor*'s relocation can best be characterized as an attempt at balancing its citizens' economic interests. Although the Deventer service

69 Transcription: It[em] op den selve[n] dach gocschalck bueving kolck, marquart, doe sij spreken myd den coepluden van der draperien v[erteer]t I [1] l[i]b[ram] VIIJ [7.5] kr[omstaarten].

70 Bosch, *Stedelijke macht*, 182-183, 412-413.

71 Benders, *Bestuursstructuur*, 243.

72 The comparison is based on the day wages of stone masons and their unskilled helpers recorded in the 1440 account: HCO, 6698, inv. no. 1.19b, fol. 13r.

73 Wubs-Mrozewicz, *Traders, ties and tensions*, 199-207.

sector and tax farmers could have profited from the relocation, the concomitant Flanders boycott would hurt the interest of the city's merchants. Consequently, the government refused to support the relocation until it reached an agreement with its merchants to subsidize the city's cloth industry. The Deventer government was far from willing to set aside some of its citizens' interests in order to attract additional commerce to its city. Although surprising from the perspective of Gelderblom's hypothesis, the city government's response was not entirely unique. Even during its city's heyday as a commercial metropolis around the mid-sixteenth century, the Antwerp government hesitated in organizing and regulating the marine insurance market until a compromise was reached between merchants with diverging opinions, city officials, and commissioners representing the princely government.⁷⁴ In fact, the rest of this section argues that balancing the economic interests of its citizens characterized the Deventer city government's economic policies throughout the fifteenth century.

During the fifteenth century, the city government pursued various policies to serve the merchant community at large. The 1448 book of ordinances, for example, includes legislation to protect merchants' goods from seizure as collateral in lawsuits.⁷⁵ Judicially speaking, however, the city government's ability to serve merchants was limited. Until at least the late fifteenth century, jurisdiction over foreigners (*vreemdelingen*) remained contested between the city government and the sheriff (the representative of the bishop of Utrecht as the city's territorial lord). The sheriff and the government were not polar opposites, since both were recruited from the same social groups and families and many sheriffs served as aldermen later in life. Still, the situation remained awkward as the city government could not claim full jurisdiction over merchants visiting Deventer.⁷⁶ In addition, the government invested in infrastructure to facilitate merchants traveling to Deventer. It bought and renovated a building known as the *Rijkenstein* in order to rent it out to Leiden cloth merchants.⁷⁷ Although

74 Dave De ruysscher and Jeroen Puttevils, 'The art of compromise. Legislative deliberations on marine insurance institutions in Antwerp (c. 1550-c. 1570)', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review* 130:3 (2015) 40-48.

75 Seizure was only allowed as deposits for delayed rents: HCO, 0690, inv. no. 132-1, book 3, fol. 2r.

76 Benders, *Bestuursstructuur*, 66-70.

77 A.C.F. Koch, 'In en om het stadhuis van Deventer', in: A.C.F. Koch (ed.), *In en om het Deventer stadhuis* (Deventer 1982) 36-37; for another renovation in 1445 see: HCO, 0698, inv. no. 1.20a, fol. 9v; Sneller states the Leiden merchants rented the *Rijkenstein* between 1444 and 1449: Sneller, *Deventer*, 47-48; In the City's accounts the rents from the *Rijkenstein* are recorded until 1462: HCO, 098, inv.

the government also benefited financially from these rents, their efforts fit within a broader policy to serve and attract merchants to Deventer. It is telling that according to the city's treasurer, the government paid for the construction of a *kantoer* (an office) in the *Rijkenstein*, because "the merchants from Leiden had so often requested it."⁷⁸

Protecting merchants traveling to Deventer by issuing safe-conducts was also part of the government's attempts to attract commerce.⁷⁹ Protection, though, could go further than safe-conducts alone. In 1452, for example, a conflict between merchants from Holland and Zutphen occurred when Zutphen merchants confiscated the goods of Holland merchants in Hattem. Following up on this news, the Deventer magistrate immediately sent warnings to Amsterdam, Haarlem, and Leiden, as well as to Hollanders residing in Hardewijk. In the following weeks, the city government requested safe-conducts for Holland merchants in Arnhem and deliberated with their colleagues from Kampen and Zwolle about securing traffic on the River IJssel.⁸⁰ In the end, diplomacy did not suffice, and the government led a military expedition to escort Holland merchants to Deventer.⁸¹ Interestingly, on request of its Zutphen colleagues and the duke of Guelders, the Deventer government also provided the Zutphen merchants, who had confiscated the Holland merchants' goods in the first place, a safe-conduct to the Deventer fairs.⁸² The conflict thus clearly shows that the Deventer city government did not choose any side and served the merchant community at large in the benefit of trade.

Crucially, the city government also actively protected Deventer merchants against competition from the foreign merchants they tried to attract in the first place. In 1443, it issued an ordinance which prohibited foreigners from marrying Deventer women and established the maximum number of Hollanders that could live and trade in Deventer.⁸³ According to Weststrate, this ordinance was a reaction to the confiscation of four ships from Kampen by Hollanders in the 1440s, since Kampen and Zwolle responded with similar legislation.⁸⁴ Slechte, however, points out that the ordinance was also a matter of trade policy.

no. 1.23e, fol. 1r.

78 "dair die coeplude van leyden voele omme gebeden hadde": HCO, 0698, inv. no. 1.21h, fol. 13v.

79 HCO, 0690, inv. no. 132-1, book 1, fol. 2; HCO, 0722, inv. no. 19, fol. 13r-15v.

80 HCO, 0698, inv. no. 1.21f, fol. 4v-5v, 9v.

81 HCO, 0698, inv. no. 1.21f, fol. 10r.

82 HCO, 0698, inv. no. 1.21f, fol. 5v, 9v-10r.

83 Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer I*, 237.

84 Weststrate, *In het kielzog*, 161.

Through marriage, Hollanders could obtain Deventer citizenship which included toll freedom for two major tolls (the *Katen-* and *Bischofstol*).⁸⁵ Holland merchants were clearly interested in evading these tolls, as previous conflicts between them and Deventer show.⁸⁶ Apart from constituting a major share of the city government's revenues, the tolls gave Deventer merchants an edge over their competition. City governments, in fact, often employed tolls and taxes to keep trade in the hands of their citizens.⁸⁷ The fact that the ordinance continued to be in force until 1473 suggests it was more than a reaction to a single incident but, rather, a structural attempt at protecting Deventer merchants against competition.⁸⁸ The city government thus not only served the Holland merchants by renovating buildings and providing safe-conducts, but also made sure they did not constitute a bigger threat to Deventer merchants than necessary.

In conclusion, the government's response to the *kontor's* relocation brought to the fore what had been the core of its economic policies throughout the fifteenth century: balancing the interests of the city's service sector, tax farmers, and active merchants. This conclusion has implications for current explanations of the IJssel cities' economic policies that, though truly Hanseatic cities, at times undermined the strategies set out at the Hanseatic diets. Looper argues the IJssel cities followed their own bottom-up strategies to strengthen their position as the commercial bridge between the Holland-Flemish and Hanseatic economic regions.⁸⁹ The case of the *kontor's* relocation adds an extra layer of complexity. It shows that the Deventer city government undermined the Hanse's strategies in order not only to connect the Hanseatic region with the Holland-Flemish region but also to protect the interests of its city's merchants. All in all, the Deventer government behaved how A.B. Hibbert characterized late medieval urban economic policies back in 1963: although, in principle, city governments aimed to attract as much trade as possible, in practice, they simultaneously aimed to keep trade in the hands of their own citizens.⁹⁰

85 Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer I*, 237. A.J. Wientjen, 'Tolheffing in Deventer', *VORG Overijsselse Historische Bijdragen* 110 (1995) 19-20.

86 Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer I*, 233-234.

87 Hibbert, 'The economic policies', 162-172.

88 Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer I*, 237; HCO, 0690, inv. no. 132-1, book 1, fol. 7v.

89 Looper, 'De Nederlandse hanzesteden', 119-122.

90 Hibbert, 'The economic policies', 160-172.

Staying in power by navigating political institutions and balancing conflicting interests

What made the Deventer city government pursue their ambivalent economic policies? The city government's actions do not reflect tensions between the Deventer elite's attempts at rent seeking and visiting merchant guilds or territorial princes protecting merchants' rights. Neither do they suggest attracting the Hanseatic merchants to Deventer was the city government's primary objective leading them to set aside other interests. The balancing of economic interests suggests that Van Bavel's approach to city government's policies as reflecting a balance of power among interest groups is most useful. To understand how the balance of power impacted economic policies, this section departs from the Social Conflict View of institutional change, arguing that the Deventer city government shaped its policies in order to retain its position by navigating the local balance of power among interest groups.

The concept of political institutions is crucial for understanding the balance of power among different interest groups. Political institutions, like economic institutions, are defined as the patterns of interaction that govern the relationships between individuals. In this case, however, they constrain and incentivize political rather than economic actors. According to the Social Conflict View, political institutions and the distribution of resources determine who is powerful enough to change (or maintain) economic institutions to their own liking.⁹¹ Furthermore, this elite would have primarily aimed to protect its own position of power even when it resulted in economic institutions that were suboptimal for some groups or for society at large.⁹² In the Deventer case, the city's political institutions created a political context characterized by a balance of power among various interest groups. Thus, in order to retain its position of power, the city government could not afford sacrificing the interests of some of its citizens for the benefit of others.

Focusing on the fourteenth century, G.M. de Meyer and E.W.F. van den Elzen claim that the Deventer citizens had virtually no ways of promoting their interests because the same wealthy families occupied both the bench of aldermen and the council practically alternating between both functions on a yearly basis.⁹³ In the fifteenth century,

91 Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson, 'Institutions as a fundamental cause', 389-396.

92 Ibid., 432-433; 448; Robinson, 'Elites and institutional persistence', 33; Ogilvie, "Whatever is, is right?", 662-667.

93 De Meyer and Van den Elzen, 'Oligarchie: vloek of zegen?', 6.

mobility among the Deventer aldermen was still relatively low compared to other cities in the Low Countries. The records of aldermen's names in the accounts covering the years between 1400 and 1454 show that on average, the Deventer aldermen fulfilled their function seven times.⁹⁴ This is more than double the number Brand found for Leiden and Peter Stabel for Deinze, Eeklo, and Kaprijke.⁹⁵ Moreover, in Deventer only seventeen percent of the identified aldermen served once versus 40 percent in Leiden and 70 percent in Rotterdam.⁹⁶ Finally, 24 percent of the identified Deventer aldermen served more than ten times versus 16.5 in Rotterdam, 12.5 in Dordrecht, and 4.5 in Ghent. Only in nearby Zutphen was the percentage of aldermen serving more than ten years markedly higher at 54 percent.⁹⁷ Although numerically closer to Rotterdam, the situation in Deventer probably corresponded better to that of Zutphen. The percentages of Zutphen, Rotterdam, Dordrecht, and Ghent are based on a sample covering a period almost three times as long as mine (1400-1550). Including more years would most likely allow for observing a higher percentage of longer careers, especially in governments characterized by relatively low levels of mobility. Hence, De Meyer and Van den Elzen's characterization of the Deventer city government as relatively closed-off holds for the fifteenth century as well.

The fact that the same individuals and families dominated the Deventer city government throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, did not entail that the rest of the citizenry had no ways of promoting their economic interests. Recent research has shown that inhabitants of cities throughout late medieval Europe conducted a wide range of constructive activities in order to influence their governments' decision-making.⁹⁸ Although the Deventer sources

94 1454 marks the end date because afterward the names are not mentioned for eight years and, when they reappear, only surnames are mentioned, which hampers identifying individuals. In what follows all percentages are rounded up to integers.

95 Brand, *Over macht en overwicht*, 51; Peter Stabel, 'Deinze, Eeklo en Kaprijke, kleine stadjes in het laatmiddeleeuwse Vlaanderen. Kleinschaligheid en stedelijk leven' (Master Thesis Ghent University 1985) 19.

96 Brand, *Over macht en overwicht*, 52; W.P. Blockmans, 'Mobiliteit in stadsbesturen 1400-1550', in: D.E.H. de Boer and J.W. Marsilje (eds) *De Nederlanden in de late Middeleeuwen* (Utrecht 1987) 249. Comparing Blockmans's other results is difficult since his exact calculations differ per city discussed, and because he includes other functionaries such as councillors in addition to the cities' secretaries and sheriffs in his calculations.

97 Blockmans, 'Mobiliteit in stadsbesturen 1400-1550', 252.

98 Jelle Haemers and Ben Eersels, 'Introduction: Shaping urban politics from below. Citizen participation in late medieval Europe', in: Ben Eersels and Jelle Haemers (eds) *Words and deeds. Shaping*

do not explicitly record how citizens influenced the government's economic policies, they suggest at least two ways in which citizens could influence the government's decision-making. First, the account books and the city's book of ordinances testify to the influence of a randomly selected electoral and advisory board known as the *meente*. Secondly, the Deventer cloth merchants could influence government policies through their membership of the city's cloth merchant's guild as suggested by information from its guild book.

According to the 1448 book of ordinances, the *meente* was a randomly selected group of citizens who had a strong influence on urban politics because they elected and advised the government. Although the origins and role of the *meente* before the fifteenth century are subject to debate, it had become a political force to be reckoned with by 1448.⁹⁹ The book of ordinances dating to that year prescribes that every year, on February 22, all citizens had to assemble at the cloth hall and draw beans. Those who drew black beans would form the *meente* and elect the new aldermen and councillors, while the sitting government was explicitly forbidden to intervene.¹⁰⁰ The election was not simply a formality. In 1447, it already followed the procedures to be formalized in the future book of ordinances: the *meente* elected the new government while the sitting government kept its distance celebrating the election separately.¹⁰¹ The election results show how the *meente* could, in practice, replace established politicians. Of the city's twelve aldermen, three established politicians were replaced by newcomers who had never served since 1400. From at least 1447 onward, the individual members of the Deventer city government depended directly on the opinions of randomly selected citizens for their positions of power.

For fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Antwerp, Janna Everaert also argues that a role in the formation of the new government offered opportunities to influence government policy. The Antwerp government was not elected by its citizenry but appointed by the duke of Brabant who,

urban politics from below in late medieval Europe (Turnhout 2020) 7-32; and the various essays in this collection.

99 C.A. Kalveen, 'Uit de geschiedenis van de Deventer gemeente tot omstreeks 1481', *VORG Verslagen en Mededelingen* 92 (1977) 29-59; De Meyer and Van den Elzen, 'Oligarchie: vloek of zegen?', 5-21; Rheinhold Schneider, 'Do die Ghemyente op den raet hues hadde gheweest Deventer Oligarchie und Kontrollfunktionen der *communitas* im 14. Jahrhundert', in: Ellen Widder, Mark Meriowsky, and Peter Johanek (eds), *Vestigia Monasteriensia: Westfalen – Rheinland – Niederlande* (Bielefeld 1995) 13-29.

100 HCO, 0690, inv. nr. 132-1, book 1, 14r.

101 HCO, 0690, inv. no. 20e fol. 8r; The separate celebration became common practice from around 1400 onward: De Meyer and Van den Elzen, 'Oligarchie: vloek of zegen?', 9.

from 1477 onward, would renew half of the government on a yearly basis by choosing from a list of candidates.¹⁰² Everaert suggests that although merchants barely sat in the government, they did exert considerable influence on its policies by serving as officials known as *wijkmeesters*, who could determine half of the candidate list.¹⁰³ Considering the *meente*'s role in forming the new Deventer government was more far-ranging, it would have provided a random selection of citizens with considerable influence on government policies. Because the government was ignorant of whether next year's *meente* would be populated by citizens profiting from the service sector, tax farming, or active trade, it was induced to take all of its citizens' interests into account.

Throughout the year, the *meente* continued to exert influence on government policies even if the exact nature of its contribution is not recorded. In theory, the *meente* was responsible for controlling the city's accounts and had the final say about all loans or gifts to private parties.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, no new ordinances could be added to the book without the *meente*'s consent and the *meente* had to meet at least four times a year.¹⁰⁵ Although further quantitative analysis of the Deventer accounts might show these rules were not followed to the letter, the 1451 accounts show the *meente* did indeed check the accounts and met with the government on nine occasions.¹⁰⁶ The subject of the meetings are not always recorded, but at least two of the meetings concerned a topic that touched on the government's economic policies. They concerned the papal indulgence for the 1450 jubilee, which was a religious issue with important economic consequences.¹⁰⁷ Due to its conflict with the city government of Münster, the papacy would only offer the indulgence if Deventer chose its side. After at least two deliberations with the *meente*, the city government decided it could not risk its trade relations with Münster and declined.¹⁰⁸ The account

102 Janna Everaert, *Macht in de metropool. Politieke elitevorming tijdens de demografische en economische bloeifase van Antwerpen (ca. 1400-1550)* (Amsterdam 2023) 30-33.

103 Ibid, 119-120.

104 Kalveen, 'Uit de geschiedenis van de Deventer gemeente', 50; as Benders shows, Kalveen mistakenly claims that the magistrate could only sell annuities with consent of the *meente*, whereas the book of ordinances clearly states that the magistrate could not lend or offer money to private persons without the *meente*'s consent. Benders, *Bestuursstructuur*, 254; HCO, 0690, inv. nr. 132-1, book 1, fol. 6v.

105 "Item soe salmen die meente toe vier tieden vanden iaere te samen hebben." HCO, 0690, inv. nr. 132-, book 1, fol. 12v-13r.

106 HCO, 0698, inv. no. 21c, fol. 3v, 4v-5v; HCO, 0698, inv. no. 21d, fol. 4v-5r, 6v-8r.

107 HCO, 0698, inv. no. 21c, fol. 5r-5v; HCO, 0698, inv. no. 21d, 7r.

108 Slechte, *Geschiedenis van Deventer I*, 219-220.

books do not provide evidence of a meeting between the government and *meente* on the topic of the *kontor*'s relocation, but the meetings that were held provided the citizens sitting in the *meente* with ample opportunities to voice their concerns.

In addition to being randomly selected as a member of the *meente*, the Deventer cloth merchants had additional opportunities to influence government decisions through their membership of the cloth merchant guild. First, many members of the city government had personal ties with members of the cloth merchant guild. The guild book contains three lists of new members (including the sons of members) which allow for a comparison of their family names with those of the city's aldermen. Two lists are dated to respectively 1443 and 1455, while the first list can be dated between 1418 and 1443, based on handwriting and its location in the manuscript.¹⁰⁹ In the end, I compared the lists with the names of the aldermen retrieved from the accounts covering the period 1418 (the earliest possible date for the lists in the guild book) till 1454 (the latest suitable account). For this period, the surnames of 40 out of the 78 recorded aldermen resurface in the cloth merchant book's lists. In practice, the overlap between both groups must have been higher because ten of the aldermen are only listed with their patronym and could not be included in the comparison.¹¹⁰ In addition, figure 3 shows that the percentage of aldermen with family connections to the cloth merchants' guild remained rather stable around 50 percent per year. Crucially, this comparison does not show that a large share of the government's members were active merchants; it rather testifies to the familial relations between merchants and the government. Familial connections could be one of the most direct ways for merchants to influence government policies even if they did not sit in the government themselves, as Everaert also points out for fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Antwerp.¹¹¹

The influence of the cloth merchant's guild on government policies went further than its members' familial connections. Concerning pre-modern European guilds in general, Ogilvie argues that informal agreements between city governments and merchant guilds often resulted in the guilds financially supporting the government in return for measures that served their members' interests.¹¹² Although the Deventer

109 HCO, 0934, inv. no. 27, 15-20, 27-30, 35-38.

110 The surnames used were mostly toponymic (e.g., Van Leiden or Ten Bome), occupational (e.g., Hoyer or Bierman), or of unknown origin (e.g., Puyssen or Splitof).

111 Everaert, *Macht in de metropool*, 116-117.

112 Sheilagh Ogilvie, *The European guilds. An economic analysis* (Princeton 2019) 37-38, 46-69.

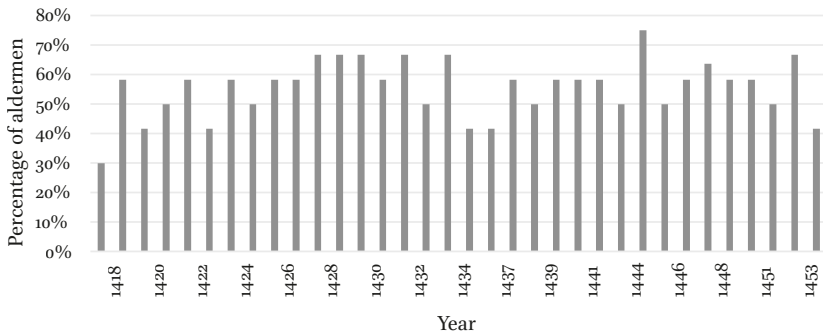


Figure 3 Graph listing the percentages of aldermen serving between 1418 and 1454 with family connections to the cloth merchants' guild. Percentages are used because in some years the board of aldermen counted less than twelve members, such as in 1418 (ten aldermen) and 1448 (eleven aldermen)

(sources: HCO, 0698 inv. nos. 15-21i; HCO, 0934, inv. no. 27.)

sources do not explicitly record the guild influencing government policies, Ogilvie's characterization appears on point. The guild had ample opportunities to make informal agreements with the government. Apart from the familial connections between both groups, the guild book explicitly states all of the guild's deans simultaneously sat in the city government.¹¹³ The guild's leadership thus had direct access to the government which must have led to the informal exchange of financial support for favorable policies because the cloth merchant's book also shows the guild provided the government with at least one loan.¹¹⁴

All in all, the political institutions and resulting balance of power among interest groups answer to a large extent why the city government's economic policies constituted a constant compromise between its citizens' economic interests. Due to the influence of the *meente* and the cloth merchants' guild, the government's power directly and indirectly depended on the support of citizens with potentially conflicting interests. As a result of this political context, the city government could not sacrifice the interests of the city's service sector, tax farmers, and active merchants without endangering its own position of power. Evidence from other late medieval and early modern cities also suggests that economic policies that on first sight appear illogical or suboptimal from an economic point of view were primarily the result of the political elite's power plays.

¹¹³ HCO, 0934, inv. nr. 27, 5, 23.

¹¹⁴ HCO, 0934, inv. nr. 27, 12.

Robert DuPlessis and Martha Howell argue how the governments of Leiden and Lille pursued policies to protect small-scale producers, even though this practice went against the economic interests of the political elite who were mostly major drapers and merchants. The authors suggest that political elites followed this course of action in order to secure the stability of their cities' political communities and their own place within it.¹¹⁵ Although Brand puts forward evidence that the Leiden government did serve its own economic interests, he does not fundamentally challenge the idea that the government's actions primarily resulted from internal balance of power among interest groups.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, the Strasbourg city government, dominated by wealthy merchants, also took measures against its members' economic interests under pressure from the citizenry.¹¹⁷

Even the economic agendas of the Bruges and Antwerp city governments were probably mainly based on the political elite's political interests. According to Jan Dumolyn and Bart Lambert, the Bruges government only shaped economic institutions to merchants' needs "as long as it fitted in with the governing classes' own economic and other interests."¹¹⁸ Moreover, they suggest that the overlap in networks of agents active in the city government and those active on higher political levels meant that the majority of Bruges' political elite had other interests than providing the ideal institutional framework for international merchants.¹¹⁹ Niels Fieremans provides an example of what the government's other interests could look like. Studying the legal practices of the Bruges government, he concludes that the government primarily aimed to guarantee peace by balancing the interests of its citizens with those of foreign merchants.¹²⁰ Furthermore, Jeroen Puttevils' account of the Antwerp city government's willingness

115 Robert S. DuPlessis and Martha C. Howell, 'Reconsidering the early modern urban economy. The cases of Leiden and Lille', *Past and Present* 94:1 (1982) 49-84.

116 A.J. Brand, 'Personal government or urban policy. The involvement of the urban toplayer in the economy of Leiden in the late Middle Ages', in: Herman Diederiks, Paul M. Hohenberg, and Michiel Wagenaar (eds) *Economic policy in Europe since the late Middle Ages* (Leicester 1992) 27-32.

117 Eberhard Isenmann, *Die Deutsche Stadt im Mittelalter, 1150-1550. Stadtgestalt, Recht, Verfassung, Stadtrecht, Kirche, Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft* (Vienna 2014) 408.

118 Jan Dumolyn and Bart Lambert, 'Cities of commerce, cities of constraints. International trade, government institutions and the law of commerce in later medieval Bruges and the Burgundian state', *TSEG – The Low Countries Journal of Social and Economic History* 11:4 (2014) 93.

119 Ibid., 100.

120 Niels Fieremans, 'Brugse schepenen, internationale handelaren en ingewikkelde conflicten. Handelsconflicten voor de Brugse schepenbank in de vijftiende eeuw', *Handelingen van het Genootschap voor Geschiedenis* 159 (2022) 113-114.

to sacrifice the interests of local merchants in order not to offend foreign merchants leads Safley to suggest that the government “sought in the first instance power rather prosperity.”¹²¹ The claim that city governments primarily designed their economic policies to maintain or strengthen their position of power, given the local balance of power among interest groups, appears to apply more broadly.

Conclusion

In light of the recent acknowledgement that city governments played a key role in shaping economic institutions, I set out to identify the main economic and political factors informing the economic policies of the fifteenth-century Deventer city government. The first section identified three main interest groups which would conflict in light of the Hanseatic *kontor*'s relocation from Bruges to Deventer: the service sector, tax farmers, and active merchants. As the second section shows, the Deventer government responded to the *kontor*'s relocation with an ambivalent strategy that can best be described as a hesitant compromise. It did not follow a convincing strategy to attract the Hanseatic merchants to Deventer as would have suited the service sector and tax farmers. Instead, it actively hindered the relocation up until it reached a compromise with the city's cloth merchants who would have been particularly hurt by the relocation's concomitant boycott of Flanders. This attempt at seeking a compromise between its citizens' conflicting economic interests characterized the government's policies throughout the fifteenth century. The final section shows how these policies resulted from the government's attempt to maintain its position of power given the prevailing balance of power among Deventer's interest groups. It showed how political institutions connected to the *meente* and the cloth merchants' guild guaranteed not only the merchants but also citizens profiting from the service sector and tax farming far-ranging influence. All in all, the city's internal power plays were a major concern for the Deventer government when designing its economic policies, a claim that appears to apply to other cities as well. Consequently, the Deventer case suggests a productive way forward is to study how local power plays informed city governments' economic policies.

¹²¹ Safley, 'Institutions and their discontents', 68; Jeroen Puttevils, *Merchants and trading in the sixteenth century. The Golden Age of Antwerp* (London 2016) 151-158, 174-175.

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