



**Second level local authorities under pressures of change:
meeting the challenge of glocalization**

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There have been over decades two systems of local government in Europe. On the one hand, the anglo-scandinavian model, which is statutory-based, and the local authorities have been always considered as territorial agencies of the state. On the other hand the continental-mediterranean model, which is built on the principle of general responsibility, and local authorities are seen as the expression of community identity and problem-solving autonomy. The first model, in a context of welfare state development, gave way to large-scale, functional local governments without communitarian bases. The second model crystalized in a fragmented puzzle of small-scale authorities, with serious problems of management capacities. The communitarian deficit of the statutory model paved the way to the (re)strengthening of a great number of town councils. The management deficit of the other model was partly solved through the reinforcement of supramunicipal authorities. All of this draws a general view of multilevelled local systems in the EU, but on a basis of great diversity. It is quite different to refer to an English county, a French department, a German kreis or a Spanish province (let aside the distance, within Spain, between, for exemple, Basque or Catalan provinces).

In any case, the generalization of second level local authorities in the EU arises now the question of to what extent this level is under pressures of change in the current transition of governance modes in the EU. Putting it simply, the shift from traditional government to new governance evolve around two key points: an emergent conception of multilevel governance, and a new complex of public-private relations. In both dimensions, the traditional images of hierarchies and segmentations is being fastly replaced by the new images of interdependencies and networks. Within this new context, second level local authorities are resulting generally reinforced; they are better prepared, in many aspects, than traditional municipal or regional levels to meet the challenges of new governance in the process of Europeanization.

Let me put forward two reasons. On the one hand, second level local authorities have rarely worked on a basis of institutional monopoly, they usually exert shared responsibilities, and they used to perform relational roles of support to municipal or town councils. They are, therefore, better equipped to work on a

increasingly complex multilevelled context. Crucially, they may be well prepared to deal with European institutions. On the other hand, second level local governments tend to hold a more integrated view of the territory, beyond the sectoral allocation of policy areas. Crucially, they may take the leadership of area-based partnerships, where municipalities and other public and private actors are brought together.

Yet, supramunicipal levels must face, at least, four different challenges. Only the capacity shown to meet these challenges will bring them, in fact, to play key roles in the new context of European governance.

The Structural Dimension.

The key question here is to what extent the structure of multilevel local governance must be revised. If it is recognized as functional, and a broad political consensus has been built around it, then the structural dimension is not opened. However, the structure of levels may be under pressures of change arising either from the emergent dilemmas of complex governance, or from new processes of local/community identity-building. In this case, the structural question is opened.

The Functional dimension

Following the structural dimension, a new question arises just on functional terms: must the roles played by the second level of local government be revised ?, or otherwise, the allocation of responsibilities and resources among local levels is working well enough. Even, if there is a case for reform, the very conception of governance may be at stake: from the sectoral management of programmes to the building and leadership of networks oriented to integrated models of spatial and area-based development.

The democratic dimension

The democratic dimension presents three main questions to be dealt with: a) are direct elections necessary to all levels of local government, and concretely, to second level institutions ?; b) how can the accountability of the various levels be guaranteed in a complex context of local governance?; c) to what extent local governance needs processes of participatory democracy, beyond the ballot box, at the supramunicipal scale ?

The Relational Dimension

New local governance may not be based in the future on the grounds of the traditional splits between levels, and between public and private actors. Multilevel tends to evolve to patterns of complex convergence of public actors within every policy domain. Public-private relations at local level tend to develop to different kind of partnerships. But multilevel and partnership can be understood from different perspectives, prioritizing cooperation or competition.

	COOPERATION	COMPETITION
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MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE	Network Federalism	Contractual Federalism
PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS	Network Management	Contractual Externalization

Let's see in the next figure how the second level –within the context of multilevel governance- of three main countries of the EU have resituated along the four dimensions above mentioned.

	BRITAIN	FRANCE	GERMANY
STRUCTURAL DIMENSION	System of variable Institutional Geometry	Two-levelled homogeneous system. Emerging flexible intermunicipal partnerships	Two-levelled system With variable powers depending on the Population scale
FUNCTIONAL DIMENSION	Second level playing qualitative and strategic roles	Variable allocation of roles following the presence of collective identities.	Still strong segmentation of roles between first and second levels
DEMOCRATIC DIMENSION	All-levels direct election High Abstention. Expansion of Grassroots participation.	All-levels direct election. Variable abstention. Low accountability, low citizen participation.	All-levels direct election High Abstention. Expansion of Grassroots participation.
RELATIONAL DIMENSION	Transition from competitive contractualism to Cooperative network Management	Low density of multilevel relations. Intermunicipal partnerships.	Still hierarchical federalism with pressures towards a network federalism

Finally, we can list some points of proposal in relation to the future of second level local authorities in the UE:

- Going beyond institutional rigidities and rationalism. When spaces are of increasing complexity, a multilevel local governance of variable geometry is needed.
- Second level local governments have to be set up either on the basis of identity or on grounds of management capacity. In each case, however, the

consequences on the democratic, functional and relational dimensions will be of different nature.

- The level of decentralization of the regional government must coincide with the second level of local government, to render the whole system more simple.
- Second level authorities are called to alter substantially their conceptions of governance: from standardized and executive roles to qualitative and strategic functions.
- Direct elections to second level must be held in all cases when there is a collective perception of territorial-based identity. Otherwise, democracy may be seen on the side of accountability and outcomes.
- Processes of democratic innovation, that is, the direct involvement of citizens in local decision-making, should be introduced at second level to deal with strategic planning issues.
- Hierarchical federalism is to be transformed into network governance, where second level governments may negotiate policy decisions on the basis of symmetrical interdependencies.
- The local-global axis must be reinforced. The second level can play key roles: mediating the impacts of europeanization and globalization on municipal governments and channelizing the views of the communities in the global context.
- Differences and conflicts must be seen as positive realities. Complexity cannot be artificially reduced. Most conflicts have the potential to engender creative solutions. Second level authorities should be prepared to work on the basis of conflict and alternative/peaceful mechanism of conflict management.