

12 Local councillors and administrative reforms

Max-Christopher Krapp, Werner Pleschberger and Björn Egner

12.1 Introduction

Local government reform is a continuing process both in Europe and beyond. Not only are European countries experiencing an ongoing political and academic debate about the most suitable approach to local government reform; in many countries such reforms have been implemented some time ago. As Wright (1997: 8) pointed out fifteen years ago, ‘public sector reform is in fashion and no self-respecting government can afford to ignore it’. This was not only true for the 1990s, but is still true today. The NPM (New Public Management) paradigm has taken the role of the leading concept for administrative modernisation in numerous European countries and has triggered many real reform initiatives (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004). It is beyond dispute that local government is targeted by its ‘parent systems’ in higher levels of government with NPM inspired reforms.

From a critical perspective, the idea of reform targeting municipal administration is an old-fashioned idea dating back in history, which is resold under the NPM label. NPM is occasionally used as a collection of reform tools rather than a consistent reform concept. Some country studies give evidence that local actors are more sensitive towards the request for administrative reform by comparison with the representatives of the higher levels of government (Hammer Schmid and Mayer 2005 for Austria), but by no means stress all the ‘hard’ NPM-elements or put them into practice. Local actors may also historically have picked up the NPM-agenda before the national or the regional level. The representatives of local government sectors – researchers, private management consultants, higher local civil servants and political representatives of local authorities – have generated a type of ‘advocacy coalition’ (Sabatier 1988) and have pushed the local administrative reform processes. In particular, management consultants and their surveys often give the impression that administrative modernisation advances consistently and progressively, and is mainly demonstrated by mentioning singular best-practice cases.

The key goals discussed within the NPM frame are changes in the institutional settings of local government (horizontal power relations), and fostering of the involvement of societal actors - or inter-active policy-making. Further very

distinctive strands of the NPM-inspired discourse are efficiency (aimed at reducing costs and improving productivity) and competition (aimed at improving the customer orientation of local service delivery). However, as the concept varies at the national level, the strategies and activities are diversified on the local level as well (see Wollmann 2008 for Sweden and Germany, Pleschberger 2003 for Austria).

In the pre-NPM-era local authorities gained some experiences with the 'privatization' of local service production (e.g. organizational spin-off, outsourcing of services to private companies etc.), which nowadays is a common feature of local service provision. The NPM-inspired reform strategies in historic view again intensified these developments and have generated many new modernization projects, which in many cases have been experimental in nature (e.g. balanced scorecards, performance comparisons etc.).

A comparison of the conceptual and best-practice oriented 'modernization fireworks' of the NPM-era and the 'real' reform practice according to many findings has produced rather conservative reforms, and/or that their effects are moderate and often contradictory (Pleschberger 2003; Kuhlmann 2009: 251). The effective implementation and the impacts regarding administrative modernization measures are repeatedly assessed rather uncritically among the supporters and are understood as demonstrating a need for new reform initiatives. Furthermore, the actual practical experience of local councillors concerning reforms most notably exhibits a multitude of forms, changes and results. The differences in implementation, which need to be considered in a sophisticated manner, are embedded in the diverse institutional national context, in which the NPM-reforms are executed.

Considering the convergence and divergence of NPM-developments in Europe, we suggest that among local councillors there is a broad, relatively stable, and reasoned reform consensus that is distributed across European states. We argue that administrative reform is 'internalized' cognitively and individually as well as socially by groups of local councillors, which results in mutual consolidation and enforcement. But it would be wrong to overestimate the general attitudes of local councillors towards modernization, because they operate in the 'concrete' political sphere normally as interventionist trouble-shooters (Orr and Vince 2009: 666) and as 'agents' trying to maximise given utility functions under given constraints.

They may believe that beneficial gains of modernization projects in their community best take effect in the long run with few up front financial costs. Furthermore, for councillors, NPM-reforms pose the very fundamental question of the future profile of the functions of local councillors, in a very specific manner. Programmatically, administrative modernization implies a new understand-

ing of the communal council, which differs markedly from the established model of administrative ‘detail government’ by local politics. Actions conforming to NPM – amongst other things – offer strategic target control by local politics through the local council and the evaluation of target attainment through a relatively autonomously acting administration.

Effectively implemented strategies and projects of administrative modernization have a further genuinely political effect: they induce a real loss in the actual power of local councillors in the short term. In other words: within political science an interesting question is if and to what extent local councillors are willing to take part in a process of change, which reduces their power and strives for a fundamentally different share of power between political and administrative officials compared to the traditional model of local democratic government, which ‘positions managers as visionary leaders, with important strategic and technical skills’ (Orr and Vince 2009: 666) upon which local councillors may depend.

In this chapter, we analyse how local councillors perceive administrative reforms at the local level and discuss the degree of their acceptance from several explanatory perspectives. More specifically, the responses towards four statements within the framework of the MAELG survey are explored:

- ‘Politicians should only define objectives and control outputs, and never intervene into the task fulfilment of local administration.’
- ‘Competition between service providers facilitates citizen choice in public services.’
- ‘There are few benefits from contracting out or privatising services in the municipality.’
- ‘Public-private Partnerships are more effective in solving problems than public administration and representative bodies.’

The first statement introduces the separation between administrators and politicians. This includes the separation of professional administration concerned with the implementation of policy from political processes of the setting of policy goals. This idea of clarifying the tasks of politics and administration includes the requirement to formulate objectives of the city and to define corresponding public tasks (outputs or products in terms of NPM). NPM, though allowing discretion in the context of administrative actions, also directs focus onto the control of the agents through different mechanisms. Politicians expect better performance by local administrative agencies. To achieve better performance, they pass responsibilities to them, as well as the resources necessary to meet public objectives. Furthermore, structures to monitor the achievements are required,

which refers to the necessity to install a system of operating figures, performance measurement, or other such mechanism to evaluate performance. For councillors, this implies self-restraint, because they are requested to reduce their activities to the level of public objectives and thus to change their deep-rooted tendency to intervene in many singular and very specific affairs in local administrative decision making, and to stay out from the day-today issues. As Pandey and Moynihan (2006: 11) point out: 'No group of political actors is more important to the operation of public agencies than elected officials. Through a variety of formal hierarchical as well as informal mechanisms, elected officials have the opportunity and ability to penetrate deeply into the inner workings of public organizations.' Local administrations should now alternatively work in a more business-like fashion, based on the assumption that there should not be significant differences between the management practices in the private and public sector, wherein the private sector corresponds with effectiveness and efficiency of service production.

The second statement points to the approach to develop mechanisms of competition between parts of the public sector. This should achieve better and more cost-effective results, through which residents could benefit. Competition can be shaped as 'non-market competition, including benchmarking activities, performance comparisons, and internal 'quasi-markets'' or as 'market competition, consisting of public/public, public/private or private/private competitors, including also cross-border-competition of different public providers' (Reichard 2002: 64). The formulation of the statement in the questionnaire is focused on the second version of competition and thereby poses an ambitious conception. An example of this sort of market competition can be provided by the voucher system introduced in the Swedish primary school sector in 1992, where parents have the right to choose between public and private sector providers (Green-Pedersen 2002: 281).

Contracting out and the privatisation of services as expression of a 'lean state' were particularly promoted in the 1990s (cf. Homburg et al. 2007: 6). The dominant perspective was the excessive size of the state, which had – in the eyes of the critics - to be resolved by a shift of task fulfilment from the public sector to the private sector. Task review should differentiate between the genuine duties of the state and other activities, which might be better realised by private service providers. Privatisation aimed to shape public service production towards the market in different ways, ranging from for instance pure privatisation by outsourcing, to managed competition of service provision between internal public and external public private providers by competitive tender – which can be described as alternative service delivery (Andrews and Moynihan 2002) inspired by the doctrinal components of privatisation or quasi-privatisation.

Public Private Partnerships (PPPs), which are highlighted in the last statement, were created and can be understood as an alternative to pure privatisation strategies. In these arrangements public and private actors cooperate over a long-term period to realise a common goal. The formal and informal arrangements and organizations are based on the delegation of functions from the governmental territorial hierarchy. As the co-operation depends on the mutual recognition and cooptation of the public and private ‘partners’, there is always some risk that the public partner loses considerable responsibility for the public goal in exchange for only limited gains (Peters 1997). Criticism of PPPs highlight three major points. First, it is questionable that PPPs do in fact generate more efficient service delivery. Second, the question has been raised if PPPs have an impact on genuine political processes such as the uneven bargaining positions of the public and the private side or ‘structural mismatch of knowledge’ (Stephenson 1991: 119). Third, it has been argued that PPPs may not ultimately benefit citizens, but may perpetuate skewed distributions in a political entity. For example, a certain PPP only delivers its service for a special spatial area or a special group, creating injustice regarding service access (cf. Stephenson 1991).

12.2 Attitudes of local councillors to NPM reforms

The responses of local councillors to the statements vary considerably (Table 12.1). Competition is the least disputed element of NPM discussed here, with more than 57% of all respondents stating that ‘competition between service providers facilitates citizen choice in public services’.

Table 12.1: Aggregated overview of attitudes

Statement	N	0	1	2	3	4	Mean	Std. dev.
Never intervene into task fulfilment	11,655	5.4	26.1	19.3	35.0	14.2	2.26	1.151
Competition	11,593	3.5	14.1	24.9	41.7	15.8	2.52	1.028
Few benefits from contracting out	11,616	7.6	25.8	26.0	26.5	14.1	2.14	1.272
Public-Private Partnership	11,628	5.7	20.3	33.9	29.4	10.7	2.19	1.057

Weighted for countries, table cells indicate share of valid answers. 0=strongly disagree; 1=disagree; 2= neither agree nor disagree; 3= agree; 4= strongly agree.

The other three statements fail to attract a majority of ‘agree’ responses. The separation of politics and administration, the desirability of reforms for contracting out and establishing Public Private Partnership are more controversial.

Table 12.2: Aggregated overview of attitudes by countries

	Never intervene in task fulfilment			Competition			Few benefits from contracting out			Public Private Partnerships		
	mean	N	Std. dev.	mean	N	Std. dev.	mean	N	Std. dev.	mean	N	Std. dev.
Austria	2.43	475	1.001	2.46	480	.912	2.50	462	1.034	3.18	498	.896
Belgium	2.10	660	1.122	2.06	653	1.028	2.16	660	1.096	1.95	1,380	1.122
Croatia	2.58	491	.963	2.99	493	.758	2.15	478	.921	2.47	494	1.225
Czech Rep.	2.34	843	1.013	2.98	845	.744	1.94	843	1.005	1.90	994	1.026
France	1.86	1,368	1.104	2.40	1,344	.810	2.40	1,360	1.093	2.07	660	.977
Germany	2.25	956	1.105	2.46	943	.861	2.32	957	1.089	2.32	957	1.089
Greece	2.86	262	1.022	2.74	258	.954	2.47	263	1.036	1.94	471	1.013
Israel	2.67	146	1.122	3.32	147	.805	2.04	144	1.187	2.18	136	.954
Italy	2.46	1,147	1.099	2.78	1,159	.927	2.16	1,141	1.119	2.36	736	.922
Netherlands	2.58	750	1.081	2.11	734	1.024	1.93	749	1.038	2.16	844	.911
Norway	1.96	722	1.188	2.36	723	1.342	2.12	724	1.462	2.61	493	.944
Poland	2.90	489	1.257	3.49	492	.732	1.68	493	1.309	2.29	723	1.133
Spain	2.21	468	1.130	2.42	462	.932	1.93	465	1.142	2.54	147	.950
Sweden	2.70	492	1.184	2.58	495	1.392	1.83	494	1.564	2.22	1,145	.977
Switzerland	2.16	1,001	1.089	2.30	983	.972	2.44	1,000	1.201	1.84	951	.985
UK	1.91	1,386	1.176	2.28	1,382	1.051	1.90	1,386	1.104	2.48	259	1.098
Total	2.26	11,655	1.151	2.52	11,593	1.028	2.14	11,616	1.172	2.15	10,888	1.106

Additionally it can be shown that there is to some extent variation in the aggregated attitudes between countries (Table 12.2). The national context entails different structures of local government, which can indicate reform needs and reform obstacles, and also bring into focus national reform discourses and story lines, which could influence individual attitudes. Clear patterns of attitudes by countries cannot be readily identified in this overview.

We assume that the attitudes to several reform aspects are not totally independent, but councillors evaluate them as single concepts. This is explored by testing the correlations between those single variables (Table 12.3). Half the correlations are low. When the statement which concerns the relationship of actors *within* the municipal apparatus is involved, there is no major connection between councillors' statements. But if the three statements pointing to the 'external' part of NPM are analysed, they show correlations coefficients with a middle degree ($r=-.349$, $.445$ and $-.364$ respectively).

Table 12.3: Correlations between attitudes

	Competition	Few benefits from contracting out and privatization	Public-Private Partnerships
Never intervene into task fulfilment	.125** N=11,508	.011 N=11,557	.127** N=11,539
Competition		-.349** N=11,478	.445** N=11,524
Few benefits from contracting out and privatization			-.364** N=11,524

Pearson's r , ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

This shows that the response of councillors varies. Some reforms aspects are more acceptable than others and thereby have to be explained differently. Consequently we will analyse those elements separately and try to identify the force of different explanatory factors.

12.3 Explanatory variables and operationalisation

The analysis of attitudes towards reform can draw on and be illuminated by previous studies focused on the German context (cp. Krapp 2012; Egner et al. 2012), where significant explanatory variables could be identified. These factors refer to a) individual aspects such as the perception of the necessity for reform, the individual ideological disposition or notion of democracy, and to b) context specific aspects as the city size, the local government type as well as the na-

tional background. Their relevance towards the different reform aspects can be outlined as follows.

First of all, the *necessity for reform* should be conceptualised as an explanatory variable. Thereby the individual assessment of the need of reforms should be used instead of ‘objective’ criteria, because the dominant perception of the status quo should be more relevant for the analysis of attitudes than pure figures such as for example the local budget, revenues, number of unemployed. If specific key data of a city are of individual importance for the view of the existing context, this should be captured by the subjective perception of the respondents. Thus it could be argued that politicians who perceive the status quo as problematic could be more open-minded towards new ways of organizing local service delivery.¹ The analysis will show if this construction of the necessity for reform can be a significant factor and how relevant this general perspective is compared to other determinants.

Placement on a left-right scale is a broadly applied method to catch the *ideological disposition* of individual actors. It allows a valuation of basic orientations which can be hierarchically connected to concepts of economic, social and political orders (cp. Converse 1964; Hibbs 1977; Castles/Mair 1984; Schmidt 1996). It can be assumed that councillors who have placed themselves on the left, have a more critical perspective towards more competition, contracting out and privatisations as well as PPPs. Because of their essential beliefs and normative orientations towards economic and social aspects they understand public employment as a sphere of well situated working places deserving protection. Furthermore councillors on the left may be more sceptical towards the proclamations of better results of service delivery through economic actors.

The *notions of democracy* of local actors can be differentiated between representative and participatory categories (Heinelt 2012; Haus/Sweeting 2006) While a representative understanding focuses on the central act of voting as most important determination of politics, a more participatory notion of democracy refers to the active and direct inclusion of residents. Those categories are not to be seen as ‘mutually exclusive or incompatible’, they rather ‘co-exist to a greater or lesser extent alongside each other’ (Haus and Sweeting 2006: 153). Councillors with a strong participatory notion are possibly more positive towards cooperative forms of service fulfilment through PPPs, while contracting out and privatising of tasks may be perceived as a reduction of the scope of democratic decision-making. To test the relevance of a participatory notion the results of a factor analysis were included. Several statements regarding aspects of decision-making were assessed by the respondents and transformed to a new

1 The wording of the statement the respondents had to assess was: ‘The need for changes and reorganisation of the local government sector has been greatly exaggerated.’

variable linked to either representative or participatory notions of democracy (cp. Heinelt 2012: 4f).²

As a context specific variable *city size* is important for the perspective of actors. With growing city size the local administration is in general growing as well, including more local activities and services. Smaller cities are marked by less complex and comprehensive tasks. In other words the size of a city determines the ‘portfolio’ of activities and thereby can influence councillors’ views regarding aspects of service fulfilment (such as the feasibility of private involvement). Following Brecht’s law (Brecht 1932), we use the natural logarithm of the number of inhabitants as independent variable.

The disparity between *former Communist states* and states with a longer tradition of a market economy is crucial in considering questions related to service delivery. The path breaking developments in former communist states may have evoked a systematic shift of the aggregated attitudes of the respondents. As Skelcher (2005: 350) puts it, ‘[...] the impetus of economic liberalization in the transitional states of eastern Europe has resulted in extensive use of contacting-out [sic] to reform public services and stimulate private activity.’ It can be assumed that under the context of relatively new experiences with private companies the analysis uncovers more optimistic views.

Furthermore the variables *age*, *gender* and *education* are explored, since they are standard control variables in statistical models trying to explain individual behaviour or notions.

12.4 Analysis and Results

To identify possible determinants for councillors’ assessments of the four dimensions of new public management, we conducted a series of OLS regressions, where we used the variables mentioned in the previous section as independent variables and the councillors’ assessments about elements of NPM as dependent variables. For each dependent variable, a model was set up with all independents. After that, independent variables with the highest values of p , i.e.

2 The statements referring to a participatory notion were: ‘Residents should participate actively and directly in making important local decisions’, ‘Residents should have the opportunity to make their views known before important local decisions are made by elected representatives’, ‘Political decisions should not be taken only by representative bodies, but should be negotiated with concerned local actors’ and ‘Local referenda lead to high standard of public debate’. Statements referring to a representative notion were: ‘Apart from voting, citizens should not be given the opportunity to influence local government policies’, ‘Political representatives should make what they think are the right decisions, independent of the current views of local people’ and ‘The results of local elections should be the most important factor in determining municipal policies.’

the ones with the lowest statistical significance, were removed incrementally. Thus, for each dependent variable, a ‘best’ model was constructed, leaving only significant variables inside the model, giving four models in all. Those models are depicted in Table 12.4.

Table 12.4: Model overview

Model	I	II	III	IV
N	10,050	9,787	10,060	9,803
R ²	.047	.215	.222	.155
R ² corr.	.046	.214	.222	.154
P	.000	.000	.000	.000
greatly exaggerated	.137***	-.066***	.203***	-.050***
ideological right		.346***	-.387***	.359***
participatory	.056***	.217***	.061***	.139***
municipality size	-.041***	-.022*	-.078***	-.022*
post-communist	.080***	.181***	-.049***	.069***
Age	.095***	.039***		.030***
Female	-.037***	-.034***		
Education			-.055***	.039***

Table reports the standardised regression coefficients in order to show the importance of the different independent variables in the model. Model I: Relationship between politics and administration. Model II: Competition. Model III: Contracting out and privatisation. Model IV: Public-Private Partnerships. Weighting applied to cases balancing the share of councillors from within countries in the overall sample according to different response rates from countries. * for $p < 0.05$; ** for $p < 0.01$; *** for $p < 0.001$.

The first general result is that the models yield a good model fit in terms of individual data which are used to explain human behaviour. Three of the four models well exceed $R^2 = 0.1$, and the best model even comes close to explaining a quarter of the variation on the dependent variable.

Model I shows that the main determinant for a councillor’s assessment about the separation of politics and administration is their general notion about public administration reform. Those who hold a rather critical notion about public administration reform (‘The need for changes [...] has been greatly exaggerated’) in fact do highlight the separation element, which seems inconsistent. All the other determinants are comparably low in influence, though they show a statistically significant impact. Councillors who support participatory democracy tend to support the separation of spheres – perhaps because they understand the self-restraint of councillors as a favourable term to realise a well-regulated form of participatory democracy. Councillors from small municipalities tend to have a sceptical view towards the separation of spheres, perhaps because in small municipalities, separation seems unrealistic due to the small scale of political and administrative apparatus. On the contrary, older and male councillors tend

to support the separation of politics and administration. Councillors from post-communist countries tend to favour the separation of politics and administration; this is the second most influential variable in this model. Generally, the first model has the poorest determination coefficient and does not give a good explanation of the councillors' notions on the separation element.

Model II, about the councillors' assessment of competition, yields a better result in terms of the determination coefficient and the weighting of the determinants in the model. The main driving force concerning this question is the ideology position of the councillors, where there is a strong connection between a tendency to the political right and the expectation that competition between service providers facilitates citizen choice. Competition is perceived as an appropriate measure, particularly in post-communist countries. As in Model I, councillors' notions about participatory democracy also plays a certain role, while municipality size, age and gender are very much similar to Model I, both in respect of the direction of the effect and the relative size of the effect within the model. Also the overall attitude towards NPM plays a role: The more a councillor feels that the necessity for reform is exaggerated, the more s/he tends to have a negative view on competition.

Model IV is similar to Model II in most respects. A councillor's assessment about the problem-solving capacity of Public-Private Partnerships is strongly influenced by the councillor's ideological position. Councillors of the ideological right tend to be more convinced that PPPs are better than public administration when it comes to problem-solving. Again, being a supporter of participatory democracy correlates with a positive notion toward this NPM element, which may be associated with PPPs integrating private actors in service delivery. Again, those who oppose NPM and think that reforms are exaggerated tend to see PPPs more negatively. The size of the municipality is again significant, but shows only a small coefficient. Councillors from post-communist countries show a more support for PPP as a problem-solving strategy. Also, two personal attributes are significant factors, but also only produce a small coefficient, namely age (the older, the more supportive towards PPPs) and educational level (the better educated, the more supportive).

Turning to model III, one has to keep in mind that the original question concerning the item was *negative* in terms of formulation. The statement reads 'There are few benefits from contracting out or privatising services in the municipality'. Therefore, using the same independent variables, we would expect the signs of the coefficients to change. In fact, four of them do and two of them do not. By way of explanation, first of all, it is striking that ideology again is the main explanatory variable of the councillor's assessment for the item. Right-leaning councillors are more likely to reject the statement and thus supporting

contracting out and privatisation, as could be expected. The more general notion about reforms is also, as expected, significant with councillors who state that the need for reforms is exaggerated unresponsive of contracting out and privatisation. Councillors from post-communist countries are again in the supporter column, and those councillors who are better educated also reject the statement. As expected the positive statement towards participatory democracy produces a positive effect, which means that they tend to reject contracting out or privatising services. Regarding the size of the municipality it turns out that the effect is negative, so that councillors in large cities tend to see privatisation in a more positive manner.

Generally, it can be said that three of the four items (competition, contracting out/privatisation and public-private partnerships) assessed by the councillors can to a certain extent be explained by three main determinants, namely their perception of the overall necessity for administrative reforms, their position on the left-right ideology scale, and their overall tendency towards a participatory kind of democracy. For some dimensions, additional variables do play a role, i.e. the number of inhabitants as a proxy for the size of the administration, belonging to a post-communist country where public sector reforms are perceived as necessary and personal attributes such as age, gender and educational level of the councillors that took part in the survey.

12.5 Conclusion

Critics of the traditional model of administration stress its managerial deficits, including the strong connection to formal rules, which has, in their view, produced ineffective and inefficient delivery of public services. But the dynamics of NPM proliferation in the last two decades have not only been the reaction towards a model of administration which has been perceived as traditional and bureaucratic. It was also a process fostered by elites in politics, administration and consulting companies and some even doubt that the process was necessary when looking at some benchmark countries (cf. Moynihan 2006).

In the last two decades, many approaches and examples can be found which intended to implement change in local government. These intentions were mostly supported by upper levels of government with financial resources and expertise, though with varying success. The achievements of reform do vary dramatically: At least, it can be observed that real, structural, market-oriented efforts like genuine privatisation (as inspired by liberal ideas) have remained relatively rare, while technological elements of NPM often have adapted to the particular situation.

We suspect that many local councillors have direct experience with the implementation of NPM schemes, partly due to the broad international discourse and partly due to practical experience in their own municipality. The councillors' attitudes towards NPM are influenced by their individual 'reform spirit' and are – more or less – based on experience. Independent from the perceived rhetorical and actual dynamics of reform, NPM at the local level is not a new phenomenon.

Equally, the 'political' factor in NPM has a different meaning in comparison with the traditional model of public administration, where the political sphere provided tasks in detail which were then implemented by the administration (Osborne 2006). Together with NPM, elected local politicians suffer from the loss of functions. They are confined to strategic definition of goals which implies the retreat from political governance in detail. For the short term, local councils face a severe loss of power without the expectation that this loss can be compensated by increased influence in goal definition in the long run.

Altogether, the NPM-related attitudes of local politicians are not homogeneous, which can be related to different preferences for the single reform elements captured by this study. Only low expectations are expressed concerning key elements of NPM reform like contracting out and public-private partnerships. Agreement is stronger for elements like competition between service providers in order to strengthen the freedom of choice of citizens. The claim for non-interference in administrative implementation of tasks set by political decisions is also assessed ambivalently.

Regarding the explanation of the reform attitudes, the relevance of three particular determinants can be confirmed in this study: First, councillors who perceive a general need for reform and thereby disclose a less status quo-oriented perspective are more open minded towards these reforms, with the exception of the separation of political and administrative spheres. This factor is of particularly importance for the estimation of contracting out and privatisation, which can be seen as the most extensive reform approach. Second, the attitudes towards competition, contracting out and PPPs are strongly influenced by the ideological disposition of local councillors and thereby reveal the high politicisation of these reform approaches. This is especially remarkable for the approach of PPPs, which has been introduced as an alternative to pure strategies of privatisation. Third, the relevance of notions of democracy for the explanation of reform attitudes had been verified and seems to be a separate topic for further research.

Furthermore, the analysis has shown that the attitudes towards the relationships between politics and administration are not only divided, they are also hard to explain. This points to (still) relevant conflicts of political culture at the

local level. Local councils should take the role of the decision makers about general local goals (and as controller of implementation). This role was postulated by the proponents of the NPM model, even though the discourse about the 'separation of spheres' was not as strong as the debates about economic or managerial inspired elements of NPM. Local councils are always in danger of 'dropping back' into their old role as 'case workers' and 'administrators', who are overly concerned with detailed questions of local administrative matters. Additionally, councils may also contribute to the politicisation of the administrative process by intervening as 'government from above' (Hansen 2001, 2005). Caused by the difficulty of this new role orientation attitudes of councillors seem to be rather fuzzy and points to a lack of desirable and feasible reform approaches.

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