

Changing neo-corporatist institutions? Examining the relationship between government and civil society organizations in Belgium.

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Neo-corporatist relations consist of a stabilized institutional exchange between government, civil society and other social spheres. Current research suggests a destabilization of this relationship by ongoing governance developments, especially through the competitive pressures of NPM-style reforms. This article presents survey research of 339 civil society organizations in the neo-corporatist context of Belgium. We find little evidence of increased marketization, contrary to existing literature. In fact, our data suggests that neo-corporatist relations, at least in terms of formalized exchange, are rather stable, although the nature of specific institutions (such as the nature of public funding) appear to shift.

Keywords: civil society, governance, neo-corporatism, marketization, new public management

Introduction

The nature of the relationship between governments and civil society organizations (CSOs) has been part of a wide debate since many years. The postwar history of this relationship has been viewed in Public Administration literature as a cumulative evolution from ‘government’ towards ‘governance’, usually divided in three ‘phases’ or ‘paradigms’ (Osborne 2010; Cepiku 2008; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017; Salamon and Toepler 2015): Public Administration (the age of bureaucracy), New Public Management (the age of markets), and ‘New Public Governance’ or ‘new governance theories’ (the age of networks). Both NPM and NPG are in their own way a critique on the ‘inert’, ‘compartmentalized’, and generally ‘inefficient’ way that public services have been managed through bureaucracies. While NPM sees the cure for this illness in the healing qualities of ‘efficient’ and ‘effective’ markets, NPG emphasizes how working in networks and partnerships can improve public services compared to both bureaucracies and markets. However, in many European welfare states the idea of networks as innovative forms of governance does not fit with their history (Evers and Laville 2005). Especially for those states with a neo-corporatist tradition (e.g. Belgium, France, Germany, Austria, Sweden, ...) it is more accurate to speak of ‘welfare partnerships’ (Salamon and Toepler 2015), characterized by the institutionalized exchange between government, civil society and other social actors. In this context, CSOs do not only deliver services with the support of government, but are also, through a myriad of peak associations, actively involved in the policy design of these services in close partnership with government (Evers and Laville, 2005).

This does not mean, however, that the reforms that have been introduced through NPM have no meaning in this context of welfare-partnerships. Indeed, some argue that NPM-style reforms have had considerable impact on these European partnerships (Zimmer 1999; Bode 2011; Klenk and Pavolini 2015; Ascoli and Ranci 2002; Aiken and Bode 2009). This research suggests that NPM-style reforms have been added on top of the existing institutions, resulting

in a complex and hybrid arrangement of governance institutions. Indeed, it adds to the evidence that the relationship between government and CSOs consists of situationally bound mixed forms of governance, whereby elements of different ‘paradigms’ are combined (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017; Osborne 2006). Competitive performance, hierarchical monitoring, and coordinated policies can all coexist in increasingly 'nervous patterns of governance' (Bode 2011, 137).

The question addressed in this article is to empirically explore to what extent the neo-corporatist relationship between government and CSOs has been impacted by NPM-style reforms. This article presents the results of survey research with CSOs in Belgium, a typical example of a corporatist welfare state (Fraussen and Beyers 2016). Our data is drawn from a large-scale database co-produced by the authors, containing a wide variety of Belgian (Flemish) CSOs (2475 organizations) of which 496 have participated in an extensive survey. This survey collects the responses of the leading managers of these CSOs, and thus presents their perceptions concerning their organization. Thus, we provide an empirical test for the current state of a governance arrangement in a region considered to be neo-corporatist, making it relevant for the wider discussion on the changing nature of neo-corporatist relations between government and CSOs.

In the following paragraphs we will first discuss the concepts of neo-corporatism and governance. Then we will present a brief overview of the developments in Belgium. Next, we present our methodology, including a discussion of the measured variables. We will then present our findings, comparing the results between sectors. Finally, we discuss some of the implications of our findings.

From neo-corporatism to governance?

Neo-corporatism describes a system of interest representation that is of particular concern for understanding many European welfare states. Briefly stated, in a neo-corporatist system CSOs are not only service-providers, but they actively take part in shaping the policies that regulate those same services. Neo-corporatism is distinguished from earlier anti-democratic corporatist systems (Bevir 2007). In neo-corporatist settings, CSOs are organized in representative peak organizations that, through various institutionalized channels, seek negotiated agreements with governments (Lijphart 2012; Schmitter 1974). In a strict sense, neo-corporatism refers to a system of interest representation dealing with economic issues and the labor market (Siaroff 1999; Lijphart 2012), however, the term has also been used to describe similar systems covering a wider range of policy areas (education, health, environment, culture, arts, agriculture, ...) (Öberg et al. 2011; Fraussen and Beyers 2016). For Salamon and Anheier (1997), ‘corporatist regimes’ are characterized by the preservation of social consensus through the inclusion of (parts of) civil society in the state structure, whereby large public sector spending is combined with a large nonprofit sector.

A key characteristic of neo-corporatism is that it secures a “mutual stabilization of exchanges” between government and other social spheres (Kjaer 2016). This model of institutionalized exchange does not fit well with a linear evolution from ‘bureaucracy’ to ‘new public management’ and ‘new public governance’. Both governance theories and the neo-corporatist model are expressions of the functional differentiation of society (Esmark, 2009; Luhmann, 1997) which states that society consists of different function systems and no single function system (e.g. politics, economy, religion) holds the societal center from which an ultimate source of power emanates over all other systems. Following from this position the governance of public services becomes a matter of ‘intermediary institutions’ (Kjaer 2016) which connect function systems and through which resources, power, authority and

accountability are distributed. Neo-corporatism is a model in which peak associations functioned as stable connections to coordinate between government, civil society and the economic system (Kjaer 2016). While government held an important central position in this arrangement, other social spheres did not lose their functional autonomy.

However, neo-corporatism was confronted by the so-called ‘crisis of the welfare state’ in the 1970s - during which the unfulfilled promise of full employment and of endless economic growth become apparent as demographic evolutions put the pension-system under pressure and economic crises disrupted the political balance (Judt 2006, Kazepov 2005). A dual movement took place regarding the position of government: it became regarded as the root cause of societal problems (considered to be overly sluggish, dysfunctional and inflexible), while simultaneously being redeployed as an active instrument for the implementation of the new liberal strategies (Dardot & Laval, 2013; Wacquant, 2012). The relationship between government and the rest of society shifted from a focus on collective mechanisms of solidarity and welfare to regulation by competition and contracting (Kjaer 2016, Kazepov 2005). Thus, even though NPM attacked government for its flaws, it is itself mostly a top-down strategy (Fattore et al., 2012). Others have argued that this crisis enhanced the functional differentiation of society, making it necessary to place government in ‘horizontal’ and ‘flexible’ ‘networks’. Davies and Spicer (2015) argue that underlying the network-paradigm is the assumption that networks are well suited for these sociological conditions: ‘(...) networks are purported to be beneficial because they provide a better ‘fit’ with macroenvironmental changes such as globalization, the restructuring of the state, individualization, and knowledge capitalism’ (2015, 223). Yet, critics have pointed out that many of these ‘networks’ can be considered as especially suited for the further advancement of the aforementioned competitive liberal strategies (Davies 2011; Swyngedouw 2005).

Some authors have empirically argued that neo-corporatist institutions have been

destabilized especially by NPM-style reforms. Bode states that ‘the logics of competition and rivalry, entrance and exit, bargaining and instrumental behavior’ are fueling a ‘creeping marketization’ of welfare state partnerships (Bode 2011, 116), based on his research in Germany and France. Other research in Germany, Italy and the UK, found a ‘transnational movement towards quasi-marketization and managerialization’ (Klenk and Pavolini 2015, 253). Bode, Klenk and Pavolini also highlight that differences between countries and sectors remain important (Bode and Brandsen 2014; Klenk and Pavolini 2015, 253): even though similar techniques are used across sectors and countries, their application and use has to be considered in light of institutional, political and cultural contexts. As stated elsewhere: ‘There is no global model (...), and there is no distinct, homogeneous continental European model either’ (Pollitt, van Thiel, and Homburg 2007). Comparative research by Pollitt and Bouckaert (2017) has shown that in countries with a strong neo-corporatist tradition NPM-style reforms have had a more moderate impact – which could point to the important role of the close interaction between government and civil society in ‘buffering’ the impact of NPM reforms.

Furthermore, several authors have argued that institutional reforms in this regard almost always include some form of ‘institutional layering’ as new elements are gradually attached added on top of or alongside existing institutions without dismantling them (Streeck and Thelen 2005; Mahoney and Thelen 2010; Koreh et al. 2019). Lowndes (2001) emphasizes that governance should be considered a ‘mix’ of different steering principles (hierarchies, markets, and networks), as does Osborne (2006) in his overview of ideal-typical governance models. Importantly, this institutional layering is taking place in a situation of increasingly permeable boundaries between civil society, markets and governments. In this context, hybridity is not only the permanent state of CSOs, but also of the governance arrangement as a whole (Brandsen et al. 2005; Hustinx et al. 2014). However, institutional layering is not a neutral evolution: as new institutional elements are introduced, support for the original institutions

tapers off and internal coherence can be reduced (Koreh et al. 2019). For sure, the impact of marketization and NPM-style reforms can have considerable impact on the social functions of CSOs in the form of mission drift away from community building, preferring service delivery over advocacy, or increased ‘managerialism’ (Maier et al. 2016; Suykens et al, 2018). Of particular consequence is the development of more ‘entrepreneurial orientations’ (Bode and Brandsen, 2014) of CSOs at the expense of their community or advocacy roles.

The question whether incremental reforms are adding up to a gradual but fundamental institutional change is a difficult one, but stands at the core of the discussion. This is why Bode speaks of a ‘creeping marketization’ (2011), where he concludes that changes in both Germany and France resulted in ‘a hybrid mix of quasi-market governance and agreement-based regulation’ (2011, 135). Streeck and Thelen (2005) refer to other research (e.g. in France and Germany) in which gradual incremental changes in the ‘fringe’ accumulated to a transformative shift towards further liberalization of the broader welfare system. This institutional layering can thus have significant consequences (Streeck and Thelen 2005; Koreh et al. 2019). Empirical analysis of neo-corporatist institutions can offer more insight to this debate by establishing to what extent NPM-style institutional elements operate alongside neo-corporatist institutions. Accordingly, this paper examines such institutional arrangements in a typical neo-corporatist context (Belgium) where some recent reforms in different parts of civil society could indicate layering of the neo-corporatist institutions. Below, we will discuss this context briefly, before we continue with our research methodology and findings.

The Belgian-Flemish Case

Belgium matches all the criteria of a neo-corporatist regime, with high degrees of formalized exchange between government and CSOs (e.g. Bloodgood, Tremblay-Boire, and Prakash 2014; Jahn 2016). A clear illustration of this is the presence of the ‘strategic advisory boards’ in which

the Flemish government engages with representative umbrella organizations concerning a wide range of policy issues (economic, social, cultural, environmental, ...). Belgium also has one of the largest nonprofit sectors globally (Salamon and Sokolowski 1999), with 12.3% of the total workforce active in nonprofits (in 2014) (Rigo, Biernaux, and Volon 2018). In turn, the nonprofit sector in Flanders, the northern region of Belgium, has the highest proportion of paid nonprofit professionals in Belgium (59.5% of all paid nonprofit professionals in Belgium work for a Flemish nonprofit) (Rigo, Biernaux, and Volon 2018).

In Belgium, this neo-corporatist structure has historically intersected with a strong consociational legacy, the so-called 'pillarization' (Fraussen and Beyers 2016; Wayenberg et al. 2010; Van Den Bulck 1992): a tight coupling between CSOs, political parties and government representatives that is constructed around shared values or interests (Billiet 2004; Witte et al. 2009). Although pillarization reached its peak in the 1960s, some argue that networks between political parties and CSOs can still be of significant impact on public policymaking (van Haute et al. 2013; Huyse 2003), especially in domains such as health, social security and labor market (Fraussen and Beyers 2016).

Starting in the 1960s 'new social movements' (Hellemans 1990) organized around social issues that in their view were being ignored by the traditional pillarized CSOs: women's rights, environmental concerns, pacifist causes, and international solidarity (Develtere 2004; Stouthuysen 2004; Hooghe 2004). Many of these new movements evolved into successful organizations and developed umbrella organizations outside of the pillarized structures, with some considerable impact on the political and social agenda (Hooghe 2004) and themselves becoming part of the institutionalized consultation system. In the 1990s, as society became further de-pillarized (with citizens no longer living their lives under the cloak of the pillars), the political position of pillarized CSOs was increasingly contested (Huyse 2003). Instead, the role of CSOs in generating 'social capital' became increasingly valued, especially with the rise

of extreme-right politics in the early '90s. As one researcher put it, the societal discourse concerning the role of CSOs at the end of the 1990s seemed to shift from 'reprehensible pillars' (i.e. political) to 'praised civil society' (i.e. community; social capital) (Billiet 2004).

Meanwhile, the Flemish region developed its own substantial powers with the further federalization of the Belgian state. Importantly, the Flemish Region has mostly copied the same corporatist traditions from the federal level (Wayenberg et al. 2010), although NPM-style reforms were introduced by both the federal and Flemish governments at the start of the 2000's. These reforms fit a broader Continental European approach as 'modernizers', in which administrative reform is built on the core elements of the traditional system with modernizing elements, such as an increased focus on performance and results (instead of adherence to bureaucratic rules) and more citizen-oriented design of services (citizens as 'customers' of public services) (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2017).

Currently, recent policy reforms have introduced new market-type mechanisms in the governance of several nonprofit sectors, mainly stimulation through increased competition, pressure to gain more market-based income and the introduction of more market-type management techniques. In the domain of health and wellbeing cash-for-care systems have been introduced which entail a shift from 'clients' to 'consumers' along with increased competition between service providers (nonprofit, social profit and for-profit organizations). In the social economy (here: 'Work Integration Social Enterprises'), recent regulatory reform has introduced a unification of the sector, the centralization of administrative monitoring and steering mechanisms through the central governmental labor agency, and is expected to push towards a more market-oriented re-integration of WISE's target employees. In the socio-cultural domain, concerns have risen over the affirmation by Flemish policymakers that CSOs need to become less reliant on public funding, which resulted in an official white paper on alternative (read: non-public) sources for funding (Gatz 2017).

The above illustrates how Belgium (Flanders) constitutes a salient context for the study of neo-corporatist institutions. It illustrates the complexity and diversity of its civil society, as well as how the position of CSOs has evolved over the years to what some argue is a less political and more service- or community-oriented focus (Billiet 2004). We provided three illustrations which show how different NPM-style reforms are currently undertaken across a diverse set of organizations. In the following section we present how our study examines these three sectors in depth and present their main characteristics.

Methodology

We focused on organizations working at the Flemish regional level: CSOs that aim to provide services beyond the local community, organize political work at the level of the Flemish Region or take up the role of umbrella-organization for the Flemish Region. Specifically we collected data from CSOs in three domains in civil society: health and wellbeing organizations, social-cultural organizations, and social economy enterprises. ‘Wellbeing’ includes organizations and associations active in providing care for specific target groups (youth, people with disabilities, people in poverty) as well as ‘general wellbeing services’ for those dealing with personal, relational or social issues. The social economy consists of WISE (‘work integration social enterprises’)¹ which includes sheltered workshops (for people with mental and physical disabilities) and social workshops (for people with various psychological or social disadvantages). The socio-cultural sector consists of a more diverse range of organizations striving for certain kinds of social change: social rights movements, ethnic-cultural associations, professional associations, patient and disability organizations, political

¹ In Flanders, the term ‘social economy’ is predominantly associated with WISE (Defourny & Nyssens 2008). The term ‘social enterprise’ is also closely associated with WISE. As for instance argued by Kerlin (2006) the term ‘social enterprise’ in Belgium refers to, in the first place, ‘service organizations that are developing commercial activities’, and in the second place to WISE: “This second definition stems from the specific social service needs around which social enterprises have developed in Europe causing them to be associated with employment creating initiatives.” (Kerlin 2006, 250).

organizations, socio-cultural organizations, youth work organizations, and faith-based organizations.

Data was collected in three consecutive phases. Firstly, since there is no single database that collects all organizations across these different sectors, we analyzed different public databases ('COBHRA', 'SISCA', 'Crossroads Bank for Enterprises', 'Social Map', NACE-BEL), lists provided by the Flemish government, and lists produced by different network- and umbrella-organizations (social economy, environmental organizations, North-South movement, women's organizations, self-help associations, faith-based organizations, etc....). In order to ensure a homogeneous data-collection the research team frequently discussed how to categorize organizations. To ensure that each organization in the database was still active a web search was done to see if these organizations had some form of online presence (dedicated website, social media account, or up to date contact details). This resulted in a collection of 2475 organizations.

Secondly, following the distribution of the database population, a representative sample was extracted. In order to achieve a sufficiently representative sample with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, a minimum set of ca. 350 organizations was needed. Taking into account the wide variety of organizations, our goal was to reach a net response of 500 organizations. In total, 747 CSOs were contacted of which 496 organizations participated. We provide more details on the distribution of the sample and populations in the provided appendix.

Third, a survey was sent out in two phases, and in each phase the highest placed manager of the CSO were the respondents. In the first phase a trained professional conducted face-to-face interviews; in the second phase additional questions were presented using an online web-tool or postal survey (respondents could also opt for another face-to-face interview). The survey

questions were pre-tested, used ‘expert’ respondents, offered incentives for participation², and used labelled response options (Lee, Benoit-Bryan, and Johnson 2012). Invitation letters were sent out at the end of September 2017, the final surveys were completed in May 2018. The first phase resulted in 496 interviews, which is a response rate of 66.39%. The second phase had a lower response rate of 53.95% (403 participations). In order to check whether the respondents reflected the composition of our sample framework, we used the Chi-squared test. The results indicated that there was no significant difference between the distribution of the sample framework and the final respondents.

Lastly, because of the complex Belgian state structure, the survey asked respondents to indicate which government was the most important for their organization. For this article, we selected those organizations that indicated the Flemish government as most important (thus excluding 157 CSOs that selected the local, provincial, federal or European government). This means that our final sample includes 339 CSOs (277 in the second survey phase). Details are reported in the provided appendix.

Measures

We have constructed several variables that measured how managers of CSOs evaluated some of the key components of the neo-corporatist relationship between CSOs and government that we described above. Firstly, we measured how managers perceive the functions of CSOs in the state system, focusing specifically on their role in the policy process. Secondly, managers reported how they assess the extent of governmental monitoring as well as governmental control over strategic organizational decisions. Thirdly, we measured managers’ estimation of the proportion of different income sources (market, government, community), the occurrence

² We offered a report in which the responses of the organisation were compared to the mean scores of their respective sector or domain.

of competitive public funding, and the competitive struggle for clients (or members) and organizational resources. Finally, we added several measures to assess whether some form of ‘shared’ or ‘negotiated’ decision making was present: to what extent do managers believe that government is as a substantive partner (or not), that governmental monitoring leaves room for consultation and that certain strategic organizational decisions are made in consultation with government.

Functions of CSOs

We focused on four specific functions of CSOs: service delivery, advocacy (policy influence), political work (striving for social change) and social capital (providing a sense of belonging). The functions that CSOs fulfil can change over time, and can become part of public debate, as we have illustrated earlier with the increased attention for ‘social capital’ in Flanders. One can also argue that the creation of social capital is usually fundamental to the other functions of CSOs (service delivery, policy work and political work), as it helps to build trust and solidarity between its members (Edwards 2014), and will thus always be present. In the neo-corporatist system the function of service delivery and advocacy would also be an important part of the self-identification of the CSOs.

We measured these different functions by four items, each on a five-point Likert scale. The question was: 'To what extent does your organization fulfill the following roles?', presenting several responses: 'Giving people a sense of belonging' (social capital), 'providing a service or product that fulfills a specific societal need' (service delivery) or '(trying to) influence policy makers' (advocacy). The political function was a separate question in the survey, measured on an 11-point scale, asking 'to what extent does your organization strive for, or argue for, specific social or political change?'.

The advocacy role of CSOs deserves special attention, since it is considered a crucial

element of neo-corporatists systems. In order to influence policy and policymakers, CSOs can combine different strategies: gaining direct access to policymakers (politicians and administrators), build external pressure through political work or through coalition-forming in umbrella organizations (Heylen, Fraussen, and Beyers 2018; Verschuere and De Corte 2013). We measured each of these strategies using a five-point scale. In neo-corporatist systems, the role of umbrella organizations (or ‘peak associations’) is especially important: it is through the representative function of umbrella organizations that institutionalized participation in the policy process is regulated (Lijphart 2012; Fraussen and Beyers 2016). Umbrella organizations help individual CSOs to deal with the high transaction costs and required capacity to organize direct access to policy makers (Beyers and Braun 2014). In the specific case of Flanders, the ‘Strategic Advisory Councils’ (here called: ‘formal advisory boards’) are of particular importance: they are a central part of the governance arrangement in Flanders and provide CSOs (representative organizations, umbrella organizations) with institutionalized access to the policy process (Fraussen and Beyers 2016). To include other forms of institutionalized access, we also included the less regularly organized but still highly formalized participation in various governmental committees or ‘work groups’. In sum, we asked managers to assess in broad terms how often their CSO engaged in each of these five advocacy strategies: ‘personal contact with administrators’, ‘personal contact with politicians or cabinets’, ‘participation in formal advisory boards’, ‘participating in governmental committees’, and ‘participation in activities of umbrella organizations’ (responses included: *not, only once, several times, often, very often*).

Governmental Monitoring and Partnership

Monitoring by government expresses a top-down mechanism, which can be part of bureaucratic and NPM-style oversight. Even in ‘network-like’ relationships or partnerships, some form of

oversight (e.g. on the correct use of provided finances) can exist. We measured four different types of monitoring that assess a variety of monitoring practices. This was done by asking managers to score the following monitoring activities of the Flemish government: '...monitors your activities', '....monitors whether your finances are in order', '...monitors the performance of your organization', and '...asks about your social impact'. Again, all items were measured using a five-point scale.

We also measured to what extent this monitoring relationship offered room for consultation. We used an item that expressed that 'during monitoring there is room for consultation with the government' (again on a five-point scale). Of course, in a neo-corporatist setting, there is more to the relationship than mere consultation: government and CSOs can be considered partners in the state system. We therefore asked managers to assess whether government 'is a partner with whom your organization cooperates substantively'.

Financial Resources and Competitive Environment

In neo-corporatist partnerships, large public spending goes hand in hand with a large nonprofit sector that is supported by significant public resources. To measure the extent to which CSOs rely on public funding, market income or community contributions, we asked respondents to assess the proportions of each of these three sources of income. We excluded all responses that did not add up to 100 percent, resulting in 256 valid responses. Government subsidies do not exclude market-type steering: the use of project-based or contractual funding can introduce significant levels of competition between CSOs. We therefore asked managers whether government funding includes these types of funding, using a binary yes/no item.

Furthermore, we asked whether government was considered to be a crucial financier (5-point scale). This is important, since the subjective assessment of public funding can significantly influence how CSOs position themselves politically vis-a-vis their subsidizing

government (Arvidson, Johansson, and Scaramuzzino 2018). A second subjective indicator was measured by asking respondents to assess the evolution of the different sources of income (government, market, community) over the last ten years. We also asked respondents to assess the following statement on a five-point scale: “Compared to ten years ago, governments today opt more for temporary contractual support than for structural subsidies of your core activities.”

If the claims of a destabilization of neo-corporatist governance patterns are correct, then we should also find that CSOs are active in a more competitive environment than before. Because of the variety in context and income sources, we focused on two dimensions of competition: obtaining organizational resources and gaining clients or members. Both were again asked by subjective assessment on a five-point scale. Furthermore, a binary yes/no item measured whether managers believed the Flemish government stimulates the competition for clients.

Strategic Organizational Decisions

We look at three main areas of decision making in CSOs that can capture the possible influence of governments: the goals (or mission), their work processes (or methods) and their desired results (Verschuere & De Corte 2014). In market-types arrangements governmental control over the desired results (targets) are of particular concern for governments (Bouckaert et al. 2010). The three dimensions were measured using a five point scale with two poles (‘organizational autonomy’ versus ‘governmental control’). The middle of the scale indicated the decisions were made by 'government and organization together'.

Findings

We compared the results between sectors, using a series of Kruskal-Wallis tests with post-hoc Mann-Whitney tests (with Bonferroni correction) for pairwise comparisons. We use mean scores ('M') for the descriptive overview of the findings, and median scores ('Mdn') to report the findings of the Kruskal-Wallis test (as these are more correct for this type of rank-sum test). All statistical findings are reported in table 1.

[TABLE 1 NEAR HERE: 'Overview of findings']

Functions of CSOs

Whereas managers of CSOs in wellbeing and social economy on average report a primary concern for service delivery and social capital, CSOs in the socio-cultural sector are reportedly more balanced concerning these different functions. Overall, the highest mean scores are found for service delivery (M=4.19) and social capital (M=4.28); followed by the political role (M=3.57) and advocacy (M=3.49). However, this view can be very different depending on the sector, as can be seen in table 2. In wellbeing and the social economy, managers are clearly more concerned with the function of social capital and service delivery. In the sociocultural sector, there is a smaller distance between the different functions: social capital is followed closely by the political function and service delivery, and a bit lower by advocacy. The political function scores especially low in the social economy.

[TABLE 2 NEAR HERE: ‘Functions of CSOs (mean scores, scale 1-5)’]

We found that advocacy is not statistically different between these three sectors. For the other three functions we found that CSOs in the sociocultural sector scored significantly lower on the functions service delivery and social capital - although in general the scores on these are still high. In terms of striving for social or political change, the socio-cultural sectors scores significantly higher than wellbeing and the social economy.

Considering the different advocacy strategies, we found that managers across the three sectors seem to prefer the strategy of networking through umbrella organizations to other institutionalized advocacy strategies (direct personal contact, advisory boards, committees). On average, participating in umbrella organizations is reported to occur frequently (M=3.85, Mdn=4.00), and managers in the social economy report higher participation in umbrella organizations than those in the sociocultural sector (although the effect is small) but lower

participation in formal advisory boards compared to the other sectors. There is also a significant difference concerning the participation in governmental commissions, although this is mostly due to the difference between the socio-cultural sector (higher) and the social economy (lower). Personal contacts with administrators also seem to occur frequently, across all the sectors (M=3.38). Direct access to politicians is lower than access to administrators, and is especially lower for the sectors of wellbeing and social economy, compared to the socio-cultural sector (small significant effect).

Governmental monitoring and partnership

The four different types of monitoring (monitoring of general activities, use of finances, performance, and impact) all receive high mean scores across the sectors. Some statistical differences between the sectors could be found concerning the general monitoring of activities and performance-monitoring, but the effects are all rather small. These differences were due to the statistically higher score reported by managers in wellbeing on the monitoring of activities and performance, compared to the managers in other sectors. The scores for monitoring the use of finances was also statistically different, although no pairwise statistical differences were found. We also measured whether managers indicate to engage in consultation with government concerning this monitoring, and the overall response is slightly positive. Interestingly, there are no significant differences between the sectors, which implies that this practice is a part of the administrative relationships across sectors. We also found that managers believe that the Flemish government is interested in some measurement of ‘impact’, and again this seems to be the same across all sector as no statistical difference was found.

Concerning whether managers see government as a ‘partner’, we found a low positive average score across all sectors (M=3.23). Even though we found that in the social economy a lower proportion of CSOs agrees with this statement, there are no significant differences

between the sectors.

Financial resources and competitive environment

In general, managers estimate that public funding is the most important source of income (M=66.17% of total income of all CSOs), followed by market income (M=18.75%) and community-based income (M=15.08%). However, the three sectors have distinctly different financial structures. Based on the respondents' estimates, CSOs in the wellbeing sector are statistically more dependent on government income (M=84.81%, Mdn=95.00%) compared to the other two sectors (where the proportion of government income is about half of the total income). Market-income is significantly different for all sectors. It is reported to have only a marginal role in the wellbeing sector (M=7.41%, Mdn=0.60%), a slightly larger role in the sociocultural sector (M=21.96%, Mdn=10.00%), and, as can be expected, a more important role in the social economy (M=49.62%, Mdn=55.00%). Community income is estimated to play the largest role in the sociocultural sector (M=23.20%, Mdn=10.00%), a small role in the wellbeing sector (M=7.78%, Mdn=2.00%) and almost no role in the social economy (M=4.20%, Mdn=0.00%).

When asked for a subjective assessment of how this income structure has evolved over the last ten years, managers generally believe that things have remained somewhat stable (overall mean scores fluctuate around value '3 - remained the same', with a SD smaller than 1). When we compare this across sectors, we find that the managers in the social economy more than those in other sectors believe that the share of public income has dropped somewhat and the share of market income has risen.

The above shows that overall, income provided by government takes up a large proportion of total income for all these organizations, and that managers generally believe that this proportion has remained somewhat stable over the last ten years (except in the social economy).

Yet, many variations exist in how governments fund CSOs. Our findings pertaining to three different types of public funding can be found in table 3. The managers of nearly every CSO indicate to receive subsidies for their core activities. NPM-style public funding also occurs in all sectors. Project-based funding is reported by over half of managers in the social economy and the sociocultural sectors, and to a somewhat lesser extent in the wellbeing sector (a small statistical difference). Contracts (to provide services or products) are also frequently reported, on average by just over one in five managers in the sociocultural and social economy sectors, and 14.00% in the wellbeing sector (with no statistical difference between the sectors). We also found that the statement of increased contract-based funding at the expense of structural subsidies is slightly affirmed ($M=2.26$), and is shared by managers across the different sectors (no statistical difference was found).

[TABLE 3 NEAR HERE: ‘Types of public funding (% of organizations)’]

Furthermore, across all sectors, the Flemish government is perceived to be a crucial financier, with an overall high mean score ($M=4.54$) and with the managers in the social economy ($M=4.90$) and wellbeing ($M=4.87$) being particularly outspoken. Our statistical test shows that even in this overall high score, the sociocultural sector differs significantly from the other sectors, but the effects are rather small. The overall appreciation of government as a crucial financier is positively correlated with the received percentage of public income (Spearman $r = 0.459$, $p < 0.01$), and negatively correlated with community (-0.218 , $p < 0.01$) and market income (-0.135 , $p < 0.05$).

Competition

Respondents indicate that they experience rather little competition for organizational resources

or clients (or members) from other CSOs, and almost none from corporations. Generally speaking, competition with other CSOs for resources is considered 'reasonable' (3 on a scale of five). In the social economy competition is experienced somewhat more than in other sectors (the difference with wellbeing generates a rather strong statistical effect), although on average competition is still not considered strong. Here, the strongest statistical difference is found concerning both types of competition with corporations, although it concerns the difference between 'no' competition (sociocultural, wellbeing) and 'weak' competition (social economy). Managers also indicate that the Flemish government is generally not a strong driver of competition for members (or clients).

Strategic decision making

CSOs across the sectors indicate on average a high level of autonomy concerning their organization's strategic decisions, although for goals (M=4.13, Mdn=5.00) and methods (M=4.34, Mdn=5.00) this is somewhat higher than for results (M=3.65, Mdn=4.00). There are statistically significant differences between the three sectors, which are mostly due to higher scores of organizational autonomy for the CSOs in the socio-cultural sector in comparison to the wellbeing sector (although the effects are small). We also looked at the extent of 'shared' decision making, and interestingly found that this is the highest when it comes to the desired results: more than one in three CSOs see this as a shared process (37.10%). In case of goal-setting, about 1/5 of CSOs (21.7%) report sharing the decisions with government, and for work methods this is ca. 1/10 (10.9%).

Discussion

This article set out to assess key characteristics of the governance arrangement in Flanders, addressing the issue of whether its typically neo-corporatist governance patterns can still be observed. It provides an empirical test that contributes to the wider discussion on the changing nature of governance in neo-corporatist welfare states. Our empirical contribution is built first and foremost on establishing a database for analysis that captures a wide variety of CSOs from different sectors (sociocultural, health and wellbeing, social economy). Secondly, we conducted an extensive representative survey of CSOs, providing a rich set of quantitative data. Importantly, all data in our survey is self-reported and originates from one source (i.e. the leading managers of CSOs). Thus, we do not include the perspective of other important members of CSOs (board members, other professionals, volunteers). Because our data is self-reported, we must also be careful not to treat these findings as objective measurements. Indeed, while these perceptions provide useful insights into a large section of civil society, they cannot express what is going on *in practice*. Moreover, our survey data consists of perceptions on the *current* state of affairs (and some subjective reflections on historical evolutions) and is therefore not suited for assessing claims on ongoing trends or evolutionary dynamics. Also, while we provide an explorative overview over a wide range of organizations, we do not identify any causal mechanisms. However, based on our explorative cross-sectoral comparison, the current state of the governance relations can be considered as the (preliminary) outcome of the processes identified in the theory review. Using our data, we can assess whether some of the claims made concerning the ‘creeping marketization’ of neo-corporatist welfare states can be observed.

First of all, our data suggests that CSOs should not be considered primarily as service providers. While service provision is generally seen as very important, the most important function the managers in our survey see for their CSOs is providing a sense of belonging to

people (social capital). Interestingly, social capital scored significantly higher in the social economy and wellbeing, the sectors that also scored high on service delivery. A possible explanation might be the historical roots of these sectors in community-based social initiatives. This does not mean that social capital and service delivery were not important for the sociocultural sector, however here we found a more balanced combination of different functions. Most likely, this has to do with the more diverse composition of this sector compared to the other two sectors (cf. supra). In general, we see a civil society that can be described as ‘multi-purpose’ (Bode, 2011): if we are to believe the self-assessment of the managers most CSOs combine at least two roles to a higher degree (service delivery and social capital), coupled with a third role that is still relatively highly regarded (either advocacy or a political role). What is not clear from our results is to what extent these different roles are actually fulfilled in practice – especially given the self-reported nature of our data.

Second, as expected in neo-corporatist settings, government is reported to be a crucial financier by almost every respondent, but we do find three very different financial structures between these sectors. Given the position of the respondents (leading managers) in the organizations, we consider their estimates of these percentages as adequate variables for measuring their ‘objective’ income streams. The wellbeing sector is still mostly dependent on public funding, the social economy on a combination of public funding and market income, and the sociocultural sector combines a large degree of public funding with significant market- and community-based income. Moreover, only in the social economy (WISE) do respondents report to have experienced a decline in public funding and a rise in market-based income. WISE might be an exception because of their more pronounced hybrid status as social enterprises. Higher engagement in commercial market activities could indeed explain this reported increase in market-based income. In the other sectors, on average, the proportion of the different income sources are considered to have remained stable. We hypothesize that this

might be due to the rigid neo-corporatist framework in which public services provided by CSOs cannot easily be replaced or repealed. Another explanation might be a case of institutional conversion in which the nature of public funding has changed towards more ‘competitive’ types of funding. We discuss this further below. However, these findings on the evolution of income sources should be considered carefully: it relies on subjective recollection from the respondents and is thus susceptible to ‘hindsight bias’.

Third, we have found little evidence of market-type governance, with the strongest indicator being NPM-style public funding: managers estimate that both project- and contract-based public funding are frequently used, although to a somewhat lesser extent in the wellbeing sector. Respondents have also indicated they have experienced a rise in project-based funding at the expense of structural subsidies (again, with the same methodological caveat of ‘hindsight bias’). Yet, these results do not reflect the competitive nature of these types of funding *in practice*: maybe some percentage of these public funding strategies are embedded in a broader ‘preferred partnership’ whereby projects and contracts are tailored to the mutual needs of CSOs and government. We have also found no evidence of a high competitive environment for Flemish CSOs, as managers report only low to moderate levels of competition for resources and for members or clients.

Fourth, managers experience government in different roles, with a combination of hierarchical oversight and negotiated partnership. Hierarchy is most clearly expressed by the high importance given by managers to the procedural and performance monitoring by government in every sector – whereby managers in the wellbeing sector report the highest scores. An important limitation to this finding is the narrowly defined indicator for performance monitoring (single-item question: “this government monitors the performance of your organization”). Looking at organizational strategic decision making, more than one in three managers report sharing of decision making power with government when it comes to

determining the results to be achieved by the CSO. This percentage drops significantly lower for goal-setting and deciding on work-methods - both in favor of higher organizational autonomy. Of course, one should be careful to take these responses at face value: since these questions concern the autonomy of the CSOs, this could lead to some degree of socially desirable answering strategies (Verschuere and De Corte 2013). As such, a part of this 'shared decision making' by might actually be hiding a higher percentage of governmental control. One could assume that managers prefer to see the desired results of their CSO as a power-sharing process than of (implicit or soft) coercion by government. However, if these responses instead reflect a genuine sharing of decision making, they might point to a close intertwining of CSOs and governments on some key organizational decisions. The higher focus on results could here reflect a more NPM-style interest in the performance of the organizations.

Fifth, we found that for most CSOs participating in umbrella organizations is the most important advocacy strategy, as we expected. This might reflect the institutional rigidity of neo-corporatist policy participation, yet again we cannot speak of the resulting outcomes of these advocacy strategies. These might occur in an increasingly adversarial relationship whereby government only formally includes CSOs in the policy process but does not take their input into account.

Conclusion: change from the margins?

Our study adds to the literature on the relationship between government and CSOs and shows that the neo-corporatist institutions on which it is built has not been replaced by NPM-style institutions. Indeed, we find that NPM-style reforms occur mostly in the functioning of public funding: while public funding is for the most part considered stable by our respondents, they do report frequent use of competitive public funding. We argue that this form of institutional layering is important, but can be considered marginal in the broader institutional framework.

This does not mean that these elements are trivial but only that the ‘old’ rules (in this case the neo-corporatist institutions) are still at work while ‘new’ elements are introduced (in this case NPM-style public funding) (Streeck and Thelen, 2005). As argued by Mahoney and Thelen (2010) the reason that such layering occurs instead of a displacement of the old rules by new institutions is because of the political position of the actors involved and little room for reinterpretation of existing institutions (2010, 19). Indeed, while CSOs report high levels of governmental monitoring, our study shows a relationship between government and CSOs in which administrative and political negotiation is still important. Moreover, our study does not find high levels of competition. This suggests that the changes we are seeing are indeed in the ‘fringe’ of the neo-corporatists institutions, where negotiation-based agreements form the core of the institutional framework and market-type elements are marginal while not trivial. Theoretically, it can be argued that this mix of ‘old’ and ‘new’ could lead to lower institutional coherence, which in turn might undermine the neo-corporatist institutions (Koreh et al., 2019). To understand the effects of these changes on CSOs, our study also underlines the importance of contextualizing the discussion on the impact of NPM-style reforms, not only *between* countries or regions, but also between different sectors *within* countries or regions. Within the boundaries of what seems to be a rather stable configuration of neo-corporatist relations, each of these sectors has its particular kind of hybridity. These different contexts matter to understand the impact of current or future market-type reforms. For WISE, a rise in relative and absolute terms of market-based income can enhance the entrepreneurial autonomy of many of these organizations – spurring further innovation, but possibly at the expense of its socially oriented goals. In the wellbeing sector, CSOs have a more limited experience with market-type actions, which could result in a less autonomous position as their source of income is less diverse. In this sector, marketisation of CSOs seems to appear mostly through the introduction of ‘customer-oriented’ principles (e.g. ‘cash-for-care systems’) or competitive public funding.

Socio-cultural organizations report a considerable proportion of private income (market and community), yet because of the wide diversity of the sector it might prove difficult to develop strategies for an even lower dependence of public funding. While highly professionalized CSOs might be able to renew themselves, voluntary associations might possibly face an uphill battle.

For now, our research does not suggest a strong destabilization of the neo-corporatist institutions. A challenge for further research is to identify whether the neo-corporatist structures that we have identified do also provide an institutional space in which CSOs can *effectively* contribute to policymaking and politics, and how CSOs from different sectors experience marketisation tendencies *in practice*. While quantitative research provides much needed context, more in-depth qualitative research or mixed-methods can focus on which practices *actually* matter. Furthermore, future research should also ask what the impact is of the changing political landscape on neo-corporatist institutions, as political parties with no historical ties to civil society organizations become key actors in European governments.

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Table 1: Overview of findings

Kruskal-Wallis test ($p < 0.05$ *, $p < 0.01$ **, $p < 0.001$ ***)
 with post-hoc Mann-Whitney pairwise comparison (Bonferroni correction)
 r = effect size (small = [0.00 - 0.30], medium = [0.30 - 0.50], large = [0.50 - 1.00])

	Median values			significant? (Kruskal-Wallis test-statistic)	Sector Pairwise Comparison (Mann-Whitney)			
	Socio-cultural	Well-being	Social Economy		socio-cultural / wellbeing	sociocultural / social economy	social economy / wellbeing	
Functions of CSOs						r (effect size)		
Service delivery	4.00	5.00	5.00	Yes	(40.165 ***)	-0.3606 ***	-0.1823 ***	n.s.
Political function	4.20	3.80	3.20	Yes	(31.879 ***)	-0.2617***	-0.3179 ***	n.s.
Advocacy	4.00	4.00	3.00	No	-	-	-	-
Social Capital	4.00	5.00	5.00	Yes	(21.532 ***)	-0.1913 **	-0.2779 ***	n.s.
Monitoring and partnership						r (effect size)		
General monitoring	5.00	5.00	5.00	Yes	(15.292***)	-0.2163 **	n.s.	-0.2110 *
Use of finances	5.00	5.00	5.00	Yes	(7.110 *)	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Performance	5.00	5.00	4.00	Yes	(11.276 **)	-0.1581 *	n.s.	-0.2295 *
In consultation	4.00	4.00	4.00	No	-	-	-	-
Demands impact	4.00	4.00	4.00	No	-	-	-	-
Govt. as partner	3.00	4.00	3.00	No	-	-	-	-
Sources of income						r (effect size)		
Public income	60.00%	95.00%	41.90%	Yes	(70.340 ***)	-0.5065 ***	n.s.	-0.4833 ***
Market income	10.00%	0.60%	55.00%	Yes	(51.829 ***)	-0.3208 ***	-0.3598 ***	-0.5435 ***
Community income	10.00%	2.00%	0.00%	Yes	(38.630 ***)	-0.2392 **	-0.4128 ***	-0.4437 ***
Govt. is crucial financier	5.00	5.00	5.00	Yes	(30.873 ***)	-0.2929 ***	-0.2099 **	n.s.

(continues on next page)

Table 1 (continued): Overview of findings

	Median values			significant? (Kruskal-Wallis test-statistic)	Sector Pairwise Comparison (Mann-Whitney)			
	Socio-cultural	Well-being	Social Economy		socio-cultural / wellbeing	sociocultural / social economy	social economy / wellbeing	
Evolution of income (10 years)					r (effect size)			
Public income	3.00	3.00	2.00	Yes	(17.804 ***)	n.s.	-0.3255 ***	-0.3555 ***
Market income	3.00	3.00	4.00	Yes	(20.434 ***)	n.s.	-0.33447 ***	-0.4384 ***
Community income	3.00	3.00	3.00	No	-	-	-	-
Competition					r (effect size)			
Resources (CSOs)	3.00	3.00	3.00	Yes	(7.054 *)	-0.01380 *	n.s.	n.s.
Resources (Corp.)	1.00	1.00	2.00	Yes	(42.939 ***)	n.s.	-0.3450 **	-0.4962 ***
Clients (CSOs)	2.00	2.00	2.00	No	-	-	-	-
Clients (Corp.)	1.00	1.00	2.00	Yes	(45.102 ***)	n.s.	-0.3569 ***	-0.5038 ***
Govt. stimulates client competition (0/1)	0.00	0.00	0.00	Yes	(14.672 **)	-0.2365 **	n.s.	n.s.
Advocacy strategies					r (effect size)			
Contacts with administrators	3.00	3.00	3.00	No	-	-	-	-
Contacts with politicians	3.00	2.00	2.00	Yes	(11.736 **)	n.s.	-0.2230 **	n.s.
Advisory boards	3.00	3.00	1.00	Yes	(24.178 ***)	n.s.	-0.3317 ***	-0.3286 ***
Committees	3.00	2.00	2.00	Yes	(8.491 *)	n.s.	-0.1778 *	n.s.
Umbrella orgs.	4.00	4.00	5.00	Yes	(6.501 *)	n.s.	-0.1702 *	n.s.
Control over strategic decision making					r (effect size)			
Goals	5.00	4.00	4.00	Yes	(35.777 ***)	-0.3456 ***	n.s.	n.s.
Methods	5.00	4.00	4.00	Yes	(16.175 ***)	-0.1932 **	-0.2232 **	n.s.
Results	4.00	3.00	4.00	Yes	(16.122 ***)	-0.2294 ***	n.s.	n.s.

Table 2: Functions of CSOs (mean scores, scale 1-5)

Functions	Sociocultural	Wellbeing	Social Economy
Social Capital	4.02	4.45	4.78
Service Delivery	3.82	4.60	4.33
Political function	3.91	3.35	2.92
Advocacy	3.56	3.43	3.45

Table 3: Types of public funding (% of organizations)

<i>Percentage of organizations that have this types of income (yes/no question)</i>				
<i>Chi-square with Cramer's V test (p < 0.05 *, p < 0.01 **, p < 0.001 ***)</i>				
Types	Sociocultural	Wellbeing	Social Economy	<i>Cramer's V</i>
Subsidies for core activities	94.40%	98.10%	100.00%	<i>n.s.</i>
Subsidies for one-time projects	53.90%	37.20%	58.30%	0.176 *
Contracts (services, products)	21.40%	14.00%	22.70%	<i>n.s.</i>

Appendices

Appendix Table 1: Population and sample overview

Domains	Population Database		Response Wave 1		Response Wave 2**		Sampling goal
	N	%	n	%	n	%	%
A. Social Economy (WISE)	159	6.42%	49	9.88%	34	6.85%	10%
B. Wellbeing	603	24.36%	158	31.85%	130	26.21%	30%
C. Socio-cultural Organizations	1713	69.21%	289	58.27%	239	48.19%	60%
TOTAL	2475	100%	496	100%	403	81.25%	

** percentages of wave 2 are calculated against the initial total response of wave 1 to illustrate the lower response

Our sample is a good representation of the distribution between the three sampled sectors. In order to account for the organizational diversity within these sectors – a key characteristic of the nonprofit sphere in general (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016) – we over- (e.g., ethnic-cultural associations) and under-sampled (e.g., professional associations) some organizational segments in the sociocultural sector.

Appendix Table 2: Organizations that indicated the Flemish Government as their most important government

Domains	Response Wave 1		Flemish Govt. Wave 1		Survey Wave 2**		Flemish Govt. Wave 2	
	n	%			n	%	n	%
A. Social Economy (WISE)	49	9.88%	40	11.80%	34	6.85%	27	9.75%
B. Wellbeing	158	31.85%	134	39.53%	130	26.21%	111	40.07%
C. Social & Cultural Organizations	289	58.27%	165	48.67%	239	48.19%	139	50.18%
	496	100.00%	339	100.00%	403	81.25%	277	100.00%

** percentages of wave 2 are calculated against the initial total response of wave 1 to illustrate the lower response