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**The Spanish local political elite. Patterns of professionalization
and dualization of roles**

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Abstract

This paper seeks to analyze the trends towards professionalization of local elected representatives in Spain. Drawing on a survey on councillors -the MAELG (Municipal Assemblies In European Local Governments) research project- it attempts at evaluating some indicators of professionalization. It considers all categories of local elected representatives but focuses its attention in a specific group of them: those who are members of the executive boards or cabinets. To the extent that they hold specific portfolios and are closer to the tasks of government, we assume that their patterns of professionalization are more intense and their visions on the machinery of government different. Identifying these distinctive traits and advancing tentative explanations and effects will be the core of the study. The findings confirm that executive functions transform councillors' behavior in the local world and that there is a dualization of roles within Spanish municipal councils.

1.- Introduction

For the last two decades political and administrative reforms have been intensively applied over local governments around Western democracies (John 2000; Caulfield and Larsen 2002; Kersting & Vetter 2003; Denters & Rose, 2005), from adapting NPM recipes in city halls' management to modifying electoral rules or reinforcing citizens participatory tools. Local democracies no longer are what they were twenty years ago. Although with its own logic and dynamics, Spain is not an exception (Alba and Navarro 2003). The origins and causes for these reforms are often related to the need of strengthening the democratic legitimacy of local systems, both from the input (becoming more responsive) and from the output (becoming more effective and efficient) perspectives (Kersting and Vetter 2003).

Among all the reforms in place, we are specifically interested in those that have transformed the political leadership in local communities. Indeed, the machinery of government has also been affected by the reform agenda and a common trait of reinforcement of executive functions can be observed as a general pattern of change (Borraz & John 2004, Berg & Riao 2005). In this paper, we will just concentrate in the

evolution of the executive functions in local institutions, more and more powerful and concentrated in executive bodies such as the executive council and the mayor. This might have had an effect in the local political elite since the roles of elected officers have been altered and weights, tasks and influence of local actors (councillors, mayor, executive councillors) have changed.

Why have these strategies being implemented? Have the institutional reforms been successful towards this end? What have been the consequences? Has the role of the councillors changed after the reforms? In which direction? How are now local political elites?

The lines below will aim to provide answers to certain aspects of these questions. First by identifying the explanations from a theoretical perspective and analysing in the reforms implemented. Secondly by presenting evidence of the effects these changes have had in the Spanish local world with the empirical basis of two surveys conducted in Spanish municipalities within the European POLEADER and MAELG projects¹.

Our hypothesis is that the reinforcement of local executives has decisively affected the role of councillors to the extent that within the council we can identify two groups of politicians: one comprised by those who have government responsibilities (mayors and members of the executive board) and the other with those who do not exert these tasks. This situation drives to a growing dualization of roles. For one group politics becomes a profession whereas for the other politics remain an activity exercised on a voluntary basis by amateurs (Guerin & Kerrouche, 2008) to whom layman rule still prevails (Mouritzen & Svava, 2002). Amateurs and professionals meet in councils at the same formal level and are citizens' representatives but they have very different careers, visions, aspirations and levels of influence in decisions.

2.- The reinforcement of local political leadership

For some authors, strengthening legitimacy in democratic systems requires working on

¹ The POLEADER (Political Local Leaders in Europe) and MAELG (Municipal Assemblies In European Local Governments) are International comparative analysis of local mayors and councils. Using as research technique a questionnaire applied to local councillors it investigates the relationships between institutional arrangements, contextual change and the attitudes, careers, values and behaviours of local (mayors and councillors) leaders.

two dimensions, both of them equally important when designing and evaluating sector reform strategies (Fritz Scharpf, 1999). On the one hand democratic regimes increase in quality by being responsive, acting in accordance with the preferences of its members. In local systems this responsiveness can be reinforced by implemented certain types of tools (e.g. direct public debates, citizen surveys, direct election of mayors, etc.) conceived at supporting the input legitimacy of the political system. On the other hand, effectively and efficiently promoting the welfare of citizens can also lead to the increasing the legitimacy of the respective system from the output perspective. Although input and output dimensions are most of the cases confronted to a trade-off relation, neither of them can be ignored if the goal is to promote the quality, stability and survival of a democratic system (Kersting & Vetter, 2003).

During the last decades local governments have been targeted by institutional reforms, attempting at strengthening their output and their input legitimacy. The transformation of executive functions in which this paper is focused has been commonly linked with output legitimacy. Explanations on why local leadership has evolve to the patterns we see now are connected to the need of governing more effectively (solving problems) and efficiently (investing the less public resources possible for the achieving the maximum results). With this goal in mind, strong leadership is considered a functional response to the complex character of networks, interest groups and partners where politicians need to manage if they are to formulate and implement policies effectively (Borraz & John, 2004). In other words, in contexts of governance where public decisions are less based in hierarchically organized structures but take place in sets of relations between key public and private actors of open, complex and potentially instable networks, the requirements of building trust, flexibility and capacity of coordination can only exist if leaderships are strong and effective. Authoritative voices in the study of local government such as Goldsmith and Page (2010) have mapped the rise to a greater range of relationships between and across different levels of government all over Europe. According to them, multilevel governance is the biggest change that can be observed from twenty-five years ago in local systems.

Other explanations are also plausible and can actually be complementary (Borraz & John, 2004). One is connected to the European Union and the fact that its functioning and outputs provide ideas, models and new standards for local elites and reformers. Other is based in the idea of diffusion and claims that globalization has brought some sort of “institutional mimetism” according to which different institutions adopt similar

forms in order to achieve successful responses to similar challenges.

Spain has not been isolated from the common trend of local government reforms, including the one related to the reinforcement of political leadership (Alba & Navarro, 2003, Magre & Bertrana, 2005). Although local government is not extensively explored in Spanish academy, thousands of local governments -which deliver basic services, develop local land, promote their economies and focus attention on their neediest populations within their jurisdictions- have also evolved towards European standards and stronger leaders and city authorities conform effective networks of governance (Brugué & Valles, 2005).

Analyzing any process in Spanish local government is difficult and challenging. Difficult because it requires diving into a system characterised by a high degree of complexity with overlapping powers, enumerated networks and shared responsibilities. Challenging because the universe under research is tremendously fragmented and varied. Although Spain is a predominantly urbanized country, there are 8.114 municipalities, the majority (60 per cent) with populations below 1.000, while 84 per cent of them have populations below 5.000. This disparity in units' size makes complicated finding common patterns and explanations in the view of a tremendously wide variation in capabilities to act and institutional and political dynamics among units.

However, the lines below will try to offer some evidence of the transformation on the local leadership in Spain and its effect. Firstly, by analyzing the main elements of the local political system and the institutional reforms applied through national regulations and secondly, by offering empirical data on the perceptions of councillors on the reforms and their ultimate consequences.

3. The Spanish local political system

For any scholar interested in decentralization, Spain offers a rich ground for observation and research. During the last three decades, the post-Franco democracy has moved to a system that is federal in all but name, granting autonomy to regional and local governments. It is not only the European country that has most rapidly intergovernmentalized, but it is also still in an open process in which local governments are now fighting for their place in the final architecture. While the media and the public

keeps on focusing on the second-tier of government (Autonomous Communities) and nationalist conflicts fill up most of the political debate, thousands of Spanish local governments are constitutionally autonomous, have experienced tremendous changes in three decades of existence and deliver crucial public policies affecting everyday citizens' life.

As has been mentioned above, the map of local government is highly fragmented and heterogeneous. There are more than 8.000 municipalities, 90 percent of which have less than 1.000 inhabitants (see Table 1). This fact makes any attempt of generalization almost impossible. The country shares with the French case the phenomenon of *inframunicipalism*. Processes of amalgamation of municipalities undertaken in most of European countries in the 60's and 70's have never been implemented in Spain and all the authorised voices agree in considering them unfeasible.

Table 1: Number of municipalities by Population size, 2010

Population size	Municipalities	%
below 9.999	7362	90,75
10.000-19.999	356	4,39
20.000-49.999	249	3,07
50.000-99.999	83	1,02
100.000-499.999	56	0,69
Above 500.000	6	0,07
Total	8112	100

INE

Municipalities have their own governments and a fixed structure. In terms of the political organization, each local unit has (by law): a mayor, deputy mayors, an executive board (for municipalities above 5.000 inhabitants) and a council or municipal assembly.

The municipal assembly (council) is made up of the elected councillors and chaired by the mayor. Councillors are directly elected. Each municipality forms a single electoral constituency. Candidates run in a great percentage in political parties' organizations and lists are blocked and closed. Seats are allocated by a proportional system in accordance with the d'Hont formula. The calendar of local elections is the same for the whole country and the term of office is four years. The number of councillors to be elected is dependent on the size of the municipality, ranging from 5 councillors in small

municipalities to 57 councillors in the local assembly of Madrid, the highest populated city (see table 2).

Table 2: Number of councillors by Population size

Population size	Number of councillors
below 250	5
251 – 1.000	7
1.001-2.000	9
2.000-5.000	11
5.000-10.000	13
10.000-20.000	17
20.000-50.000	21
50.000-100.000	25
Above 100.001	*

*for municipalities above 100.000 inh. 1 councillor added for every additional 100.000 or fraction

Mayors are, by law, in charge of chairing the local executive, chairing the council, leading local government and administration and representing the municipality.

The executive board (*Junta de Gobierno*) members are the Mayor and the councillors appointed by him/her. This number cannot exceed a third of the council size. Councillors members of the executive board (executive councillors) have responsibilities in the tasks of government. They are charged with portfolios and, by delegation, with powers controlled by the mayor. Only in the so-called “Big-Cities”² mayors may fill up to 30 percent of executive cabinet positions by the appointment of non-elected councillors and may delegate a significant part of institutional competences to them. However, few mayors have made use of this tool during recent legislatures (Martínez-Fuentes, 2008). Most of the members of the cabinet are councillors in these Big-Cities as well.

Local government was scarcely mentioned in the constitution, in contrast to the autonomous communities. The constitutional charter limited its treatment to the formal recognition of local government autonomy and the principle of financial self-sustainability. Yet more than three decades later, neither of these traits are completely

² The Law 57/2003 of *Measures to Modernize Local Government* uses the term Big Cities to refer to large population municipalities with more than 250.000 inhabitants and capital of provinces (departments) with more than 175.000 inhabitants. In addition, cities with population above 100.000 can apply for the status of “big-city” and benefit from the specific political and organizational mechanisms allowed for them.

guaranteed in Spain's municipalities. Local authorities complain that they occupy a poorly-defined political space.

When the main legal instrument regulating the institutional design of local government - the Spanish Local Government Act (SLGA) on 1985 - was enacted by the national Parliament six years after the first democratic elections, it helped to clarify local competences and responsibilities. The act also gave support to the policies and actions that municipalities had developed - in a legal vacuum - for nearly two terms of active democratic government.

The starting point of the Spanish local model was more a "parliamentarian" form, with the mayor being a strong political personality but very constrained in his/her executive capacities by the need to pass most of the decisions in the council. This situation changed with the evolution of the political practices and the reform following the negotiations of the so-called "Local Pact". The 1999 SLGA reform formalized this agreement with strengthening of the executive powers of the mayor and the supervisory tasks of the council. The evolution of the political practices and the exercise of the tasks by the mayor have approached the system to a "presidential" one (Alba, Navarro 2003).

The "Local Pact" had been an initiative launched in the early nineties by the Spanish Association of Municipalities and Provinces (Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias, FEMP) representing a strong and common demand of local authorities to central and regional authorities for change. They argued that after the country had developed a deep process of devolution (the main beneficiaries of which being the regions), the moment for a second devolution process had arrived. Negotiations finished with: (1) a wider participation of local governments in some political areas and consulting bodies (2) deep changes affecting the organizational model of local government and the relative positions of mayor and council (3) local government got more legal protection against potential interferences by the state or the autonomous communities (4) the regulation of the non-confidence vote was reformed to make it effective.

These reforms represented just a small part of what local actors have brought in their agenda but, for the concern and topic of this paper, it embody an enormous step. It improved governance by increasing responsibilities for the executive and giving supervisory powers to the Council. At the same time it strengthened the position of the

mayor in terms of monopolizing the managerial and executive functions in order to produce a more efficient machinery of government.

According to what mayors expressed seven years later when where asked about it in the POLEADER project³, the reform was very effective. Mayors perceive that there have occurred many changes in influence in the last decade among the various actors of local affairs. One of the most relevant change has been the one between the local executive actors and the local assembly. 60 percent of local leaders affirm that local executives have acquired more power in relation with the local assembly and 75 percent of mayors state that there has been a notable change of influence favouring the mayor in relation with the council. Conclusively, the reform has been effective.

4.- Councillors and Executive Councillors, a dualization of roles?

The second part of the paper will be devoted to test our hypothesis of the emergence of dualization of roles among local councillors due to the gain of influence of local executives and the consequent professionalization of those councillors who exert executive functions. For this group there are some indicators pointing to a professionalization of their political tasks and careers. For them politics becomes a profession whereas for the others there are signs of more amateurism in their daily activity and career patterns (Guerin & Kerrouche, 2008), here, the layman rule would still prevail (Mouritzen & Svava, 2002).

We will use information from the MAELG survey⁴ comparing executive councillors (members of the executive board) with ordinary councillors. We will concentrate on

³ Political Local Leaders in Europe. Based on a survey conducted on mayors of municipalities above 10.000 inhabitants through a questionnaire. 156 questionnaires answered out of the 646 units of the universe (24,1% of the universe). Proyecto SEC 2003/09005 "Líderes políticos en los gobiernos locales", Plan Nacional de I+D, Ministry of Education.

⁴ Of the 750 Spanish municipalities with population above 10.000 inhabitants, 200 of them were selected by the Spanish research team for the MAELG survey on the base of a stratified random sample. The MAELG questionnaire was sent in September 2009 individually to each of the 2000 councillors elected in those municipalities in total. Getting responses was challenging due to: difficulties in reaching the councillors themselves, expressed denial of many councillors to invest time in responding due to the length and complexity of the questionnaire (315 variables, 23 pages) and political resistance of some mayors and/or local political groups. In June 2010, at the time of the closing of the fieldwork we had obtained 520 responses (see number responses by region, size of municipality and

data about: socio-demographic profile, level of influence, relations with the local party, rewards system, time devoted to office tasks and career preferences and distinctive visions on NPM reforms.

The first explorative step will be of descriptive representation. In our analysis we are interested in identifying how different councillors in cabinets are compared to the rest of the elected local representatives. For doing so we will look, first, to their socio-demographic profile. At the local level, empirical studies have shown that decision-makers are predominantly male, middle aged high in professional status and middle aged (Steyvers & Reynaert, 2006). This situation is also the case in Spanish municipalities but: are executive councillors a more exclusive group in this respect? Can we state as Steyvers and Reynaert in their study of European mayors that “from the few are chosen the few”?

4.1 Socio-demographic profile of Spanish councillors

Table 3 shows data on gender, education, age, years living in the municipality and seniority in office. Table 4 shows information about the profession councillors practiced before entering into politics.

Table 3. Socio-demographic profile of Executive Councillors

Socio-demographic profile				
		Executive councillors %	Rest of councillors %	Total %
Gender	Male	69.5	65.3	67.2
	Female	30.5	34.7	32.8
Education	Elementary school	2.3	4.8	3.7
	Secondary school or equivalent	15.1	21.3	18.5
	University/ college or equivalent	82.6	73.9	77.8
Age	18-35 years	19.6	21.3	20.6
	36-45 years	31.5	30.9	31.2
	46-55 years	31.5	31.3	31.4
	56-65 years	15.1	15.1	15.1
	66 years or more	2.3	1.5	1.8
Years living in the municipality	5 years or less	1.4	1.5	1.5
	6-10	1.4	4.2	2.9
	11-20 years	11.1	12.1	11.6
	21-30 years	24.4	30.7	27.9
	31 years or more	61.8	51.5	56.1

councillor's party in Appendix II). This number represented a lower rate (25% of the sample) than that obtained in other countries. An uneven geographic distribution of responses was also part of the picture, where Madrid and Catalonia are overrepresented.

Years as councillor	5 years or less	32.3	56.5	45.2
	6-10 years	37.8	29.8	33.5
	11-15 years	19.4	9.3	14.0
	16-20 years	7.8	2.8	5.2
	21 years or more	2.8	1.6	2.2
Total N		221	275	496

MAELG survey

In terms of gender, our sample reflects the national average. After local elections in 2007, women represent 30,9 percent of the total number of councillors in Spain. Of a total of 66.132 councillors in the country, 20.436 are women, having increased this number in a 23% compared to 2003 elections. This is the effect of the Gender Equality Act and the subsequent reform of the electoral system of 2007 which now includes the obligation for candidatures in European, national, regional and local elections to present gender balanced lists. However, higher differences persist if we look at the proportion of women at the head of the city-hall. Only a 15 percent of Spanish mayors are women, 1.221 out of the 8.112. This difference is also relevant in our group of executive councillors, showing a more difficult access of women to relevant positions in the political machinery of local government. Of our respondents, only a 30.5 percent of the executive mayors are women, compared to the 34.7 percent of the rest of councillors in municipal assemblies.

Concerning their age, the largest percentage of councillors in all Spanish councils is between 26 and 45 years old. Councillors after 2007 elections are younger than their predecessors (see figure 1) in part as an effect of the larger presence of women among local political elites.

If we look at the level of education, national figures for 2007 elections (FEMP, 2007) show that 24% of councillors have elementary education, 36.2% have secondary education and 39.4% of the councillors have a university degree. Women are better educated, 43.2 percent of them (compared to 37% of men) have higher education studies. However, our respondents in the MAELG data-set differ from these numbers. As showed in table 3, 77.8 percent of them declare to have a university degree. We do not know exactly to what extent this figure is valid for the whole universe of municipalities above 10.000 inhabitants. On the one hand, it is reasonable to imagine that political elites in bigger municipalities will tend to have a higher level of training, compared to their counterparts in rural areas. On the other hand, this could show a

higher inclination of councillors with a university degree to fill in and send back the questionnaire. We do not have national numbers of education levels by size of municipality. Nevertheless, our information does allow us to confirm that executive councillors are even better trained, having 82.6 percent of them (compared to 73.9 percent for non executive councillors) university degree.

Looking at aspects of seniority (years living in the municipality and years as councillors), we detect some distinctive features. Most of the Spanish councillors have lived in the municipalities they serve to for most of if not all their lives. More than half of them (56.1 percent of the total) have lived there for more than 31 years. Executive councillors overcome this figure and the rate of them living in the municipality for more than 31 years is 61.8 percent.

Lastly, for that which concerns seniority in office, our data indicate that 45.2% of the councillors have been in office for 5 years or less. Out of the other half, the bigger percentage is concentrated in the section between 6 and 10 years serving. Here, again, executive councillors are different. The highest percentage (37.8) is for those in office between 6 and 10 years and 27.2 percent more have been in office for more than two terms. If we consider that candidates elected for three legislatures will probably the facto become professional politicians this could indicate a dualisation of roles in Spanish municipal assemblies between ordinary councillors and those with specific tasks.

Table 4.- Profession of Executive Councillors

To which occupational category did you belong before your first mandate as a councillor?		
	Executive Councillors	Not executive councillors
Professional politician	2.6 (5)	3.0 (7)
Civil servant	20.0 (39)	18.6 (44)
Business manager	6.7 (13)	9.7 (23)
Teacher	16.4 (32)	13.9 (33)
Liberal profession (lawyer, doctor)	11.3 (22)	11.8 (28)
Engineer	9.2 (18)	7.2 (17)
Clerk	13.3 (26)	15.6 (37)
Shopkeeper	2.6 (5)	2.1 (5)
Labourer	6.7 (13)	6.3 (15)
Farmer or fisher	0	0.4 (1)
Student	5.1 (10)	5.1 (12)
Retired	0 (0)	1.3 (3)
Housewife/-man	2.6 (5)	2.1 (5)
Other	3.6 (7)	3.0 (7)
Total	100.0 (195)	100.0 (237)

In summary, executive councillors tend to be better educated and with deeper roots in their cities. They do not show important differences in the profession they had previously practiced but show a more professionalized profile in terms of years exercising the political activity although they are not older than their counterparts.

4.2. How influential are executive and ordinary councillors?

In exploring variables that attempted at producing knowledge for a better understanding of the functioning of the local machinery of government, we have selected some which can also throw light on how different perceptions are between the two groups in which councillors are basically asked about the degree of influence of the different categories of councillors (mayors, executive councillors and ordinary councillors)

In line with the typologies that place the Spanish case in the “Strong Mayor” form of local government (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002)⁵, councillors confirm this attribute by perceiving that mayors are highly influential in the city, moreover, the most influential actor over the local authority activities. It is not only that the formal institutional rules are designed to model a political system in which the main executive powers are in the hands of the city leader, but responses of privileged witnesses confirm that they actually exercise them. Interestingly, mayors are perceived more influential by executive councillors. 98.6 percent of members of cabinets think mayors have a very high or a high influence, compared to 93.8 percent in the other group. These numbers show a different perception in those who are closer to the power. Being within the machinery of government (and, therefore, being better witnesses of how power is exercised) makes them to perceive an even more enhanced authority of the leader.

⁵ There are two major typologies on local government in recent literature. The typology by Hesse and Sharpe (1991) addresses the distribution of competencies in service provision as well as the political influence of the local level in relation to upper-level governments and the importance dedicated to local democracy. Hesse and Sharpe thereby draw a distinction between three country groups: the Anglo group, the Franco group and the North and Middle European Group. The typology by Mouritzen and Svara (2002) is oriented towards horizontal power relations among local institutional actors and relies on three key organizing principles of municipal government: layman rule, political leadership and professionalism. Mouritzen and Svara (2002) thereby distinguish four ideal types: the strong mayor form, the committee-leader form, the collective form and the council-manager form.

It might be worth at this point to remind that one of the main objectives in designing the institutional architecture of Spanish local government during the democratic transition was to strengthen the political leadership of the mayor since there was widespread fear for political instability. A mayoral model was adopted inspired by the “bourgmestre” of the Lander in southern Germany which gives significant prominence to the figure of the mayor (Magre and Bertrana, 2005). In addition, due to the fact of the strength of political parties in the Spanish political system at the local level as well (Botella, 1992), the presidential figure of the mayor gets even more reinforced as he tends also to be the president of the local party group of he/she is a member.

Table 5. Influence of the Mayor in local government

	High Influence	Some influence	Little influence	Total % (N)
Executive councillors	98.6 (218)	1.4 (3)	0	100.0 (221)
Non executive councillors	93.8 (225)	3.3 (9)	2.9 (8)	100.0 (272)

Differences are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level (Sig \leq 0.05). The question to councillors is: “On the basis of your experience as a local councillor in this city, and independently of the formal procedures, please indicate how influential each of the following actors are over the Local Authority activities: the Mayor”

The executive board is also perceived as very influential although, here, the influence decreases compared to that of the mayor and the differences between the answers of executive councillors and non-executive councillors are not statistically significant (see table 6). The former tend to identify the cabinet in which they serve as a slightly more powerful, compared with the opinion of the rest.

Table 6. Influence of the Executive board in Local Government

	High Influence	Some influence	Little influence	Total % (N)
Executive councillors	86.0 (190)	10.4 (23)	3.6 (8)	100.0 (221)
Non executive councillors	83.3 (225)	11.5 (31)	5.2 (14)	100.0 (270)

The question to councillors is: “On the basis of your experience as a local councillor in this city, and independently of the formal procedures, please indicate how influential each of the following actors are over the Local Authority activities: The Executive Board”

Where we do find significant differences again is in the perceptions the two groups have regarding the influence of councillors over the local authority activities. Here members of executive boards point out a higher influence of single councillors on local government than that perceived by councillors themselves (see table 7). 54.5 percent

of the executive councillors think the influence of single councillors is high, whereas only 29.1 percent of the second group see themselves so influential. This difference is intriguing. Is it political correctness on the side of the executive councillors? Or, do they have better information to assess the actors determining the outputs of the policy process and then their opinions reflect the real world in a better way?

Table 7.- Influence of Single Councillors in local government

	High Influence	Some influence	Little influence	Total % (N)
Executive councillors	54.5 (120)	41.4 (91)	4.1 (9)	100.0 (220)
Non executive councillors	29.1 (78)	44.0 (118)	26.9 (72)	100.0 (268)

Differences are statistically significant at a 99,9% confidence level (Sig ≤ 0.001). The question to councillor is “On the basis of your experience as a local councillor in this city, and independently of the formal procedures, please indicate how influential each of the following actors are over the Local Authority activities: Single Councillors”

The picture of the weights of political power in local government can be completed when we take a look at a last variable in this section. Asked ordinary councillors about their influence over local authorities activities, 49% of them think they have little or non influence at all (see table 8).

Table 8.- Influence of the respondent in local government

	High Influence	Some influence	Little influence	Total % (N)
Executive councillors	56.3 (120)	39.0 (83)	4.7 (10)	100.0 (213)
Non executive councillors	17.8 (45)	33.2 (84)	49.0 (124)	100.0 (253)

Differences are statistically significant at a 99,9% confidence level (Sig ≤ 0.001). The question to councillor is “On the basis of your experience as a local councillor in this city, and independently of the formal procedures, please indicate how influential each of the following actors are over the Local Authority activities: Myself”

Summing up, councillors’ answers confirm the elements already known of the Spanish local political system: power centralized in the strong leader, delegated to few members of the cabinet (whose members are freely appointed and removed by the mayor) to make the governmental machinery more efficient, and lack of influence of the rest of councillors. The more actors know about the decision-making process, the more they enhance these features. Ordinary councillors find themselves playing a role consisting just in looking at the real leaders and being removed from their decisions.

Councillors in executives are also the ones more willing to vote according to the opinion of the party in case of conflict between different imperatives of their role as elected representatives (see table 9). Being party's opinion on policy issues highly relevant for all, the fact of occupying a seat in government makes party's guidelines more relevant.

Table 9.- Councillors voting behaviour in case of conflict between different imperatives

	Vote according to his/her own conviction	Vote according to the opinion of the party group	Vote according to the opinion of the voters	Total % (N)
Executive councillors	27.8 (59)	60.8 (129)	11.3 (24)	100.0 (212)
Non executive councillors	34.0 (91)	51.9 (139)	14.2 (38)	100.0 (268)

The question is formulated in the following terms: "If there should be a conflict between a member's own opinion, the opinion of the party group in the council or the opinion of the voters, how should, in your opinion, a member of the council vote?"

In combination with tables 10 and 11, we get a clearer idea of the relation between the local party organization and the party's council group. For all councillors Influence is as high from the local organization over the party's council group as in the other direction, showing that one group and the other are the same one. As shown in table 12, two thirds of all councillors occupy a position in the local party organization.

Table 10.- Influence of the local party organization over the party's council group

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Total % (N)
Executive councillors	87.4 (187)	4.2 (9)	8.4 (18)	100.0 (214)
Not executive councillors	87.4 (236)	7.4 (20)	5.2 (14)	100.0 (270)
Total % (N)	87.4 (423)	6.0 (29)	6.6 (32)	100.0 (484)

The question is formulated in the following terms: What is your opinion on the following statement about your party? The local party organization has much influence over the decisions of the party's group

Table 11.- Influence of the party's council group over the local party

	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Total % (N)
Executive councillors	88.8 (191)	4.2 (9)	7.0 (15)	100.0 (215)
Not executive councillors	87.6 (233)	6.0 (16)	6.4 (17)	100.0 (266)
Total % (N)	88.1 (424)	5.2 (25)	6.7 (32)	100.0 (481)

The question is formulated in the following terms: What is your opinion on the following statements about your party? - The party's council group has much influence over the decisions of the local party.

Table 12.- Councillors occupying a position in the local party organization

	No, never	Yes, previously	Yes, presently
Executive councillors	15.0 (31)	22.7 (47)	61.8 (128)
Not executive councillors	17.2 (44)	17.6 (45)	62.9 (161)
Total % (N)	16.2 (75)	92 (19.9)	62.4 (289)

The question is formulated in the following terms: Do you presently have, or have you previously had, a position (board member, etc.) in your party's organization (beside the party's council group)?- In the local party.

5.- Other indicators of dualisation between executive and ordinary councillors

In this last part of the paper, we will address the rest of indicators that are often linked to the professionalization of political elites: rewards system, work in office and career.

- Rewards system

Unfortunately, the information included in the MAELG questionnaire about the rewards system does not allow us to discriminate between those making their living from the political activity and those combining it with other profession. The question is formulated in the following terms: Do you receive an allowance as a councillor? (in the Spanish questionnaire "una compensación/retribución"), which is answered overwhelmingly in positive terms. The possibility of receiving an allowance and its quantity depends on the specific rules of each municipality. The available data in other studies show a significant variety of types and level of compensation (Magre & Pano, 2010)

Table 13. Possibility of allowance perceived by councillors

	No	Yes	Total
Executive councillors	4.1 (9)	95.9 (212)	100.0 (221)
Not executive councillors	8.1 (22)	91.9 (250)	100.0 (272)
Total % (N)	6.3 (31)	93.7 (462)	100.0 (493)

The question is formulated in the following terms: Do you receive an allowance as a councillor?

-Work at the City Hall

Because governing is becoming a more and more complex task, councilors employ a relevant amount of time in . Here too we find significant differences between our two types of councilors. Tables 14 and 16 show the type of tasks executive councilors devote more hours to.

Table 14. Time spent in meetings with administrative staff (average number of hours per month)

	N	Mean	Sd.
Executive councilors	211	23.56	24.05
Not executive councilors	246	11.86	20.14
Total	457	17.26	22.77

Differences are statistically significant at a 99,99% confidence level (Sig ≤ 0.01)

There is also a difference in the access to information they get to perform their job as councilors (see table 15). While 85.9% of the executive councilors find this access satisfying or very satisfying, only 46 of the rest of the councilors have the same opinion.

Table 15- Information from the administration to perform their job as councilors

	Satisfying	Neither satisfying nor unsatisfying	Unsatisfying	Total % (N)
Executive councilors	85.9 (189)	9.1 (20)	5.0 (11)	100.0 (220)
Non executive councilors	46.0 (126)	20.8 (57)	33.2 (91)	100.0 (274)

Differences are statistically significant at a 99,9% confidence level (Sig ≤ 0.001). The question to councilors is “Do you get a satisfying amount of information from the municipal administration to perform your job as a councilor?”

Table 16. Time spent in desk work preparing activity in the Council

	N	Mean	Sd.
Executive councilors	212	54.41	48.72
Not executive councilors	254	42.05	41.82
Total	466	47.67	45.46

Differences are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level (Sig ≤ 0.05)

- Plans for the future

Table 17.- Plans for own's career

For the time being, what are you planning to do at the end of the present mandate?					
	Continue as a councillor	Continue my career in a higher political office at the local level	Continue my career in a higher political office at the national/regional level	I would like to quit politics	Total
Executive councillors	52.0 (106)	5.4 (11)	18.6 (38)	24.0 (49)	100 (204)
Not executive councillors	55.8 (140)	10.0 (25)	11.2 (28)	23.1 (58)	100 (251)
Total % (N)	54.1 (246)	7.9 (36)	14.5 (66)	23.5 (107)	100 (455)

Differences are statistically significant at a 95% confidence level (Sig ≤ 0.05).

Table 18.- Reasons for quitting politics

If you want to quit politics, could you please state why? - I lack influence (of myself, my party or municipalities in general)			
	No	Yes	Total
Executive councillors	89.3 (50)	10.7 (6)	100.0 (56)
Not executive councillors	78.3 (54)	21.7 (15)	100.0 (69)
Total % (N)	83.2 (104)	16.8 (21)	100.0 (125)

Differences are statistically significant at a 90% confidence level (Sig ≤ 0.1)

5.- Concluding remarks

If we try to summarize our findings, executive councillors are indeed a distinctive subgroup in municipal assemblies. Their profile, tasks they develop, position held in the decision-making process and career expectations place them in the path to professionalization. This trend seems to be reinforced by institutional frameworks and by transformations of local political leadership.

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