Size and local democracy: The final word on the matter?

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70th Birthday Seminar for H. Baldersheim and L.E. Rose
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Across borders

IGS
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Baldersheim
Stadt Aub
Kreis Würzburg

Baldersheim

Baldersheim

Baldersheim

Baldersheim
A recurrent theme in democratic theory
Two perspectives: Gulliver’s Travels

Brobdingnag

Lilliput
1) Brobdingnag: Reform Theory

- Differentiation & Competition
- Pro-active attitudes
- Political participation
- Citizen performance satisfaction

Size

Professionalisation of administration

+ effect: the higher X, the higher Y
2) Lilliput: Political Community

Pro-active attitudes

Size → Community decline & distance

Bureaucratization & red tape → Political participation

Citizen performance satisfaction

+ effect: the higher X, the higher Y

- effect: the higher X, the lower Y
3) Compositional effects

- Small and big cities are “inhabited by different kinds of people”.
- In order to isolate the effects of size we must “separate out the effects of the socioeconomic characteristics of the individual living in the communities”.

(Verba et al. 1978:273)
The proof of the pudding …

Theory: three answers to question about democratic effects of municipal size

All three have a degree of plausibility. Which answer is correct?

Need for empirical evidence

(Proof of the pudding is in the eating!)
Stage 1:
secondary analysis of existing data; G&P issue 2002


B. Dентers, M. Goldsmith, A. Ladner, P. Mouritzen, L. Rose:
Size and Local Democracy,
Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2014

Stage 2:
collection of new data in four countries:
CH, NO, DK & NL
Three sets of criteria in SLDE

Ten criteria based on citizens’ orientations and involvement in local democracy

a) Inputs: citizens’ interest, knowledge and participation

b) Throughput: citizens’ confidence in politicians

c) Outputs: citizens’ satisfaction with performance
Three levels of analysis

Level 1: Four countries
- Wide variation in average size
- Similar local government systems; but important differences remain (e.g. direct democracy)

Level 2: 50-60 municipalities per country
- *Selection: maximize variation in size*

Level 3: 30 respondents per municipality
- *Selection: random sampling*
MLA: stepwise analysis

1) Bivariate correlation

Size → Party activism

2) Total effect (minus compositional effect, model 3)

Size → Party activism → Backgrounds
3) Total Effect = Direct + Indirect

Size

Political Competition

Party activism

Community Integration

Personal background

+ effect: the higher X, the higher Y

- effect: the higher X, the lower Y
Findings: size effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative size effect in three or four countries</th>
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Size effect on contacting

- Personal political competence
- Satisfaction with local government
- Party activism
- Local contacting
- Confidence in local politicians
- Distinctiveness of local voting
Size effect on satisfaction

- Negative size effect in three or four countries
- Negative size effect in two countries

- Personal political competence
- Satisfaction with local government
- Party activism
- Local contacting
- Confidence in local politicians
- Distinctiveness of local voting

![Graph showing size effect on satisfaction](chart.png)
Our final word on the matter!

No evidence for **compositional effects**

Weak corroboration for **Lilliput thesis**
- 6 (more or less) consistent significant negative effects
- Effects may be rather weak
- Size Matters .... A little bit!

Strong refutation of **Brobdingnag thesis**
- 0 (more or less) consistent positive effects
Reformers: “Brobdingnag not that ugly!”

- Scale increases not so disadvantageous as often claimed!
- More professionalism & specialisation and more legal quality; performance gains

- Other research: no conclusive evidence for systematic positive scale
- Amalgamation reforms are costly: direct costs and opportunity costs
- Our research: if there are advantages, citizens are not appreciative of these