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STRONG LEADERS? THE CHALLENGES AND PITFALLS IN MAYORAL LEADERSHIP

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The questions executive mayors face regarding the fulfillment of their leadership role often reveal dilemmas and paradoxes. The subject of this article is how executive mayors cope with these dilemmas and paradoxes and whether or not the selection procedure matters. It presents results of a comparison of English elected mayors' interpretations of three dilemmas and Dutch appointed mayors' expectations of those same dilemmas. The first dilemma involves the creation of a sense of community versus multiplicity of inclusions and identities. The second dilemma concerns the need for strong leadership versus the networked character of society. The third dilemma involves that strong leadership is expected, potentially leading to leaders having a false image of strength. The results show that mayors must balance the dilemmas within the boundaries set by the leadership context. Second, the directly elected mayors in England differ little from centrally appointed mayors in The Netherlands regarding their handling of the dilemmas.

INTRODUCTION: DIVERSE QUESTIONS FOR MAYORAL LEADERSHIP

Like other public leaders, executive mayors face many diverse questions regarding the fulfilment of their leadership role. These questions often reveal dilemmas in fulfilling that role. The necessity of coping with these dilemmas poses serious challenges to executive mayors and other public leaders. By 'executive mayors' we mean mayors with executive responsibilities, either exclusive or shared ones, and not ceremonial mayors or mayors that merely preside over council or board meetings. Despite variation in procedures for selecting mayors across Europe (Schaap *et al*. 2009a), the dilemmas and challenges that confront mayors are arguably quite similar. This raises the central topic of this article: how do executive mayors cope with leadership dilemmas, and does the selection procedure affect their ability to cope with them? In other words, we first studied a diversity of demands that local society poses on the mayor; secondly, we questioned how mayors as local political leaders deal with those demands and dilemmas. We finally raise the question whether directly elected mayors in England behave differently in this matter to their Dutch appointed colleagues. Put more abstractly, the issue here is how specific institutional arrangements (that is, procedures for the selection of mayors) affect relationships of mayors with their local community.

From the literature, in our search for dilemmas, we selected three major dilemmas and challenges concerning mayoral leadership. We decided to focus on external dilemmas, despite the undoubted relevance of internal dilemmas (for example, the choice between creating visions for the city and being an organizational leader, as addressed by Berg 2006, p. 328). The first dilemma, then, involves the necessity of creating a sense of community (a local identity) even though multiple inclusions and multiple identities characterize local communities. The second dilemma concerns the tension between the need for strong leadership and the interdependent, networked character of society. The third dilemma involves the fact that leaders are expected to be strong. The desire of followers to believe that their leaders are strong may lead them to have a false image of strength. At the

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same time, leaders should stand accountable. In order to stay in power, they must avoid situations in which they also come to believe in false images of 'strength'.

Mayors have to face all these leadership dilemmas. Many leadership studies take on a psychological character and tend to place strong emphasis on the individual. Because our focus is on the relationship of leaders to their public contexts, we have chosen a social-anthropological perspective for examining the dynamics of public leadership. Leaders have and operate in reciprocal relations with their followers (that is, citizens, other actors or stakeholders) in order to realize common policy goals (Burns 1978). Public leadership emerges within societal and political contexts. The followers and the context are as important to the nature of public leadership as are leaders to the followers and the public sphere (Elgie 1995; Chemers 1997). The word 'follower' is a commonly used and neutral concept in leadership theory, meaning 'any person that is part of the community to be led'. The public context is not characterized by any one-dimensional need for leadership. As we have said, executive mayors and other public leaders face diverse questions in the course of fulfilling their leadership roles. Moreover, in the set of requirements for effective leadership, these questions often reveal contradictions and paradoxes.

ENGLISH AND DUTCH MAYORS: OPPOSITE CASES?

To answer the question of whether selection procedures affect the ability of mayors to cope with these dilemmas, we made a comparison. In England, interviews were conducted with the mayors of Hackney (Jules Pipe), Lewisham (Steve Bullock), Middlesbrough (Ray Mallon), Newham (Sir Robin Wales), Stoke (Mike Wolf) and Watford (Dorothy Thornhill). Other interviews in England were conducted with Jessica Crowe (First Deputy of Hackney), Nigel Sayer (Executive Office Manager of Middlesbrough), Kathryn Stokes (Principal Corporate Development Officer of Middlesbrough), Professor Ken Young (of Queen Mary College and Goldsmiths College, University of London) and Professor Nirmala Rao (of Goldsmiths College, University of London). In The Netherlands, inter-views were conducted with the mayors of Zoetermeer (Jan Waaijer), Naarden (Peter Rehwinkel), Uithoorn (Hannie Groen), Leidschendam-Voorburg (Michiel van Haersma Buma), Hardinxveld-Giessendam (Arie Noordergraaf), Rijswijk (Ineke van de Wel) and Groningen (Jacques Wallage).

We first studied the ways in which directly elected mayors in England deal with leadership dilemmas. We then confronted centrally appointed Dutch mayors with the same dilemmas, asking them how they dealt with them. Finally, we compared the behaviour of directly elected English mayors to the behaviour of Dutch appointed mayors. Thus this study is based on both literature as well as (for a large part) on in-depth interviews with English and Dutch mayors. We interviewed a majority of the directly elected English mayors (six out of a total of 11) and seven Dutch mayors (appointed mayors, like all Dutch mayors). These methodological decisions led to an exploratory study that allowed in-depth discussions and examples.

Why in any case should one make a comparison between England and The Netherlands? The interesting thing is that England and The Netherlands represent opposite cases, but have both undergone a number of similar developments. Both England and The Netherlands are part of a European trend concerning the call for more direct and partici-patory democracy, governance and leadership style, even at the local level. Nonetheless, their respective state traditions (that is, Anglo-Saxon and Germanic; see Loughlin and Peters 1997) differ considerably. Second, there appear to be enormous differences in

decision making regarding mayoral selection procedures. Uniformity is one of the most obvious characteristics in The Netherlands. Central government makes the decisions and local authorities have hardly any policy discretion regarding their institutional design. In England, the central government allows municipalities to choose between options. A limited number have opted for directly elected mayors, while the vast majority of municipalities prefer the leader-cabinet model (see, for example, Rallings *et al*. 2002). Third, the political systems differ sharply. Governing in The Netherlands at all levels means governing by coalitions, while in English local councils usually a single party has a majority of the seats. Fourth, English municipalities had the opportunity to opt for a directly elected mayor (those mayors are the subjects of this study), whereas Dutch mayors continue to be appointed by central government. Finally, the position of the mayor in the two countries differs. The literature provides for a number of typologies. Following Heinelt and Hlepas (2006, pp. 31ff), the directly elected mayorship in England is of 'strong mayor form', meaning that mayors control the majority of the council and are in full charge of all executive functions. Dutch mayors are of the 'collective' type, although in The Netherlands' form, a slightly adapted type. Their statutory function amounts to that of a non-voting chair of the municipal council and a voting chair of the executive board for which actions the mayor assumes equal accountability to the aldermen. At the same time, mayors have exclusive capacities regarding public safety and policing. In this latter role, they resemble 'strong mayors'.

In terms of mayoral local government, both countries are in a transition phase. England has opted for a local variety of government, enabling local councils to choose between a number of government models (for example a leader-cabinet model and two directly elected mayor models; Pimlott and Rao 2002; Copus 2006). The Netherlands' policy-makers have discussed institutional change but have so far failed to implement any plans. Thus the country has experienced a long 'in-between' period from an appointed mayor towards what may turn out to be a directly elected mayor after all – but nobody knows exactly what or when. Over the course of time, the appointment procedure has changed, and local councils have gained influence (Derksen and Schaap 2007). Although state committees have been formulating proposals since the 1960s, the political elite have never wanted to abolish the system of centrally appointed mayors. In 2005, the Senate (*Eerste Kamer*) rejected a constitutional amendment that was necessary to enable direct (or indirect) mayoral elections. Without a doubt, one can observe a tendency towards more 'local influence' and less 'national appointment', and in the recent past even of 'popular influence' if a council decided to organize a consultative referendum over its advice regarding candidates for mayoral office. Nevertheless, due to the requirement of making Constitutional changes – and providing the political elite opts for it – it will take at least six years to introduce directly elected mayors.

In short, despite some converging tendencies in European sub-national democracy, England and The Netherlands remain quite different. The same holds when it comes to the mayoral office and the selection procedures. Based on literature analysis, we assume that mayors in both countries face the same leadership dilemmas. If their dealing with those dilemmas is more or less similar, we may conclude that the selection procedures for mayoral office are not of any great influence in the fulfilment of mayoral leadership roles.

Our selection of Dutch and English cases is based on two criteria, 'characteristics' and 'orientations'. In relation to 'characteristics', we paid attention to gender, the number of years a mayor remains in office, career path, and the size of the city involved. In the Dutch selection, for example, there is variation in a big province capital, a small town, and a few

average sized municipalities. In addition, the English selection of municipalities shows variation in sizes too. In relation to 'orientations', the dataset shows for example, variety in the political background of the mayors.

The results of the study may prove important for contexts outside England and The Netherlands. The leadership dilemmas discussed here are essentially the same in all Western European countries. The results show that directly elected mayors in England differ little from centrally appointed mayors in The Netherlands regarding their reactions to the usual dilemmas, outlined below, faced by all mayors: (1) community building with multiple identities; (2) strong leadership in the context of interdependencies; and (3) image formation and accountability of leadership. Indeed, as Copus (2006, p. 43) has noted, 'The mayor is able to construct for himself or herself a high public profile, but this is not something beyond the wit of the competent council leader'. This gives us hope that our own study may be relevant for other, non-mayoral, political leaders.

DILEMMA 1: COMMUNITY BUILDING WITH MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

The first dilemma regards how mayors are able to form a local identity and play a connective leadership role in a society characterized by fragmented identities. In other words, it involves how they can do this in a society that is increasingly fragmented by processes of individualization, informatization, globalization and de-territorialization (see Castells 2004).

One psychological theory on the development of identity argues that identity emerges in dialogue with a 'significant other' (Sullivan 1953). In addition to this dialogue model, organizational and political theories hypothesize that leaders play a vital part in forming the identity of their followers (see Grint 2000; Haslam and Platow 2001; Hogg *et al*. 2003). In their classic work, Bryson and Crosby (1992) state that the ability to create and communicate purpose and the ability to bring people together are essential leadership skills. History is replete with examples of followers who consciously or unconsciously identified themselves with their leaders. Famous leaders fulfilled this crucial role of identity formation, but people sometimes expect the same from less heroic leaders as well. Effective leaders address the collective imagination of their followers. According to Freud (1921), leaders are able to create a group identity by articulating dreams. When communicating them to others, they are also able to evoke a new perspective that resounds with people's 'subliminal self'.

As 'standard bearers', mayors play a role in the formation of local identity. In the current era of complexity and institutional fragmentation, people expect leaders to shape the shifting frameworks of individuals and draw connections between organizations. Effective local leaders are able to reshape identity and purpose, even during times when associations with the traditional pillars of identity (for example, industry, economic activity and the institutions that were previously compartmentalized by pillarization) no longer maintain a dominant presence (John 2001).

To be able to form a collective identity in times of uncertainty and danger, public leaders must be able to identify what and whom the members of the community should fear or should cherish. Images of friends and foes are linked to social inclusion and exclusion ('t Hart and Ten Hooven 2004). Effective leaders realize (whether consciously or unconsciously) that contexts must be portrayed with dramatic images in order to promote sense making. They are aware of the effectiveness of creating segregation in terms of 'us

versus them', 'in-group versus out-group' and 'wrong versus right' (Kets de Vries and Engellau 2004).

The task of community building and (re-)shaping local identity and purpose is not easy. A question that 't Hart and Ten Hooven (2004) pose concerns the lines (whether geographic, religious, ethnic or socio-economic) along which the boundaries of a community must be drawn. Another question concerns the universal or particularistic character of the political identities that leaders project onto their surroundings.

On the one hand, leadership implies a clear answer to the question of how a community should handle multiple values that are desirable in and of themselves but which are jointly conflicting. At the same time, it is nearly impossible (and often considered undesirable in principle) for leaders in the public sector to declare their own values and ideas as binding for society. There seems to be a tension between standards in the public and private domains. Questions concerning the line between the domains, the possibility of overlap, and the conditions under which one domain should be given preferential treatment, become relevant. While this debate has obviously kept political philosophers busy for centuries, there are dilemmas in the contemporary political reality that demand that public leaders take a stand. The question then arises whether public leaders should separate themselves from the people or incur their wrath by strongly defining identities – an activity that goes hand in hand with social inclusion and exclusion.

Society expects leaders to be able to set out a course and to state norms by which they wish people to behave. Although democratic legitimacy is indeed sought after, we tend to want leaders to take action in times of crises or uncertainty and to resolve to take measures when political impasses arise. At the same time, political executives (for example, mayors) are expected to avoid committing themselves solely to any particular group within the community. After all, the mayor is often known as the '*pater familias* of society'. The mayor should be above the various political parties and should 'keep the community together'. The issue of directly elected mayors raises the question of whether mayors would be capable of filling such a lofty post when they have had to create distinct profiles of themselves according to their (party-specific) political viewpoints.

Mayors' reactions to the dilemma
To what extent are mayors able to fulfil the identity-formation role for a community that calls for boundaries (thus possibly leading to exclusion), while also demonstrating their ability to be connective leaders? Mayors in both England and The Netherlands emphasize the large quantities of time that they spend on identity formation and connectivity during the course of their daily business, particularly in extreme situations, whether happy or sad. English and Dutch mayors visit all kinds of cultural, sports and religious events. The results of the symbolic meaning that identity-forming activities involve, largely depend on the personal style of the individual mayor, and they can have considerable implications. Sir Robin Wales, mayor of Newham, writes a column in the local newspaper in which he regularly writes about respect for all the people of the Newham community, an example of his personal intervention for community building. The Dutch mayor, Jan Waaijer, talked in his 'new year speech' about tolerance in the local community, explicitly referring to the murder on the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh two months before.

The mayor of the English town of Middlesbrough, Ray Mallon, provides a striking example of effective 'identity' leadership. The community of Middlesbrough is an old industrial town with a population suffering from low economic self-esteem due to poverty, pollution and crime. Ray Mallon therefore contacted the billionaire Sultan of Dubai and

invited him to visit Middlesbrough. Not only did the Sultan's visit to the town generate new investment in the town's commercial district, it also generated a great deal of attention from both the national and the international press. This type of symbolic action provided an opportunity for Middlesbrough to break out of its negative spiral and regain economic momentum.

In addition to personal style and initiative, a number of other factors influence the extent to which mayors can execute the identity-forming and connective aspects of leadership. Because of this, the capacity of any leader to fulfil all these aspects by themselves is limited. Mayors therefore need to surround themselves with various actors, including executive and non-executive councillors, deputies, political leaders, local bureaucrats and officers, as well as the leaders of civil society. 'We try to identify organizations that can help us reach the people', said Steve Bullock, mayor of Lewisham. The space for identity-forming and connective leadership is also dependent on the model of local governance with which a mayor must work. It is apparent that elected mayors have more leeway, since they are able to fall back on the people's mandate. Because the cabinet also has the capacity to shape identity and set standards, mayors have more autonomy when they can appoint their own deputies. In the model in which the mayor operates alongside a council manager (as illustrated by Mike Wolf in Stoke-on-Trent), the role of the mayor is restricted to setting general policy lines.

A local community is often a multifaceted gathering of cultural and geographic differences. While executing their roles in identity and community formation, mayors should address the municipality as a (geographic) whole. Because the encompassing municipality does not always define the sense of community, they must also think in terms of neighbourhoods.

A strong personal or (party) political interpretation is not only subject to pragmatic boundaries in the process of carrying out its communal identity and values, it is often considered undesirable as well. It is therefore necessary to identify with local uniqueness. Complex and controversial policy issues, such as the integration of minorities, call for conscious and carefully considered interpretation of rhetoric and symbolic communities. The measure of criticism that mayors receive while carrying out the identity-forming values and the measure of social exclusion that can arise depends largely on the abstractness of their rhetoric. Although they must be decisive, their argumentation may lose its power and ability to create unity if it becomes unclear. High profile mayors who clearly display their political preferences jeopardize their own connective role within the community, something which a directly elected mayor will exhibit, according to some Dutch mayors. In contrast, other Dutch mayors, such as Jacques Wallage of Groningen, believe that an 'integrative' leadership style is more sustainable than the more political or populist style, and therefore this mayor has no fears for a situation where there are politically profiled directly elected mayors. In addition, as discussed below, English experience has shown that directly elected mayors are able to fulfil a connective role.

Simplifying the first dilemma in terms of a strongly political and polarizing interpretation of identity-formation and the connective yet elevated role of mayor, Dutch mayors observe that problems on both sides of the dilemma are increasing. In contrast, English mayors suggest that the combination of the two sides might be easier than the Dutch mayors perceive. Even though personal leadership style and political party background do have an influence, and even though the role of a directly elected mayor is likely to be that of a political and identity-defining figure, this does not necessarily go hand in hand with losing the role of a connective 'pater familias of society'.

DILEMMA 2: STRONG LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERDEPENDENCIES

We now address the question of whether it is possible to act as a strong leader in an era that is characterized by eroded functional authority and horizontal forms of steering and accountability. Steering takes place in a non-hierarchical fashion, it occurs in networks of (local) partners (Kickert *et al*. 1997; Rhodes 1997; Castells 2004; Sørensen and Torfing 2007). We refrain from analysing historical development in this respect. One may wonder whether or not non-governmental actors could previously be steered in hierarchical fashion – or whether or not previously there were any relations with them at all. For our analysis, we can state that mayors function in a network environment, in a context of interdependencies. Mayors play a vital role as parts of networks with other local authorities, quasi-nongovernmental organizations (quangos), schools, various associations and foundations, civil society and other actors. It is remarkable that, despite these developments, the call for strong leaders is increasing. Because major ideologies have collapsed, people tend to look more to leaders than to ideologies to set new courses (Lipman-Bluman 2000, p. 9). Especially in times of uncertainty or crisis, people seem to need expressive leaders who proclaim the identity of a community with distinction and who radiate strength in the media (Boin and 't Hart 2003).

We cannot be certain whether or not the call for strong and expressive leadership in a society in which governance takes place in networks represents a paradoxical situation and a duty that is hard to fulfil. Mayoral leadership, after all, involves forging resolutions with a diverse mix of organizations, local partners, and authorities from several territorial levels. One possible pitfall could occur when, inspired by society's call for expressive and strong leadership, a leader becomes too dominant or authoritarian within the network of involved partners and stakeholders. This is not necessarily a contradiction; it is a genuine pitfall. Handling conflicting interests well is part of the mayoral role. We can say, however, that playing a connective role in a local network is nevertheless no easy job for a mayor.

Mayors' reactions to the dilemma

English mayors and English experts point out that strong personalities, people who have the ability to carry out a vision for the local community and who are not necessarily connected to any political party, can indeed be successful in elections. Nonetheless, they observe that it is incorrect to suppose that such mayors have no eye for serious matters. In most cases, voters elected these mayors 'because of' their understanding of serious issues and their ability to articulate local worries in a charismatic way. Nigel Sayer, the city manager of Middlesbrough, says that in the early days after Ray Mallon won the mayoral elections, Mallon's unconventional leadership style shocked some business and societal partners, but that they later on appreciated his vision for the city.

English mayors interviewed attest to the fact that actors in their networks generally have a positive attitude towards the idea of a strong elected mayor. Such mayors are appreciated because of the improved clarity and decisiveness that they bring to the decision-making process and because they often have a clear goal and vision for a city or town and its surrounding area. According to the mayor of Watford, Dorothy Thornhill, 'strong elected mayors promote their collaborative partners, and that's also for their own sake'. Within this framework, mayors are able to have a good overview of how the public, private and voluntary sectors can cooperate with municipal public services, both to fulfil the expectations of citizens and to develop shared policies that conform to the expectations

of regional and national governments. It is important to note, however, that, in most of the English communities that now have directly elected mayors, the public's expectations of those mayors were high because their faith in government and politics had dwindled to low levels before the mayoral election was held.

Many Dutch mayors are reluctant to express an outspoken desire for strong and expressive leaders. They fear the emergence of authoritarian and dominant leaders who are not capable of fulfilling a connective and consensual role in the network of involved actors. According to Jan Waaijer of the Dutch city of Zoetermeer, 'I think that elected mayors are more dominant because they are ''survivors''. They can do everything, since they have the majority of voters behind them'. 'Directly elected mayors will not take much risks in the cooperation with local partners, they will operate more for their own electoral sake', said Ineke van der Wel, mayor of Rijswijk. Dutch mayors also fear that a highly profiled, expressive leader could generate resistance from the governmental environment. In the end however, they do trust their culture, one in which there is little social basis for macho-leaders and a great desire for a consensual and cooperative '*pater familias*'.

To date, England has yet to experience a situation in which a mayor has become overly authoritarian or dominant. Nonetheless, the possibility is not ruled out that the new system of direct elections, which concentrates decision making around a single person, could generate this danger, since the risks are greater with independent mayors.

The dilemma addressed here assumes a paradox between expressive and connective leadership. We can conclude that both English and Dutch mayors acknowledge that, theoretically, the need for strong and expressive leaders threatens the connective role of leadership, since this need could generate leaders who are either authoritarian or populist. In practice, however, this kind of leadership cannot rely on any extensive social basis. The English cases show that mayors develop themselves as individuals with a strong electoral mandate and that the network of involved local partners needs mayors who can proclaim their vision with distinction while preferring to adopt a consensual and connective leadership style that is linked to public needs.

DILEMMA 3: IMAGE FORMATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF LEADERSHIP

Rudolph Giuliani, the former mayor of New York City, once said, 'I do not deserve all the credit I received for what went right while I was mayor, or all the blame for what went wrong, but I do deserve to be held accountable for the results of my office' (Giuliani 2002, p. 119). The dilemma concerns the extent to which mayors are able to re-adjust expectations of their leadership to a realistic scale, to prevent mistakes and, by being accountable, to face the consequences that result from expectations.

In the discussion above, we referred to the psychological notion that identities are created in dialogue. People define their own identities in the process of becoming competent actors who are able to understand themselves and others. They do this by learning human behaviour, coming to think and act in a dialogue with 'significant others' (Sullivan 1953). This means that the creation of identities is not a one-way process. According to Kets de Vries (1993), followers have a need 'to mirror', meaning that they project their desires upon their leaders. Because mirroring is a consistent dynamic in our daily lives and our relationship with others, it is essential to understand how this dynamic works.

Followers can cause their leaders to have the fatal illusion that they truly are the imaginative creations that their followers have made them out to be. Effective leadership

depends on the power of leaders to have a grip on reality and to see things as they really are, despite pressure from those around them who produce such false reflections. These considerations concerning mirroring suggest that, in the relationship between leaders and followers, the desires of the followers at least partly determine who and what the leader is.

We should not be blind to the fact that 'the mirroring game' also has advantages, however, since it produces solidarity in shared vision and purpose-driven action with visible results. Nonetheless, introspection, self-criticism and resilience are needed to be able to accept open and honest feedback from others and to limit distortion in the mirroring process (Kets de Vries 1993). The challenge is to find a way to draw the attention of leaders to this point and to prevent them from merely seeing what they want to see. Courageous people, with visions that flattery has not distorted, and who are willing to call a leader to attention, must offer such help. According to Kets de Vries (1993), one effective instrument for achieving this aim is a modern interpretation of the ancient tale of 'the king's fool'. When a leader makes bad decisions because of poor insight, the 'fool' can help to reveal this foolishness, thereby helping the leader gain a better grip on reality. Some organizations have a position (an internal advisor or some sort of ombudsman) that is specifically designed to fulfil this function. Nonetheless, it is often easier to have someone from outside the organization (for example, a professional coach) participate in peer-group reviews. The bottom line is that corrective mechanisms are needed to prevent too much leniency in leadership.

In terms of leadership, attention to correction mechanisms is important from both moral as well as amoral perspectives. Based on the plea for power preservation in Machiavelli's *Il Principe* (1513), it can be argued that correction mechanisms are necessary to prevent leaders from being brought down. Leaders must prevent fact and fiction from becoming intertwined; in other words, they must avoid starting to believe the images that have been projected onto them, and which are not based on reality. Machiavelli's amoral approach states that, to preserve their power, it is sufficient for leaders merely to give the impression that they have virtuous qualities. As long as they can correct the projected images of their leadership for themselves, a distorted image of reality will not overthrow them; this exemplifies the amoral plea for the presence of sufficient correction mechanisms in leadership.

In addition to the amoral approach to public leadership, there is also a moral and normative approach. While amoral leadership defines itself by advocating a level-headed analysis of politically administrative experts, moral leadership distinguishes itself by advocating integrity in the actions of public leaders. Political administrative expertise is especially concerned with preserving power, while integrity is more concerned with preventing the abuse of power. In terms of administrative jargon, words such as morale, integrity and accountability have gradually taken a more prominent position (Bovens 1998). Measures taken to prevent power abuse (for example, 'whistle-blowing provisions') are a result of this increased attention. Not only must administrators behave responsibly, public authorities also face increased demand to stand accountable for their administrative actions. Others often initiate accountability – and in the presence of various forums (for example, the city council) or superiors. The core value of responsibility involves 'being accountable in the presence of a forum', since the absence of a forum tends to distort thinking in terms of responsibility (Van Gunsteren 1974).

Both the amoral and the moral approaches to leadership lead to the conclusion that correction mechanisms are necessary. We label the various institutions and individuals that

function as correction mechanisms as either internal or external mechanisms. Institutions and individuals that are close to a leader and are involved with the 'active responsibility' of that leader we consider part of the internal correction mechanisms. These institutions or individuals may fulfil the role of the 'fool', the 'coach', the 'peer group' or similar figures. In the case of a mayor, a deputy or a civil servant who works closely with the mayor, could play the role of the 'fool'. A professional consultant or former mayor could fulfil the role of the 'coach', and a gathering of colleague mayors could fulfil the 'peer group' role.

Institutions or individuals that are at a greater distance from the leader and are involved with 'passive responsibility' can be considered external correction mechanisms. Institutions or individuals that fulfil such roles include the 'whistleblower', the 'superior' and the 'formal accountability forum'. In the case of a mayor, the 'whistleblower' role is often fulfilled by a civil servant from a public organization; 'the superior' could be an official at the next highest level of government (for example, the Queen's Commissioner in the case of appointed mayors in The Netherlands), and a 'formal accountability forum' could be the city council. In the end, all of these correction mechanisms serve the purpose of holding leaders accountable.

Mayors' reactions to the dilemma

Directly elected English mayors, as do appointed Dutch mayors, display a striking combination of authority and accessibility. Mayors observe that although people feel that they are able to address their elected mayor in a supermarket or on the street, they sense that the mayor has power and can actually make a difference. This combination produces high expectations. Nonetheless, mayors have limited means at their disposal with which to meet these expectations. This can generate power-incongruity if the discrepancy between what people expect and what the mayor (whether appointed or elected) is actually authorized to do becomes too great. Steve Bullock, the mayor of Lewisham, gives the following example: 'I can't do much related to the quality of education. I only have draconic powers, like closing a school, but many people think that I can take care of education in a very detailed way'.

Several factors influence the magnitude of the potential power incongruity. The amount of influence varies by position (for example, mayors hold different places in a council than they do in a cabinet). This factor bears considerable influence on the ability to live up to promises that have been made. Mayors are strongly dependent upon the stance that the majority of their cabinets take. It must be noted once again that the authorization that is given to directly elected mayors and the liberty that they have to live out their policy preferences depends upon whether they are granted 'presidential powers'. The core issue is whether they may appoint and fire the aldermen. The flexibility of the civil service is another issue that directly influences the fulfilment of promises, given that it determines (at least in part) the extent to which and the speed with which the promises are implemented.

Despite the limited powers and privileges that they claim to have, both English and Dutch mayors state that the risk of power abuse is greater for directly elected mayors. Providing honest reflection on their leadership can break the isolation that confronts mayors, and it can help limit the risk of power abuse. Mayors use multiple descriptions to characterize the attitudes of their colleagues: they are conceited and arrogant; they lack a discerning spirit; and they are not open to reflection. Whatever the truth may be,

mayors' attitudes and their lonely position at the top make them vulnerable to abusing their powers.

Internal correction mechanisms place mayors in a better position to cope with external accountability processes (that is, passive accountability). The pressure for passive accountability is greater for directly elected mayors. Again, the increased influence of the media plays a major part in this process; the risk of not being re-elected only raises the stakes. Many mayors emphasize the importance of good feedback from the civil service and from people they can trust within the organization. Mayors often deliberately seek these people and 'grant them the freedom to speak freely'. The mayor of the Dutch city of Groningen, Jacques Wallage, pleads for a strong autonomous civil service. Wallage states, 'I am a devoted supporter of a non-political civil service, because it is also an important countervailing partner. Therefore, I always gather young civil servants around me and ask them: ''Tell me, what do you think?'' If your civil servants behave like slaves, then you are doomed to fail'.

Neither English nor Dutch mayors make frequent use of professional coaches. The mayors who do have coaches strongly encourage others to do so as well; nonetheless, it makes no sense to force people to have a coach. Dutch mayors also report that collective reflection with colleagues (in 'peer groups') does not happen often enough, and they would welcome new initiatives. English mayors do come together on a regular basis, possibly because the fact that the first group of directly elected mayors consisted of only 11 people and this facilitated arranging these meetings. They do point out that useful peer-group reflection is not always easy to accomplish. One of the reasons for this is the fact that reflecting with colleagues from neighbouring municipalities does not always lead to open and honest discussions because of their sometimes conflicting interests. English mayors and experts observe that the corrective role of civil servants is increasing, and they welcome this development. They state that it is necessary, and they call for the introduction of 'recall' as an extra accountability mechanism. Some mayors doubt whether citizens are capable of making sound judgements of a mayor's leadership; this ability is essential to any recall procedure. These mayors argue that citizens are unlikely to be interested in all of the aspects that are necessary to make a good leader. In addition, the added media attention would increase the risk of personification. English mayors point out that, although personal traits matter and come into play during election campaigns, once the elections are over, the attention shifts back to sound policy and administration. Directly elected mayors can promise a lot, but they feel the pressure of their re-elections. According to Dorothy Thornhill: 'I've had sleepless nights about that, will I be re-elected?' Furthermore, the mere fact that mayors draw attention because of their strong personalities does not mean they do not receive attention for serious matters as well. As stated previously, in many cases, the very reason that particular mayors were elected is that they were able to combine knowledge of serious matters with the ability to stand up for local issues and represent the people (see also Randall 2004).

The question of whether mayors are able to deal with the increased pressure for responsibility touches on the dilemma of both taking to heart reflection that is offered and knowing when to disregard it. Mayors should judge the feedback they receive, whether from internal or external correction mechanisms, according to its merits. The great pressure for accountability demands that mayors have considerable resilience and capacity for dealing with criticism while remaining open to admitting mistakes, regardless of the consequences.

CONCLUSIONS

One of the main goals of this study was to gain useful insight into the diverse questions of leadership, particularly with regard to different institutional designs, notably directly elected versus centrally appointed mayors. The central assumption in this study was that, while the roles that mayors must fulfil are clear, they must deal with diverse questions of leadership and the resulting pitfalls and challenges, as shown in the three dilemmas discussed above. Mayors must balance the dilemmas within the boundaries set by the leadership context. Both the spirit of the times and the relationship that public leaders have with their followers determine the route of their leadership. As shown in this study, this path has many pitfalls.

First, the information from the interviews with mayors does not contradict our hypothesis that there are diverse questions concerning leadership. During the interviews, the mayors often touched on the issue of various dilemmas in leadership. It is important to note, however, that some mayors more than others were likely to consider particular dilemmas, since the interviews were often a reflection of their own leadership styles. Some mayors deliberated about their leadership roles in a well-tuned and balanced manner, while others seemed more interested in promoting their particular towns and mayoral policies.

This study focused on three mayoral dilemmas. The first concerned the necessity of creating a sense of community (that is, a local identity) in a situation where multiple inclusions and multiple identities characterize local communities. In the discussion above, it became clear that being elected is certainly not the only factor that determines a mayor's ability to play a connective role. We also concluded that, although directly elected mayors do play such a role, they run the risk when displaying their own political preferences of jeopardizing their own connective roles within their communities. English experience has not shown that directly elected mayors are unable to fulfil a connective role. We finally discussed the fear of Dutch mayors that direct mayoral elections could endanger the connective role of the mayor. The conclusion here was that according to the English experience this fear was unfounded.

The second dilemma concerned the tensions between the need for strong leadership and the interdependent, network character of society. Both English and Dutch mayors acknowledged that, theoretically, the need for strong and expressive leaders threatens the connective role of leadership, since this need could generate authoritarian or populist leaders. Nonetheless, in practice this type of leader has not emerged. Even if mayors tried to become such leaders, they would probably lose societal support. The English cases show that mayors develop themselves as individuals with a strong electoral mandate and that the network of involved local partners need mayors who proclaim their vision with distinction while preferring to adopt a consensual and connective leadership style that is linked to public needs. In this respect, the sensibility of the UK government's proposal (DCLG 2006) that '(All) the executive powers of local authorities will be vested in the leader of the council' (or the directly elected mayor) is open to debate. The policy may stimulate mayors (and leaders) to act with excessive strength, thereby potentially losing societal support.

The third dilemma concerned the fact that leaders are expected to be strong. Followers want to believe in the strength of their leaders, and this desire could create a false image of strength. At the same time, leaders should stand accountable. In order to stay in power, they must avoid situations in which they also come to believe in false images of strength.

Despite the limited powers and privileges that they claim to have, both English and Dutch mayors state that the risk of power abuse is greater for directly elected mayors. Providing honest reflection on their leadership can break the isolation that confronts mayors and it can help limit the risk of power abuse. Internal correction mechanisms place mayors in a better position to cope with external accountability processes (that is, passive accountability). The pressure for passive accountability is greater for directly elected mayors. Again, the increased influence of the media plays a great part in this process; the risk of not being re-elected only raises the stakes. Many mayors emphasize the importance of good feedback from the civil service and from people they can trust within the organization. Mayors often seek such people deliberately and 'grant them the freedom to speak freely'. The question of whether mayors are able to deal with the increased pressure for responsibility touches on the dilemma of taking to heart reflection that is offered while knowing when to disregard it. Mayors should judge all of the feedback they receive, whether from internal or external correction mechanisms, according to its merits. According to our findings, the risk of directly elected mayors abusing their powers may not be very high after all.

Overall, we may conclude that directly elected mayors in England and their centrally appointed Dutch colleagues more or less face the same leadership dilemmas, despite differences in the institutional contexts. To put it more precisely, different selection procedures for the mayoral office barely affect the leadership dilemmas that confront mayors. Both types of mayors, however, recognize that direct elections do increase some risks. Directly elected mayors risk losing the ability to fulfil a connective role and risk turning into authoritarian or populist leaders, or even into mayors who abuse their powers. According to the English experience, it was concluded that those fears are unfounded. This conclusion is also supported by decades of German experience, even in Southern Germany, where the mayor traditionally has an almost presidential status. Wollmann (2004, pp. 160–1) discusses 'autocratic dangers' and concludes: 'the local experience and practice (. . .) do not support this apprehension. On the contrary, (. . .) a balanced relation between the elected mayors and the councils'.

FINAL REFLECTIONS: A QUEST FOR STRONG (MAYORAL) LEADERSHIP?

Finally in this study, we address the fundamental question of how we should deal with the call for stronger leadership in society. The public desire for leadership may have become stronger in recent decades, as leadership has been restricted in scope politically. People want public leaders who contribute to the formation of a community's identity, who have a clear vision, and who give direction. Leaders may need to be strong and expressive in their performance. At the same time, there is a need for connective leadership and for leaders who can keep the community together in the current environment of great diversity. It is apparent that the public has a particular preference for leaders who present an interactive, integrative and consensual leadership style. This apparently ambivalent need for leadership is the core of the leadership challenge, especially perhaps for mayors.

In this study, this ambivalence is focused on the leadership practice of mayors in directly elected and centrally appointed positions. Mayors face the same challenges, regardless of the selection procedure. Although some processes (for example, the personalization of politics) inevitably occur in the political reality of both the elected and appointed mayors, they are stronger in the case of elected mayors. The potential for dealing with these and other processes in an unbalanced fashion requires that more attention be directed to the

accountability aspects of mayoral leadership. The need for strong and expressive mayors (who know how to make clever use of the rhetorical and symbolic aspect of leadership) generates the well-known risks of populism instead of policy content, power abuse instead of integrity, and immoral instead of moral leadership. The English cases have shed new light on the disadvantages of directly elected mayoral leadership. The pitfalls remain real, but they are less threatening than is sometimes expected – a conclusion of other studies as well (see Schaap *et al.* 2009b). Nevertheless, correction mechanisms are necessary to stimulate responsible, expressive leadership and to prevent the dangers revealed by this study from becoming reality. As leadership becomes stronger, the responsibility and accountability aspects of leadership require more attention.

The role of 'internal correction mechanisms' should not be neglected, even though attention to public accountability is an important feature of elected mayoralty. These forms of feedback and correction should be stimulated through more and better peer group reflections. Local institutions cannot force mayors to surround themselves with people who will provide them with honest and sincere feedback, but they should encourage them to do so. These kinds of feedback could be a valuable supplement to existing mechanisms of public accountability, thereby reducing the dangers of excessively strong and expressive leadership.

The need for leadership is nothing new. Although one can interpret the current call for leadership in a variety of ways, there is a general desire for visible, visionary, strong and expressive leadership. With regard to this desire, it is not enough that public leaders merely facilitate public decision making, especially since the concept of leadership has been restricted considerably in the last decades. It is therefore not surprising that there is an articulated wish for a directly elected mayor who 'really has something to say' (which implies the 'mayor-cabinet model'). As observed by Copus (2006), 'Elected mayors (. . .) are a focus for public, community, media and governmental attention and negotiation in a way that a collective decision-making body such as a council cannot be' (Copus 2006, p. 161). This is in accordance with public opinion; 59 per cent of the respondents (as compared to 29 per cent of councillors) support the statement that '(H)aving an elected mayor means there was someone who could speak up for the whole area' (Rao 2003, p. 7). The other side of the story is that individual leadership may endanger the representation of the local community (Orr 2004, p. 342).

Leaders are supposed to inspire and mobilize people. When mayors want to do this, they need to have the opportunity to both make and realize promises. More leeway for leadership is possible, provided there are sufficient correction mechanisms to prevent absolutism in leadership. Montesquieu's credo of the separation and balance of powers will thus remain relevant in the future of mayoral leadership. One of the directly elected English mayors, Robin Wales of Newham, understood this and took the initiative to strengthen the council (Copus 2006, pp. 184ff). In general, however, directly elected mayors seem to seek checks and balances in strong participatory democracy with co-decision making by citizens, rather than in the concept of an independent council (Haus and Sweeting 2006, pp. 160–1).

An antithesis – in which people prefer that others do not draw attention to themselves – appears to be slowly emerging within egalitarian culture. The call for stronger leadership can also be understood in this light. A democracy needs leaders who can adhere to this call; it needs people who radiate authority while remaining approachable. There is no room for tyrants or people with a great lust for power; instead, there should be people who are both inspired and able to see the needs of the public. Although this may seem

idealistic, a democracy cannot help but be based on ideals. After all, we do not need strong leaders; we need brave leaders. Public leaders must dare to stick their necks out while remaining willing to stand accountable for their deeds. That is the challenge of today's leadership.

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