Call for Papers: Manifesto coordination in multi-level settings

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In political science, party manifestos are the most frequently used tool in order to observe party policy positions. Yet, the focus of these studies has been primarily on manifestos drafted at the occasion of the national elections (parliamentary and presidential), as for the example in the seminal Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge et al., 2001; Klingemann et al., 2006). In addition, national manifestos have often been used as a proxy for party position at other levels of government. But empirical studies of manifestos beyond the national level demonstrated a different pattern: the content of the manifestos of a political party not only varies across time and types of elections, but also across levels of government.

When dealing with manifestos for elections at other levels (eg. at the European, regional or local levels), the interest of literature is often to analyse whether parties compete in elections based on national issues (see for instance Kritzinger et al. 2004; Brunsbach et al. 2012; Wüst 2009; Kvar 2013) given the dominance of the first-order model in the multi-level analysis of elections. Conclusions for these works on European and regional manifestos (see for instance Pogorelis et al., 2005; Librecht et al., 2009; Debus 2008; Cabeza et al., 2016) indicate that even if national issues are indeed present, issues related to – respectively – European and regional elections dominate these party platforms. More recently, several works started to investigate the opposite relation, i.e. the importance of European and regional issues in national party manifestos (see for instance Hellström, 2009; Toubeau, Wagner, 2016).

Yet, the attempts to understand party manifestos as a fully-fledge multi-level phenomenon remain rather rare. There exist several academic works comparing national and supranational manifestos (see for instance Brunsbach, John, Werner, 2012), national and regional manifestos (see for instance Pogorelis, et al. 2005; Debus, 2008), or national and local manifestos (see for instance Harrison, McSweeney, 2008) but these analyses remain largely limited in their scope, i.e. over time and cross-nationally. This research project intends not only to fill in this gap by providing a more extensive comparative analysis across levels of governments, but also by focusing on one specific aspect of the multi-level aspect of party platforms: their coordination across policy levels.

More specifically, the Brussels workshop aims to gather papers around three dimensions of this multi-level manifesto coordination:
1. The ‘what’: The papers focus on the sets of elements that are common (and therefore the elements that vary) between manifestos at different level. These papers analyse the core ideology, the core strategy or even a subset of common proposals and pledges. Other topics include the position of parties on the left-right axis, on other cleavages and on important issues at different levels. Finally, do we observe trends over time and across parties towards a nationalization or rather a territorial specialization of manifestos?

2. The ‘how’: The papers describe and analyse the production of manifestos and their logic of multi-level coordination within a political party. These papers focus for instance on the different actors involved in this process, its pace or the importance of internal party structures or factions, but also discuss the existence of ‘framework’ manifestos or party guidelines and the freedom for local and regional party branches to deviate from it.

3. The ‘why’: The papers investigate the different strategies of multi-level manifesto coordination implemented by parties and their effects on a variety of issues. Does multi-level manifesto coordination lead to electoral success, to the defence of specific sub-national interests, to the preservation of the party’s internal cohesion or of its ideological unity? Other related topics include the impact of multi-level manifesto coordination on government participation and public policies across levels of government.

The objective is to offer a high standard publication that would cover the three different dimensions of the manifesto coordination across levels. The different participants will be gathered during two days in early March 2018 at the University of Brussels, in the framework of a joint Waseda-ULB partnership. Participants will be invited to present the first draft of their papers and will receive feedbacks from the discussants and the other participants. The most promising papers will be included in the edited book or in a journal’s special issue. A second set of feedbacks based on the second drafts of the papers will take place in May-June 2018 and the edited book or the special issue will be submitted around July 2018.

Given the last minute notice for this call, interested participants are invited to contact Régis Dandoy (rdandoy@aoni.waseda.jp) as soon as possible or ideally before Monday 22 January.