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*Opening the list: the presence of 'candidates d'ouverture'  
in the 2012 local elections in Wallonia*

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*Draft version*

## Introduction

In Belgium, the idea of ‘openness’ is a well spread notion in electoral political discourses and the 2012 local election in Wallonia is no exception to this trend. Despite a clear victory, it is indeed very common for local political leaders in Belgium to announce that they will open their majority to other lists, ideas or political movements. The idea of ‘openness’ is also part of the local electoral campaign in terms of recruitment: non-partisan candidates – who clearly want to distinguish themselves from the party – are recruited to figure on the lists as ‘independent’ candidates. They are called candidates ‘*d’ouverture*’ as a sign of openness towards the civil society, the opposition, or dissidents from other political parties. Actually, these candidates are recruited for various reasons: there are sometimes used to win more votes, to demonstrate the citizen / democratic character of the list, to enhance the fact that the list ‘makes politics differently from established political parties’, to underline the local roots of the list, or to simply fill in vacancies on a list.

Although the recruitment of this type of candidates is a common electoral strategy during the Walloon local electoral campaign (the candidates ‘*d’ouverture*’ are regularly mentioned on the electoral leaflets, in press interview, etc.), it is however hardly explored in the election studies. In this paper, a tentative definition of the concept as well as its operationalization is firstly presented. Secondly, we scrutinize political parties’ internal rules for the recruitment of these candidates before analysing the structure of opportunity explaining the substantive variations observed. Finally, we briefly discussed whether or not this electoral strategy can be seen as a winning strategy (not only from the point of view of the list but for the candidates ‘*d’ouverture*’ themselves).

### 1. Concept and data

The motivations underlying the recruitment of ‘candidates *d’ouverture*’ are diverse and reflect the multifaceted nature of this concept. Yet, most political observers and Belgian voters have an intuitive common sense of its meaning and this explains why the term candidates ‘*d’ouverture*’ is actually used (by parties, journalists, candidates, etc.) as an established concept during the campaign. From the viewpoint of researchers, the systematization of the concept is nonetheless more complex, especially with the little attention that has been given to this topic in the literature.<sup>1</sup>

A first logical step towards a systematic definition of this concept lies in the etymology of the term. ‘Openness’ firstly implies a reconfiguration of political borders: the goal is make possible the communication between two spaces that are – partially or completely – hermetic to each other. For the electoral lists presented by political parties, it means opening the ‘world of the political parties’ to ‘other worlds’, that is to say the civil society in its broader meaning: be it local civic society activists, members of NGOs, public figures from the media, artists,

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<sup>1</sup> Probably because this concept is only used for electoral list system, electoral research predominantly dominated by the Anglo-Saxon tradition has paid little attention to this topic.

candidates from sports, dissident candidates from other political parties, members of political parties who do not present a list of candidates, etc. In this context, two kinds of candidates can be distinguished on the lists: on the one hand, internal candidates directly recruited within the party (party members) and on the other hand, external candidates recruited specifically for the electoral campaign.

In the context of the local elections of 14<sup>th</sup> October 2012 a unique data collection process has been implemented in order to understand and compare the local dimensions of these elections in the 262 Walloon municipalities. The focus was put on the ‘supply side’ of the election, i.e. the strategies set up by parties, focusing on each electoral list in each municipality and on candidates. Each municipality presents a different socio-demographic and political profile. There are not only huge differences in terms of the size of a municipality, its degree of urbanization, etc., but also in terms of campaign issues and of parties that compete in these elections. In some municipalities, the electoral competition occurs only between national parties while it occurs only between local parties in some others.

The electoral system is the same for all Walloon municipalities: a proportional system with semi-open lists where the voter can either vote for the list or one or several candidates on the same list. Seats are attributed based on the Imperiali formulae and on electoral districts that correspond to the limits of the municipality. However, two differences linked to the electoral system have a direct impact on the candidate selection process. First, the number of seats in each municipality council varies according to the number of inhabitants in the municipality<sup>2</sup>. This number of seats corresponds to the maximal number of candidates that can run for election on a particular electoral list. This has a direct impact on the candidate selection as – in order to present a complete list – lists running in highly populated municipalities need to recruit a large number of candidates (see section 3). Second, a system of computer-based vote has been implemented in 39 Walloon municipalities. Besides its impact on turnout, computer-based voting has also an impact on the composition of the lists and the positions of the different candidates. Contrary to the system based on paper ballot where there is only one column per list (and therefore only one candidate as the head of the list), computer-based votes implies that the list in the screen is divided in two (or more) columns, multiplying the heads of columns for each list.

Besides the differences in terms of electoral system, there are also differences in terms of party system in each municipality. National and local parties compete in these elections but in different configurations, producing 262 unique party systems. Sometimes a national party competes in a municipal election, sometimes it is a purely local party with only local candidates, with a lot of different scenarios in between (eg. a national party that competes with a local name, a local party that presents a list headed by a federal minister or MP, an electoral alliance between a national and a local party, etc.). In sum, the analysis of the candidate recruitment for local elections requires first a clear typology of electoral lists at the local level.

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<sup>2</sup> This number varies from seven seats in the least populated municipalities to 51 in the largest one.

In order to fully grasp the local list phenomenon, all the 1012 lists that participated in the local elections of 2012 in Wallonia (262 municipalities) have been thoroughly analysed<sup>3</sup>. Existing measurements of the local list phenomena (based on the list name, its election number or even surveys of local politicians) are not satisfactory as they only focus on a sample of electoral lists and they have little information about candidates on the list. Therefore, we collected a large amount of information on each list and on some categories of candidates on each list. Based on this data, we built a typology of electoral list and each list has been classified based on its position on a local-national axis. These positions have been clustered in five main ideal-types (see Table 1).

The ‘national’ lists are the electoral lists whose name corresponds exactly to existing parties at the national level. National parties are the one represented in the federal parliament (the French-speaking CDH, Ecolo, FDF<sup>4</sup>, MR, PP and PS) as well as the PTB+. 455 lists that participated in the local elections (45% of all lists) can be directly attached to a national party. Yet, some of these lists do not use the national party label but can still be attached indirectly to national parties by their names (eg. using the name of ‘PS+’ instead of ‘PS’ or of ‘MR-IC’ instead of ‘MR’) or by the fact that the majority of the candidates on the list are identified party members of one national party. In our typology, there are 99 such ‘quasi-national’ parties. Together, ‘national’ and ‘quasi-national’ lists account for more than half of the lists in competition. When looking at the party level, the national lists can be summarized to four main parties: PS, MR, CDH and Ecolo<sup>5</sup>.

On the other side of the local-national axis, we find purely local lists, that display no connection at all with a national party. Such ‘local’ lists composed of local candidates represent 20,6% of the 1012 electoral lists in Wallonia. But not all local lists are purely local. We also identified ‘quasi-local’ lists, i.e. lists that are local but that display some connection with national parties. Our three criteria for the identification of quasi-local list are: the presence in the list of a regional or national minister or MP; or a list attached to a political movement with a supra-local or sub-regional ambition but is only able to be present in a few municipalities<sup>6</sup>; or a list identified by the coder as having another type of connection with a national party based on the media or the official discourse of the list. Together the local and quasi-local account for more than one third of the lists for the local elections in Wallonia in 2012. The last category of electoral lists concern the electoral alliances, i.e. the lists composed of a majority of candidates that can be attached to a least two political parties or that can be identified by the coder as an alliance based on the media or the official discourse of the list.

*Table 1. Number of list (per type) and electoral results*

List type	N	%	Votes (in %)
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<sup>3</sup> For more information about the project, its methodology and the data collection, see Dandoy, Dodeigne, Matagne and Reuchamps (forthcoming, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> This party split from the MR one year before the local elections of 2012 and currently has three federal MPs.

<sup>5</sup> The FDF, PP and PTB+ presented electoral lists in only 23, 10 and 13 municipalities respectively.

<sup>6</sup> It mainly concerns the list related to the following political movements: Lepen, Wallonie d’abord, Fédération des Nationalistes Wallons, Parti pirate, Parti des pensionnés, and Démocratie Nationale.

National	455	45,0	58,9
Quasi-national	99	9,8	10,3
Quasi-local	113	11,2	8,0
Local	208	20,6	10,3
Alliances	137	13,5	12,6
Total	1 012	100,0	100,0

In this typology, a special treatment is required for the ‘quasi-local’ and ‘local’ lists. In the latter, it is not rare to observe a large proportion of candidates ‘d’ouverture’ while sometimes the notion of ‘openness’ is even directly associated with the name of the list (for example, ‘Groupe d’ouverture’ (*Openness group*) in Antoing, ‘Assesse, respect, ouverture, citoyenneté’ (*Assesse, respect, openness and citizenship*), ‘Responsabilité, ouverture, progrès et solidarité’ (*Accountability, openness, progress and solidarity*) in Mettet, ‘Gestion et Ouverture’ (*Management and openness*) in Rouvroy, etc.) However, due to the nature of ‘quasi-local’ and ‘local’ lists in which party members account by definition for a minority of the list, the concept of openness is no longer operational. When the list is mainly composed of candidates ‘d’ouverture’, it is actually more accurate to describe the presence of party members as a sign of openness from the list the ‘world of political parties’. Therefore, extending the notion of openness to ‘quasi-local’ and ‘local’ lists is clearly concept stretching<sup>7</sup>. For these reasons, our analysis focuses only on quasi-national lists, national lists and alliances. Overall, it represents 691 lists on a total of 1.012 lists or 62.3 % of the lists presented at the 2012 local elections in Wallonia.

To identify the candidates ‘d’ouverture’ present at the 2012 Walloon local elections, the operationalization of the concept of openness is based on the supply side of the elections: do lists distinctively use the label of ‘ouverture’ by highlighting the presence of such candidates during the campaign? To do so, for all the 691 electoral lists under investigation, we asked all leaders of local sections of parties: “do you present candidates ‘d’ouverture’ on your list? If so, how many?”. Our dataset is completed with an in-depth analysis of list / party websites, local newspaper articles, electoral leaflets, etc.

## 2. Formal and informal party regulations for candidates ‘d’ouverture’

In this section, we focus on the party internal regulation regarding the recruitment of candidates ‘d’ouverture’. According to De la Dehesa<sup>8</sup>, left-wing parties are more likely to include candidates ‘d’ouverture’ on their lists. Because they recruit more often external candidates, their statutes also tend to mirror the practice by institutionalizing regulations regarding the recruitments of ‘candidates d’ouverture’. Therefore, we expect that the socialists (PS) and the greens (Ecolo) expose a greater degree of institutionalization than the liberals (MR) and, to a lesser extent, the Christian-democrats (CDH). As we describe in this section, all national parties’ statutes provide several information on this matter, even though a clear

<sup>7</sup> Even though we only work on the supply side of the electoral list openness.

<sup>8</sup> DE LA DEHESA, R., *Queering the Public Sphere in Mexico and Brazil: sexual Rights Movements in Emerging Democracies*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2010.

distinction can be operated between the greens (Ecolo) and the three other main Walloon political parties

## 2.1. The socialists (PS)

The PS national party statutes do not mention the candidates ‘d’ouverture’. Only local sections statutes address this issue. Since it is almost impossible to consult all local sections statutes – because there is at least one and sometimes several local sections per municipality – only a limited number of statutes have been analysed for this paper.<sup>9</sup> A large proportion of local statutes do not disclose anything as far as the candidates ‘d’ouverture’ are concerned. Nonetheless, some do give details about how to deal with these candidates. Three examples are presented in the next paragraph, from the most to the less restrictive.

In the municipality of Remicourt, candidates have to fulfil constraining conditions to be eligible as a candidate. Candidates must be affiliated to the party since minimum one year. This excludes *de facto* the case of some candidates ‘d’ouverture’ having been recruited at the last minute. Besides, other conditions guarantee that the candidate is a member of the socialist ‘pillar’: supporting the socialist united action, being a defender of the state educational system (in contrast with the catholic system), being assessed by the local committee as being a good activist, among others. These requirements remind those of the national statutes of the Socialist party in the 1970s<sup>10</sup>. However, some local sections are less strict than Remicourt, for instance Flémalle’s local section. In this municipality, the local section committee holds the right to settle on candidacy requirements. Among these are cited for example the age and the membership. Membership seems to be common given that the committee is in charge of collecting candidates’ proofs of membership. But there is room for non-members, or at least for one. Statutes mention that one place (out of 26) is saved for “a member of a non-Belgian community or a candidate originated from the civil society”. This person is not appointed by party members (as other candidates are), but directly by the committee. In this municipality there is thus potentially a place for a candidate ‘d’ouverture’ on the Socialist list. Finally, the local section of Enghien is the section where we have found the largest openness towards potential candidates ‘d’ouverture’. The candidate is not necessarily a member of the party. The general assembly of the local section can give a special dispensation, at the majority of valid votes. Overall, the Socialist party seems to be relatively reluctant to the candidates ‘d’ouverture’ since a great share of its local sections requires party membership to candidate. Despite this, some dispensations can be considered.

## 2.2. Ecolo

The greens have the more detailed rules regarding the candidates ‘d’ouverture’. National statutes develop four categories of potential candidates. The first and second categories are

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<sup>9</sup> A deeper analysis should be undertaken within the framework of a future research in order to grasp the full diversity of the socialist local political life.

<sup>10</sup> OBLER, J. « Intraparty Democracy and the Selection of Parliamentary Candidates: The Belgian Case », *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 4, n°2, 1974, pp. 163-185.

members of Ecolo and of Groen, the Flemish sister party. Third, members from other political movements can become candidates if Ecolo has passed an agreement with the movement to run together at elections (under Ecolo's name). In this case, the list is an alliance between Ecolo and another party without that the alliance reflects on the list's name. Fourth, a non-member of Ecolo can run on an green party list, if her candidacy has been approved by a two-thirds majority. The local assembly – composed by all party members living in the municipality – is competent for accepting the candidates 'd'ouverture'. Besides, the Federation Council (a conference of delegates at national level) can decide to impose further requirements to aspirants.

Next to Ecolo's statutes, other local electoral rules apply to local sections of the party. The document details specific procedures related to the candidates 'd'ouverture'. It even provides a definition of this special kind of candidate: "a candidate non-member of Ecolo at the time of the filling of his/her candidature". It is explicitly mentioned that Ecolo's lists must aim for the presence of candidates 'd'ouverture'. These candidates have to take an audition in front of the local campaign board – body composed by the local secretariat, by candidates at strategic places (that is eligible or visible places) and by members designated by the local section because of their experience or useful input. To sum up, Ecolo is quite open towards potential candidates 'd'ouverture' and even encourages their presence. However, these have to comply with stronger requirements than other candidates.

### **2.3. The Christian-democrats (CDH)**

The Christian-democrats show a weak degree of institutionalisation of the candidates 'd'ouverture'. A sole article in their statutes tackles the thematic of candidates 'd'ouverture', and even rather implicitly. CDH's statutes state that, in order to be a candidate at elections, every *member* must have been regularly registered by the party during at least one year and having paid the party subscription at the time of his/her candidacy. According to this rule, no candidate 'd'ouverture' could be accepted. Nonetheless party statutes mention one exception. A candidacy from a non-member is accepted if two-thirds of the committee members agree on it. The decision-making regarding the 'candidates d'ouverture' is thus taken exclusively at local level. Moreover, every candidate has to sign a declaration of agreement on the party programme and on the deontological code, and must provide a cover letter alongside his/her candidacy. In short, candidates 'd'ouverture' are potentially possible on CDH's lists, but these have to be accepted by a strong majority of local leaders. Furthermore they have to agree with the party ideology, which may limit the recruitment possibilities.

### **2.4. The liberals (MR)**

The liberals do not mention any requirement in their statutes as for condition regarding party membership for being a candidate. No article addresses the question of the candidates 'd'ouverture'. However, this lack of information is usual for this party because candidate selection procedures are also poorly described. This party is used to rely on its own tradition

rather than explicit rules when selecting its candidates (Bouhon, forthcoming)<sup>11</sup>. The analysis of party statutes is not a good way to study this party. Accordingly, this analysis of party rules does not grasp which practices take place in the field regarding the selection of candidates ‘d’ouverture’ for the MR lists.

## **2.5. Partial conclusion on party statutes’ analysis**

The detailed analysis of party statutes and rules partly confirms the hypothesis of De la Dehesa arguing that there is a “leftist parties’ institutionalisation of external candidacies, independent candidate slots to non-party members to build alliances with civil society”<sup>12</sup>. In this respect, the socialist party (PS) does not confirm our expectations because its party rules are eclectic but, most of the time, require party membership. As for Ecolo, the party is open to candidacies from some candidates ‘d’ouverture’ and has certainly the most institutionalised procedure. This party validates the hypothesis of leftist parties’ institutionalisation of this type of candidacies. The Christian-democrats CDH asks for party membership but foresees some procedures for dispensations. Finally, the liberal party (MR) is the least institutionalised party regarding this topic, what is not without consequences on its electoral practices – as we see in the next section.

## **3. The recruitment of candidates ‘d’ouverture’**

### **3.1. Differences between types of lists**

The recruitment of candidates ‘d’ouverture’ has frequently occurred, even though for a minority of lists. Overall, there are 290 lists, i.e. 42% of the 691 lists, with at least one candidate of this type. The presence of candidates ‘d’ouverture’ varies largely according to the type of list: on the one hand, they were mostly present in alliances (54,7%) and quasi-national lists (54,6%) but on the other hand they were only in one third of the national lists (35,4%). Thus, such candidates are most often found in alliances and this choice seems to be explained by a specific political and electoral context.

In fact, almost two-thirds of the alliances with candidates ‘d’ouverture’ are lists composed of political movements in the opposition at the local level (63,2%). When we dig into the origin and their electoral campaign, the presence of candidates ‘d’ouverture’ reflects the will to gather a diversity of voices within the municipality in order to offer an alternative project to the parties / lists in the majority. This also why such list type has fewer difficulty to offer a complete list of candidates. In addition, while in some municipalities the candidates ‘d’ouverture’ are former members of the majority, in most cases the candidates ‘d’ouverture’ belong to the civil society and they are very often to be found in the associative life of the commune. This last element is usually put forward as a way to go against the so-called

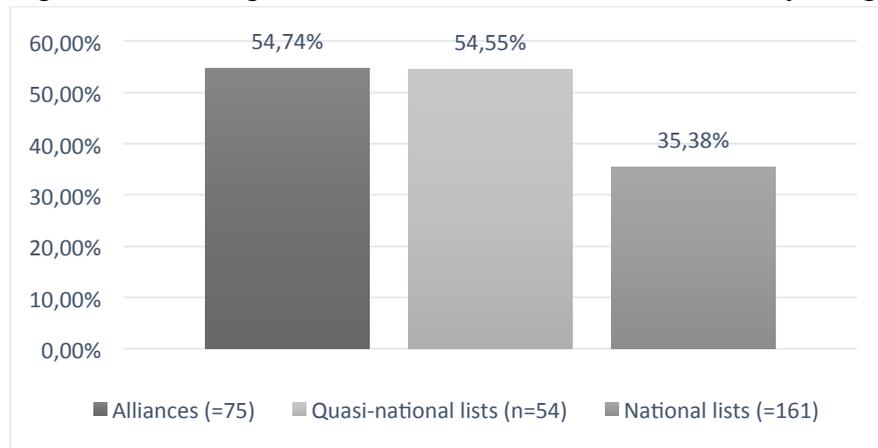
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<sup>11</sup> BOUHON, F., *Le droit électoral et l’inégale influence des gouvernés. Étude comparée en droit allemand, belge et britannique*, Thèse de doctorat, Université de Liège, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> DE LA DEHESA, 2010, *ibidi.*, p. 99

politicized management of the incumbent majority that drifted away from local realities and daily life of the citizens.

Figure 1. Percentage of lists with candidates ‘d’ouverture’, by category of list



For the lists made of an alliance of a list that belongs the incumbent majority with another political movement, this strategy of opening the list reflects the search for inclusiveness. In several of these lists, the label refers directly to the adjective ‘together’ (*ensemble*). In some municipalities, it is also the emphasis on a consensual management of the city, often around the figure of the mayor. In fact, in a municipality where an alliance is present, this openness is even more important since the effective number of lists is close to two.

The second finding that comes out figure 1 has to do with the lower percentage of candidates ‘d’ouverture’ in national lists (only one third). Given the partisan nature of these lists, one could have assumed a greater will to open the composition of these lists. Yet, given the high percentages for the quasi-national lists, the openness of a national party seems to be correlated with the openness for the name of the list itself. That is when one list was to be open, it first opens its names and then it looks for candidates ‘d’ouverture’, rather than keeping the national party’s name and looking for candidates ‘d’ouverture’.

In fact, we can notice that a majority of quasi-national lists have recruited candidates ‘d’ouverture’. The candidates wish to reflect directly this specific feature of the list in its name, probably for strategic reasons. In quite a few communes, this openness can be seen in prefix and suffix to the national party’s name such as « IC » for ‘Intérêts communaux’ (*municipality interests*), the sign « + » or the adjective « plus » or the term « independent ». In other cases, although the list made of a majority of candidates from one national party, the openness is so important that the list adopts a label that emphasizes the reference to the municipality and not the party anymore. By contrast, for the 35,4% of the national lists that have in their ranks candidates ‘d’ouverture’, this strategy seems to be not as important. There is no reference in their name that uses explicitly the logo or the name of the national party.

This hypothesis is confirmed when we look at the proportion of candidates ‘d’ouverture’ within the lists. Not only are the quasi-national lists more likely to have candidates

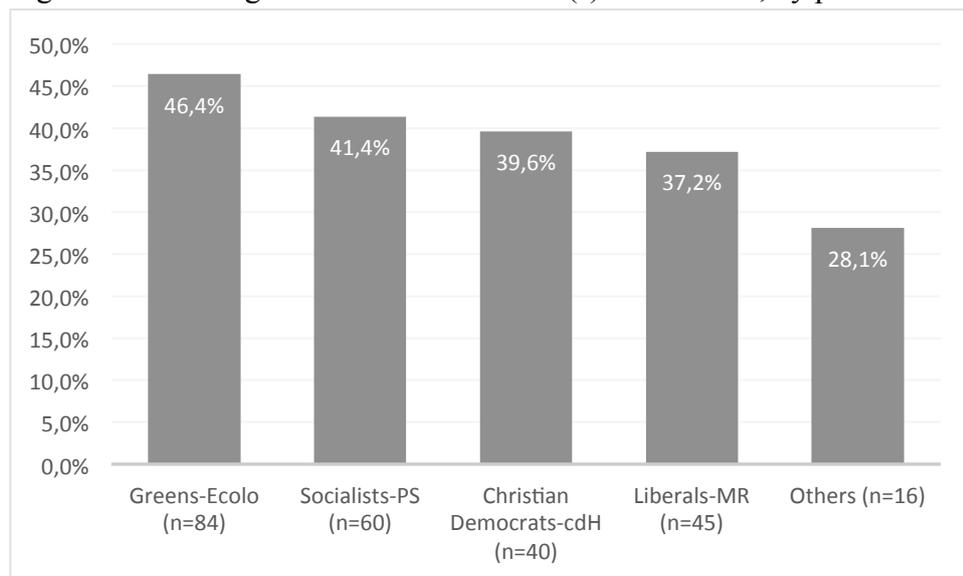
‘d’ouverture’ but also they are more likely to have more candidates ‘d’ouverture’ than national lists. On average, 25,2% of all candidates in quasi-national list were such candidates. In other words, 5 candidates on a list made of 21 candidates (mean size of quasi-national lists). By contrast, 19,6% of all candidates in national lists were candidates ‘d’ouverture’. This percentage is significantly lower, with 5 candidates on a list made of 25 candidates (mean size of national lists).

### 3.2. Differences between the four national political parties

The openness of a list varies significantly from one national party to the other (if we consider both national and quasi-national lists). Two hypotheses can be made to explain these variations.

The first one has to do with the degree of institutionalization of specific procedures to recruit candidates ‘d’ouverture’. Such procedures may reflect the parties’ will to frame this practice; the institutionalization is the consequence of the will to open one’s list. The differences observed here in the local Walloon context confirms De la Dehesa’s hypothesis of a left-right cleavage: lists from left-wing parties tend to be more open than lists from right-wing parties. On the one hand, we find 84 Ecolo lists related to the green party Ecolo (46,4%) and 60 PS lists (41,4%) and, on the other hand, 40 CDH lists (39,6%) and 45 MR lists (37,2%). The differences are not that big but they are significant (see figure 6.2). This hypothesis finds support when the two extreme parties are compared. In its statutes, Ecolo is very specific and very detailed about the recruitment of candidates ‘d’ouverture’ whereas the MR hardly mentions it. Thus difference can also be seen in the figures: there is a difference of 39 lists between Ecolo and the MR, i.e. 9,2 points of percentage.

Figure 2. Percentage of lists with candidate(s) d’ouverture, by parties



In line with a neo-institutionalist approach, a second hypothesis can explain these differences between parties. Once institutionalized, these procedures offer new strategic resources for the

local political actors: the institutionalization is the cause of the openness. The political parties that have institutionalized the recruiting procedures for the candidates ‘d’ouverture’ are more likely to open their lists. Our results confirm also such phenomenon: Ecolo has much institutionalized its recruiting procedures and it is also within this party that most lists are open.

The degree of openness varies thus in function to the type of the lists and of the political parties. The analysis of the specific features of the municipality (size, urbanization, electoral competition) as well as the personalization of politics (presence of the mayor on the lists and of VIP’s) shows that these factors are also of importance in explaining the presence of candidates ‘d’ouverture’. That’s the purpose of the following section.

### 3.3 Explanatory models

In this section, descriptive statistics that demonstrated the importance of the list type in the observed differences concerning the openness of a list has to be tested by a multi-variate analysis. A set of potentially explanatory variables has been integrated in a logistic regression model, such as the size of the municipality (log), its urbanisation rate<sup>13</sup>, the degree of electoral competition in the municipality<sup>14</sup> and a absolute majority in previous election, the presence on the list of the incumbent mayor or of European, regional and national ministers or MPs (variable name: VIPs). In addition, our model includes the list type (see section 1) with the national list as the reference category, and the party with the green party (Ecolo) as the reference category.<sup>15</sup>

At the list level, our analysis (see Table 2) confirms that the list type has an important influence on the openness of a list: quasi-national lists and electoral have a higher probability (respectively 3,1 and 2,7 times higher) to include this type of candidates compared to the national lists. This Table 2 also confirms the observed differences across parties: the green is the political party that opens the most its lists to the candidates ‘d’ouverture’ as the CDH and the MR present a probability of around -50%.

Other factors related to the characteristics of the municipality have an impact on the probability to observe candidates ‘d’ouverture’ on a list. Rural municipalities have a smaller probability to present such types of candidates (-40%) while the opposite is observed for municipalities with a weak party competition (1,6 times higher). Compared to municipalities with a medium party competition, the probability to observe candidates ‘d’ouverture’ is higher

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<sup>13</sup> Rural municipalities (thinly populated area), semi-urban municipalities (towns and suburbs/small urban areas), urban municipalities (cities/large urban area). For more information, see [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/degree\\_urbanisation/introduction](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/degree_urbanisation/introduction) The category of semi-urban municipalities has been used as reference category.

<sup>14</sup> Weak party competition (one or two parties compete in the elections in the municipality), medium party competition (three or four parties), strong party competition (more than four parties). The category of medium party competition has been used as reference category.

<sup>15</sup> This variable is composed of five categories: the four main national parties (socialist, Christian-democrats, liberals and green) and a category ‘others’ that gathers all other (quasi-)national parties and alliances.

in municipalities where two parties do compete.<sup>16</sup> The openness of a list to this type of candidates can be seen as a strategy to show a distinct profile from the unique opponent. The municipality's size and the fact that the municipality witnessed the presence of a list with an absolute majority in the previous elections have a small positive effect on the presence of candidates 'd'ouverture' but coefficients are not significant.

At the list level, and besides parties and the type of list, an important explanatory factor is to be found in the case of a complete list (vs. a list that does not present the maximum number of candidates – that correspond to the number of seats to be elected in the municipal council). These complete lists have a much higher probability of presenting candidates 'd'ouverture' (2,7 times). This is not surprising as recruiting candidates 'd'ouverture' *de facto* increases the number of candidates on a list. A valid explanation is probably that these candidates are not only selected because they increase the vote-catching capacity of the list but also because they are a 'quantitative reinforcement' to the list as they fill in the empty spaces on the electoral list and increase the number of candidates on a list.

Finally, the factors linked to the personality of other (main) candidates on the list also has an effect on the probability to observe candidates 'd'ouverture' on a list: the lists where the incumbent mayor is present presents a significantly lower probability to present candidates 'd'ouverture' (-40%). Strategically, it seems that the incumbent mayor (that often is the head of the list) tends to compose a list around its personality and its achievements rather than on the attractiveness of candidates 'd'ouverture'. Only 42 of the 242 lists that included the incumbent mayor also include more than 25% of candidates 'd'ouverture'. On the contrary, incumbent lists (that were already competing in the previous elections) and lists presenting a European, regional and national minister or MP increase the probability to recruit candidates 'd'ouverture' but their coefficients are not significant.

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<sup>16</sup> Including the four municipalities where only one list was competing.

Table 2. Logistic regression

Covariates	$\beta$	Std. err.		$e^{\beta}$	c.i. (95%)	
Intercept	-3.1037	1.3879	*			
<b>Municipality Variables</b>						
Population (log)	0.2163	0.1521		1.241	0.921	1.673
Rural	-0.5170	0.2359	*	<b>0.596</b>	0.376	0.947
Urban	-0.2967	0.2474		0.743	0.458	1.207
Weak party competition	0.4935	0.2775	.	<b>1.638</b>	0.951	2.822
Strong party competition	0.2270	0.2828		1.255	0.721	2.184
Absolute majority	0.0784	0.3054		1.082	0.594	1.968
<b>List Variables</b>						
Christian Democrat (CDH)	-0.7233	0.2919	*	<b>0.485</b>	0.274	0.860
Liberal (MR)	-0.7780	0.2682	**	<b>0.459</b>	0.272	0.777
Socialist (PS)	-0.2894	0.2539		0.749	0.455	1.231
Other party	-0.4885	0.2993		0.614	0.341	1.103
Quasi-national list	1.1421	0.2703	***	<b>3.133</b>	1.845	5.322
Alliances	0.9954	0.3027	***	<b>2.706</b>	1.495	4.897
Complete list	0.9901	0.3071	**	<b>2.692</b>	1.474	4.914
List present in 2006	0.1694	0.1841		1.185	0.826	1.699
Presence of mayor	-0.5133	0.2607	*	0.599	0.359	0.998
Presence of VIPs	0.2248	0.2537		1.252	0.761	2.059
<b>Model</b>						
	<b>Khi 2</b>	<b>DF</b>				
Likelihood Ratio	65.5715	16	***			
Score	62.8977	16	***			
Wald	57.9617	16	***			
Observations	<b>N=691</b>					

Entries are parameter estimates ( $\beta$ ), their standard errors (Std Err.), odds ratio ( $e^{\beta}$ ) and their 95% confidence intervals (c.i.) of a binary logistic regression. The dependent variable is the presence of candidates 'd'ouverture' on the list (= 1).

.  $p \leq 0.10$ , \*  $p \leq 0.05$ , \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.001$ .

#### **4. The openness: a winning strategy?**

As demonstrated above, several strategic dimensions explain the choice of a list to recruit candidates 'd'ouverture'. The effects of the analysed variables, although important, must not make us forget the local and specific reasons which led the lists to open (or not) to such candidates. It is therefore difficult to assess the extent to which this strategy can be described as successful. In this last section, two dimensions are looked at: the results of candidates 'd'ouverture' individually and the results of the lists where they were present.

At first, we adopt the point of view of the candidates 'd'ouverture' themselves. It is important to note that the following examples are only given by way of illustration. At this stage of the research, it is not yet possible to produce global results that allow us to connect this aggregated data with individual information from the 19.675 candidates at the elections of 14 October 2012. Among the candidates 'd'ouverture', some ambition to get a seat in the local assembly and succeed. At Estaimpuis, for example, a candidate previously affiliated with CDH decided to join the Greens on their list (while remaining independent) and succeeded.

The army colonel Luc Gennart is another successful candidate 'd'ouverture'. Being candidate on the MR list in Namur he even got an alderman position. In Braine-l'Alleud, a candidate 'd'ouverture' also managed to get elected as municipal councillor on the Ecolo list. However, many candidates 'd'ouverture' failed to get elected. This is for example the case for both tennis player Christophe Rochus and football player Mbo Mpenza in Grez-Doiceau. Yet, if this is disappointment for some, winning a seat was not always the main objective of every candidate. To stand on a list may be a way to develop one's network in the municipality, to make oneself better known, to please a friend, or to live an electoral experience without really entering a partisan arena.

In Mons, two candidates on the PS list were clearly presented as candidates 'd'ouverture'. One of them is a well-known actor of the art and culture scene in Mons. She received a small number of preference votes (0.63% of the votes) and ended up as ninth substitute councillor, despite her twelfth position on the list. The second candidate 'd'ouverture' is the president of an association for intercultural dialogue. She did not receive enough votes to get elected neither (0.33% of the votes) but she was placed at the bottom of the list. The same happened in Braives where five candidates 'd'ouverture' were present on an alliance list 'PS-Ecolo'. None were elected. All these candidates have nevertheless brought some additional voices for the list (in Braives, they gathered more than 21% of the preference votes recorded for the list). That brings us to the second issue: did their presence benefit the electoral performance of the list?

According to the different models tested, the lists including candidates 'd'ouverture' obtain an average of 2 to 4% of additional votes. Although this figure may appear to be low, this 'bonus' is not negligible, because sometimes it takes only a few votes to win the last seat or an absolute majority. For instance, in Dour, the PS list won ten seats in the municipal council, among which three were taken by candidates 'd'ouverture' (together accounting for 17.01%

of the votes for the list). Two of them were proclaimed liberals<sup>17</sup>. This political group thus gained an increased importance due to its strategy of opening to candidates ‘d’ouverture’.

## Conclusion

The candidates ‘d’ouverture’ were an integral part of the 2012 local electoral campaign in Wallonia, as evidenced by the repeated use of a ‘label’ in the electoral communication, the number of lists that included this type of candidates and, in some cases, the relatively high percentage of ‘candidates d’ouverture’ on a list. To analyse this phenomenon, we used survey data of the local political leaders (heads of lists) and on information gathered in media items and in party documents and platforms. Although the concept of candidates ‘d’ouverture’ encompasses (sometimes very) different realities, this analysis allows us to better understand the dynamics underlying the use of this label, especially in the perspective of future (comparative) research.

Our multivariate analyses demonstrated that there is a higher probability of observing the presence of candidates ‘d’ouverture’ on Ecolo and PS lists as they tend to be open more frequently and more largely. One can also note an institutionalization of this tendency to open lists to candidates ‘d’ouverture’, this is especially true for Ecolo. The statutes of some parties regulate the procedures for the acceptance of candidates ‘d’ouverture’. In addition, there are more candidates ‘d’ouverture’ in municipalities where electoral competition is low (2 lists in competition). Furthermore, lists with candidates ‘d’ouverture’ are mostly complete lists. It is often difficult to recruit enough candidates, especially in large cities where the number of candidates is directly proportional to the size of the municipality. Opening the list is a way to fill in vacant positions. When an incumbent mayor is present on a list, the latter is less likely to open itself to candidates ‘d’ouverture’. The campaign appears to be mainly organized around the most prominent political figure of the municipality and its policy record rather on these candidates ‘d’ouverture’. On the contrary, VIP candidates boasting a mandate from another political level tend to recruit more candidates ‘d’ouverture’, presumably to (re)affirm the local roots of their list.

Finally, we raise the question of the electoral impact of opening a local list. Is it interesting for a candidate and/or party to use this electoral strategy? It stands from our analysis that only a few candidates ‘d’ouverture’ managed to get elected. However, it seems that the prospect of obtaining a seat in the municipal council is probably not the primary motivation for these candidates. It is above all a commitment to help the list by the way of one’s personal local reputation or to increase this reputation for other non-political purposes. However, our results show that the presence of at least one candidate ‘d’ouverture’ tend to increase the electoral performance of a list. There is often a marginal – but potentially decisive – benefit when the election outcome is uncertain. In any case, in order to measure the vote potential of an

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<sup>17</sup> This list does not qualify as an electoral alliance since a liberal list was competing in the municipality (under the name ‘DR Plus’). According to one of the liberal (MR) candidates on the PS list, the alliance between the MR and the CDH is the reason why he could not join the MR list and accepted to stand on the PS one, while being explicitly presented as a candidate ‘d’ouverture’.

individual candidate or of an electoral list, analytical models linking our aggregate data and candidate-level detailed information should be developed to draw more precise conclusions.

It seems that the ‘opening up’ of politics – by way of the candidates ‘d’ouverture’ – is a significant trend in Walloon municipal elections. In Belgium, and to a lesser extent in other countries, these political and electoral dynamics have not received the attention they deserve. Candidates ‘d’ouverture’ are far from being a rare phenomenon and future studies will certainly help us to know more about them.

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