Local Self-Governance
in the context of Weak Statehood
in Antiquity and the Modern Era

A Program for a Fresh Perspective

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Abstract

The nucleus of statehood is situated at the local level: in the village, the neighborhood, the city district. This is where a community, beyond the level of the family, first develops collective rules that are intended to ensure its continued existence. But usually this is not the only level of governance at play. Above it, there are supralocal formations of power, varying in scope from regional networks to empires, which supplement the local orders or compete with them. The premise of this Research Unit is that local forms of self-governance are especially heterogeneous and prominent, wherever supralocal statehood exists in the mode of weak permeation. The central question of our approach is how local forms of self-governance work in this context. We will examine the relations to the state level as well as to other local groups as they develop over time; the scope and spatial contingency of forms of self-governance; their legitimization and the interdependency with the organization and collective identity of those groups which carry them out; finally, we will turn our attention to the significance of self-governance for the configuration of weak statehood. The empirical focus will be at the local level, which has so far been largely neglected in the research on governance beyond the state. In order to achieve this, we will work with case studies that are structured by categories and situated in geographical areas and time periods that lie outside of modern Europe with its particular development of statehood since the Late Middle Ages: in Antiquity, and in the Global South of the present. By incorporating these different time frames, we hope to contribute to overcoming the dichotomy between the modern and pre-modern era, which is often given canonical status. Our goal is to create a comparative analysis of different configurations of order as well

as the development of a typology of patterns of local governance. The structure of the empirical comparison itself promises methodological insights, since it will entail recognizing, dealing with, and overcoming disciplinary limitations. Starting with the identification of typical patterns and processes, we hope to gain a better grasp of the mechanisms by which local configurations of order succeed, while at the same time advancing the theoretical debate. This will allow us to make an interdisciplinary contribution to the understanding of fundamental elements of statehood and local governance that are of central importance, especially in the context of weak statehood. The insights we hope to gain by adopting this historical perspective will contribute to understanding a present that is not based exclusively on its own, seemingly completely new preconditions, and will thus significantly sharpen the political analysis of various forms of governance.

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Foreword

This Working Paper by the DFG Research Group *Local Self-Governance in the Context of Weak Statehood in Antiquity and the Modern Era* marks the start of a series of papers in which we document our research. This series is part of a communication strategy that introduces our discussions and suggestions into the broader debate of the international research community. Our Working Papers are interdisciplinary and intend to stimulate the exchange between scholarly disciplines beyond our circle.

1 Introduction

Society begins on-site. Anyone who joins the local sports club in her neighborhood, anyone who sets up a joint fund with his neighbors and designs a schedule to be better prepared for the summer barbecues, anyone who forms an association with the other bakers in town to push harder for common interests, anyone who joins a vigilante group to protect his village – anyone who does such a thing, beyond the narrow confines of his or her own family, takes part in local self-organization. Most people are involved in local groups, worldwide. Local self-organization means a process in which individuals in a group take on common problems and find lasting solutions to them, which are supported by the consensus of the group and which function decentrally, i.e. without external control. The rules set in this way structure society, politics and the economy. The state has no part in this – at first.

Of course, the transregional, central state whose power impacts the local level exists almost everywhere in the world. If the state sets up a police force, does the town still need a vigilance committee? Thus, competition in providing public needs between the state and local self-organization can easily arise. Our hypothesis is a simple correlation: the weaker the state's impact on society is, the more important local self-governance becomes. Not because an entrepreneurial spirit of enterprise suddenly spreads among the population, as a naive version of market liberalism might imagine, but simply because survival and a dignified life depend on it: Inadequate or entirely lacking state functions in the areas of security, material or socio-cultural foundations force people to find their own solutions on the ground. In the context of weak statehood, local self-governance is much stronger. We rarely find such conditions in Europe or in North America, but rather in the Global South. If we include the past in our search, it is not very hard to find similar societies, for example in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, in the Abbasid Caliphate, or in Antiquity. It is therefore worthwhile to analyze these kinds of local arrangements, and to do so across the supposedly canonical threshold between Modernity and Premodernity. Our project is highly relevant because local self-organization in the context of weak statehood is not an occasional variant of political organization but was rather the norm until the nineteenth century, and it still prevails outside the Western world.

This is the premise of the interdisciplinary Research Unit 2757, which started its research in April 2019 at Würzburg University. In seven subprojects, several disciplines from Classical and Ancient Studies to the Social Sciences are exploring the question: How do local forms of self-governance work in the context of weak statehood? Weak statehood does not mean that the state has withdrawn from local matters. This is simply not true in most cases of the past and the present. Rather, a weak state is stable and not directly threatened in its existence, but only partially functional. The state is certainly a factor and has an impact on local arrangements. Local self-organization cannot work without taking into account its authority. Here is where things get exciting. How does self-governance function under these conditions? And: how does local self-organization interact with state regulation? The relationship to the (central) state is not simply an addendum. It lies at the heart of our group that we concentrate on the relations between both levels. Only a constant focus on the interrelations between local self-governance and state regulation will allow us to precisely characterize the various forms of self-organization as well as the actors and constellations of actors at the local level.

Near Eastern Archaeology, Old Testament Studies, Ancient History, Comparative Politics, Social Anthropology, Anthropogeography, Sinology, and Sociology are participating in this Research Unit. We also discuss the interdisciplinary opportunities and challenges of this endeavor in Working Paper 2.[1] There we focus on the concepts, theories, and methods we have developed jointly or further develop. This paper presents our fundamental approaches and premises: We embed our agenda in previous scholarship, we structure local self-governance and state regulation as research fields and make it accessible for interpretative and empirical research, and finally we formulate our research goals.

2 Initial considerations and state of research

Wherever people share common living space, they set rules for living together. This self-organization first takes place in face-to-face communities, where people know and acknowledge each other and can develop community functions with general participation. The everyday environment of most people is characterized by the neighborhood, the quarter, the municipality. Therefore, despite today's widespread mobility and the possibilities of digital networking, human existence is primarily still spatially situated. The individual experiences community formation ('Vergemeinschaftung') essentially at his or her regular place of residence: "Locality matters."[2] Because of this connection between space and community, local space is the genuine site of collective self-organization, i.e. the place where autonomous rules and regulations are most likely to emerge.

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[1]   Lauth et al. (2019).
[2]   Korff (2003), see also Appadurai (1995, 204).

The logic of self-organization applies to rural subsidiary and village communities as well as to neighborhoods and quarters of larger settlements. Self-organization can, however, only have a limited effect on such settlements in their entirety, i.e. for what today is called a city, not to mention on regional, national and even larger formations. This brings in another aspect: Local rules do not exist in a political vacuum. On the one hand, they affect the collective self-reproduction processes of other, adjoining local communities. On the other hand, and this is most important, they are usually located in the context of regional, national, or even imperial power structures with considerable repercussions on local stability and dynamics. Local self-organization thus forms a functional basis of statehood and at the same time interacts with the formations of this statehood at higher levels.

The (central) state's power to enforce regulations may fluctuate considerably. In Europe, and in the Western world in general, a legal and welfare state has become the norm, with a tremendous capability of structuring society.[3] In the Global South of today, however, with its much larger population and numerous countries, weaker forms of statehood prevail. This can go as far as in Libya or Somalia, where the state in many regions has collapsed. Fortunately, these are extreme cases, the norm is rather the so-called weak statehood: the state is not on the verge of collapsing and is basically stable, but it is not capable of fulfilling all the functions it should according to the Western model. The state's power to enforce its rules is limited regarding regions, policy fields and social groups.[4]

Of course, local self-organization is not unaffected by this. While it has a greater scope for development in many regions of the Global South, and is often indispensable for providing basic public needs (such as access to drinking water),[5] in the industrial societies of the West the role of local organization is rather limited. Europeans understand local self-governance primarily as urban and municipal administration; grass-roots forms of rule-setting (for example, citizens' action committees) are regarded as supplementary. This is a consequence of the fact that the commune of the European Middle Ages has had a tremendous impact on the development of the Western state.[6] Hence, the close connection between city and the (central) state has considerably reduced the municipal scope for action.[7] The European urbanization is a special case in

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[3] We do not take into account here whether the state executes its functions largely itself or rather, as in recent decades, limits itself to the role of a manager which outsources the implementation to international, transnational and private actors. In this case, too, the state remains ultimately responsible for any legitimate authority (Genschel/Zangl 2008, 450).

[4] Draude et al. (2012, 9). On the concept of the Global South see Dados/Connell (2012). Schlichte (2018, 53-61), provides a nuanced overview of non-OECD countries.

[5] It is not by coincidence that *Postcolonial Studies* allow a good perspective on the diversity of autonomous rules at the local level, see Draude/Neuweiler (2010).

[6] This connection is widely accepted, even if scholars today are less convinced than Weber (1972, 727-814), that the barter economy of the market and the voluntary association of citizens in the commune was the source of rationalization, capitalism and bureaucracy. See Dilcher (2000); Capogrossi Colognesi (2000, 102-106); Schreiner (1986, 131-143); Stasavage (2011).

[7] Häußermann et al. (2008, 270-276, 331-337); Wollmann (2004); Siebel (2004, 32-35); id. (2015, 45-53); Reinhard (2002, 196-209, 239-247).

the formation of local patterns of order. Another historical development had a similar effect. The Industrial Revolution and the technological progress it triggered have created an ever-growing potential for communication, transport and surveillance, on which the modern, Western state draws.[8] Areas where industrialization has not yet advanced to such an extent – like in parts of the Global South – offer only limited possibilities for extraction and coercion. This is also true for all the supra-local states before the late eighteenth century.[9] In the present, and even more so in the past, weak statehood thus represents the norm in the possible impact of a state's regulatory power.

Interestingly, it is precisely in the ancient Mediterranean region and in the ancient Near East that we find a series of vast, partly imperial polities that were of considerable duration: from the early realms in Egypt and Mesopotamia to the Roman Empire, which dominated the Mediterranean world for more than half a millennium and still outshines every other political formation in this region to this day. Such combinations of political stability and territorial size would have been impossible had there not been a considerable degree of local self-governance. After all, premodern structural conditions did not allow for a single political center to provide or even take responsibility for all the regulations that were necessary to provide basic public needs and a minimum of sociocultural integration. Top-down regulation had to be supplemented or improved by self-organization 'from below', i.e. by local communities taking charge. Such coexistence, cooperation and even opposition between local self-governance and weak statehood can be found in the present as well as in antiquity. It is constitutive for many political systems.

In our considerations we have been inspired by some recent *research trends*, following them, but also pursuing our own direction. First and foremost, there is the extensive debate about state and statehood. Researchers have often emphasized that state authority is not a given.[10] The discussion deals primarily with the modern era,[11] but the heterogeneity of premodern political organization has also been brought into much sharper relief.[12] Similarly, current theories in the social sciences, developed for example in the debate on neo-institutionalism, presume that social negotiation processes and forms of political authority cannot be adequately grasped by a rigid concept of state, but rather it is necessary to analyze comprehensively formal and informal rules and regulations.[13] Thus, forms of governance beyond the state have come into focus.[14]

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[8] We define Modernity, regardless of the debates about postmodernism, as the epoch that begins with the great revolutions of the late 18th century and continues to the present day, in the sense of an advanced modernity.

[9] Kiser/Sacks (2009) also emphasize this similarity from the perspective of economic sociology.

[10] See von Trotha (1994). Migdal/Schlichte (2005) take up and continue this discussion.

[11] For example Genschel et al. (2006). The impressive results of the work of the now completed Bremen SFB 597 *Staatlichkeit im Wandel* are summarized in Leibfried et al. (2015).

[12] Lundgreen (2014) provides an overview of the debate on the modern and ancient state. The results of the new Bonn SFB 1167 *Macht und Herrschaft – Vormoderne Konfigurationen in transkultureller Perspektive* will also be of importance here.

[13] See March/Olsen (1989); Peters (1999); Lauth (2004).

[14] See Akude et al. (2011).

We now have categories for the informal rules and patterns[15] that allow for an adequate analysis of the empirical diversity. Scholars nowadays not only consider the official structures of the state, but also the manifold informal and partly hidden regulations that likewise permeate society; these exist alongside the formal structures or – and this is usually the case – are in many ways interlinked with and blend into them.[16]

However, these research efforts on statehood have so far hardly been conducted at the local level. The relevant studies on informal rules focus on the national level and, in the context of globalization processes, on the international level.[17] This is also true for the recently finished SFB 700 *Governance in areas of limited statehood* (Berlin), which has made fundamental contributions to the analysis of institutional arrangements that coordinate varying governance actors – which we will take up in part – but has concentrated on functional areas. In general, geographical areas at the local level are rarely analyzed as places of autonomous processes of community formation.[18] For the Greco-Roman world, the numerous works on the city, especially on the polis of classical Greece, constitute a certain exception.[19] But researchers are still more interested in the development of statehood – 'how does the city-state arise and what are its characteristics?' – than in local self-governance per se. It is not by coincidence that non-urban places of self-governance, such as villages, are often ignored.[20]

A similar problem is the tendency to analyze local patterns exclusively under the premise of the needs of the central governments of national states, kingdoms and empires.[21] To give an example: Elements of local self-organization already existed in Mesopotamia during the third and second millennium BC.[22] Nevertheless, the political history of the Ancient Near East is often told as a succession of vast monarchic regimes. Only a small number of scholars analyze informal local governance in its own right, and even they rarely address patterns of interaction with higher polity structures.[23]

The most significant exception, speaking in scholarly disciplines, is social anthropology, especially in its focus on Africa. As early as the 1940s, anthropologists worked on

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[15] See Schuppert (2011).

[16] See Elwert et al. (1983); Giordano (2013).

[17] See Akude et al. (2011); Genschel et al. (2006).

[18] One of the exceptions in the Berlin SFB that deals with local manifestations is Braig/Alba (2013).

[19] Cf., for example, Hansen (2006).

[20] The most notable exceptions are Schmitz (2004); Mitchell (1993, 176-197); Schuler (1998, 217-288); on the autonomy of rural communities during the Empire (first-third centuries AD), see Nollé (1999).

[21] An example is Kootz (2006). Research on empires is currently en vogue – see most recently Gehler/Rollinger (2014); Menzel (2015). Actually, these forms of polity are historical exceptions.

[22] Self-organization in Mesopotamia: Jacobsen (1943); Fleming (2004); Seri (2005). For Egypt, too, many researchers interested in decision-making and implementation at the local level presume a top-down relation with the central state, which is seen as the dominant actor. Cf. for example the conventional account by Manning (2013). On administration see Moreno Garcia (2013). For the subsequent epochs (Hellenism, Empire) see Monson (2012).

[23] Korff/Rothfuß (2009); Hölldampf/Rothfuß (2013); Rothfuß/Korff (2015); Klumpp (2014); Hadfield/Weingast (2013); Baland/Platteau (1996).

local sociopolitical organization in absence of a state or in areas of limited statehood.[24] Anthropological research on change through colonization and urbanization has resulted in many studies on informal institutions at the local level – for example, land rights in rural areas, the informal economy in cities, paradoxical side effects of decentralization such as the resurgence of ethnic identity and 'traditional' leaders.[25] Furthermore, a line of research on statehood as a process in colonial and postcolonial Africa has shown that processes of state- and nation-building in sub-Saharan Africa are, in many places, confronted with alternative models of local self-government – resulting in a diverse overlapping and competition of institutions and legitimations. Despite numerous case studies, however, anthropology has rarely brought together its findings on local self-organization in comparisons across regions or epochs.

The relationships between local, autonomous rule-making and weak state authority have therefore by no means been sufficiently studied. Yet the frequency of their occurrence alone justifies an analysis. *We see considerable research potential in three new approaches*:

- We reverse the established perspective and focus on local self-governance, not on the state. We are more interested in the significance and the consequences of local interactions and interdependencies than in their effects on a distant capital or on the political system as a whole.

- Weak statehood is for us the norm of state authority and impact. This allows us to overcome a Eurocentric (research) perspective that is often hardly discussed, at least not on the European continent. In global terms, the European-Western 'strong state' is the exception. The term 'weak statehood' unfortunately resonates with a notion of incompleteness and dysfunction. This seems rather inappropriate because the interaction between local self-organization and weak statehood often produces local arrangements of considerable duration and stability, which allow for the provision of diverse needs. The conditions for such successful arrangements need to be explored more closely. Weak statehood is not necessarily a phenomenon to be overcome, but may also signify a desirable state of affairs or one worth preserving. In this perspective, a higher impact of state regulation is not 'progress', for example, when it comes to consolidating authoritarian regimes.

- We deliberately compare examples from Antiquity with those from non-European regions of the present, instead of analyzing them as separate case studies. By doing so, we want to preclude that the first set of results will be assessed as merely typical for Premodernity. Likewise, local arrangements in the Global South should not be regarded as inferior, 'colonial' remnants from European and Western statehood, but rather as indigenous (and postcolonial) examples

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[24] Cf. the classic work by Fortes/Evans-Pritchard (1940).
[25] Cf., for example, Bierschenk/Olivier de Sardan (2014); Hart (1973); Hilgers (2011); Lentz (2010).

for the human capacity to invent and enforce rules.[26] By choosing this line of research we hope to make the case that the threshold between Premodernity and Modernity, often regarded as the decisive transition in human history, is only fundamental for European history.[27]

To implement these approaches we conduct various case studies and compare them to each other. Such an analysis of local self-organization does not depend on the same era or the same region, but on the premise of a similar context of weak statehood. We definitely assume the existence of societal universals: In spite of all historical divergences, under similar conditions and confronted with similar problems, the emergence of similar patterns of rules is not inevitable, but nevertheless probable. We are going to analyze how these rules work, with our empirical, polity-focused approach.

3 Terms and Theoretical Framework

The interdisciplinary implementation of such an approach requires a common research design that uses identical terms and is based on a coordinated theoretical foundation. The challenges and the scientific progress linked with this line of research are discussed in more detail in our second working paper on interdisciplinarity[28]. Here we concentrate on our basic concepts and the main theoretical approaches.

With *self-governance* we mean the organizing of a group, which happens within the group, i.e. is determined and executed by all group members or their representatives; which is based on social norms, which are the outflow of shared values of all group members; which is made for the long term; which is valid for all group members and, only for them; which works autonomously and without external control.[29]

We use the term *self-organization* in a similar sense as self-governance. While self-governance focuses on the results, self-organization refers to the process. Self-organization is understood here as an open collectivization process, through which common interests and positions are stabilized in social relationships, networks and often in a shared real-life 'locality', while groups are institutionalized through the mechanisms of solidarity and/or hierarchy.[30]

The term *local/locality* is conceptually closely related. We understand it to mean all forms of local community formation, which go beyond the family context and include the public sphere. The distinction to communities based on kinship and ethnicity is

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[26] Here our approach coincides with the agenda of Postcolonial Studies to overcome colonial discourses and power structures that are still effective today. See Quijano (2000); Chakrabarty (2000); Mbembe (2005); Mignolo (2011).

[27] Even for Europe the fundamental character of this transition is now under discussion, explicitly with regard to statehood. See Patzold (2012); Frie (2013).

[28] Lauth et al. (2019).

[29] See Popitz (2006, 61-116); Thomann (2017). The term 'group' refers to a certain number of members who are in continuous processes of exchange with each other and have a sense of togetherness (an 'us'-feeling').

[30] Similarly, but even more specifically, is the definition given by Atkinson et al. (2018, 170). In general: Ostrom (1990); Mayntz (2006); Ellickson (1991).

fluid. On the other hand, translocal, regional forms of organization which transcend the everyday experience of inhabitants are excluded. The form and degree of local community formation are the subject of the analysis, but not part of the definition. An orientation based, for example, on the degree of political organization alone would exclude important phenomena from the outset. The focus is therefore on spaces with common infrastructural and sociocultural elements.

By *state* we refer to the official state and its formal institutions; the term *statehood* means the *state* from a gradual perspective. Following Max Weber, we see the core of the state in the control of the monopoly on violence, by which the state makes its decisions binding within a certain territory.[31] This idealtypical definition is often associated with the security function. Particularly in a liberal understanding of the state, the state is assigned further functions that relate to material and socio-cultural foundations of life. We regard these governance areas as central aspects of our understanding of 'state'. We do not include further-reaching functions that only came into existence with the development of the modern legal and welfare state.

The term *weak statehood* is common in scholarship and refers to the impact of a state's regulatory power.[32] In contrast to a collapsed *failed state* or a *failing state* that is breaking apart, a *weak state* is indeed only partially functional, but fundamentally stable and not directly threatened in its existence. Of course, such a state is not able to execute all the tasks that a *strong state* fulfils according to the European-Western model. The limits of state impact can be territorial (regional), functional (sectoral) and temporal. From a methodological point of view, the term weak statehood corresponds to a diminished subtype in which not all defining characteristics are comprehensively developed; however, they are recognizably more present than in a *failing state*.

We distinguish local self-governance from state regulation. The latter usually happens in a multi-level system that includes local, regional and 'national' levels. Regulations at the highest (central) government level usually have the greatest impact on local conditions. However, direct contact is more often made with state officials at the middle, provincial level (governors) and the lower, local level (mayors, city councils, representatives of state authorities, local troop commanders). At the local level, there is no spatial difference between self-governance and state regulation, and thus the differences between statehood and independent local actors become sometimes blurred. At this level the official state can, if the municipality is not regulated by the central state, itself represent a variant of local self-organization (for example, the Greek *polis*, which is often aptly called the 'city-state'). Here the categories overlap. But whenever the representative bodies of a settlement depend on supra-local state power – whether they are appointed, whether they are accountable, whether they are

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[31]   See Weber (1972, 29); Wrase (2013, 6).
[32]   See Lambach (2016).

formally codified and thus guaranteed by the state –, they are an expression of local organization, but not of local *self*-organization.

Of course, these terms do not work without context. Only their *theoretical embedding* allows one to analyze the various phenomena in a comparative perspective. Starting from epistemological considerations on the cognitive possibilities of the actors, we build on our basic premises with the help of neo-institutionalist theory and expand them by the inclusion of governance concepts. Both approaches allow us to categorize the various forms of self-organization and to analyze formal and informal patterns in a complementary manner.[33]

Regarding *institutional theory,* we take up two variants of neo-institutionalism: historical and sociological institutionalism. The first draws attention to the importance of power constellations for the formation and transformation of institutions. These include not only official institutions, but also binding systems of rules and social behavioral orientations. Historical institutionalism studies path dependencies and, using the idea of *windows of opportunity,* marks specific situations in which such paths can be changed or abandoned.[34] Both the stability of the paths and their change in specific constellations (*critical junctures*) are subject of the analysis.[35]

Sociological institutionalism, with its broad understanding of institutions, not only defines binding rules as such, but also organizations, cultural patterns, symbols and cognitive models (*frames*).[36] Such a divergent understanding of institutions, in which only temporal continuity is the common denominator, makes a clear definition difficult, but it also leaves more room for integrating different research perspectives. Sociological institutionalism also brings into focus the meaningful and orientation-giving function of institutions, which structure social action. The action of the individual is largely determined by his or her integration into the group and the societal context, but it is not determined by it. A change in societal norms tends to happen slowly and without major ruptures.

Both theoretical variants of neo-institutionalism allow for a systematically guided analysis of the characteristics and the dynamics of precisely those social, economic and political patterns of governance that are informally constituted. Thus, all rules and patterns are included that are not fixed in writing and monitored by state authorities.[37]

According to the *governance concept,* governing does not only happen through authoritative regulation by the hierarchical state, but also through interaction and negotiation processes by the actors of the political-administrative system with economic

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[33] See Peters (1999); Benz et al. (2007); Lauth (2015); Bröchler/Lauth (2014).
[34] See Peters (1999); Steinmo (2008); North (1990); Ackermann (2001); Mahoney (2000); Schreyögg/Sydow (2003); Wetzel (2005).
[35] Streeck/Thelen (2005).
[36] See Powell/DiMaggio (1991); Scott (2001). The Dresden SFB 537 on *Institutionalität und Geschichtlichkeit* has taken up this perspective, see especially Rehberg (2014).
[37] See Giordano (2013); Hayoz (2013).

stakeholders, associations and civil society.[38] Governance means the management of interdependencies in institutionalized systems of rules, taking into account patterns of interaction and modes of collective action (such as networks). Governance research aims to analyze the change in the way public problems (the ability to regulate), for example in conflict resolution or providing services, are dealt with under conditions of changing statehood. Initially developed for modern Western systems, the concept of governance is also applicable to the analysis of non-Western and pre-modern structures of rule that have comparable complex structures or coordination needs. Terms like *hybrid governance* and *neopatrimonialism* express terminologically the adaptation to different systems. We suggest that our empirical findings in the Global South and in the ancient world contribute further to the development of the governance concept, especially with regard to local self-governance. The theorem of 'shadow of hierarchy', which is relevant for policy research in Western states, can also be applied, in a modified form, in the context of weak statehood.[39]

4   Six questions regarding local self-governance and state regulation

Our research takes the central concept of local self-governance as its starting point and asks a number of guiding questions: What is regulated? Who regulates? How are things regulated? Where does regulation happen? Why does it happen? How are local groups' relations with the state regulated?

What is regulated? The issue are the basic needs of the individual, which can only be satisfied in a group context:

- Security: The protection of body and life requires the control of public space, punishment for the use of violence, modes of dispute resolution.

- Material foundations of life: these include infrastructure, the resources provided for them through taxation, physical labor or economic activity, market regulation, welfare.

- Socio-cultural foundations of life: these include the continuation of the community and its norms, culture, education, religion.

These areas of regulation rest on a basic understanding of the state, which is most appropriate for weak statehood.[40] At the same time, we exclude tasks such as foreign policy or defense, which informal, local self-organization cannot meet in the long run.

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[38]   Cf. Benz/Dose (2010). On the categories developed in various governance perspectives, see Benz et al. (2007).

[39]   Mayntz/Scharpf (1995). Our results can also be compared with the analytical findings of the Berlin SFB 700 *Governance in areas of limited statehood.* In addition to its already available results – such as Draude (2012) and Risse (2011) – the final reports, which have yet to be released, will also be taken into account. The *Oxford Handbook of Governance and Limited Statehood*, published in 2018 and edited by Thomas Risse, Tanja A. Börzel and Anke Draude, already offers the main conclusions.

[40]   With regard to the modern state, which has discovered many more tasks anyway, they have been further differentiated: Benz (2008); Voigt (2018). Isensee/Kirchhof (2006) name as areas of state regulation among others

Who regulates? Autonomous actors of self-governance at the local level may be various social groups and subgroups: for example, neighborhood organizations; gangs; clubs, associations and cooperatives; cult communities; political parties; social entrepreneurs (as local production and trade organizations); NGOs; actors of violence or security; official bodies and officials (unless they are controlled by higher levels of government). We are only interested in those actors who have sufficient capacity for integration and socio-political stability that enable them to create self-governance, to enforce it in the long term and to sanction its violation.

How are things regulated? This question deals with the internal governance processes within the local groups. How and with what intentions and implications does self-organization happen? If self-governance is jointly fixed by all group members, this reflects rather egalitarian participation structures. These can even be called democratic if, even in conflicting decision-making constellations, regulations are created and accepted by all. The fixation by authorized representatives is accompanied by a more differentiated hierarchy. Organizational consolidation probably expresses itself in more formal decision-making procedures, whereas ad hoc regulations characterize a more informal structure. A distinction can thus be made between hierarchical vs. egalitarian decision-making patterns, strategic vs. ad hoc action, consensual vs. conflictive decision-making, restrictive vs. comprehensive forms of participation. Aspects of clientelism and patronage are also considered in the analysis.

Where does regulation happen? At the local level, of course. But this simple answer does not yet take sufficient account of the relationship between space and group. In a sparsely populated rural area, it is more likely that a single group will execute the necessary self-governance. With higher population density, the probability increases that there are several actors in the same local context who offer self-governance but coexist because of different collective identities (ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc.). A strong manifestation of group identities is often reflected in spatial separation, even segregation. Such groups tend to offer the same functions as other actors possibly resulting in contrary relationships with them. However, if such spatial separations do not exist, i.e. if people live in mixed localities, they do not necessarily transfer the community functions relevant to them all to a single actor. The sociological dimension of the individual's belonging to different social groups is only hinted at here.[41] In our context, the overlapping of networks means that the respective groups offer functions from different governance areas or, if this is not the case, complementary or subsidiary regulations. Therefore, not only must the interaction between local self-governance and state regulation be taken into account, but also the relationship between different groups at the local level. For these processes of differentiation be-

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economic distribution and supply, energy supply, labor market, population development, family policy, internal integration, science and technology, media, sport and leisure, health care, protection of natural resources. Cf. also the regulatory areas in Almond/Powell (1978, 10-12).

[41] On the universality of this circumstance see Popitz (2006, 67f., 107-111).

tween cooperation and isolation, between living together and segregation in geographical, social and metaphorical space we use the neologism limination. This word avoids the negative connotation that is otherwise associated with concepts of demarcation.

Why does self-governance happen? Local self-organization is first of all justified by its functional efficiency. A group's own regulations are indispensable if a state offer does not exist, and if it does exist, they must be cheaper, simpler and more effective. But just as the groups that support them need identity building, self-governance requires meaning in order to continue. Normative notions of order (such as public-spirited, solidarity-based action, legal or religious claims to validity) can have a legitimizing effect, as can patterns and narratives of justification (such as 'constraints', tradition, personal histories or internal hierarchies in the group). In this way local patterns of regulation are charged with meaning, they appear as a guarantee for good or at least better living conditions and are an expression of a collective process of self-assurance of the group.[42] Normative importance justifies the regulations internally, but thanks to the social capital generated, it also serves to prevail against state regulation and parallel local self-organization.

These five questions allow an analysis of the various forms of local self-organization. For us, however, the basic condition of weak statehood is decisive. Thus, the relationship to the (central) state is not some kind of addendum; rather, the connection of these two levels is the essence of the research group. It is only by constantly considering the interrelations between local self-organization and state regulation that a precise characterization of the various forms of self-governance as well as of the actors and actor constellations at the local level becomes possible. Often, self-governance only becomes effective in the context of a minimum degree of statehood. Therefore, a further question must be asked:

What are the relationships between local self-governance and state regulation? Four basic types of relations can be distinguished:

- *Substitutive*: Local self-governance, in the form of functional equivalents, completely replaces state functions or does not allow them to develop at all. For example, a local community regulates the water supply, which the state does not (or no longer) provide.[43]

- *Subsidiary*: Self-governance and state regulation are coordinated and complement each other. The state takes care of water extraction and bottling, while the local community takes care of transport.[44]

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[42] Cf. Barth (1969).

[43] Cf. Lauth (2004, 222); on water supply in common-property regimes see Gibbs/Bromley (1989); Wade (1988).

[44] Subsidiarity is understood here as a division into organizational functions, not as a modern Western interplay of (state) decision-making competence and (local) organizational power in the sense of Genschel/Zangl (2008, 431f.). An autonomous functioning of self-governance is not compatible with ultimate state responsibility, even if the danger of such a development is not small in a subsidiary relationship. Cruz (1989) gives an example

- *Complementary*: The interaction takes place in mutual but uncoordinated coaction. The state provides water from the distant river, the community supplements the supply, which is perceived as insufficient, with water from a newly constructed well.

- *Contrary*: the services are similar and compete with each other. The state water supply is perceived as functionally inefficient, which is why the local community tries to displace it by building up its own supply chain.

Among the last three types, parallel offers exist next to each other.[45] Neither does the state have a monopoly on power, nor is the state powerless. Apart from the local actors, it is just another provider of binding rules. Therefore, there is less friction in the first relation where there is no direct coexistence. The intensity of the relations can vary. We distinguish between interactions (mutual contacts) and interdependencies (mutual dependencies).

5   Research Fields and Goals

The perspectives opened up by the six questions provide the heuristic framework for the separate subprojects. They can also (and will now) be described as fields of research on specific contents. However, this is not the only reason why we enrich our presentation with illustrative examples from the agenda of the subprojects. This combination is a further step on our way to formulate the central goals of our Research Unit. The comparative socio-spatial analysis focuses on four fields of research shedding light on various aspects of local self-governance in the context of relations with the (central) state:

- *Organization*: Formal institutions are essential for the internal coherence of a group. We are interested in group access, functions of the members and, above all, hierarchy. Do offices, an order of rank and a line organization exist? Who has the organizational power? The specific characteristics of self-governance therefore correspond with the internal organization of the group, as may be seen in the construction or conversion of public buildings. Group organization is also influenced by interaction with the state. The Seleucid intervention in Jerusalem and the actions of the Maccabees turned the most important local authority, that of the High Priest, into a vehicle for the emergence of institutional coherence and thus contributed significantly to changes in task and functions of the Jerusalem temple organization. Conversely, it was precisely the democratic nature of credit cooperatives in Brazil that produced contrary interaction when the central state transformed into a dictatorship; later again,

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(of the organization of irrigation); a possible further project G [Rothfuß] is being investigated. We will take up this topic in our theory and methods forum (see Lauth et al. 2019).

[45]   Lambach (2011).

the democratization of Brazil supported analog processes in the university system. We are not interested in the respective government form itself here, but rather in its impact on relations with the local level.

- *Normativity and collective identity*: Self-governance has to convey a 'positive message' to attain long term-stability beyond mere functionality. Rules can give meaning to a group – for example, vigilantes see themselves as a legitimate policing force. In Maputo, public interest-oriented cooperatives provide basic services and goods (*urban commons*). Legitimizing narratives are of particular interest here. We find interdependencies with the state levels already in Late Antiquity: The social practices of the Christian communities, which were primarily normative organizations, first led to (unsuccessful) persecutions by the Roman Empire, then, when the state itself had become Christian – again a change in the form of the regime –, substitutive and subsidiary forms of interaction dominated (for example in church building). However, differences over the subtleties of the faith again provoked contrary attempts at regulation, now on the part of a Christian empire. Normative importance can help with a group's prevailing or asserting against state regulation, but it can also become an object of state intervention itself.

- *Spatiality*: The importance of the territorial dimension does not only reflect the fact that one subproject deals with land conflicts in China. The higher the population density, the greater the necessities, the possibilities and the complexities of self-governance. We have to distinguish, for example, between urban and rural areas in Burkina Faso to better assess the significance of different spaces: For the same reason the subprojects on Mozambique and China are located in peri-urban quarters. We also pay attention to the question of how far the memberships of groups overlap or stay separated. Space is also a social concept of meaning. Frequently, we can observe coalitions of local groups, whose rules are complementary or subsidiary to each other and substitute state regulation. On the other hand, frictions and disputes between the various groups often do not allow the state to take a passive stance. They may even lead to government intervention, which may paradoxically create more local freedoms if, as in China, the state's regulations happen to be vague and ambivalent. Is it important here whether the groups constitute themselves on ethnic, linguistic, religious, legal, professional, social or economic similarities? Overall, we examine how configurations of actors and networks vary in different geographical, social, and imaginary spaces and what effects are associated with them.

- *Temporality*: Self-governance is not static, but is subject to adaptations (e.g. due to environmental changes, population growth or technological innovations) which are indispensable to maintain its functionality. We are particularly interested in the depth and acceleration of changes to specific relations, which can change suddenly or gradually. Both can be observed in Boğazköy, which is analyzed chronologically from the Iron Age to the Roman period and has seen

regulation attempts by the Persians, Greeks, Celts and Romans. Contrary relations may become subsidiary ones, subsidiary interaction may even lead to the integration of self-organization into the state hierarchy and thus to the loss of autonomy. Conversely, if the state has been completely substituted in all areas of regulation, it can cease to be an actor at all. Limination processes may be triggered by the emergence of new objects for regulation – such as renewable energies in China – or new groups, for example through migration, and may cause changes in coalition formation and actor constellations. We also pay attention to polity changes that are initiated beyond the local level, but which have an impact on it. We have already mentioned changes in government or regime form or the slow increase in regulation impact during the Roman Empire. To analyze both the processes as well as the paths, path dependencies and path changes, all subprojects, including the contemporary-focused ones, work in a historical perspective.

Our central *goal* is to better understand local forms of self-governance in the context of weak statehood, in addition to the expected empirical and methodological progress at the level of the subprojects. Local self-organization has to be assessed according to its success. To go beyond functional efficiency, the *quality* of self-governance has to be measured not only by its duration, i.e. its potential for long-term availability, but also by its stabilizing effects for group coherence. However, there is a very important distinction to make: The positive effect on the group may coincide with an analogous impact on the local configurations of order as a whole, but this is not necessarily the case. Other actors of civil society also have to be taken into account, especially the (central) state. Some examples may illustrate the difference: The Jewish communities of Alexandria and Antioch suffered from the growing organizational power of the local churches. The successful organization of a Maccabean group initially only led to increased attempts at regulation and to state violence. Armed groups in Burkina Faso provide peace and security, but as vigilantes they pursue clientelism and take repressive action against other actors in local society. Thus, it depends largely on the chosen perspective if a local arrangement can be evaluated as a 'high quality constellation'. In addition, our perspective is not necessarily the same as that of the actors themselves. In other words: Do they regard themselves as agents of particular interests or do they also claim to serve the common good?

Another, although not completely different, question is whether the success of local constellations of order should be analyzed as a descriptive problem or rather be evaluated under normative categories. Order (understood as the absence of chaos) may exist in a liberal state as well as in an authoritarian regime, in a free society as well as under the thumb of the mob. But what's possible is not necessarily desirable. We consider both aspects: The first one helps us to see what has, under which conditions, de facto prevailed. This conforms to scholarly standards. The second one, however, points beyond an enduring and stable order to ethical categories that include other

norms such as personal integrity. This orientation is indispensable for us because we also want to facilitate the applicability of our results.

6   The seven subprojects

The comprehensive approach outlined above serves as a starting point for the subprojects. The case studies will examine and critically reflect our hypotheses. A brief presentation will introduce our empirical agenda.

Subproject A: Andreas Schachner (Near Eastern Archaeology)

Boğazköy: Local Self-Governance in Central Anatolia from the Iron Age to the end of the Roman era (ca. 1100 BC to 400 AD)

The long-standing excavations of the German Archaeological Institute in the ruins of the Hittite capital Hattusha (an UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site) have produced a large variety of findings and finds beyond the Late Bronze Age, especially from the entire first millennium BC and the first to fourth centuries AD. Starting from the premise that social practices are reflected in archaeologically visible, material culture, archeological finds will form the basis for an investigation of local self-governance in Central Anatolia during this period. The rich archaeological material reveals strong fluctuations in statehood between egalitarian structures, local forms of state hierarchies and the integration of the settlement into large-scale imperial systems during the observation period. The changes versus the continuity in the settlement structure, the various architectural forms and other elements of material culture (especially ceramics and prestige goods) reveal what level of complexity of statehood could be achieved under the respective conditions.

The archaeologically visible differences reflect the area of conflict between local self-organizing and general state governance, on the basis of which the forms and the scope of self-governance can be identified. Thereby, it is possible to show how society organized itself under changing political and economic conditions and to what extent governance imposed by a central state was able to shape long-lasting regional and local structures. In the absence of written sources, the possibilities for making detailed statements are comparatively limited, but this approach makes clear, on the one hand, to what extent certain forms of governance and self-governance are reflected in the material culture; and, on the other hand, thanks to the length of the observation period, it is possible to distinguish between constant factors with long-term effects that can hardly be influenced by individuals (e.g. geographical factors) and human agency reflected by the elements of cultural or social developments that can be changed through human action. This scope also allows us to define these factors' respective effectiveness.

Subproject C: Barbara Schmitz (Old Testament Studies)

Local Self-Governance in Judea in the Second Century BC:

Historical and Literary Perspectives

This subproject deals with the massive conflicts surrounding the cult and the way of life in Judea in the second century BC. Individual groups of the local elite prompted these conflicts through their innovations with regard to the socio-cultural foundations and through their attempt to update traditional ways of life. At that time, Judea was part of the ruling Seleucid Empire, which was limited in its depth of regulation authority. Recent research in the field of Classical studies on the constitution and internal functioning of the Seleucid Empire will help to analyze the seemingly authoritarian interventions on the part of the king as part of the struggle over new forms of self-governance at the lowest (local) level of government.

The oldest sources available are the First and Second Book of Maccabees. These are examined narratologically in two case studies in order to capture their particular concepts, their narrative perspectives and their intentions. The two books are differently conceived, independent narratives that describe the events as massive and illegitimate interventions not only by local actors but also by the state. The depictions of the First and Second Book of Maccabees, which are both highly perspective-bound, describe the local forms of self-governance as identity-generating stories of self in such a way that actors are either legitimized or delegitimized and thus generate *ex post* narrative coherence and normativity. This subproject also aims to further develop the theoretical framework of narratology in order to combine narratological analyses and historical-critical approaches more closely than has previously been done.

The parallel case studies will be evaluated comparatively and examined historically in a historical-critical rereading. Tensions and differences between the perspective-bound literary representations and the historical reconstruction will be examined primarily with a view to the organization and institutional developments in Jerusalem. The research design of the research group will make it possible to determine the areas of governance, the different regulatory bodies and limination processes, as well as the forms of governance and the relationship to the central power in the course of the developments of the second century BC, and to thus foster an appreciation for the events as decisive moments in the development of Judaism in antiquity. "Locality matters" — also and especially in the Judea of the second century BC.

Subproject D: Rene Pfeilschifter (Ancient History)

Local Self-Organizing, Urban Civil Society and Church Norms: Alexandria and Antioch in the Roman Empire

This subproject deals with self-governing groups in two major cities of the Roman Empire from the first to seventh centuries AD. Both Egyptian Alexandria and Syrian Antioch offer a glimpse into the workings of dynamic urban communities. Those segments of these cities that are not regulated by the state can most precisely be conceptualized as urban civil societies. The working hypothesis of this subproject is that it was not state governance, but rather the functioning of the civil society that, in large measure, determined the quality of the local configurations of order. The socio-spatial processes of limination between the self-governing groups as well as their internal development of cohesion through internal organization, normativity and collective identity will be tracked as they developed over a period of several centuries. The crucial context for this is constituted by the relationships with the centralized state, usually represented by the governor, and with the municipal administration, which finds it clearest manifestation in city council and local office-holders. While the communal organization initially, at the beginning of the imperial period, can perhaps still be considered as self-governing, i.e. autonomous, with the increasing regulation through the Empire it effectively developed into the local government level, without, however, losing all elements of self-governance. One of the aims of this subproject is to contribute to a better understanding of socio-political formations such as these, which defy easy classification.

The two case studies will commence with a survey of the conditions in the well-documented fourth century and then work their way back diachronically into the early Empire as well as forward into Late Antiquity. Among the wide range of clubs, associations and neighborhood organizations, the Jewish and Christian communities are the best-attested. With the Christianization of the Mediterranean world the latter became the dominating local group due to the fact that they seemed the most effective at fostering a sense of shared identity and providing a working self-governance. The displacement of other formations, especially of the Jewish communities, did not in and of itself lead to a destabilization of local configurations of order. However, due to the church's character as a highly normative organization, it had to, in the eyes of contemporaries, be perfectly aligned with regard to its dogma both with the 'Reichskirche' and with the Christian state. This led to forms of state intervention of an unprecedented vehemence through which the emperor sought to enforce his regulations.

These attacks, not yet fully understood, on the local capacities of self-governance, which impaired the urban civil society, will be another focus of the subproject.

Subproject E: Hans-Joachim Lauth (Comparative Politics)

The Organization of University Education and Credit Lending in immigrant Communities of South Brazil

Brazil's history of statehood is marked by many vicissitudes. After the end of the second Empire of Brazil, the republic, founded in 1891, was in many respects a weak state, especially in its outlying regions such as South Brazil. Getúlio Vargas and his authoritarian project of the Estado Novo (1937-1945) tried to improve the nation state's capacity for governance. He succeeded in strengthening the function of the central state, but not permanently. Functional and spatial fluctuations of state governance have likewise characterized the later periods of authoritarian and democratic rule.

This subproject investigates two forms of local self-governance in South Brazil pertaining to the functions of socio-cultural and material foundations. It will analyze the complex relationships between national and local state governance on the one hand, and the self-governance of local communities, on the other. The two case studies are situated in Santa Cruz do Sul (province Rio Grande do Sul) and focus on different areas of governance. The first case study investigates a facility of higher education, which continued earlier activities of German settlers. More precisely, the creation and functioning of the communitarian university UNISC will be analyzed, which is run by members of civil society. The aim is to test the assumption that immigrants were an important factor in the creation of a thriving civil society. In the course of the ensuing developments, the different relations of limination within these immigrant communities had changed and were constituted anew.

Analogous transformations are investigated in the second case study with a look at the generation of social capital in the economic sphere. The object of investigation will be the local credit cooperative Sicredi Vale do Rio Pardo in Santa Cruz do Sul, which is one of the first credit unions for farming loans in Brazil. Today, Sicredi is a model of participation, transparency and innovation for cooperatives in Brazil, not only due to its survival during the military dictatorship.

From this perspective, a comparison with the collective narratives of the university UNISC as well as its strategies and contents of legitimation is of interest as well. Furthermore, local transformations and their limination effects will be analyzed in a historical perspective, including path dependencies. An important aspect of both case studies will be to take into account what type of regime was exercising state rule. In the case of a regime change, it will be examined to what extent the relationship between local self-governance and state order was modified.

Subproject F: Katja Werthmann (Social Anthropology)

Local Self-Governance for the Provision of Security: Vigilantes in Burkina Faso

This subproject studies local self-governance in the realm of security. The research focuses on vigilantes in the West African state of Burkina Faso. Vigilantes have emerged in response to increasing criminality in rural and urban areas. The project compares two different formations of vigilantes: hunters (Jula: *dozo*) who invoke a centuries-old tradition, and "self-defence groups" (*groupes d'auto-défense*) or "guardians of the forest" (Mooré: *koglweogo*), which have emerged more recently. The subproject explores the vigilantes' activities, ways of self-legitimization and reciprocal liminations. The rapid expansion of *koglweogo* is an effect of the political transition since 2014, when a popular uprising ended Blaise Compaoré's regime after 27 years. The state is currently faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, official law enforcement has been understaffed for a long time. Therefore, the government supports forms of local policing. On the other hand, vigilantes undermine the state monopoly on the use of force. They levy arbitrarily fixed fines, inflict corporal punishment and torture, and carry firearms in spite of a prohibition. Moreover, there have been confrontations between *dozo* and *koglweogo*. Therefore, a debate over vigilantism is currently playing out in the public and in the media.

This subproject asks whether forms of regulation and intervention by vigilantes are substitutive, subsidiary, complementary or contrary to state regulation. Do vigilantes constitute new forms of power 'beside the state' or of civil society? What is the relationship of the individual vigilante groups with each other and with official law enforcement? The project also asks how vigilante groups are organized internally, how they legitimate their activities and to what extent they are seen as 'local' and legitimate on the ground.

The subproject's aim is a differentiated understanding of the occasions, forms and legitimations of local self-governance and self-organization within a post-colonial African nation-state that represents the limited reach of statehood, which is the common ground of this research group. Both empirical case studies contribute to a greater precision or a modification of concepts such as 'weak state', 'governance', 'civil society' and 'vigilantism'.

Subproject G: Eberhard Rothfuß (Human geography)

Urban Shadow Spaces in the Postcolonial State: Self-organization of Land and Water Resources in the Periphery of Maputo (Mozambique)

Since 1992, the young post-colonial state of Mozambique has been undergoing a profound political transition process, from a formerly socialist state to a democratic nation-state which is increasingly taking on neo-patrimonial traits. The influence of unions and cooperatives led by the party *Frente da Libertação de Moçambique* (FRELIMO)

is dwindling and being complemented by the activities of civil society actors, often supported by (international) NGOs. The capital of Maputo with its densely populated peripheral districts plays a crucial role in the socio-political transition process. The peri-urban spaces have led to a self-organized shadow existence in many spheres of life in order to provide the material as well as socio-cultural necessities. They can be thought of as a laboratory in which a catching-up democratic transition is taking place from below and from the social edge, and in which development processes are playing out with customary authorities and (non-)state actors interacting to create a specific form of governance of a postcolonial civil society. An ambivalence is revealed here: on the one hand, there is a lack of willingness and/or ability on the part of the state to provide urban infrastructures and services to all citizens, but on the other hand, this offers vulnerable and marginalized groups options for self-determination and increased autonomy.

Therefore, the subproject will focus its empirical research on two self-organizing collectives in the peri-urban quarters of KaMabukwana and Katembe and inquire into their logic of practice as informal 'service providers' in the areas of water supply and agricultural food production in community gardens. Thus, two important forms of practice of resource-based and welfare-oriented *urban commons* are at stake, which remain constitutive for many African urban life-worlds. Due to their existential practices, these self-organizing groups are closely embedded in the social space of their respective *barrios* and *communidades*.

The overarching research question of this project is twofold: Does self-organization in the provision of both of these essential services undermine or enhance the authority of state institutions in the provision of public goods/services in the periphery? Does it provide an avenue for the efficient delivery of these services in the long-run?

Conceptually, the project is based on the governance and actor-centered institutional approach of the 'shadow of hierarchy' and uses the heuristic approach of *social entrepreneurship* on the level of practice. This concept identifies innovative bottom-up strategies for alleviating social problems such as poverty and exclusion, in which principles of solidarity play a constitutive role.

Subproject H: Doris Fischer (Sinology / Economics)

Renewable Energy and Local Governance in China

This subproject investigates how the fast deployment of renewable energies is influencing local governance in China. Due to the technical and physical characteristics of renewable energies, a successful energy transition requires a decentralized use of renewables. As a result, the fast deployment of renewables and the decentralization of the power system create areas of weak state governance – as defined by the Research Unit – at the local level.

Against this background, the subproject investigates how local communities in China are seizing the opportunities presented by the state-driven, but not fully state-steered fast deployment of renewable energies. The project is interested in how the transition to renewables is negotiated and organized at the local level, and how local communities balance conflicting goals and interests. Does the energy transition stabilize existing economic, social and political liminations or does it create new ones? Unlike earlier investigations into China's energy sector or environmental policies that were primarily interested in assessing the success or failure of state policy implementation, this subproject focuses on the forms of local self-governance that are developing in order to address these challenges and opportunities.

By analyzing the processes of local governance, the subproject investigates how formal and informal rules evolve, and how these rules influence the relationship between local and state actors in the context of the energy transition. The subproject's specific contribution to the Research Unit, which intends to produce theoretical insight into local self-governance in areas of weak state governance at different times and in different regions, lies in addressing the aspect of changes in local governance triggered by a technological revolution.

The subproject relies on insights from institutional theory and in addition refers to concepts of multi-level governance. Both concepts are useful for characterizing the Chinese political system and central to the literature on transition management, which emphasizes the importance of local niches for political innovations.

7 Conclusion and Perspectives

Our joint research emphasizes the local, bottom-up perspective instead of the top-down focus from the state or even global level. The local level has never been consistently chosen as a starting point for research in the past, even though earlier research on limited statehood has produced remarkable results, on which we build. It is the local level that has always been relevant and therefore poses comparable challenges to local arrangements in its everyday environment of the neighborhood, the quarter and the community – beyond a specific area or time.

It is this interest in comparison that constitutes the methodological core of our project. The comparison of local self-governance across continents and epochs, especially across the threshold between Premodernity and Modernity, which in the end may not be so important, sharpens the eye for patterns of human community and society building.

The comparative analysis of the results achieved in the subprojects will allow us to better categorize the 'quality' of local arrangements and to adequately typify actor constellations at the local governance level and between local and translocal levels. By constructing such a typology, we will be better equipped to analyze precisely the characteristics of weak statehood. Towards the end of our work, in the course of a

second funding phase, we want to analyze the formative role of local self-governance for the conditions and functioning of weak statehood. At the same time, we will identify theoretical foundations for an improved assessment of the mechanisms of societal stabilization. Which arrangements allow for a long term-stability of local self-governance and simultaneously do not make this alleged weakness of statehood look like a failure?

We aim to formulate middle-range theories on specific areas of governance and relation forms at the local and translocal governance levels. This theory-building will integrate the separate disciplinary efforts and raise them to a new analytical level. We thereby intend to make an essential contribution to comparative research on human community formation and self-organization.

It is important to us to generate awareness of the fact that the emergence of the strong state of Western character, especially the Western European welfare state, was not without alternative. Quite the opposite, it arguably has been neither the only, nor the predominant and certainly not the most self-evident form of statehood. Finally, other, weaker forms of statehood should not automatically be equated with forms of social order that are deficient and urgently in need of an overhaul according to the European example. Our findings are intended to contribute to the debate on the appropriate strategy of state building and, not least, to facilitate the identification of context-appropriate support strategies.

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