Modernisation in small steps? Comparing the organisational reforms of the British Conservative Party and the German CDU

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Abstract: Research on political parties has long identified "environmental" pressures upon parties to undertake organisational and programmatic reforms – this applies in particular to "catch-all" parties or Volksparteien. Changed social and media structures, the decline of organisations traditionally associated with the parties, and the growth in alternative possibilities of political participation create significant organisational – as well as programmatic – challenges. This paper compares the German CDU and the British Conservatives in two respects: in particular it focuses on their organisational responses to the election defeats they suffered at the end of the 1990s, examining those reforms which took place and consider whether these match the expectations of organisational reforms anticipated by proponents of the "cartel party thesis". While in both cases there are similarities, but (in particular in the German case) it is important not to understate the extent of internal party resistance to reform, and thus the difficulties with which aspiring party reformers are confronted. This conclusion suggests, more broadly, that in reality the process of party change is more than an almost automatic, isomorphic, and inevitable response to a changing environment. Rather it is punctuated, messy, and often contingent on events and agents.

1. Introduction: changing parties in a changing world?

Since the early and important works of Duverger (1954) and Michels (1962), there has been tremendous scholarly interest in the development of party organisations, and party organisational change. This reflects the important consequences that may flow from political parties' organisational forms: different modes of organisation (for instance, the relationship between leaders and members, the methods of candidate selection, the nature of electoral campaigning and fundraising, or the interaction between different levels) may have a profound impact upon parties' policy choices, their strategic positioning and their electoral success. Interest is also a function of a divide in the literature between accounts which assume - sometimes implicitly – that long-to-medium term changes in the environments in which parties operate will sooner or later lead to party change and those who see the latter triggered, in punctuated fashion, by particular events or people, most obviously electoral reverses and turnovers in leadership..

The Conservatives and the CDU are interesting to compare. They enjoy similar positions as the major party on the centre-right of the political spectrum in their respective polities and are thus *most similar* cases. Albeit in different ways they have - historically anyway – both operated as relatively decentralised organisations: in the CDU, there were horizontal division between factions and vertical divisions between the different *Länder* (Schmid 1990), while in the Conservative Party, a form

of "stratarchy" existed before the term was popularised by scholars like Katz and Mair (1995 and 1997), with Central Office (as party HQ was known) being neither a creature of the leadership nor really in control of local constituency associations (see Pinto-Duschinksy, 1972; see also Webb, 2000: 192-9). At the same time, the parties' institutional environments differ radically, with the centralised and legally relatively *laissez-faire* British institutional context contrasting sharply with that of German federalism and a prescriptive Party Law. This paper considers the reforms undertaken when each party suffered a major electoral shock (followed by further convulsions) around a decade-and-a-half ago, when the British Conservatives found themselves on the receiving end of New Labour's l1997 landslide and the CDU was ignominiously booted out of office at the hands of an SPD-Green coalition one year later. Neither party was able to stage a rapid or impressive comeback: in the UK further election defeats in 2001 and 2005 were followed by a less-than-triumphant return to power as part of a coalition in 2010; in Germany, a second defeat in 2002 was followed by rather mixed results in 2005 and 2010, although on both occasions the CDU was at least able to return to government.

Britain and Germany, like other European democracies, have both experienced substantial and, for parties anyway, disruptive changes (see Krouwel, 2012) Social structures have evolved, with a tendency towards individualisation and changed lines of political conflict. Patterns of family and social organisation have also changed, meaning that political socialisation occurs differently, leading to much higher levels of electoral volatility. Further important changes commonly pointed to – although sometimes overblown (see Allern and Bale, 2012) – include *secularisation* and the loosening of.links with civil society and interest groups. This not only contributes to higher electoral volatility, as socialisation into a particular *milieu* is less likely to shape voting behaviour, but it also leads to organisational challenges for political parties, since such movements may become a less fertile source of members, activists, and also channels of communication. Moreover, there are now so many other ways that those who want to participate in politics can get involved, with "citizens preferring to invest their efforts elsewhere, and particularly in groups where they can play a more active role, where they are more likely to be in full agreement with a narrower range of concerns, and where they feel they can make a difference" (Katz / Mair 1997: 105). The astonishing spread of the internet as a means of communication, has opened up new opportunities for political parties, in both external and internal communications, but may be renderering traditional (but in some ways still functional) ways of keeping up contact redundant.

In the German context, reunification also had a profound impact upon the context in which political parties operated. The near-absence of established organisational structures of political parties (apart from the post-Communist PDS, later renamed the Left Party), the absence of long-standing ties between parties and citizens (reflected both in higher electoral volatility and lower turnout), as well as a radically different social structure (with lower levels both of religious observance and trade union members) all prevented a western organisational structure seeming optimal. This led to east German parties having a very different organisational structure to their western equivalents, with a focus on capital-intensive campaigning rather than on voluntary work by members (Grabow 2001).

Katz and Mair (1995) point to certain organisational reforms, which, crucially, they link to changes in wider social structure. The first concerns "professionalisation", with "politics as profession" becoming the "principal goal of politics", rather than, in earlier phases of party development, social reform or amelioration being parties' principle goal (Katz / Mair 1997: 110). Moreover, political competition is on the basis of "managerial skills and efficiency", and party politics is recognised as "a full-time career" (*ibid*: 116). Secondly, there is an important shift in the internal balance of power. Ostensibly, parties appear to become internally more "democratic", with a shift in power away from middle-ranking functionaries towards individual members (and members being treated as individuals rather than an organised body). In fact, because organisation amongst the mass of members is more difficult than amongst a network of functionaries, this can lead to what Webb (1994: 120, cited in Hopkin 2001: 351) terms "democratization as emasculation", where party leaderships in fact gain, rather than lose power. On a related point, the boundary between members and non-members will, according to Katz and Mair (1997: 109-113), be eroded. This might manifest itself in holding primaries involving non-members in candidate selection, or incorporating non-members into policy-development processes, or indeed campaigning. Accountability of elected politicians to the party members is weakened, and instead they are increasingly seen as accountable to the wider electorate. There may also be ideological consequences to such developments, if, as is often assumed, inactive party members are closer to the median voter than party activists (and indeed non-members are closer to the median voter than members) (Hopkin 2001: 351).

According to Katz and Mair (1997) here are two other features of the cartel party organisation which flow from the changed nature of parties' environment. The nature of election campaigning changes, with a shift towards "capital-intensive" approaches, with less need for the (reduced and sometimes disempowered) membership and activist base to be involved in labour-intensive campaign activity (*ibid*.: 113). Moreover, parties become less reliant, in this account, on members as a source of finance, instead relaying "increasingly for their resources on the subventions and other benefits and privileges which are afforded by the state" (*ibid*: 113). All this reinforces a tendency toward centralisation although Katz and Mair (1997: 114) note that there is still some advantage to parties in having local office-holders (in encouraging involvement and participation), provided these do not act as the basis for the "mobilisation of challenges" to the party leadership. Accordingly a "stratarchy" of mutually autonomous levels of party organisation is expected to emerge.

Other accounts acknowledge these environmental drivers of change but lay equal (if not more) emphasis on less amorphous sources of change (both endogenous and exogenous) and, indeed, on inertia in party organisations. Michels (1962) and his "iron law of oligarchy" of course stresses the likelihood of centralisation in party organisation, and this trend is also identified in Kirchheimer's work on the "catch-all party" (Kirchheimer 1966). Panebianco (1998: 264) sets out the model of the "electoral-professional party" which, in organisational terms at least, has much in common with the "cartel party" – equally emphasising the likelihood of the "central role of the professionals", the "appeal to the 'opinion electorate'", a "pre-eminence of the public representatives [in party organisation]", and "financing through interest

groups and public funds". However, unlike Katz and Mair, Panebianco is at pains to stress that there is no automatic move from a change in a party's environment to a change in its organisation:

> "The most persuasive hypothesis … is that organisational change is … the effect of an external stimulus (environmental and/or technological) which joins forces with internal factors which were themselves undermining the power structure. ... When *neither* environmental challenges *nor* internal preconditions are present, organizational change cannot take place." (Panebianco, 1998: 244, our emphasis).

Katz and Mair have also been criticised (for instance by Kitschelt, 2000) for having inadequate "microfoundations" (encompassing an explanation of actors' choices) for their theory of change. Meanwhile,Harmel and Janda contend party change does not "just happen" (1994: 261) in response to environmental pressures, and they stress that proponents of organisational change may face a "wall of resistance" (*ibid*: 261). Instead, Harmel and Janda emphasise the potential importance of "leadership change, a change of dominant faction within the party, and/or an external stimulus for change" (*ibid*: 262) – this external stimulus is a held often to take the form of a "shock", which is "so directly related to performance considerations on a party's 'primary goal' that it causes the party's decision-makers … to undertake a fundamental re-evaluation of the party's effectiveness on that goal dimension" (*ibid*.: 268). There is, then, no necessary link between a change in a party's environment and organisational change, unless that environmental change leads to a fundamental "shock" causing the party to question whether it can fulfil *its raison d'être*.

This paper will consider signficant attempts at reform in the UK Conservative Party and the German CDU. In particular, two expectations stemming from Katz and Mair's cartel party thesis will be considered:

1. Whether organisational reforms have led to a power shift in the parties. We might expect either <u>centralisation</u>, or alternatively the formation of a <u>stratarchy</u>, with mutually independent local and national elites.   A related but distinct issue is the role of leaderships, middle-level functionaries and members: as suggested above, we might expect to see a shift of power upwards towards leaderships and downwards towards members.

2. Whether there is evidence of <u>professionalisation</u> in the party, in terms of its organisation of campaigning and of its party careers, both in terms of career paths and goals, and also the organisation of the parties.

This paper will show that, in both cases, there is <u>some</u> evidence of those changes drawn from the environment in which political parties operate that we might expect from Katz and Mair's "cartel party" analysis. However, party organisational change is substantially shaped both by the differing institutional contexts but also, more broadly, by the fact that it is often a slow, messy and contingent process, with internal actors able to shape, and potentially to scupper reforms. As a result, accounts of party organisational development need to acknowledge two things. The

first is that a feedback loop exists between endogenous and exogenous drivers of change which means we have to do more than merely infer an almost automatic, isomorphic connection between environmental and party change. The second is that, in part because "parties are conservative organizations and resist change" (Harmel and Janda 1994: 248), change is therefore often punctuated and contingent rather than slow-burn and sure-fire. To recognise the latter is not, of course, to deny a role for path dependency. Indeed, the latter helps explain, for instance, why the Conservative Party has seen substantially more reform in recent years than has the CDU,. In fact, Harmel and Janda's claim that "propensity of a party to change is inversely related to party age" (*ibid*.: 282) can, on the basis of this analysis, be qualified: not only party age but also the degree to which a particular structure is embedded will shape the extent to which the organisation reforms. So, for instance, in the case of the CDU, the existence of decentralisation and powerful middle-ranking functionaries has a tendency to stymie the empowerment of individual members and of party HQ. As a result, we point to an almost paradoxical finding – the tragedy of party change if you like – namely that, in cases where incongruity with optimal organisational structure is greatest, and thus the greatest environmental pressure to depart from established structures exists, reforms are likely to be hardest to realise.

2. Organisational reforms in the UK Conservatives post-1997

a. Power shift in the Conservative Party?

Prior to 1998, the Conservative Party enjoyed a unique, "tripartite" organisational structure. The leader was chosen by the Conservative MPs, in a secret ballot, and (in theory at least) oversaw Conservative Central Office, with its professional staff. Located in the same building, the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations served as an "umbrella" for the many Constituency Associations, whose role included the selection of candidates for public office. The "party's" annual conference was convened by the National Union but had no formal (and very little informal) influence over the policies pursued by the leadership and, by extension, the parliamentary party (see Bale, 2012).

Under the newly-elected leader, William Hague, following their 1997 election defeat, the Conservatives set about organisational, rather than programmatic renewal, under the banner *Fresh Future*. In so doing, the were prompted both by the scale of the election defeat and the pent-up anger of grassroots members who felt they had been betrayed by disunited and sleazy MPs, as well as by a feeling that organisational reform was more pressing than programmatic reform, and would in any case be more readily achievable (Bale 2011: 74; Webb 2000: 195). *Fresh Future* fitted rather closely the twin expectations of centralisation of power with the party leadership and headquarters, on the one hand, and empowerment of individual members on the other. Individual members were to be given the chance to choose the Conservative Party's leader for the very first time, even if that choice were to be limited to deciding between two candidates chosen by ballot by the parliamentary party. At the same time, there were substantial elements of centralisation: for the first time, there would be a national membership list and, even more importantly the voluntary, professional and parliamentary sides of the party were brought together

into a single organisation; moreover, party headquarters was afforded new rights to both set goals (for instance, with regard to membership and fundraising) and take action against recalcitrant local associations (Bale 2011: 75). Local associations, however, gained no real say over policy,. In a final flourish confirming the role of individual members, the final decision upon the new structure was referred to a one-member, one-vote ballot amongst party members, which came out overwhelmingly in favour of reform.

Nonetheless, there were some difficulties in the implementation of the *Fresh Future* reforms. For instance, although one motivation of the reforms was to increase the flow of resources to the party's headquarters from associations, attempts by the centre to approach local members directly for cash were rebuffed by associations, leaving the party's headquarters (not for the first time!) substantially overdrawn and delaying investment in IT (Bale 2011: 76-7). In addition, following the election of another unsuitable and unsuccessful leader, Iain Duncan Smith, in 2001, the Conservatives again reviewed their procedures for electing a leader, anxious following a third successive election defeat in 2005 that members (potentially more remote from the median voter than Conservative parliamentarians) should not lumber the party with another loser. Specifically, the leadership (under pressure from the parliamentary party) proposed that the choice of leader would once again become the exclusive property of the party's MPs, who would only be obliged to consult their constituency associations. This proposal – which was combined with a number of other organisational changes widely seen to favour the elite over ordinary members – sparked a backlash from some MPs, from the Party's former Chief Executive, and marked the beginning of the now extraordinarily influential *Conservative Home* website as self-styled spokesman for the Tory grassroots (Bale 2011: 266). The rule change failed to gain the required two-thirds majority in the "National Convention" (of representatives of Conservative Associations).

As a result, the Party's new leader was elected at the end of 2005 under the system established in 1998. That system did not, however, prevent the election of a so-called 'moderniser' and, nor, since the Fresh Future reforms had never placed any limitations on the ability of whoever was chosen as leader to decide policy, did it prevent the successful candidate, David Cameron, setting about a programme of policy renewal - one that, in fact, fits neatly with Katz and Mair's expectations of centrally-steered policy development, which is then ratified, in a plebiscitary fashion, by party members. A vague statement of the party's modernised values that would apparently inform the policy specifics still to come, *Built to Last*, was put to the membership in 2006, and was duly affirmed by an overwhelming majority, albeit on an embarrassingly unenthusiastic turnout of just 27% (Bale 2011: 313).Cameron also proposed changes to the Party's candidate selection procedure. Until 2005, local Conservative associations were essentially free to choose from a long list of candidates approved by the centre. Cameron instead insisted on the following changes:

- A "priority list", popularly known as the "A-list" of candidates was created (as a sub-set of the previous national list, which comprised 50% women and 20% candidates from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and in particular at early stages of the selections of more promising seats, Associations were required to choose a candidate from this list (Parliament 2010; Wigbers 2012);

- Holding an "open primary", whereby all self-declared Conservative supporters could attend and vote upon the candidate to be chosen from the final shortlist declared by the local association, became a requirement for Conservative Associations with under 300 members, and became an option for others (Wigbers 2012);

These reforms, including the creation of the "priority list" reflected a clear desire to increase the diversity of the Parliamentary Party, but in doing so it quite controversially eroded the autonomy of the leading functionaries in local Conservative Associations in several ways: first, Conservative Central Office, in offering to local associations a far smaller pool of candidates to choose from, was in practice able to steer the composition of the types of candidate chosen far more tightly. Moreover, the hurdle for a local "favoured son" in a promising constituency would be significantly higher, as not only would he be required to be accepted onto the approved list, but he would also have to meet the far higher bar of inclusion upon the priority list. Finally, at the "long-listing" stage of selecting a candidate, subtle pressure was applied upon local association members (with even David Cameron apparently dropping by on occasion: Bale 2011, 301), and indeed, for some selections closer to the General Election, the final shortlist was agreed jointly between Conservative Central Office and the local association (Parliament 2010: Ev 445).

It was the priority list which proved most controversial (Bale 2011: 301-2) Criticism came from members with a strong belief that Conservative candidates needed local connections to the constituencies they contested, from defenders of the autonomy of local associations and from those who (perhaps because they were meritocrats, perhaps because they were sexist, or perhaps because they were aspiring candidates worried about losing out) were opposed to what they dubbed a 'politically correct' move to get more women into the parliamentary party (see Childs and Webb, 2011) . In practice, in the run-up to the 2010 election, there was a constant tussle for power over candidate selection between Conservative Central Office and local associations – and, although the resulting process certainly reflected a substantial centralisation in power, there had to be some compromise, the leadership deciding in January 2007, for instance, that associations could choose from the bigger approved list rather than the Priority List but that women should make up half the places on their final shortlists Perhaps surprisingly given experience elsewhere, the insistence upon open primaries proved less contentious, because pilots were held prior to the 2005 election in a handful of constituencies but also perhaps because membership of the Conservative Party has traditionally operated on something of a sliding scale, with an accent on social rather than political, card-carrying participation . Prior to the 2010 election, primaries were held in 116 cases, and 48 of those candidates were elected to the House of Commons (Wigbers 2012). In two cases, the primary took the format of a postal ballot to all registered electors. Although local functionaries still remained in charge of the shortlist in these cases, the final decision was placed to a limited extent (in the case of primaries held at a meeting) and a large extent (in the case of the two all-postal primaries) outside the control of local members, neatly conforming to Katz and Mair's expectations.

It might have been anticipated that, with the introduction of devolved political institutions in 1998 (with first elections taking place in 1999), there would be a

measure of decentralisation introduced into Conservative Party organisation in Scotland and Wales. Initially, however, this only happened to a very limited degree (Fabre, 2008), almost certainly because the party north of the border had a long history of autonomy anyway while legislative and executive devolution in Wales (where the party was fully integrated with that in England) was in any case much more limited Following the Conservatives' poor showing in Scotland in the 2010 election, the Sanderson Report (Scottish Conservatives, 2010) argued for some organisational reforms, including, most significantly, the direct election of a leader of the Scottish Conservatives on a One-Member, One-Vote basis. The creation of this potentially powerful post therefore represents some decentralisation in response to the "environmental" pressure of a change in political institutions. Indeed, the change might have gone even further had not the resulting election seen the defeat of Murdo Fraser, who had argued for the creation of a completely autonomous Scottish Conservative Party (but one whose MPs would take the Conservative whip at Westminster) (BBC 2011).

   b. *Professionalisation in the Conservative Party?*

From 1997 onwards, there was some a shift towards professionalisation in the Conservatives' campaigning operation. Turnover in Conservative Central Office reflected a desire to reshape it into a "modern political communications outfit" (Bale 2011: 78) although the increased involvement of 'outsiders' can be overdone since the Conservatives had for decades used external advertising agencies, contracted consultants and pollsters to advise on campaigning. The Party faced clear pressures to draw upon "capital-intensive" campaigning methods of the sort envisaged by Katz and Mair, since a party membership with an average age of over 60 in the mid-1990s (Bale 2011: 405) might struggle to deliver energetic grassroots campaigning. Prior to the 2005 election, the party purchased "Voter Vault" software (inspired by the US Republicans), layering demographic data upon the electoral register (Denham / O'Hara 2007: 183), and Fisher and Denver found a start up-swing in levels of "modernisation" in election campaigning (using such technologies as telephone canvassing and direct mail), although there was also an increase, for the 2005, in more traditional forms of campaign activity (Fisher / Denver 2009: 199-201). The party also made substantial attempts to improve its web presence (Bale 2011).

However, the most significant (if initially slow) improvement after 1997 – in part prompted by pressure by advisers like the Australian Lynton Crosby and Lord Ashcroft – was in local organisation. Pattie and Johnston note that, over time, the organisational reforms designed to maximise the party's number of seats at election time appeared to bear fruit: whereas in 1997 and 2001, nearly as much money was spent in "safe" as in "marginal" constituencies, suggesting misplaced effort due to the intransigence of local members, in 2005 this had started to change, with campaigning expenditure suggesting a more rational allocation of resources (Pattie / Johnston 2009: 419); this process appeared to have continued into 2010 (Pattie / Johnston 2010: 501). Given that a great deal of the resources thrown at marginal constituencies came in the form of call-centres and targeted communications rather than doorknocking by dogged local activists. – The start of this shift occurred outside CCHQ: Lord Ashcroft's operation was before 2005 a private one and a thorn in the side of a leadership (a leadership in which he had no confidence). Under

David Cameron, Lord Ashcorft was persuaded to become an integral part of the Conservative Campaign Head Quarters, and thus the change in the nature of campaigning has to be seen as part of rather than in contradistinction to the professionalised, centralised operation predicted by Katz and Mair.

The types of candidates selected and elected by the Conservatives were not radically different from their immediate predecessors, (Bale 2011: 302), almost certainly continuing the trend toward a 'political class' identified across Europe (see Cotta and Best, 2007). That said, the money spent on getting them there came from private not public sources – one aspect, at least in which the Conservatives (and other British parties) depart markedly, and perhaps not unexpectedly (Detterbeck, 2005), from the cartel party model.

c. Summary

Overall, there is indeed some evidence in the UK's Conservative Party of change in response to environmental pressures, as Katz and Mair anticipated. The evidence is strongest for suggestions that power has shifted upwards towards the party leadership (seen as a collective rather than as an individual – the latter, after all, has always been preeminent), and downwards towards individual members and away from activists, as well as some blurring of the boundary between members and non-members. This shift started with the *Fresh Future* reforms of 1998, and was particularly evident in changes to candidate selection processes introduced after David Cameron's election as party leader in 2005,leading to a noticeable increase (albeit from a low base) in the proportion of female and BME Conservative MPs,). When it comes to professionalisation, too, there is evidence of a steady switch towards capital-intensive campaigning focused upon constituencies where it is most needed. Outside professionals continued to be drawn upon by the party when needed to support campaigns, and most of those elected continued, unsurprisingly, to have begun their political careers with the party early on, either as local representatives, researchers and advisors, or both.

Nonetheless, even in this case developments should not be regarded as unequivocal confirmation of Katz and Mair's assumption of environmental isomorphism. First of all, the two biggest sets of changes (the *Fresh Future* reforms and reforms to candidate selection) occurred straight after election defeats and were immediately pursued by a newly-elected party leader. This therefore offers strong support to Harmel and Janda's claim that contingency and agency are also important in understanding party change, and in particular suggests they are right to focus on change in the party's leadership. After all, it took three election defeats before there was a substantial erosion of local associations' power over candidate selection, pointing to considerable reluctance by party leaders to confront local functionaries. When centralising reforms to candidate selection were brought about, they proved highly controversial and difficult to realise, requiring significant investment of the leader's political capital, and an ongoing negotiation and renegotiation between the levels of the party. The structural resistance of party organisation to change which Harmel and Janda anticipated. was also evidenced by the defeat of proposals to reform the selection process for the party leader proposed in 2005. More generally,

the case of the UK does not support Katz and Mair's expectations of increased state funding. In short, there was organisational transformation in the direction anticipated, but it was partial, punctuated rather than steady,, and blocked in some areas, testifying to the slow and contingent nature of party change.

3. Organisational reforms in the German CDU post 1998

a. Power shift in the CDU?

The formal structure of the CDU have remained substantially unaltered since the 1960s, and indeed formally appears to bear many of the hallmarks of Katz and Mair's characterisation of the "mass party" (Katz / Mair 2007: 95). The lowest level of organisation is the branch, or *Ortsverband*, of which there are over 11,000. This is followed by the level of the District, or *Kreis*, which is the lowest level of the organisation enjoying some constitutional and financial autonomy. In some, larger states (or Länder), there is an intermediate level (termed a *Bezirksverband*) before the level of the state party, the *Landesverband*, which exists in fifteen of Germany's sixteen states (the CDU does not organise in Bavaria, where instead its sister party, the CSU, represents Christian Democracy). Representatives of the *Kreis- , Bezirks-* and *Landesverbände* between them elect the 1,001 representatives of the federal conference, which itself elects the party leader and other office holders, a "core executive" (termed the *Präsidium*), and the large and rather unwieldy party executive committee, which includes those in the *Präsidium*, and at least 26 further members. Alongside these structures, there are various affiliated interest groups within the CDU, such as those representing working-class members, business people, women, young people, lesbians and gay men, and those with a background in the formerly German territories in eastern and central Europe (Koecke / Sieben 2010).

Importantly, the picture of the CDU's organisation which emerges is not one of mutually independent layers, but rather one where there are significant linkages between the different levels: for instance, CDU Minister Presidents of each state are often represented in the *Präsidium* in their own right, while all chairs of each *Landesverband* attend the party's executive – so the organisation is interlocking, rather than a stratarchy (Schmid 2008: 72). Indeed, it is this feature which has allowed political parties to often serve as an important forum to mediate conflicts within the Federal Republic of Germany (Lehmbruch 2003).

Since the 1998 election defeat, internal reforms to the CDU have been far more modest in character than in the case of the British Conservative Party. The most significant changes went the banner of the *Bürgerpartei* ("Citizens' Party") project of 2003, when a commission led by the then General-Secretary (and thus head of the party's organisation, answerable between conferences to the party leader), Laurenz Meyer, proposed some changes to the party's conference (CDU 2003). The introduction to the proposals sounded radical: "In the modern citizens' society, the CDU has to secure its future as a people's party, even under the constantly changing conditions of social-structural change and modern communication" (*ibid*.: 1). However, in practice the changes proposed were extremely modest: even such

proposals as limiting the number of offices an individual could hold were defeated in the run-up to the conference (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2003).

The *Bürgerpartei* changes did, however, introduce one substantive change, which fits with Katz and Mair's expectations: there some encouragement given to party units to extend participation in candidate selection. Previously, party units had a free choice whether to involve all members in candidate selection, or just delegates; the *Bürgerpartei* reforms allow them to retain this choice (while encouraging all-member involvement), but they allow 25% of the members of a party district, or branches to convene a meeting to change the method of selection (CDU 2003: 10). This has now been introduced, though by no means universally: according to a senior CDU official, some 60% of party units now involve all members in candidate selection, rather than just delegates (Interview, June 2011). In Germany's mixed-member electoral system, too, some MPs are elected from the party list rather than by direct election, decisions on the composition of the party list are decided upon by conferences of delegates, based upon extensive preparatory discussions and negotiations by party functionaries, and not by all members. Even where all members are involved, in practice there is every chance they will be presented with a *fait accompli*, with a particular candidate certain to win as a result of prior negotiations (Wigbers 2012). In each case, the whip hand is held by party functionaries below the national level: in the case of decisions upon individual constituencies, the relevant *Kreisverband* chair and executive is decisive, while in the case of state lists, negotiations are conducted within the state party (though paying careful attention to geographical balance, and thus closely involving the level or levels below).

The changes also offered some encouragement to involve members in all-member ballots on both personnel decisions (typically the choice of a leading candidate or a Land-level party chair) – a possibility which already existed – and also, in a new proposal, on policy matters. The hurdle for such an initiative is set high, with one third of party units needing to request such a ballot, and the majority of the executive of the relevant level then agreeing (CDU 2003: 11), so in practice decisions upon when to involve all members are taken by functionaries at each level. There has, to date, been no involvement of all members in taking policy decisions, while elites have carried out an all-member ballot to determine party office-holders only very sporadically: typically when there is a stalemate situation, the elite has no preference, or where there is a risk of grave internal conflict (Jun 2009: 187).

The text of the *Bürgerpartei* document emphasised, at great length, how non-members should be encouraged to be involved in party decisions, arguing for opening rather than a "closed shop", (CDU 2003: 6), and encouraging less discussion of constitutional mattes so that party conferences become more interesting (*ibid*: 7). However, in practice there has, to date, been no substantive involvement of non-members in decisions upon party policy, and there has been no interest in opening candidate selection processes to non-members.

There are other areas, too, where the CDU's resistance to change appears to confound Katz and Mair's expectations. In terms of resourcing, analysis of the party's accounts, as submitted to the *Bundestag* authorities each year, shows that the proportion of expenditure by the party centrally is just 29%, with 20% being spent

at the level of the *Landesverbände*, and the remaining 51% being spent below that level (Bundestag 2011); levels of central expenditure have been falling, rather than rising (Feser 2010). Staffing is also decentralised, and in fact there has been a <u>reduction</u> in staffing at the party's headquarters, as a result of a party finance scandal, in the period since the 1998 election (Bösch, 2005: 180).

Sub-national party units, and in particular the *Kreisverbände*, have been careful to safeguard the autonomy in other ways, too. For instance, the CDU decentralises its membership administration to this level, rather than retaining a national register, in spite of the obvious economies of scale this might offer; fundraising has also been almost completely left to the *Kreisverbände*, with the result that some do not pull their weight. Campaign organisation, too, is substantially decentralised. In state elections, the national party plays a supporting role, not a leadership one, while in federal elections the campaign at the level of the constituencies remains decentralised: there is the "offer" of central support, but there is no central direction as such (Interview with CDU official, June 2011).

b. Professionalisation of the CDU?

The visitor to the CDU's splendid glass headquarters in central Berlin, the Konrad-Adenauer-Haus, would perhaps gain the impression of a seriously modern organisation. However, in practice, although this level of the party is indeed highly professionalised, the decentralisation and fiercely-guarded autonomy of the sub-national units (in particular the party districts), in such areas as campaigning, fundraising, and membership administration means that very substantial boundaries are set to such professionalisation.

Outside agencies are now routinely involved in the design of campaign slogans, advertising materials and the like, in campaigns at all levels of the party (Interview CDU federal official, June 2011; Interview CDU *Landesverband* official, June 2011). The federal party also developed a so-called *Citizen-Relationship-Management* programme, which contains a database of policy enquiries and other contact with the party from the general public, and allows for the creation of standardised responses and subsequent follow-up in future campaigns. As the name implies, this draws upon the *Customer Relationship Management* now common amongst companies and public sector organisations (Schröder / Neumann: 2010). It is now the case that most (although not all) *Landesverbände* are linked into this system, and it has, in the view of the party HQ, proved extremely useful (Interview, CDU federal official, June 2011).

This professionalisation at the central level is not always reflected beneath the national level. In particular, the central party HQ has to see itself as making an 'offer' to the sub-national units, especially the *Kreisverbände*, but it is up to them whether they take up the offer. Some do, but many don't: for instance, when a web programme to allow the easy and cheap creation of party websites (fitting the CDU's corporate identify) was set up, take-up was around 20%. Similarly, a wide range of courses is offered by the party's HQ, for instance in training candidates, sharing campaigning best practice or assisting with web design: these are often over-subscribed, but in practice the same *Kreisverbände* take up the offer, with a high proportion not engaging. Staff at the party HQ have to be acutely sensitive to any

perception of trying to engage in hostile 'take-overs' of sub-national units, and need to respect their autonomy; in some cases, this prevents reform for which the functional case might otherwise be compelling. This sets significant boundaries to professionalisation. Limits on the use of technology are also placed by the German historical context: in particular, commercially available databases with personal information have not been used for political campaigning as widely as might have been expected (Interview, CDU federal official, June 2011).

In terms of the professionalisation in political career paths, there appears to be some evidence for this, although again the point should not be over-stated. As early as 1997, Saalfeld claimed that "There is little doubt in the literature that politics in Germany has increasingly become a professional career" (Saalfeld, 1997: 33). For a career as a CDU parliamentarian, a long-standing period of party membership is near to being a prerequisite: It is no surprise that Gruber finds that over 40% of senior CDU politicians had joined the party by the age of 20, rising to 70% by the age of 30 (if politicians born in the former GDR were taken out, these figures would presumably be higher) (Gruber 2007). By contrast, there are increasing possibilities for young party members to forge a career path without a great deal of engagement with the broad mass of party members, and instead moving from university (perhaps with involvement in a political youth organisation) into a ministry or another part of the executive (Interview, Chair of CDU interest association, June 2011)

Some further evidence for professionalisation concerns the level of education of politicians, compared to the broad mass of party members. Gruber finds that over 90% of top German politicians are educated to university level, rising to nearly 94% amongst younger MPs (*ibid*: 7). This is significantly higher than amongst the wider CDU membership, where 46% has done at least Abitur and / or been to university (Neu 2009: 165), and the contrast with branch executive committees is even stronger (Spier 2010).

c. Summary

This short analysis of the CDU has provided even clearer evidence than that of the British Conservatives to the slow and contingent nature of party organisational change. Notwithstanding the changes in the environment in which German parties operate (and also the shock of election defeats), organisational centralisation is barely visible: instead, the power of sub-national units of the organisation appears very firmly entrenched. Moreover, there is no real sense of a "stratarchy" of mutually independent elites being created: rather, there are important inter-locking mechanisms which mean that the party's core executive committee has substantial representation from those representing the level of the Länder. Nor has power shifted radically to members: in terms of candidate selection, there has been only a modest shift towards power shifting form functionaries to members (and in practice members may formally end up "ratifying" a decision which has long since been taken by local functionaries); in terms of other internal decisions, the mass of members are only involved in decisions when it is in the interests of elites to involve them.

There are some trends towards professionalisation of the CDU, both in terms of its party organisation and its career paths. However, in the case of its organisation, this

process is substantially restricted by decentralised nature of the party organisation. In both cases, it might almost be appropriate to discern parallel structures: on the one hand, there is a highly professionalised party headquarters, leadership and senior parliamentary party, and on the other hand a network of district parties with a radically different, far less professionalised *modus operandi*.

Webb (2000: 195) makes the point that the Conservative Party leader William Hague appeared to focus upon organisational renewal because, compared to programmatic reform, it was "a somewhat less thorny nettle to grasp". In the case of the CDU, the opposite might be the case: the party leadership has, in particular since re-entering government in 2005, had to take the party's grassroots on a long and contentious journey towards the ideological centre ground, leaving no political capital spare for the modernisation of party structures.

4. Conclusions

Notwithstanding the different contexts, the picture that emerges from the examination of our two cases is that party organisational change of the sort envisaged by Katz and Mair by no means simply flows from an environmental stimulus. In the case of the Conservative Party, there was some power shift – both upwards to the leadership, and downwards towards all members – away from local functionaries. However, in the cases of the most major sets of reforms (pursued after the 1997 and 2005 elections), the endogenous condition of a change of leadership, following the "external shock" of an electoral defeat, was required, and in each case, rather than a simple transfer of power, there emerged significant compromise and a period of tense contestation of power between the different levels of the party. In the case of the CDU, there is almost no evidence of centralisation in organisational power away from local functionaries towards party leaders; there has been a modest transfer of power from local functionaries towards individual members in the field of candidate selection, but this is not replicated in other aspects of the party's organisation.

Interestingly, in the case of the Conservatives, experiments with primary elections have seen some marginal blurring of the boundaries between members and non-members – and with relatively little resistance, albeit some grumbling. Within the CDU, formal involvement of non-members in candidate selection would not conform with German party law, but in any case has not been proposed by party leaderships, and exhortations to involve non-members in party activity more widely do not appear to have been heeded. There is, however, evidence In both parties, of professionalisation in campaign activity. However, especially with the CDU but also the Conservatives to some degree, this has occurred outside, rather than within, the existing local organisational structures. This points to another, important possibility for party organisations, namely that a first response to environmental pressures to professionalise may result not be internal adaptation but the creation (often contested) of alternative, professional structures with an appropriate functional shift – be that in handling communications at the party's headquarters, or arranging telephone campaigning: indeed, this may be the only way in which such modernisation is viable.

In the case of the Conservative Party, both major reforms came about immediately after – and indeed as a result of – a change, just as Harmel and Janda (1994) anticipated: in this case, at least, there appears to be a "window of opportunity" presented to undertake organisational reform. In the case of the CDU, however, notwithstanding two changes of leader (as well as "external shocks" of election defeats, and of course the environmental pressures for change), new leaders either did not discern, or did not take advantage of, such a window. As a result, Panebianco's (1988) claim that party organisational reform will not happen if neither exogenous nor endogenous prerequisites are present appears under-stated. Actually, there is no more an automatic link between leadership change and organisational reform, than there is between environmental pressures for change and change itself. In understanding the way parties mediate pressures for change, these cases do appear to suggest that a certain "path dependence" is present. In the case of the Conservative Party, for instance, the relative openness to primaries participation may well reflect the fact that activism among Tories was traditionally more social and inclusive than overtly political and based on big distinctions between card-carrying members and the rest. In Germany, the powerful decentralising forces in the CDU's organisation account for the slowness and difficulty of party organisational reform.

In a range of areas, then, Katz and Mair's clear and parsimonious predictions about the way in which party organisations will respond to environmental pressures for change seem to be confirmed. However, once one scratches beneath the surface, change is an altogether more complicated, contingent, slower and messier process than their account would suggest. As Harmel and Janda stress, change doesn't just happen. It can only come about through the action (and interaction) of events and people, by no means all of whom have to be the 'great men' who go down in history. Both scholars, and would-be political reformers underestimate the ability of internal actors both to thwart and drive change by exercising agency, and indeed political power, at their peril.

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5. Bibliography

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