

City government and public services in Antwerp, 1500-1800

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Introduction

The government of pre-modern European cities had a broad range of functions, which it fulfilled in a relatively autonomous way. They had to provide jurisdiction, regulations of economic life, administration maintain the public order and to organize the public space, that is the streets, squares bridges and public buildings¹. By and by it increasingly provided services to the urban community, including the provision of economic infrastructure, poor relief, teaching, and health services. The city was, however not the exclusive provider of such services. Many remained in private hands or were managed by ecclesiastic organisations, craft guilds or fraternities. Hence, poor relief was generally in the hand of ecclesiastic organisations, while craft guilds provided social security for their members and their families. The city government regularly sustained these associations by means of subsidies, and provided regulations, without however mingeling with the actual work of the providers. The central state appeared only very late as a provider of public services. While it remained rather absent in this field during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its activities in the domains of poor relief, teaching and health care became more frequent from the eighteenth century onwards. In this paper the public finances and the ordinances of the city governments of Antwerp, a major commercial centre of the Low Countries during the early modern period, will be analysed in function of the degree of the expenses for and the involvement in public services. By analysing samples from the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a long-term evolution in the involvement of the urban government in different fields of public services shall be highlighted.

Urban public services in the Old order – a general survey

In the sixteenth century, Antwerp was depicted by visitors and inhabitants as a highly organised and well provided city. Especially its commercial infrastructure was exceptionally well developed. For many it was the place to be in 16th- century Europe.

Lodovico Guicciardini, the author of the most detailed and most thoroughly researched description of 16th-century Antwerp was particularly impressed by the port which he called one of the most practical ones in the world, the new town hall and the great commercial buildings of the city. The most impressive and also most expensive building however were the new, so-called Spanish, fortifications, which were built between 1542 and 1562, and which included a new commercial city extension, called the Nieuwstad. Antwerp therefore can be seen as a standard for urban public services in the sixteenth centuries. It is therefore tempting to find out what the major services were and who were the major providers as well as the beneficiaries. Especially the role of the local authority, the town magistrate, which should become the major provider of public services from the nineteenth century on, will be highlighted.

Urban government during the middle ages and the early modern period included different fields of activity: political and legislative authority, defence, financial and economic organisation, particularly market organisation, religious organisation and education, the maintenance of public order and jurisdiction². In Antwerp, the aldermen were responsible for the jurisdiction within the city and in the urban district as well as the administration, public services and public works. They also issued decrees or ordinances concerning various aspects of urban life, among which the fields of jurisdiction, the organisation of public space, social policy and economic policy predominated³. Particular tasks were those of police and fire-prevention. Two of the aldermen had to run the prison, one functioned as commissioner of the schools and two had to act as commissioners of the mint. One had to take the function of governor of the city gunpowder and munition⁴. The former aldermen also had functions such as directors of the orphanage, the hospital, aldermen of the cloth hall, dikegrave of the *Watermolenbrug*, different courts of jurisdiction, and masters of

¹ D. Nicholas, *Urban Europe. 1100-1700*, London, 2003.

² E. Isenmann, *Die Deutsche Stadt im Spätmittelalter, 1250-1500*, Stadtgestalt, Recht, Stadtregiment, Kirche, Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft, Stuttgart, 1988, pp. 131-198, K. Gerteis, *Die deutschen Städte der frühen Neuzeit. Zur Vorgeschichte der bürgerlichen Welt*, Darmstadt, 1986, p. 87f., cit. in Knittler, Herbert Knittler, *Die europäische Stadt der frühen Neuzeit. Institutionen, Strukturen, Entwicklungen*, Wien, München, 2000 (Querschnitte 4), p. 124 – van Uytven, 1991, p.25).

³ M. 't Hart and M. Limberger, *Antwerp and Amsterdam: The Autonomy of the Metropolis Vis-à-vis the Central State, 1530-1830*. Paper to be Presented at the Conference on Metropolis and State in Early Modern Europe (c.1400-1800) , London, 27–28 March 2006.

⁴ F. Prims, *Geschiedennis van Antwerpen*, vol. II/1, p.72-73, G. Van den Broeck, *De Antwerpse magistratuur, 1675-1699. een bijdrage tot de institutionele en sociale Geschiedenis* (unpublished MA thesis) Gent, 1980, 197-201.

church-fabrics. Furthermore they had to carry out the control of measures, weights, public markets, building of public buildings. According to R. van Uytven the city cared for the welfare of its citizens, however more through ordinances and regulations, rather by active intervention. The actual execution of public services was left to individuals. Hence, fire-prevention was the task of all inhabitants. Wells, dikes and roads had to be maintained by the community. Also schools were run by religious institutions, or foundations of craft guilds or individuals. Even services as the control of measures and weights, official transport services and tax collection were generally leased out. The intervention of the city consisted therefore more in the organisation and regulation of public life than actually providing services⁵.

Jurisdiction

The city had a high degree of autonomy in the field of jurisdiction. Although the major legal officers, the schout (sheriff) and the amman, were ducal officers, the aldermen were in the first place judges. The aldermen were responsible for civil as well as for criminal justice in the city. It was however the legal officers had to care for the execution of the sentences, and therefore had several officers at their service as well as the hangman. Also the jail was part of the ducal demesne. Besides the general law courts the city had specific courts, such as the court of the cloth hall, where disputes between cloth merchants were settled, the peiskamer, a law court dealing with minor infractions, and the weeskamer dealing with the concerns of orphans⁶. Furthermore the aldermen were responsible for the registration of all kinds of transactions, a function that was gradually taken over by notaries, although official registration of real estate transactions remained obligatory until the end of the Old Regime.

Public order and security

The organisation of public security resided under the so-called police-chamber, which included also health control, market-police, the control of measures and weights, and

⁵ R. Van Uytven, *Burgerrecht en stedelijke instellingen*, in *Stad in Vlaanderen. Cultuur en maatschappij, 1477-1787*, J. Van der Stock, ed., Gemeentekrediet, Brussel 1991, pp. 19-29. and *Idem*, *Stedelijke openbare diensten te Leuven tijdens het Ancien Régime*, in: *Het Openbaar initiatief van de gemeenten in België. Historische grondslagen (Ancien Régime)*. Handelingen van het 11^e Internationaal Colloquium, Spa, 1-4 sept. 1982, pp. 22-43.

⁶ The jurisdiction of the cloth hall and the peiskamer were abolished in 1681. Boumans, *Antwerps stadsbestuur*, p. 148-154.

building regulations. The actual police function was executed by a mere four agents, the called 'korte roeden'. A specific function of the police chamber was the removal of refuse. This was the task of the *moosmeier*, a service that was leased out. In the eighteenth century this service worked with 10 carts with horses and 15 in the winter. The domestic refuse to the quai from where it was shipped to the countryside as fertilizer. Cesspits were emptied by a special service with another 15 workers exclusively by night and also transported to the country. Furthermore there was a cart collecting rubble and six women to sweep the markets.⁷ Fire prevention was also coordinated by the aldermen, more specifically six among them who acted as *brandmeesters* (fire-masters). They had to see if the ordinances concerning fire prevention were respected. For the actual extinction of fire, 26 voluntary *putmeesters* were recruited among the citizens. They had to direct the extinguishing work and had to control the material, leather buckets, ladders and pumps, which were provided by the city⁸. Furthermore, there were 12 fire-guards who toured the streets of the city during the night. In financial terms the expenses for these services were almost neglectable and consisted mainly in the salaries of the town-officials.

Economic policy

The economic policy of the city government can be divided into three major fields: local market policy, commercial policy and industrial policy. The city authorities were morally responsible for guaranteeing the prosperity of the community and its inhabitants. The most basic task consisted in the provision of food for a fair price. The aim of urban regulations was to avoid high food prices by forbidding grain merchants or millers, to buy and resell grain at high prices before the larger public had a chance to buy directly from the producer. Therefore, all grain had to pass through the market place, and be offered first to the common citizens, before millers, bakers and grain merchants were allowed to buy the remainder.⁹ Within the city magistrate there was a responsible official for urban market policy, the *keurmeester*. Originally the function was a ducal office. Only in 1561 the city bought the office. He had to fix the bread

⁷ J.F.Mertens and K.L.Torfs, *Geschiedenis van Antwerpen sedert de stichting der stad tot onze tyden*, 7 vols., Antwerpen, 1845-1853, III p.148.

⁸ Boumans, *Antwerpse stadsbestuur*, p. 155-161.

⁹ M. Limberger, *Sixteenth-century Antwerp and its Rural Surroundings. Social and Economic Changes in the Hinterland of a Commercial Metropolis (ca. 1450 – ca. 1570)*(Studies in European

prices and to prevent fraud and speculation. He also had to control the compliance of the rules concerning the market, transport, building and public space. There were also special *keurmeesters* for herring, hop, lime, stone, soap and hay. *Ijkers* and *roeiers* were to control the measures.

The commercial activity in the city was a central issue for the urban authorities. The city government tried to accumulate royal privileges and to obtain a high degree of autonomy in order to control the economy of the city by herself¹⁰. The city spent high amounts to get control over roads, tolls and the ferry over the river Scheldt in order to provide a favorable commercial environment. Throughout the sixteenth century the city invested heavily in the commercial infrastructure, like the building of warehouses, the port etc. Among these buildings, the Stock Exchange, built in 1531, the *Oosterlingenshuis* (Hanse House), built 1564-68, the *Hessenhuis* (1562-64), and the *Tapissierspand* (1551-52) and the *Juwelierspand* (1565), the Mint and the balance (1547-48) are to be mentioned. In 1544 the city government bought the building of the former van Liere residence and gave it to the English merchant adventurers. During the construction of the Nieuwstad, major works were made to improve the port infrastructure¹¹. These constructions had to be financed through loans, which led to a huge urban debt weighing heavily on the urban finances throughout the 17th and 18th centuries¹².

Finally, city governments were involved in industrial policy, mainly through the intervention of the craft guilds. The economic and social policy of the city was the responsibility of the aldermen together with the Monday Council, a council including particularly the urban craft guilds¹³. The city government also provided subsidies for new industries.¹⁴ Since the fifteenth century, cities tried to attract new industries by granting privileges to craftsmen and organising monopolies. Proposals were

Urban History, 13) *forthcoming*, p. 36. See also S.L. KAPLAN, *Provisioning Paris, merchants and millers in the grain and flour trade during the eighteenth century*, Ithaca, 1984, especially Chapter 1.

10 Goris, p. 3-4

11 Lombaerde, in *Achievements*.

12 M. Limberger, Private money, urban finance and the state: Antwerp in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Paper presented at the 14th International Economic History Congress, Helsinki, 2006, Session 13: Citizens, Money and Urban Governments in Northern Europe in the Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Era.

13 Boumans, *Antwerpse stadsbestuur*, p. 19-38.

14 Génard, *Anvers à travers les ages*, vol I, p. 458.

thoroughly analysed and judged on their potential success¹⁵. In the late seventeenth century, clothmakers should be attracted by building a fulling- mill. This mill was leased out. The city was however responsible for the maintainance of the mill¹⁶.

Poor relief

Poor relief was organised within the chamber of the poor, a centralized, secular institution, which was however not part of the city government. The Chamber of the poor was founded in 1459, which made Antwerp one of the first cities in the Low Countries to start centralized relief. It did not abolish the other poor tables. In 1531, emperor Charles Vth ordered that all charitable resources be placed in a common fund. This had been claimed before by the chamber of the poor. The city council was reluctant to this measure and endorsed it only in 1541. Only in 1557, after a trial in the council of Brabant, the magistrate had to cede and centralize poor relief. In 1612, the city opened a house of correction (tuchthuis) an institution where vagrants were put for forced labour. Similar houses of correction were opened during that period in other places of the Low Countries, such as in Amsterdam, Brussels, or Haarlem¹⁷. The poor chamber was directed by four almoners who were elected among the citizens. The function of almoner involved a great financial responsibility, which made that candidates tried their best to avoid being elected. The incomes came mainly via donations during mass, processions, weddings etc. from gift-boxes and from bequests. Furthermore, the poor chamber sold the products made by orphans and foundlings in the respective institutions and the property of deceded poor. Finally, from 1648 on it received part of the beer excises, i.e. 6 stuivers, per barrel. The services it provided contained poor relief, the maintainance of poor prisoners in the urban jail, and the payment of the wages of teachers, doctors, surgeons and nurses in the hospices.

Also craft guilds organised a system of poor relief for their members. The members had to contribute for a special fund, which served to pay money or food gifts for poor

¹⁵ Goris p. 9.

¹⁶ Pk. 1733: Magistraatboek 1673-74, 15 april 1674.

¹⁷ O. Zeller, *La ville moderne*, in: J.L. Pinol, ed., *Histoire de l'Europe Urbaine, I De l'antiquité au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, 2003, pp. 595-858, 840 f.

members and to establish residences for old guild brothers¹⁸. Furthermore there were foundations by individuals.

Only in the late eighteenth century, this traditional system was reformed. The central government of the Austrian Netherlands had published an ordinance in 1765 in which poor relief was made subject to a stricter control. Begging was forbidden and healthy poor were obliged to work. This system responded to the demand of the industry for cheap labour. According to these principles the Antwerp city government established a new system of poor relief called *Nieuwe Bestieringe van de Algemeenen Armen* (new administration of the general poor) in 1779. In fact, the *Nieuwe Bestieringe* was welcomed by the local textile industry, because it allowed the entrepreneurs to reduce their wages¹⁹.

Health Care

The city was responsible for the surveyance of the public institutions of health-care: the St. Elizabeth hospital, the leppers (Leprozerie), St. Julians, Blauwbroeders, Infirmerie, and the Beguinage. The different institutions were however run by religious orders. The St. Elisabeth hospital was the largest of them with a capacity of 200 patients, although at certain moments the number could rise up to 400 or 500. The St. Elisabeth hospital had a considerable patrimony, which produced a yearly income of 400 to 6000 fl. After repeated complaints by the almoners and the city magistrate concerning the inefficiency of the hospital, a reform of the service was decided by the bishop of Cambrai, in 1551.²⁰ Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the Broad Council of Antwerp claimed a better control of the financial administration of the hospital as well as the right to nominate the accountant. Only in 1769, the city obtained the right to control the accounts.

On the occasion of epidemic diseases, the city intervened with subsidies, or the building of pest-houses. In 1625, 43 pesthouses were built outside the city walls, and in subsequent years the number was increased. The city established a separate fund for

¹⁸ C. Lis and H. Soly, Craft guilds in comparative perspective: the Northern and Southern Netherlands, a survey, in: M. Prak, C. Lis, J. Lucassen, H. Soly eds., *Craft Guilds in the Early Modern Low Countries: Work, Power and Representation*, Aldershot, 2005, pp. 1-32, 20-25.

¹⁹ C. Lis, H. Soly and D. Van Damme, *Op vrije voeten? Sociale politiek in West-Europa (1450-1914)*, Leuven, 1985, pp. 114-117.

²⁰ P. De Commer and H. Soly, *De zestiende eeuw. Harde Tijden voor zusters en zieken (1490-1585)*, in: *Het St.-Elisabethziekenhuis te Antwerpen. 750 jaar Gasthuis op't Elzenveld 1238-1988*, Brussel, 1988, pp. 65-89, 70.

the maintainance of the pesthouse. Its dotation was of 12 000 guilders. Here the sick were treated by pestmasters and some nurses. The dead were transported by religious from the orders of the black sisters the isters rom the St. Elisabeth hospital and the *Cellbroeders*²¹. General measures that were taken included the prohibition of free movement without a health certificate²². The leppers could find relief in two institutions: the cloister of Terzieken and the leproseury outside the city gates.

There were several initiatives to organise health care in a more efficient way. Since 1532, there were four official city medecins. Already in 1620 a Collegium Medicum was founded in order to regulate the medical professions of doctors and surgeons²³. In the 18th century a health commission was established, in which two aldermen were represented together with medecins and surgeons²⁴. But it was only during the period of French government that the responsibility of health care came into the hands of the urban government.

Education

Education was not seen as a public responsibility²⁵. Nevertheless, Antwerp had a great number of schools. Private schools where basic skills were taught in Dutch were under the control of the cathedral chapter, five parish schools, the school of the cathedral chapter (called Papenschool) as well as the colleges of the Jesuit and Augustinian Order provided secondary teaching. Finally there were schools for poor children, funded through foundations and Sunday schools, where religious sisters paid by the city taught. ²⁶. There were also schools for professional education. The guild of the surgeons had their own professional school since the first half of the sixteenth century. After the abolition of the craft guilds..., Especially in the second half of the eighteenth century, numerous craft schools for gils were founded. By 1780, there were 149 such 'schools' were girls from the age of six learned to make lace or to

²¹ P. Commer, Hygiëne en gezondheidszorg in Antwerpse gezondheidsinstellingen tijdens het ancien régime, in: Maclot, P. Pottier, W.'n Propere tijd!?: (on)leefbaar Antwerpen thuis en op straat (1500-1800), p.3-44.

²² See e.g. the letters by different city government from january 1669 to the city government of Antwerp, in which the requirement of health certificates is withdrawn.

²³ P. Leenders, Overheid en geneeskunde in de Habsburgse Nederlanden en het prinsbisdom Luik, Kortrijk, 2001, p. 22.

²⁴ A. Van Schevenstein, De reglementering der leproosdij in Antwerpen, in Antwerpsch Archievenblad, 2e reeks, II, 1927, pp. 130-132.

²⁵ C.R. Friedrichs, Urban politics in early modern Europe, London, New York, 2000, p. 25-34.

spin. Instead of paying for their education they had to work for free for their mistresses²⁷.

In the second half of the 18th century, profound changes took place in school policy of the central state. Although the general ordinance by Maria Theresia from 1774 concerning compulsory lower education did not apply to the Low Countries, the abolition of the Jesuit order and their colleges in 1773 and the establishment of the Royal College in 1777 was a first major step toward state education.²⁸

Defence

In principle the central state had control over military power and provided the necessary troops in case of hostilities. However the city had its own urban guards with a total of ca. 460 members in the sixteenth century. The members had to provide their own weapons and armours and were only paid a small financial contribution for their uniform by the city. In cases of emergency, the whole male population was obliged to serve in the urban militia. Furthermore there was a general obligation for serving in the city guard, although this service became increasingly professionalised²⁹. The fortifications of the city in the sixteenth century caused extremely high costs for the city and also led to a major corruption scandal. In order to control the situation, the central government decided about the nomination of the fortification masters.

Infrastructure

Besides the commercial infrastructure which received a strong attention by the city authorities and the fortifications, the town government had to maintain also the streets, canals and other public buildings of the city. In the sixteenth century, the economic expansion of the city gave rise to a full-sized urbanisation project by real estate speculator and building entrepreneur Gilbert van Schoonbeke, with the active collaboration of the city government and even the central government,. His establishment of new centres with specific economic functions within the city

²⁶ These Sunday-schools were listed in the urban accounts together with the prison.

²⁷ Lis, Soly and Van Damme, *Op vrije voeten?*, p. 117.

²⁸ H. De Grote, *Onderwijs en geestelijke stromingen*, in: *in Antwerpen in de XVIIIe eeuw, Instellingen, economie, cultuur*, 1952, p. 348-372.

²⁹ Voet, *De gouden eeuw van Antwerpen*, p. 108.

transformed the urban structure of Antwerp profoundly³⁰. Hence, already from the 17th century on, the city planned to cover the canals that ran through the city, but only in nineteenth century were these works completed³¹.

Another important aspect of the urban infrastructure for which the city cared very early was water provision. Drinking water was originally provided through numerous wells, considering the fact that the water of the Scheldt was not fit for drinking. These wells were of public interest especially from the point of view of fire prevention. Between 1650 and 1750 these wells were replaced by pumps in order to prevent contamination of the water. From the late fifteenth century on, water had to be canalized into the city from the river Schijn, to provide the city with sufficient fresh water. For this purpose, the city built a canal of ca. 10 km called Heretalse Vaart³². In 1556 an aqueduct, connected with a pump, provided fresh water for the new breweries in the Nieuwstad, which had been built several years earlier by the entrepreneur Gilbert van Schoonbeke³³. In the seventeenth century, the water provisioning system was further elaborated by means of several connected pipelines. The city maintained its own messenger service, the *stadsboden*, to different cities. This service was leased out to individuals. In 1659 a conflict arose concerning the monopoly of the royal postmaster concerning correspondence abroad³⁴. Furthermore, regular transport services by boat and by wagon were maintained. The city leased out the services, which were regulated by urban ordinances³⁵. The city also invested in the infrastructure of roads and canals and organised transport and messenger services between different cities. The public clocks in the town hall, on the tower of the

³⁰ H. Soly, *Urbanisme en kapitalisme te Antwerpen in de 16e eeuw. De stedenbouwkundige en industriële ondernemingen van Gilbert van Schoonbeke*, Brussels, Gemeentekrediet van België, 1977 (Historische uitgaven: reeks in-8° = Collection histoire: série in-8°; 47).

³¹ Mertens & Torfs, *Geschiedenis van Antwerpen sedert de stichting der stad tot onze tijden*, 6, Antwerpen, 1851, p. 30.

³² W. Van Craenenbroeck, *Oorsprong en expansie van de waterverzorging voor de Antwerpse brouwers*, in: P. Maclot and W. Pottier, eds., *'n Propere tijd!?' (On)leefbaar Antwerpen thuis en op straat (1500-1800)*, Antwerpen Antwerpse vereniging voor bodem- en grotonderzoek, 1988, p. 66-92.

³³ H. Soly, *De brouwerijenonderneming van Gilbert van Schoonbeke (1552 - 1562)* in: *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis* 46 (1968), pp. 337 - 392 and 1166 - 1204.

³⁴ K. Van Honacker, *Lokaal verzet en oproer in de 17de en 18de eeuw. Collectieve acties tegen het centraal gezag in Brussel, Antwerpen en Leuven*, Kortrijk, 1994, B. Houben, *Antwerpens verzet tegen de centrale macht in 1659*, unpublished thesis, University of Ghent, 2004.

(http://www.ethesis.net/antwerps_verzet/antwerps_verzet_inhoud.htm) Houben

³⁵ A letter from the city magistrate of Mechelen to Antwerp mentions a regulation concerning the daily wagons between Antwerp and Mechelen. 16 may 1679.

cathedral and on the Stock Exchange were regularly maintained by the city government.

The financial implications of public services in the town accounts (1530-1830)

The survey in the previous section shows that there was a whole variety of public services in which the urban government was involved to some degree. However, if we look at the town accounts, only a small part of the city budget is dedicated to public services in the modern sense. Throughout the early modern period, the greatest part of the expenses went to debt charges, administration and for the salaries of the town magistrates, public works, and taxes to the central government³⁶ (table 1).

Table 1: Major categories of public expenses, Antwerp 1530-1830

<i>Category</i>	<i>1530-1545</i>	<i>1665-1680</i>	<i>1744-45</i>	<i>1782-83</i>	<i>1815-1830</i>
Debt payments	58%	59%	57%	65%	15%
Wages & administration	13%	14%	19%	15%	11%
Public works	9%	7%	6%	16%	18%
Taxes	17%	11%	7%		0%
Poor relief		0,1%			22%
Schools					5%
Fiests		0,2%	7%	1%	1%
Central authorities		8%	0,9%		0%
Security		0,3%	0,3%		7%
Military		0,1%	0,9%		6%
Purchase of real					

³⁶ M. 't Hart en M. Limberger, Staatsmacht en stedelijke autonomie. Het geld van de stad, in "Tijdschrift voor Sociale en Economische Geschiedenis", III, 2006, p. p. 36- 72. (themanummer: het geld van de stad eds. M. 't hart en M. van der Heijden). The samples of the Antwerp town accounts which form the basis for this paper were analysed in a comparative research on urban autonomy in Antwerp and Amsterdam between 1530 and 1830. The additional data from the two sample years from the eighteenth century come from F. Blockmans, De stadsfinanciën, in *Antwerpen in de XVIIIe eeuw, Instellingen, economie, cultuur*, Antwerpen, 1952, p. 46-63.

estate	1%				5%
Material		3%			
Religion		0,1%	0,1%		2%
Others	2%	4%	2%	4%	2%

In the period 1530-45 public services, like education, social policy, culture and religion were only mentioned among 'others', a post which accounted only for 2% of the total expenses. In this category all kinds of occasional expenditures were listed. Only some among them can be categorised as public services, other referred to loans to the emperor, gifts to the commissioners of the court, extraordinary salaries to town officials and others. Four of the posts refer to expenses concerning economic services in the broadest sense. First, the pilots (*roeidragers*) who were to help the ships to enter in the port, belonged to the category commercial services, the subsidies for certain categories of artisans moving to the city are a measure of industrial policy, the town clerk registering the grain prices as well as the weight of the bread, as well as weighing the bread being sold at the market are a classical measure of urban market policy. As grain prices were vital for the social climate in the city, the city magistrate not only tried to avoid sudden increases of the grain prices. Furthermore the weight of the bread was adapted to the grain prices in order to maintain the price per loaf stable³⁷. Finally, the aldermen of the cloth hall performed as an early form of commercial law court. Social services included payments for health care, that is, the visitation of the leppers and the salary of the pest master, poor relief, and school. In 1549-1550 subsidies were paid to 5 doctors, 6 surgeons, 2 doctors during epidemics, 3 midwives and 3 midwives during epidemics, and a doctor to teach the surgeons³⁸. Payments for public order contained the salary of the fire master and his servants, the rent for a plot for a garbage disposal outside the city walls, and the rather uncommon salary of a doghunter for an amazing quantity of 2688 dogs. Finally, the archers guild received a subsidy of 32,5 lb. for the participation in a shooting competition in Brussels. Although the archers formed the urban militia, this was rather a cultural manifestation, which served to represent the city.

³⁷ M.-J. Tits-Dieuaide, *Le grain et le pain dans l'administration des villes de Brabant et de Flandre au Moyen Age*, in: *Het Openbaar initiatief van de gemeenten in België*, pp.453-491.

³⁸ P. Génard, „De rekening der stad Antwerpen van het jaar 1549-1550,“ in *Antwerpsch Archievenblad*,

Table 2: References to public services in the post *other expenses* in the Antwerp city accounts, 1530-31

<i>Category</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Amount</i>
Economy	Pilots for helping big ships enter into the harbour	210
	Artisans coming from outside for exercising their profession (spurmaker, marshall)	34
	The Clerk of the secretary for writing down the weekly grain prices and the weight of bread and for weighing the bread on the market	9
	Salary of the aldermen of the cloth hall	132,8
Health care	Various persons for visiting the leppers	133,6
	Mr. Laureis Oeyens pestmaster	17,5
	Women of the almonershouse for their assistance	10
	'Paepenschool' – school of Our Ladies Church	24
Public security	The fire masters	7,4
	The servants of the fire masters and the peace makers	29
	A plot outside the Kronenburg-gate for garbage	6
	Doghunters voor 2688 (sic!) dogs	5,5
Defence (representation)	Archers guild for participation at shooting competiton	130

	in Brussels
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Also the incomes of the city accounts reflect the existence of some public services for which no explicit mention was made among the expenses: Already in 1530, the city provided a crane, a balance, a cloth-hall, a fish-market, public measures and watermills for the use of which the inhabitants had to pay³⁹. The costs of these services, once again are hidden in the town accounts in the very general posts of public works and salaries. Even the major building enterprise of the sixteenth century in Antwerp, the new fortifications which cost the city millions of guilders left surprisingly few traces in the city accounts until 1545, except through increasing the tariffs of excises, and, on the long run an enormous urban debt.

Table 3: Incomes from public services in 1530-31 (in guilders)

<i>Description</i>	<i>Guilders</i>
Crane	800
Cloth hall	550
Herring chamber	428
Cut cloth	360
Watermill	161,8
Winecourtiers	80
Cellars	74,8

³⁹ Boumans, Antwerps stadsbestuur, p. 63. The crane was only partly (25%) property of the city.

Market stalls	52,4
Balance	41,4
Wine measure	36
Fish stalls	18,4

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the accounts are a bit more explicit, but still public services hardly figure among the regular expenses. During the period 1665-1680 the amounts reserved for poor relief (0,1%) and health care remained very marginal (0,02%) (see table 1). It is only by a closer qualitative analysis of the accounts that the organisation of public services obtains more profile. Among the incomes, those related to economic infrastructure, like leases for the crane, tolls and ferries as well as from watermills remained the most important. The excises for the repayment of the debts made for the 16th-century fortifications still formed a considerable part of the urban taxes. Health care could count on subsidies coming from a special beer-excise called ‘8 stuivers for the contagious disease’, and the incomes from payments of wood from the public storehouse, which went to those affected by the plague at the pesthouse. And finally the city yielded a right for the repair of the road from Merksem to Dambrugge, just outside the city (table 3). In total about 15 % of the incomes can be related to public services.

Table 4: Incomes related to public services, 1665-1680

<i>Category</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Amount</i>
Economic	Lease	lease crane, commercial services	25668,8
Economic	Lease	tolls, ferries	19363,2
Economic	Lease	Watermills	5398,1
Defence	Tax	Excises for fortification (16 th c.)	31655,6

Defence	Loan	Loan for urgent fortification (1678)	5930,3
Health	Tax	8 stuivers contagious disease	10733,5
Health	Rights	Wood sale for pesthouses Stuivenberg	1193,7
Roads	Rights	Road Merksem Dambrugge	6205,9

Among the expenses, some of the annuities the city had to pay were the results from loans the city had taken for providing public services. The so-called *houwer* was a water reservoir outside the city walls, which was part of the drinking water supply system of the city. The reservoir was filled with water from the river Schijn and was led further into the city from there. It had to be cleaned repeatedly in order maintain the water quality⁴⁰. Two annuities were paid for the building of a city brewery called 'den Engel' in 1655. Poor relief and health care, although not significant among the regular expenses, received occasional subsidies, which had to be financed through annuities. Hence the city gave subsidies of 25000 guilders to the almoners for poor relief in 1634, 25000 in 1664, and 16000 in 1674 and two more in 1657 and 1659 of which the amount is not specified. 50000 guilders were paid for relief during an epidemic disease, which hit the city in 1643, and an unknown amount during a contagious disease in 1656. The plague, called 'haastige ziekte' (hasty disease), induced the city government to dedicate a particular fund to those affected. It was funded with a special tax on beer and produced ca. 12 000 g. per year which were used for the food and health care of the infected⁴¹. Defence was another sector which had to be financed by loans, particularly for the purchase of munition and provisions.

Table 4: Expenses: Annuities related to public services, 1665-1680

<i>Category</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Amount</i>
Water provision	cleaning of <i>houwer</i>	10205,1
Water provision	<i>Houwer</i>	5512,2
Brewery	Brewery the Angel	10872,7
Brewery – health care	city brewery and contagious disease	3996
Poor relief	Almoners for poor	4469,9

⁴⁰Van Craenenbroeck, *Oorsprong en expansie van de watervoorzorging*.

⁴¹ Casse particulier acht stuivers op wit poortersbier, poortershoogsel voor onderstand zieke personen besmet met haastige ziekte.

Poor relief	Poor	2647,4
Poor relief	Poor	2337,5
Poor relief	Almoners for poor	666,1
Poor relief	Almoners for poor	75
Cleaning	Ferdinandusdyke, cleaning moat	6681,1
Defence	Munition	2213,6
Defence	Provisions	1362,7
Defence	Provisions and munition	491,5
Defence	Fortification Santvliet	278,7
Roads	Road Merxem Dambrugge	3788,7
Dykes	Ferdinandusdijk	913,7
Dykes	Dykes Austruweel	500,45
Dykes	Austruweel	470
Health care	Pesthouses Stuivenberg	666,3
Health care	Hasty disease	288
Commercial services	Riddertol, scale	306

Also during the 18th century, no considerable changes appear in the global picture of the expenses dedicated to public services. Surveys for the years 1744-1745 and 1782-83 show almost exactly the same distribution of the major posts of spending as during the period 1665-1680⁴². Like in other towns of the Southern Low Countries public services seem to have been established in a more or less institutionalised form, mainly at the end of the eighteenth century, and particularly after the French revolution⁴³. The French government introduced fundamental changes in the responsibilities of the city government. In 1795, a new decree redefined the authorities of the city administration: basically, the city administration became a subordinate part of the national government. It had to administer the municipal properties, the urban finances, the execution and direction of public works, and the administration of public institutions, the urban police concerning public health, cleanness of the city, safety and peace in public buildings and on the streets. The city government also lost its legal authority to the central state⁴⁴. Also the urban finances were thoroughly

⁴² Blockmans, *De stadsfinanciën*, p. 46-63.

⁴³ Van Uytven, *Stedelijke openbare diensten te Leuven*, p. 23-24.

⁴⁴ Boumans, *Antwerps stadsbestuur*, p. 371.

changed. The city had to give up its triple account system, and what was worse, had to change its fiscal system from one based on urban excises into a centralised tax system, which provided in subsidies for the city. Only in 1800, when this new system proved impracticable, taxes on consumption were re-introduced, in order to sustain the hospices and hospitals. In turn, the city had to take the responsibility for these institutions and for poor relief. From then on, subsidies for poor relief and health care became a major part of the public expenses. In the field of education, initiatives were taken to establish public schools for primary and secondary education⁴⁵.

The results of these changes were clearly visible in the town accounts. During the period 1815-1830, immediately after the French period, when Antwerp was governed by William Ist as part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands, the city accounts provide a much more detailed picture of the public services provided by the city government than only several years before. Not only are the expenses specified much more precisely than in the sixteenth century, but also the major categories of expenses had changed profoundly in their relative importance. Poor relief then made up for no less than 21% of the total budget, public works 18%, schools 10 % and public security 7 %. Closer analysis of these posts shows furthermore, the exact distribution of the expenses for the different categories. Hence, subsidies for poor relief were distributed between the hospitals, poor relief proper and, from 1823 the care for foundlings. Their administration was organised in two new communal institutions: the commission for public hospitals and the office for welfare. Within the category of public works, city lighting and the port were the major posts. City illumination was introduced during the French period and was carried out by a private enterprise. The costs of the placement of lanterns and their maintainance was nevertheless paid by the city government⁴⁶. During the United Kingdom of the Low Countries also schools became a major preoccupation of the Central State. Both state schools and urban schools were installed and the teachers were paid by public means⁴⁷. Finally, the city also invested in cultural infrastructure: the greatest investment here was the building of the new theatre building designed by architect Bourla in 1828.

⁴⁵ H. Van Daele, 150 jaar stedelijk onderwijs in Antwerpen, 1819-1969, Antwerpen, 1969, p. 11-15.

⁴⁶ Boumans, Antwerps stadsbestuur, p. 452.

⁴⁷ Mémorial administratif de la province d'Anvers, 1817.

Table 5: Public Services in Town Accounts 1815-18130

<i>Sector</i>	<i>fl./year</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Sector</i>	<i>FL./year</i>	<i>%</i>
Poor Relief (21%)			Schools (5%)		
Hospitals	49233,3	39%	Atheneum	11354,1	48%
Office of Poor Relief	41515,6	33%	Scholarships	3247,1	14%
Foundlings	18204,1	14%	Teachers	3224,4	14%
Workhouses and poorhouses	14466,5	11%	Poor school	2785,0	12%
Beggars in state workhouses	3431,5	3%	Free lessons	1479,8	6%
Public Works (18 %)			Courses on Medecine	1033,7	4%
Port	33374,5	29%	Special painters school	313,4	1%
Lighting	26744,7	23%	Courses navigation and shipping	154,1	1%
Canals	13271,7	11%	Mutuality school	114,3	0%
Streets	10436,2	9%	Didactic material	7,1	0%
Public buildings	8719,8	7%	Drawing course	4,6	0%
Hospital	5604,7	5%	Music school	2,0	0%
Military buildings	3332,5	3%	Paleography	1,6	0%
Theatres	3163,6	3%	Arts (1%)		
Churches	3108,0	3%	Theatre	3413,6	66%
Schools	2785,5	2%	Exhibition hall	1595,5	31%
Quais	2218,8	2%	Library	106,3	2%
Public walks	1796,7	2%	Museum	60,4	1%
Botanic garden	1724,4	1%	Harmonie	25	0%
Security (7%)					
Fire brigade	1468,7	55%			
Police	1083,6	41%			
Guards	91,5	3%			
Prison	21,8	1%			
Nightwatch	1,4	0%			

This contrast between the Old-Regime town accounts, where public services were only occasionally mentioned and the systematic lists of well-defined services each with their yearly budget is all the more astonishing if one considers the short period between them. This sudden change can for a large part be contributed to the deep political and institutional changes taking place in the Southern Low Countries after the French revolution⁴⁸. However deep this change was, the system of urban public services as it appears in the town accounts in the beginning of the nineteenth century, was not likely to have emerged out of nothing. Many elements were present in some form during the early modern period. The 'absence' of public services in the town accounts of the early modern period can be explained partly by the structure of the town accounts before the French administration, which disguised parts of the expenses as salaries of the town officials. This is most obvious in the accounts of the first half of the sixteenth century, which are in many ways still very medieval in their structure. This makes an exact quantitative study of the financial dimensions of specific services almost impossible for that period⁴⁹. Second, the absence of public services in the town accounts also has to do with the fact, that the city was not the only provider of services. Religious institutions, the poor chamber, craft guilds and private foundations also provided a broad range of services and hence did not figure among the expenses of the city. Finally, Leon Voet gives another explanation: For him the major reason was the tendency to organise public services in a way that they financed themselves through tariffs payable by the users. The city avoided the employment of permanent personnel for public services. They rather tried to pay people on occasional basis or by making them earn their salary through direct payments by the beneficiaries⁵⁰. Hence, although there is sufficient evidence that public services were provided and that the city government was involved in their provision, the rather marginal references in the town accounts indicate that their institutionalisation and professionalisation was still in an early stage.

Conclusions

⁴⁸ For Antwerp, this change has been documented very clearly in Boumans, *Antwerpse stadsbestuur*, p. 155-161.

⁴⁹ R. van Uytven, *Stedelijke openbare diensten te Leuven*, pp. 22-43.

⁵⁰ L. Voet, *De gouden eeuw van Antwerpen. Bloei en uitstraling van de Metropool in de zestiende eeuw*, Antwerpen, 1974, p. 104.

Long term developments in the kind of public services provided by the urban government were influenced by various factors. First, political, economic and social circumstances contributed to different developments in different cities. In the case of Antwerp, the economic boom of the sixteenth century provided a favorable surrounding for the development of public services directed towards commercial activities. The seventeenth and eighteenth century brought relative economic stagnation and hence rather different needs arose in the city. Finally, the nineteenth century and the reopening of the rive Scheldt for maritime traffic oriented, once again, the focus of urban policy towards commercial expansion and a major investment in the port. Second, long term developments of the attitude towards government and society and the responsibilities of urban and central government played a role too. The late middle ages, the sixteenth century and the eighteenth century were major turning points here. A major transition can be seen in the field of public assistance. Already in the eighteenth century, the authorities tried to regulate the problem of poverty, which was seen as an obstacle for economic welfare⁵¹. The reform policy of the *enlightened* princes Maria Theresia and Joseph II was however not fully realised in the Southern Low Countries. During the French government a new law concerning the hospitals was introduced in 1796, which transferred the responsibility to the city authorities.⁵² After the transitions of 1815 and 1830, many of these institutional changes were maintained and thus formed the base of the nineteenth century communal policy.

⁵¹ Soly, Lis, *Op vrije voeten?*

⁵² L. Vermeiren, *De negentiende eeuw. Van Gasthuis naar ziekenhuis*, in: *Sint Elisabeth*.p. 145-226, 145-153.

The budget of official poor relief was highly insufficient for supporting the poor. There were hardly any serious attempts to improve this system.⁵³

The initiatives of the central government to establish a Chamber of Commerce in 1660's were countered by the city-government who saw its privileges endangered.

It is in this context, that the decision to re-organise the urban brewing industry in 1535 was presented. Finally, a number of breweries was built in a new district of the city which was provided with fresh water from a newly built canal⁵⁴.

53 A. Kint, *The community of commerce. Social relations in sixteenth-century Antwerp*, unpublished PhD-dissertation, Columbia University, 1996, 209-213.

54 De borgemeesteren ende schepenen overleggende dat binnen der voirs. stadt nit meer en waeren dan omtrent xiii oft ten hoochsten xiiii brouwerijen ende beduchten hen dat de selve der stadt niet en zouden cunnen gerieven van bieren, belasteden den rentmeesters der selve daer op te versien ende middel soecken dat de gemeente daer duer geen gebreck en hadde ende de ingezetenen van bier versien mochten worden.... T. Masure, *De stadfinanciën van Antwerpen 1531-1571. een poging tot reconstructie*, 2 vols., Ma-thesis RUGent, 1986, p. 63; see also SOLY, H., *Urbanisme en kapitalisme te Antwerpen in de 16e eeuw. De stedbouwkundige en industriële ondernemingen van Gilbert van Schoonbeke*, Brussel, 1977 (Historische uitgaven: reeks in-8° = Collection histoire: série in-8°; 47).