

Sweden

Deepening Democracy

Tilly Beukenholdt-ter Mors
Roelant Noppe¹

Introduction

1

SWEDEN IS IN MANY RESPECTS AN UNUSUAL COUNTRY. It has less inhabitants than the London region. No more than ten percent of the country is cultivated, yet it is self-sufficient in food, while at the same time being highly industrialised. Its income distribution is the most even one in Western Europe. Local government - with a budget of 19.4 per cent of the GDP - has deep historical roots (Norton, 1997:289). Still, Swedish local government is regarded as relatively autonomous and politics is often aimed at reaching consensus. And although party membership and electoral turnout are on the decline, electoral turnout is still rather high. This makes Sweden an interesting country to study on developments in local democratic renewal.

In this chapter, we will take a quick glance at developments in Stockholm and Örebro, two of Sweden's largest cities, although Örebro is markedly smaller than Stockholm. Both cities are located more or less in the south. What problems exist with respect to local democracy in these cities and how are these being dealt with?

Because Sweden has a long tradition of local government reform, we will start this chapter by a brief description of the reforms that took place in the last century

(section 2); we believe this to be helpful for understanding the current situation, the latter which will be discussed in section 3. In section 4 we will describe the main developments in local government reform in Stockholm and Örebro. We will carefully draw some conclusions in section 5.

Local government reform in the 20th century 2

Before looking in detail at the structures of Swedish local government and the current developments in citizen-government relations, we will first summarise some of the more important developments and reforms in the past. By no means is this a complete picture: it only serves as an introduction to Swedish local government reform.

1862 seems to have been an important year for Swedish local government. According to the Svenska Institutet (1999), the 1862 local government ordinances are generally considered the first legislation in the field of local self-government. In this ordinance the tasks of the Church of Sweden were separated from civil tasks. The reform fixed the structure of local government at about 2400 rural municipalities, which coincided with the former parishes, 10 boroughs and 90 cities.

However, in the course of time, the small size of most municipalities became a problem, and after 1950, several boundary reforms were executed, which reduced the number of municipalities to 278. However, after these reforms, some municipalities were split up, increasing the number of municipalities to the current 289 (Häggroth et al., 1999:10-14). One result of the boundary reforms, according to Häggroth et al. (1999:15), was that lay administration was replaced by professional administration.

The 1970s showed some changes in local democracy as well. In 1976, the right of immigrants to vote in local elections (under certain conditions), and to be elected on local councils was introduced (Svenska Institutet, 1999:4). Also, the 1977 Local Government Act allowed a straight majority of councillors to decide to hold an opinion poll or consultative referendum (Gustafsson, 1991:186). According to Häggroth et al (1999:100), in 1994 a rule on popular initiatives was incorporated into the Local Government Act, and these days 5 percent of the electorate can request a referendum. The decision to actually hold a referendum remains with

the council, however. Of about 60 of such initiatives, only one has been approved of by the majority of the council (Häggroth et al 1999:100).

At the end of the 1970s, municipalities were given the option of introducing neighbourhood councils. Three communes did so as soon as the Act had been passed, namely, Eskilstuna, Umeå and Örebro; others were to follow later (Montin & Persson, 1996:76-77). According to Montin (2000:14), about 25 municipalities did introduce neighbourhood councils, but some of these were abolished at the beginning of the 1990s.

In 1984, the free communes experiment was launched in Sweden. According to Gustafsson, the main aims of this experiment were 'clearer management objectives, improved efficiency, modernisation, simplification of regulations, better information, more open procedures, greater accessibility, service-mindedness and greater freedom of choice for the general public' (Gustafsson, 1991:180). To achieve this, the amount of detailed state control was relaxed in several municipalities and county councils. The number of municipalities in the experiment was increased in 1988 (Gustafsson, 1991:180-183). Also, during the 1980s, user influence was put forth as an important policy, which led to conflicts with the concepts of representative democracy. Although a great number of projects were set up - some more successful than others - it was not the success many had hoped it would be (Montin & Persson, 1996:78-79).

The early 1990s showed, first, a tendency towards increasing freedom of choice, in particular in the fields of childcare, primary schools and care for elderly people. For instance, people were given the right to choose between health centres. In 1992, 12 communes had introduced this new set-up and in the period 1993-1994 another 60 were doing so (Montin & Persson, 1996:81). Montin & Elander (1995:36-37) also note the expansion of the "management by objectives" to "ordering and performing organizations"², by which latter model (established in about 40 municipalities) political activities are separated even further from the performing ones.

There have also been reforms aimed at increasing the different forms of citizen participation. Montin (2000:13-19) mentions, for example, the growing ability to use 'exit' as a strategy instead of 'voice', and a new wave of user democracy ideas, as well as 'different kinds of partnership containing public and private actors', 'social enterprises' and 'Local Employment Service Committees'.

Montin & Elander (1995:43) reach the conclusion that: "Walking the road from central state cut-back, deregulatory and decentralist strategies to de politicization and privatization trends, mostly created by the local authorities themselves, ending up with the consumerist ideology expressed in such slogans as "user's democracy" and "freedom of choice", could be briefly described as a journey from citizenship to consumerism. Thus, with the exception of election times, individuals are nowadays seldom called upon as politically active citizens. Instead they are viewed as autonomous consumers with no need of political mediators such as the political parties."

Contemporary Swedish local government

3

Having briefly discussed the major past reforms in Swedish local government, we will now present an overview of present-day Swedish local government. First, we will look at the different levels of government in Sweden. Subsequently, we will describe the tasks, the political and administrative structure and citizen-government relations at the municipal level.

Levels of government

3.1

Sweden is a decentralised unitary state, where local government is expected to play a key role. According to Montin and Amnå (2000:157), Sweden is a decentralised welfare state. Also, it is a parliamentary democracy and governed at three different levels; an experiment is taking place with a regional level.³

The first level is the national level, with the Parliament (Riksdag), the Government and State Bodies. According to Häggroth et al (1999:24), the central government is responsible for fields like:

- foreign policy and defence
- public order and security in Sweden
- the judicial system
- macroeconomic policy
- higher education and research
- highways and long-distance transportation and communications
- labour market policy and employment issues

- housing policy
- social insurance and transfer payments (pensions, child allowances, sick pay, unemployment compensation etc.)

In addition, there is the County Administrative Board, which represents the State in the county. One of the board's main functions is to direct and co-ordinate regional planning. Its executive committee consists of the county governor and 14 members appointed by the county council.

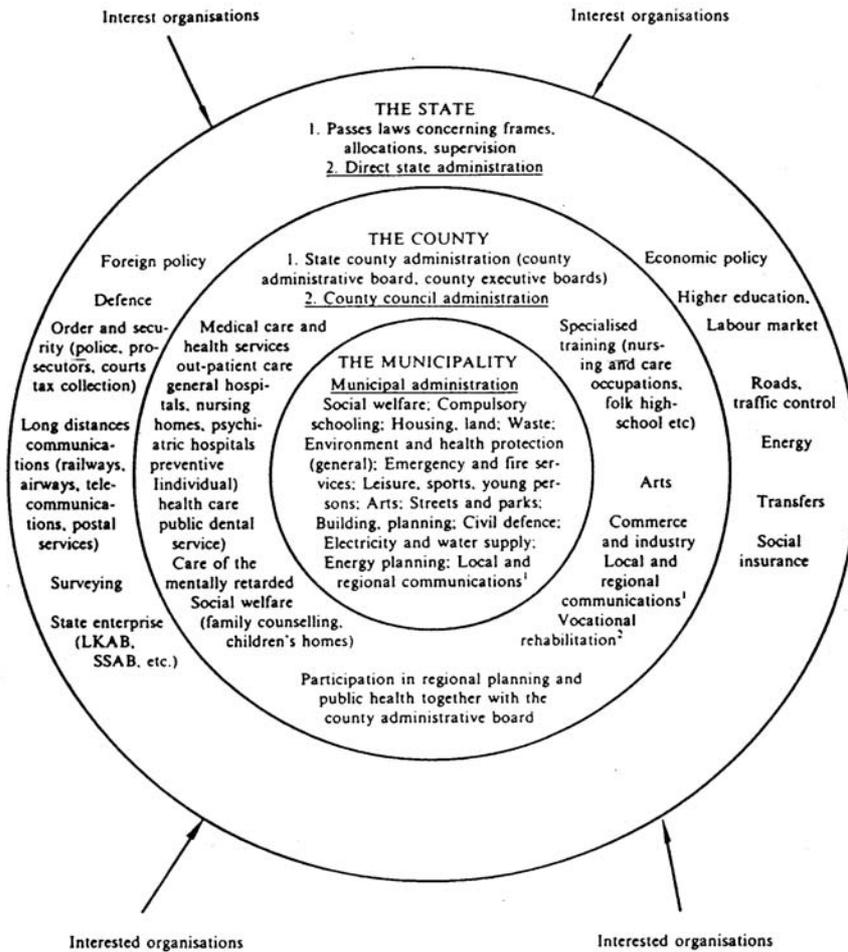
Sweden's second level of government covers counties and county councils. There are 21 counties (the national government's regional administrative units) and 20 county councils.⁴ The county council areas coincide with the counties, with the exception of Gotland, Malmö and Gothenburg. These last three are excluded from the system; effectively they are municipalities that exercise county power (Jones, 1993:122). Tasks requiring a larger population base are handled by the county councils. The county council is elected directly by the inhabitants of the county. The county council is responsible for:

- health care
- public dental care
- support for and services for the disabled
- education and cultural activities

There is a shared responsibility with the central government for vocational rehabilitation. County councils also share a number of responsibilities with the third level of government, the municipalities. The county council nominates members to the boards, which constitute the regional level of administration of central government departments. Figure 1 graphically represents the different levels of Swedish government.

The county councils most important, though not only, responsibility is that for the health care system in their regions. The responsibility includes all hospitals and primary health care centres, school health services, psychiatric, dental and ambulant services, and district health care centres which are responsible for providing preventive health care. They provide care and assistance to specific groups, including the mentally handicapped (education, care and employment), diabetics and other physically handicapped persons (Norton, 1997).

The division of responsibilities between state, county council and municipal agencies in Sweden (Source: Gustafsson, 1988 as cited in Gustaffson, 1991:172)



This figure illustrates the integration of national and local authorities, but it also reflects the mutual independence of municipalities and county councils.

1. Operated jointly by municipalities and state councils.
2. Operated jointly by the state and the county councils.

Figure 1

The municipal level

3.2

The remainder of this paper focuses on the municipalities. There are many similarities, however, between the way municipalities and county councils function. Many documents (such as, for instance, the Local Government Act and The Instrument of Government) concern both types of sub-national government. Municipal tasks, are amongst others (Häggroth et al., 1999:24-26):

- municipal social services (childcare, care for the elderly and people with functional impairments) and other social programmes for individuals and families
- education (compulsory comprehensive schooling, adult education, the Swedish language programmes for immigrants, and most of the upper secondary schooling)
- land-use planning, supervision of construction activities and issuance of building permits
- environmental and public health duties (e.g. monitoring drinking water; air and water pollution; keeping track of hygienic standards in homes, stores, restaurants, etc.; street cleaning and refuse collection)
- recreation and culture (build and operate sports facilities, youth recreation centres and so on; libraries; subsidising cultural activities and voluntary associations)
- emergency services (fire fighting, rescue services, civil defence and disaster planning).

The local political structure

3.3

Since the 1991 Local Government Act, local governments have had substantial freedom to decide on their own organisation. However, there are two obligatory elements; the municipal council and the executive committee. The Svenska Institutet describes the council as follows: 'The municipal and county councils make all major decisions of principle for their respective territories. They establish goals and guidelines for local government operations. They decide what committees there should be, as well as their structure and operating methods. They also approve of the budget, set the local income tax rate and decide other important financial matters, including the size of the fees charged for certain local services' (Svenska Institutet, 1999:2).

The executive committee has to supervise the administration of the local government and to keep itself informed on the activities of all the other committees. The Svenska Institutet (1999:2-3) names several more specific functions:

- monitoring issues that may affect the growth and financial position of the local government
- drafting the budget
- handle certain administrative tasks, such as property management
- overseeing municipal operations in company form
- preparing most decisions made by the council

The executive committee is elected by the council and usually consists of 11-17 members (with a minimum of 5). The chairman of the committee is often a full-time employee with the title of municipal (or county council) commissioner. Some other councillors, often members of the executive or chairmen of other important committees can be full-time employees as well (Svenska Institutet, 1999:3).⁵ The councils may also create other committees than the executive committee. According to the Svenska Institutet, all municipal committees are required to:

- ensure that operations in their respective fields of responsibility comply with the objectives and guidelines approved by the council and the special legislation applicable to these operations
- make decisions on matters delegated to them by the council.

The committees also prepare 'items of business for decision-making by the municipal or county council', after which they implement the council's decisions (Svenska Institutet, 1999:3). The committees' tasks can concern special functions (e.g. education), but territorial decentralisation by district committees is also allowed. In addition, a purchaser-provider model is sometimes used in which the elected officials can choose between their own public agencies and private contractors for the provision of services. Thus, apart from the traditional sectoral model, there are municipalities organised by a territorial or functional model (see Swedish Institute, 1999). Also, an election committee is still mandatory (Häggroth et al, 1999:47).

Since 1980, municipalities have been entitled to use a geographically decentralised system of district committees, each of which are responsible for a number of specialised fields in their section of municipal territory. Örebro was the first

municipality in Sweden to introduce neighbourhood councils. The organisation of neighbourhood committees (councils)⁶ reflects some basic values on participatory democracy (Andersson, 2000:3). Citizen participation is regarded a crucial concept. In recent years, interest has turned to not just attaining citizen participation, but also requiring public servants to consult clients systematically on the kind of services they need, reach agreement on the service to be provided, with a right to appeal in case of disagreement, and determine what is provided within regulations or guidelines and is consistent with the responsible use of available resources (Norton, 1997:295). To illustrate the political structure discussed, the organisation of the municipality of Örebro is presented in figure 2.

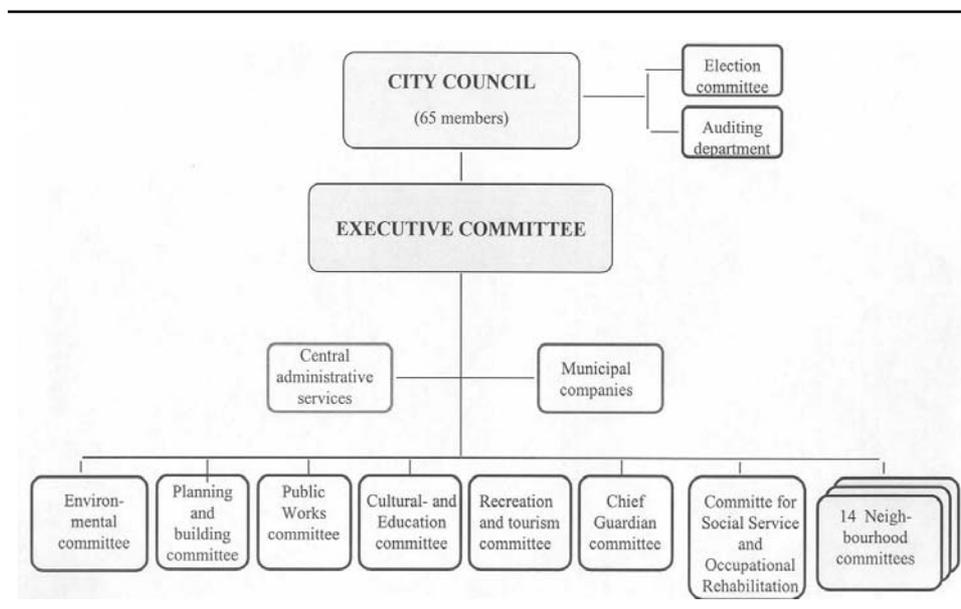


Figure 2 The organisation of the municipality of Örebro

The local administrative structure

3.4

Trends in local administration have shifted from centralising responsibility, authority and office operations - during the 1960s and 1970s - to shifting responsibility, authority, and administration back to the actual programmes. Most municipalities are currently establishing profit centres deep down in their operational structure. Also, some municipal service offices are being established. The budget, now often

decentralised to the specialised committee level, can be decentralised further. Other trends include contracting out, establishing co-operatives and turning over the responsibility for programmes to non-profit associations (Häggroth et al., 1999:58-70).

Officially, councillors' tasks include representing the people and making decisions at all levels, as well as performing administrative and executive functions. Regardless of their rank, 'local government employees are legally considered mere assistants or advisors to the elected representatives' (Häggroth et al., 1999:35). In practice though, extensive delegation takes place.

Citizen-government relations

3.5

The relation between citizens and their local government can be typified by the word 'member'. According to Häggroth et al. (1999:38), a person 'who is officially registered as a resident, owns real estate or is assessed a municipal tax is a member of that municipality and is thus also a member of the county council territory'. Members can protest against local government decisions by making an appeal to an administrative court to obtain a rule on its legality. When civil rights are violated an appeal can also be made to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The members registered as residents have the right to vote and be elected as council members if they are 18 years or older on election day (Häggroth et al., 1999:37-38). Local elections consist of voting for a certain party. The term of office is four years, and elections are held on the same day as parliamentary elections (Svenska Institutet 1999). However, the constituencies for the two respective elections differ (Häggroth et al., 1999:97). Since 1998, voters can express their preference for an individual candidate, in addition to choosing one political party (Häggroth et al., 1999:98).

Developments seem to point to a shift either towards citizens as 'users' (in, for instance, user boards), or to citizens as 'consumers' (for instance by the introduction of 'freedom of choice'). For example, since 1994, delegation of all or part of the day-to-day operation of a facility to a self-administration body has been possible.

Changing relations in Stockholm and Örebro

4

Against this rich background of local government reform, what are the present-day problems in local democracy in Sweden? To answer this question, in a tentative way, we studied two Swedish municipalities: Stockholm and Örebro. In this section, we will first report the results of the interviews and then make a comparison between the two cities.

Stockholm

4.1

The city of Stockholm is, with over 736.000 inhabitants, the largest municipality in Sweden. Although Stockholm is trying to improve democracy through renewal, it is obvious that the city faces a lot of problems due to its large size; yet initiatives are being taken to get citizens to participate in local government. Citizens can take part in opinion groups, debates and discussions, and talk to political representatives. Especially project managers for the Outer-City Revitalisation Project try to interest citizens in participation. They hope to activate more appreciation for the area where people live, for sport, cultural matters, the schools of their children, and so forth. The municipality also stimulates the principle of freedom of choice. Welfare has not only to do with getting public services, but also with choosing who provides these services. Stockholm also experiments with the Internet. For example, a try-out has been held with electronic voting. Although this is all still in an early stage, our respondents expect much from this form of participation.

Problems in local democracy

Complaints about the waning interest of the citizens in politics are not typical of Stockholm. One of our respondents put it another way: he was not sure that the citizens were not interested in politics. Citizens have opinions about the traffic in their area or about education, but they also work long hours and don't have time enough to come to, for instance, party-meetings. People judge politicians on their democratic behaviour once every four years. There is also a problem connected with the political parties themselves. One of our respondents called the political parties the most conservative organisations. "When you compare the parties with the parties thirty-five years ago, you see the same meetings, the same organisation,

the same structure and the same activities". His answer to the problem was that the parties need to change their attitude. They have to "try to get into contact with modern working people, for instance investigate what the best time is for meetings. They have to try to formulate alternatives, because if the parties cannot channel ideas from the members, they will lose more and more members". Another possibility, here too, is working with the Internet.

New forms of participation

In this paragraph, we will present a more detailed description of the citizens' participation projects in Stockholm. First, we will look at the participation projects in the outer city areas. Second, we will discuss the freedom of choice projects and, finally, pay some attention to participation through the Internet.

The intention of the project-managers in the outer areas of Stockholm is to stimulate the citizens to participate in all kind of projects. The working method is as follows: first a project-manager goes to meeting points such as a coffee-shop to ask if people have problems and if they can think of any solutions. The project-manager always emphasises that the citizens must be active themselves and that improvement of their situation is dependent to a large extent on their own behaviour. In the beginning, the citizens are often very sceptic. Once they have grown used to the idea that they can play a role in the improvement of their own situation and the area where they live, the project-manager tries to create a group around an issue in which the citizens are particularly interested. One group, for instance, is focussed on more sport-accommodations, another on cultural matters or embellishment of the streets, more facilities for children to play, etc. These groups try to formulate proposals. Next, a new phase follows. All the groups, with their own issues and their own solutions, come together in a joint meeting. The chairman of this meeting is a member of one of the issue groups. Both the joint meeting and the issue groups are visited by politicians and by the project-manager, although they only attend in the capacity of observers. To this joint meeting, about 200 citizens come to show their interest.

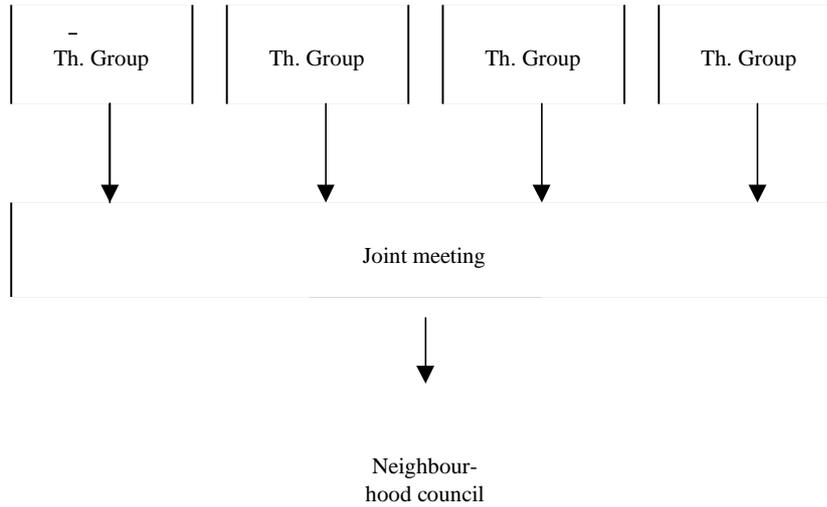


Figure 3

All the participants know that the city council has set aside money for a number of projects, but that there is not enough money to realise all these projects. In the joint meeting they must therefore decide on priorities. This can be very difficult and often it takes a lot of time to reach an agreement. After the decisions have been made, a deputy of the citizens visits the local committee to report the results and ask the politicians to use their influence for the execution of solutions conform the decisions made in an earlier phase. Our respondent was very positive about this way of working with citizens, but told us that a number of bureaucrats find it difficult to agree that stimulating citizens' participation in the planning process is a big improvement and in the public interest. Bureaucrats still think that they are the only experts, and find it hard to accept that citizens are capable to contemplate public problems themselves.

Our second respondent was a politician in Stockholm. Although this respondent found interactive policy-making an interesting subject, he thought that, in the end, the projects like the one described above will disappear. While the project-manager was very glad if more than 200 people attended a meeting, our second respondent thought this was too meagre a turnout considering the large number of inhabitants of the outer city areas. He doubted whether one could speak about representative participation.

Our respondent informed us that, in Stockholm, there was a discussion going on about Internet panels and an experiment concerning a parking place in an area of Stockholm. Only 600 voters participated, and the planned decision to make a parking place shall be carried out. When asked about the willingness to hold a referendum, our respondent replied that the success of a referendum depends on very intensive preparation. This is a problem, because the interest of political parties is not high, and most of the people who are interested in democratic principles do not have enough time to organise a referendum. Our respondent admitted that in other cities in Sweden referendums have been held. Our respondent thought that there is a future for the already existing forms of freedom of choice. Freedom of choice means, for instance, that people can choose the school they like for their children or that old people can choose the home they think best for them. The city council is willing to provide money for these forms of freedom of choice. The consequence will be, according to our respondent, that the power of the local committees will diminish and that their most important task becomes an administrative one.

During the interview, our respondent told us about an e-mail address by means of which citizens can exchange thoughts with politicians. There are, of course, citizens who only complain about things, but sometimes politicians get compliments about the way the city council is doing its job. Our respondent agreed that there are more angry e-mails than complimentary ones, but his motto was: 'Good health is always silent'.

When we compare the results of the two interviews, we see that the ideas about participation of citizens differ. The project-manager of the outer city areas advocated the principle of stimulating citizens to think about their situation and how they can improve their neighbourhood. In other words, citizens must participate, in order to be heard. The politician was more interested in the citizen as a client of the government with perhaps more opportunities of choice. He supported the

idea of user-democracy and freedom of choice. Unlike the project-manager, the politician was not a fervent supporter of the projects in the outer city areas. He doubted whether these projects were useful in the democratic process.

Örebro

4.2

The municipality of Örebro has a rather elaborate programme for democratic renewal. According to one of our respondents, there are two goals when it comes to the changing relationship between citizens and local government. The first goal is that of 'deepening democracy' by involving more people in the decision-making process, and letting them interact with both elected representatives and local government employees. As our respondent remarked, the people share an interest in and a responsibility for a good society. Second, the municipality of Örebro wants several services (like schools and elderly care centres) to establish user committees, through means of which the users of these services can influence activities. Below, we will see to what extent these new participative arrangements have already been implemented. Clearly, what we will see is that the roles citizens are supposed to play are by and large institutional roles, as most new participative arrangements tend to be firmly institutionalised. We will also show that the citizens of Örebro may not always want to play these roles.

Problems in local democracy

One of the problems in Örebro, mentioned in 'The citizens' Örebro',⁷ is the waning interest in being active in political parties. Also, the idea that electoral turnout is declining was mentioned during the interviews, although turnout rates are still fairly high. All in all, the democratic deficit doesn't seem to be very big in Örebro, especially not when it is placed in an international perspective. Yet this does not stop the municipality from instigating innovative reforms. On the contrary, we got the impression that democratic renewal is regarded as an important issue.

New forms of participation

As mentioned above, democratic renewal in Örebro follows two main lines. There is the geographically oriented participation through neighbourhood councils

(NCs) and area boards on the one hand, and forms of user-participation on the other. Note, that the city of Örebro does recognise that there may be tensions between the two, as the interests of the users can sometimes differ from those of the inhabitants. There remains a task for elected politicians to find solutions to conflicts of interest (Municipality of Örebro, 1997:10). We will now look into these matters in more detail.

Örebro, the first Swedish municipality to introduce neighbourhood councils, has now 14 neighbourhood councils. These neighbourhood councils are mainly responsible for the 'soft issues', such as schools, care for the elderly and agenda 21. As mentioned earlier, the NCs are not directly elected, but this is not really perceived as being a problem, since, as one of the respondents said, the NC areas usually cover quite diverse areas, which makes it necessary to look at the smaller areas anyhow. The often-heard criticism - that an NC may not be representative of a neighbourhood with a dominant political colour - seems therefore not so very important in Örebro.

However, the municipality of Örebro has created the option to set up area committees within the neighbourhood council areas. So far only two neighbourhood councils have set up area boards; only one has provided the areas boards with budgets of their own. The area boards have limited responsibility for their area. According to one of the respondents, the members of these boards are elected in an open meeting by attending citizens, after a list of candidates has been published in the local paper. The area boards are supported by an employee of the municipal council and the neighbourhood council, who has responsibilities for the area and is present at the meetings. The neighbourhood council may decide to delegate powers to civil servants, on condition that they have the support of a majority of users or citizens. This structure can be envisioned as in figure 4.

The other neighbourhood councils also have the right to set up such a structure. The reason that they have not done so is that the citizens do not ask for it, according to one of the respondents. This respondent was not sure, however, whether the citizens knew they could set up area boards.

Other initiatives in geographically oriented participation include the broad or community school, which aims to make schools a centre for co-operation on almost any subject.

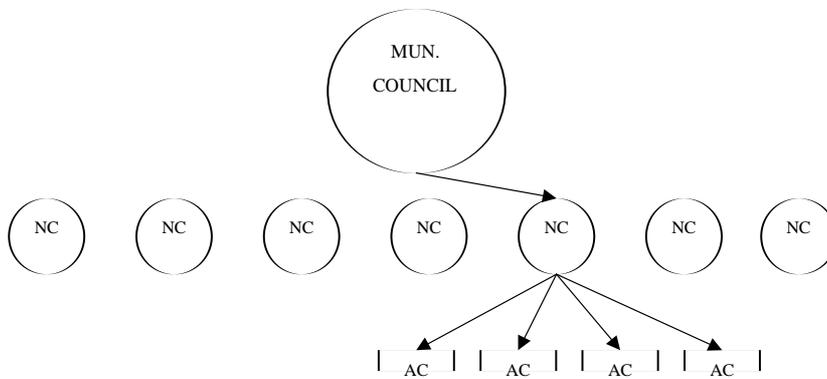


Figure 4. Örebro's structure of territorial decentralisation

A different form of participation is found in the so-called user boards. Regarding this, the pamphlet 'The Citizens' Örebro' mentions that: 'the City Council has decided that all municipal committees can form so-called self-managing institutions. In such an institution, the users - who are to be in the majority on its board - can take over the right of making decisions in many areas and particularly in schools' (Municipality of Örebro, 1997:9). Although user boards are mandatory in some Swedish municipalities, Örebro leaves the choice to the users. According to one of our respondents, 'some parents don't want the power, but if they do, they can have it'. If the parents do not want the decision-making power, the user board has only advisory powers.⁸

If a school has a 'real' user board with 'real' power, the board - with a majority of parents among its members - can make decisions within certain boundaries. For instance, they cannot decide about educational affairs (such as, for instance, which books are to be used), but they do have a say in the budgetary matters. Thus, in the end, there are still two decision-making processes, one by the board, and one by the school management. The boards are supported by a special organisation, which helps them to, for instance, acquire discussion skills.

Although they are obviously an important instrument in the governance of Örebro, the user boards are criticised as well. As one respondent put it, the boards are egoistic. It is a start for democracy, though, and hopefully users will become interested in 'becoming politicians'.

Apart from these more or less structural arrangements, there are also some experiments with 'interactive governance'. One planning procedure has been organised around local citizen meetings; after these meetings, plans are made public for people to comment on them. The respondents were also well aware of the new role of 'enabler' of the local government, i.e. enable others to act, besides the more traditional roles. However, participation of organised interests groups doesn't seem to be very intensive.

Conclusion

5

What lessons - if any - can be learned from the above? We have to be very careful in drawing conclusions based on such a small number of interviews in only two cities. Still, if we compare the two cases, some points can be made.

First of all, the Scandinavian state tradition, especially the consensual character, can be seen in the two cities we studied. Note, for example, the fact that parties from the opposition, too, are included in the executive committees and have some vice-mayors. However, as we found, for instance, that there are also meetings being held with only the majority parties' vice-mayors, we should be careful making our judgements.

Second, changes in the relationship between citizens and local government seem to take place through the use of participative strategies, including both elements of user-democracy and geographically oriented forms of participation.

In both cities, experiments are taking place designed to involve more citizens in the decision-making processes. Both cities experiment with forms of user-influence, as well as with more geographically oriented participation. This may partly be a response to problems in local democracy, like the dropping party membership rates or the declining electoral turnout. Yet we have the feeling that participation is also valued in itself, perhaps as a result of ideology or because of an interest in the creation and sustenance of social capital.

There are, however, some differences between the projects in Stockholm and those in Örebro. Whereas in Stockholm the locally conceived 'ideas' move upwards, passing a joint meeting and are decided upon in the neighbourhood council, in Örebro part of the budget and decision-making capabilities are shifted down to the area boards.

Another difference can be found in the attitudes of politicians and civil servants towards the different forms of participation. Although we must be careful not to draw any premature conclusions, our feeling is that, in Stockholm, the politician(s) and part of the civil service favour user-influence over geographically-oriented participation, while in Örebro both politicians and civil servants are inclined towards the geographically-oriented forms.

If there is one thing to be learnt about the relations between citizens and local government, it is that there seems to be a tendency of increasing the number of roles citizens and governments have to play. Citizens can act as clients, users, voters or even decision-makers; the role of local government may vary from service provider and decision-maker to enabler.

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- 1 The authors would like to thank Tomas Bergström and Kerstin Kolam for the comments on an earlier version of this chapter. Also, we would like to thank Stig Montin for his contribution.
 - 2 These are also called purchaser-provider organisations.
 - 3 In 2000 the parish lost its local government status.
 - 4 The Swedish Institute speaks of 18 county councils and 2 regions; both publications are from 1999.
 - 5 The word employee, as used by the Swedish Institute, might sound a bit peculiar here. What is meant is that these politicians are economically compensated, full-time or part-time.
 - 6 The words 'council' and 'committee' are both used.
 - 7 A municipal document on democratic renewal.
 - 8 We often mention schools as an example. It is the most common service institution with these boards, although there are userboards in day care and elderly care as well.

