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## **Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift**

*Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* är den svenska tidskriften för statsvetare. Tidskriften publicerar vetenskapliga uppsatser, översikter och litteraturgranskningar inom statsvetenskapens alla subdiscipliner och är därtill huvudorgan för Statsvetenskapliga förbundet (SWEPSA). Svenska är huvudspråket, men tidskriften publicerar också texter på danska och norska samt i undantagsfall på engelska av författare som inte har ett skandinaviskt språk som arbetspråk.

*Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* utges av Fahlbeckska stiftelsen vid Lunds universitet, med fyra nummer per år. Tidskriften utkommer år 2017 med sin 119:e årgång. Stiftelsen leds av ett flervetenskapligt sammansatt kollegium (professorer i statsvetenskap, historia, skatterätt, förvaltningsrätt, antikens kultur och samhällsliv, nationalekonomi, ekonomisk historia, socialt arbete, sociologi och statistik). Kollegiet beslutar om tidskriftens budget och övergripande policyfrågor. Tidskriftens redaktion, som är helt fristående i publicistiska frågor, består av en redaktör, en biträdande redaktör, en litteraturredaktör och ett aktivt arbetande redaktionsråd på åtta personer som sammanträder minst två gånger per år. Redaktionsrådet utses i samråd med Statsvetenskapliga förbundet och representerar flertalet statsvetenskapliga universitetsinstitutioner i Sverige.

Samtliga artiklar kvalitetsgranskas internt av två personer i tidskriftsredaktionen. Den externa kvalitetsgranskningen, med två anonyma referees per artikel, omfattar alla publicerade artiklar utom litteraturgranskningar, kortare översikter/debattartiklar och sakkunnigutlåtanden. Författaren får i samband med redaktionens beslut om publicering/refusering ta del av utlåtanden från referees.

## **The Swedish Journal of Political Science**

*Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* (The Swedish Journal of Political Science) is the Swedish journal for political scientists. The journal publishes scientific essays, review articles and literature reviews in all the subsidiary disciplines of political science and is the principle organ of the Swedish Political Science Association (SWEPSA). While Swedish is its main language, the journal also publishes texts in Danish and Norwegian and, in exceptional cases where the author does not have a Scandinavian language as his/her working language, English.

*Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* is published quarterly by Lund University's Fahlbeck Foundation, and in 2017 will be issuing its 119th volume. The Foundation is led by a multidisciplinary board (professors of political science, history, fiscal law, administrative law, classical culture and social life, economics, economic history, social work, sociology and statistics), which decides on the journal's budget and overarching issues of policy. The editorial office, which is wholly independent as regards matters related to publishing, comprises an editor, a deputy editor, a literature editor, a technical editor and an active, eight-member editorial committee that meets at least twice a year. This committee is appointed in consultation with SWEPSA and represents the majority of political science faculties in Sweden.

All articles undergo an internal quality review by two members of the editorial office, and all published articles – excepting literature reviews, short review articles/opinion pieces and expert reports – an external quality review by two anonymous referees per article. Once the editorial office has made its decision to publish or reject a paper, a referees' statement will be sent to its author(s).

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- Tidigare årgångar av Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift i fulltextformat – med sökfunktion till artikelarkivet.
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- Information om prenumerationspriser och möjlighet att teckna prenumeration på Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift.
- Kontaktuppgifter till redaktionen och redaktionsrådet för Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift.

# Tema: Modernisation of Government



# On the Elusive Nature of Modernisation in Government

Tomas Bergström & Irvine Lapsley

## Introduction

All governments are to varying degrees engaged in public sector modernisation. It is no longer an option, but a necessity, if governments are to respond to changing societal needs and to maintain a competitive economy in an uncertain international environment. (OECD 2005, p.186)

This impetus for modernisation in advanced economies is driven by economic circumstance. We live in a world of globalisation where multinationals have budgets which are the same size as, or greater than, many medium sized countries. The global markets attenuate the influence of governments to shape a domestic economic policy. Indeed, national sovereignty may also be weakened further by overarching bodies, such as the European Union, which limit the discretion of member countries. This context shifts the focus away from economic policy towards policy development for public services, as a domain over which governments can exercise greater influence even if membership in EU also has a large impact on national and local administration (Statskontoret 2016). This makes policy making in public services the essence of contemporary political thought and action in many countries. Decisions over the size of the sector, or its subsectors, policies of privatisation or marketisation versus more government-led public services dominate the political landscape. This is an important topic for political scientists, policy makers, elected officials, public service managers and of course, citizens as users of these public services and as the electorate. This is the topic which we address in this special issue.

The particular focus in this special issue is on Sweden and Nordic nations. This is also an important focus. While the modernisation agenda is most notably associated with Anglo Saxon countries such as the UK, New Zealand, Australia, the US and Canada, most commentators tend to overlook Nordic countries. However, there is a strand of writing within the NPM and modernisation literatures which identifies Sweden, in particular, as an adventurous moderniser

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(Hood, 1995; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000). Even for these commentators, the Swedish case is presented as a kind of paradox. While most modernisation initiatives are associated with neoliberal policies of the UK's Margaret Thatcher and her successors, Sweden has tended to favour a centre-left alignment in its Governments, which does not fit the neoliberal stereotype (Hood, 1995). However, there are good reasons for Sweden to be regarded as a leading edge nation in its policies of modernisation of public services. Sweden is a receptive country which is open to new ideas; its traditional centre-left alignment may appear to favour public services, but this is not necessarily acceptable if services can be delivered more effectively (Lapsley, 2017). These are important reasons for a distinctive Swedish approach. This is also facilitated by the close relationship (historical, cultural and economic) between Sweden and the UK, which is one of the most intense and early advocates of neoliberal policies in public policy. While this provides a channel for UK ideas to travel, it also opens the space for distinctive Swedish interpretations of what may be regarded as the most recent best practice. All of this makes Sweden a most interesting study setting for scholars of government practice and reform (Lapsley & Knutsson, 2017).

The perspective taken in compiling this set of papers is interdisciplinary. The study setting of public sector organisations has been depicted as inherently complex, which requires a blending of different theories to understand and explain phenomena (Jacobs, 2012, 2016). Furthermore, this paper collection recognises the preoccupation of political scientists and of scholars of institutional change with the manner and nature of substantive changes to organisations as a consequence of public policy. In particular, the manner in which modernising reforms may not eliminate established practices and structures but coexist with them is explored. This layering of successive reform initiatives has been identified by a number of scholars (Thelen, 2003, 2004; Streeck & Thalen, 2005; Van der Heijden, 2011). More recently this perspective is evident in studies of accounting changes as part of modernisation programmes (Hyndman et al., 2014; Hyndman & Liguori, 2016). Indeed, it has been suggested that the kinds of continuities captured by layering of reform processes may fit the Swedish context (Lapsley, 2017). These issues are taken up further below. First we examine what “modernisation” means in practice before examining different strands of this phenomenon.

## **Modernisation: The Debate**

We are compelled to modernise. The subject of modernisation of government is contentious though, not least because there is debate over what modernisation actually means. The debate over definition and scope is one feature of the elusive nature of modernisation. But there are other issues over its nature and its manner of implementation in different national contexts. In



this discussion we examine the general debate over what constitutes modernisation first. This elaborates different facets of modernisation: modernisation as NPM; modernisation as refinement; modernisation as recycling; and modernisation in the future. Then we examine a number of reform initiatives within these four strands of modernisation in both the Scandinavian context (as our primary focus) and UK context (as a key reference point) as examples of modernisation. In doing this we focus on organisational aspects, not technological achievements. The impact of technology in public administration, as in e-government, is certainly relevant but is beyond the scope of our discussion.

Modernisation has a temporal dimension. “Modern” indicates something contrary to old-fashioned and has positive connotations in our culture as could be seen in almost any commercial advertisement. The modern is therefore not only new it is also an improvement. This can be seen from the UK Coalition Government’s (2010–2015) rejection of the term “reform” as too negative and its replacement by “modernisation” which was seen as more positive, more exciting, more innovative (Anon, 2011). Best practice becomes even better in a linear progression. To present an idea of organisational reform as new is therefore a recipe to ensure its diffusion (Røvik 1998, p.109f.).

An important contribution to the debate over modernisation has been made by Latour (1993) who has argued that we have never lived in an age of modernity. He argues that the forces for modernity are, or perceive themselves to be, invincible (op. cit., p.39). These modernisers have power and influential positions. Their conception of a highly rational society in which cause and effect can be clearly demonstrated portrays a particular vision of society. In practice, there are many examples of irrational behaviour by humans (Sutherland, 2007). But, nevertheless, the vision of society as occupied with rational organisations and individuals can infuse the thinking of modernisers. This perspective resonates with the position advanced by one of Scandinavia’s most influential writers, Brunsson (2009), who contests the continual pursuit of the rational organisation by policy makers in contemporary society.

The theory of modernity in contemporary life has been articulated by Giddens (1990). In his writing Giddens attributes the phenomenon of reflexivity as the necessary basis for modernity (Giddens, 1990, p. 37). This is described by Giddens as the interaction of actions and knowledge (op. cit. p. 38):

The modernity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about these very practices, thus constitutively altering their character

This presents a picture of key actors in the policy making process who have the levers of power to act on their knowledge, expertise and reflections on practice.

Within the public sector such actors occupy space at the heart of government and in the upper echelons of large state entities.

Administrative reform has been one of the few growth industries in an era otherwise characterised by a declining concern with the public sector (Peters 1997, p.71).

This perspective also implies rational decision makers evaluating defined policy options. Indeed, the highly influential positivist theory of rational choice underpins many reform proposals. Rational choice theory presumes instrumental self-interested behaviour, not because its proponents genuinely believe such behaviour to be ubiquitous – but because it makes possible the kind of modelling that is the very rationale of this theory (Hay, 2011). Therefore, this choice may reflect analytical convenience rather than firm belief in rationality. The appeal of rational choice theory lies in its promise to deliver a naturalist science of the political. Crucial to this is the assumption of rationality which effectively serves to render (political) behaviour predictable in any given context (Hay, 2004). However, the assumption that there is only one rational course of action in any given setting is a starting premise in rational choice. But most non-trivial game theoretical models have multiple equilibria and are therefore indeterminate to some extent (Hay, 2011). Such indeterminacy arises not from human agency per se but from the structure of the context itself. Rational choice indeterminacy is not ontological but contingent upon the context in question. Moreover, rational choice is incapable of dealing with inherent indeterminacy injected into social systems by human agency. This means that the rationality assumption is in effect a convenient shortcut which appears to make a naturalist science of the political, which generates predictive and testable hypotheses (Hay, 2011).

The significance of modernisers is evident in a political landscape which is shaped heavily by the influence of rational and public choice models. This presumes rationality and behaviour in which political elites are depicted as acting in their own self-interest. The attribution of self-interest to all political actors may simplify modelling, but it may also complicate both reform design and implementation, thereby fostering a contested space for modernisers and their opponents. The problematic nature of modernisation arises from this tension which results in its multifaceted dimensions. Here we examine four strands of modernisation: modernisation as NPM; modernisation as refinement; modernisation as recycling; and modernisation in the future. Table 1 shows the papers in this special issue within this schema. This reveals that these different facets of modernisation are alive and well in Scandinavian countries.

Table I. Models of Modernisation

**Modernisation as NPM**

- Hjärpe (2017), Measuring Social Work – Quantity as Quality in the Social Services
- Carlstedt & Jacobsson (2017), Indications of Quality or Quality as a Matter of Fact? “Open Comparisons” within the Social Work Sector
- Mutiganda et al. (2017) Investigation of How a Private Sector Procurement Method Institutionalises in Public Sector Organisation: A Field Study in Aged Care Services

**Modernisation as Refinement**

- Carrington (2017), Consulting or Holding to Account? Riksrevisionen as an Agent of Change in Swedish Public Administration
- Bringselius & Lemne (2017), What Qualifications do Good State Audit Require? The Profiles of Ten Auditors-General
- Thomasson (2017), Professionalization vs Democratic Control – Are They Mutually Exclusive in Governance Network?

**Modernisation as Recycling**

- Bringselius & Thomasson (2017), Balancing Stability and Change in the New Weberian State

**Modernisation and the Future**

- Knutsson (2017), Advocacy Coalition Learning: Biases and Heuristics in Policy Implementation
- Fred & Hall (2017), A Projectified Public Administration. How Projects in Swedish Local Governments Become Instruments for Political and Managerial Concerns

**Modernisation as NPM**

An interesting example of what constitutes modernisation can be found in the experiences of the UK. The UK has been regarded as a leading edge reformer in its public service for decades. Indeed, it is arguable that the UK is the specific locus where the label of modernisation of public services was first coined. A factor in this was almost certainly the appointment of the leading sociologist Anthony Giddens as a special adviser to Tony Blair, the first leader of what became New Labour, which formed three administrations in the UK from 1997 to 2010. This adviser articulated the theme of modernisation as fundamental to the New Labour approach of the Third Way (Giddens, 1998). The theme of “modernisation” was the *leitmotif* of the New Labour era. An illustration of this can be gleaned from key policy documents from this government. This included HM Cabinet Office (1999) on *Modernising Government*, the UK government’s spending plans for the public sector (Her Majesty’s Treasury, 1998), *Public Services for the Future: Modernisation, Reform, Accountability*, and its proposals for the National Health Service: *The New NHS – Modern, Dependable* (DoH, 1997). Its successor government, the Coalition Government from 2010–2015 initially described its policy programme as “reforms” but reverted

to “modernisation”. These policy documents herald the introduction of *Modernisation* as an overarching theme in the articulation of government policy which continues to resonate with the practices of contemporary governments. This phenomenon has been described by one of New Labour’s key policy advisors as the codification of NPM practices under the banner of modernisation (Taylor, 2011). Also in Sweden *Modernisation* is frequently used in government documents like directives and press releases. For a while the Swedish Agency for Public Management (Statskontoret) had “modernisation of administration” as an important operational category (SOU 2004:65, p. 65).

However, while these developments can be seen as the use of a particular language to advocate change in public services, the substance of what constitutes modernisation beyond the rather vague rallying cry of “modernisation” is necessary. The specific enactments of modernisation include: the introduction of choice or market like structures; private sector management styles and ideas; advocacy of private finance schemes; a results-oriented approach to management; the re-designation of the citizen as a consumer. In practice these reforms meant an emphasis on quantification and the search for value for money. All of these manifestations of what constitutes modernisation resonate with the NPM phenomenon of the 1980s, but which continued well into the 21st century in the UK (Simonet, 2015; Hyndman & Liguori, 2016; Hyndman & Lapsley, 2016; Pollitt, 2016). This is the case also in Sweden (Borchers & Kockum 2015; *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* 2015/4) although sometimes with a critical twist (*Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* 2016/1).

These modernising reformers are depicted in the literature as strong believers in the rationalistic organisation. However, the following quote by a former UK Cabinet Minister, Howell, gives a different perspective on policy implementation (Howell, cited in Hennessy, 1990, p300):

The history of post-war British Cabinets has been a continuous story of people trying to do too much, believing that they had power over events which in fact they lacked, treating national circumstances as entirely within their control and twirling the wheel on the bridge as though every move would produce an instant response in some well-oiled engine room below.

This phenomenon depicts modernisation as a kind of failure, but this can be captured by symbolic behaviour on the part of organisations which have pretended to be “modern”. Indeed, from the perspective of those who are subject to modernisation policies, there is the distinct possibility of sagacious conformity (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). This a reaction to modernisation policies which results in members of “modernised” organisations are going through the motions with a ritualistic rather than a substantive implementation, while claiming to be “modern”. Reactions to such sagacious conformity reveals why

modernising reformers are often depicted as “relentless” and “driven” (Brunsson, 1992; Brunsson & Olsen, 1993).

There are distinct examples of this kind of modernisation in Sweden and Finland. An example is the contest for “Sweden’s most modern authority” (<http://kvalitetsmassan.se/utmarkelser/sveriges-modernaste-myndighet/>). A jury consisting of representatives of government ministries, national agencies, trade unions and consultants declares a winner at a national conference for quality issues. Among values repeatedly estimated by the juries are: customer orientation, innovation and use of the latest technology. Indeed, using measures like Customer Satisfaction Index gives evidence of the fascination for image and “brands”, like any private company. The Swedish Tax Agency, winner in 2011, is very proud of having high figures for customer satisfaction. More Swedes than former party leader Mona Sahlin seem to think that paying taxes is “awesome”.

The NPM preoccupation with quantification is evident. The ethnographic study by Hjarpe (2017) of a social service office in Sweden reveals the conviction on the part of modernisers that only numbers can provide an objective picture of the effectiveness of social care. This is a challenging situation for caring professionals who have a different training and perspective on caring for vulnerable citizens. New Public Management really corresponds to Old Private Management. The quest for evidence based social services based on numbers and calculations is not very different from Scientific Management as proposed by Taylor.

This critique of the NPM style numbers games is elaborated upon further by Carlstedt and Jacobsson (2017). This paper reflects on the audit mentality which accompanies NPM reforms. The particular focus of Carlstedt and Jacobsson is on a tool which is used to evaluate standards of services. This tool is called Open Comparisons. The drawback with this model is its use of approximate indicators which become accepted by oversight bodies and managers as precise measurements of levels of care given. Both of these papers urge caution on the part of zealous public administrators in the use of soft numbers as hard facts.

Another facet of this kind of modernisation is the practice of private sector mimicry. The study by Mutiganda et al. (2017) in Finland shows how the process of mimicry has costs of translating ideas into practice, in making private sector models portable and in the assumption of both availability of expertise and the presumption of a straightforward implementation in a public sector setting. The specific practice examined by Mutiganda et al. (2017) is an example of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) in the care of the elderly. CCT has its origins in manufacturing industry where there is a long-established practice of comparing the costs of components to see if it is cheaper to make them or buy them in from an outside supplier. That kind of practice is straightforward in the manufacturing sector context. But the application of CCT in public services has

been widely decried as simply crude cost cutting without regard to issues of quality. However, the practice of CCT as a quasi-privatisation is widely used. In this case it is a product of European Union directives. The compulsory nature of this tested the expertise of the local politicians and the outcome was a failure with significant cost overruns. This is an interesting account of how the most straightforward of private sector practices may not be readily portable to more complex public services.

## Modernisation as Refinement

Lapsley (2001; 2008) has argued that continued manifestations of modernisation resonate with the NPM ideas first promulgated in the 1980s. This phenomenon has been described by De Tocqueville (1856) as the process by which successive administrations engage in refinements of what went before. This can be depicted as evidence of a desire to do away with the mechanisms of the *ancien regime*, but which results in ever more elaborate replications and refinements of what has gone before. If we use a metaphor, that of a building, organisations are renovated to be up-to-date but you could still track elements remaining unchanged. Layer is put upon layer also in organisations (Poulsen, 2007). The discontinuity between old and new might consequently be overstated. "It is important to note that there are important areas of continuity in public service management – many things have not changed and 'traditional' ideas and practices coexist with innovations" (Lowndes 1997:50).

An example of this is the 2010 UK Coalition Government spending plans The Comprehensive Spending Review which is an interesting example of De Tocquevillian refinement. It had predecessors. But it introduced refinements: a new name, a multi-year plan, agreements on service delivery with specific targets. When the 2010 Coalition Government took office it made some changes. It changed the name to Spending Review. It dispensed with the targets and spending agreements. However, it retained the multi-year planning period, while targets went, government departments still had objectives with performance indicators; the overarching criterion of spending remained value for money and government departments were expected to produce business plans which demonstrated the achievement of value for money.

The process of refinement in modernisation is evident in Sweden, too.

Since the market-economics approach and crisis awareness were established in the early 1990s there has thus been substantial continuity regarding the main features of various government's measures to enhance efficiency in central-government activities. A new Government has, broadly speaking, carried on where its predecessor left off. This applies e.g. to management of the

agencies, use of performance management and the emphasis on structural changes in central government (Statskontoret 1997:72).

Carrington (2017) reveals how the Swedish National Audit Office is an agent for change in Swedish public administration. This agency uses its performance audits as a mechanism by which it seeks to change the behaviour of public services. In effect, the national auditors are acting as consultants to bring about service improvements. This is a very distinct refinement of standard practice and extant literature which depicts auditors as policing rather than helping. This is a very distinct Swedish practice. Furthermore, Bringselius and Lemne (2017) observe that the Swedish National Audit Office has been criticised severely in the past. Bringselius and Lemne reflect on what it takes to make a good auditor and offer refinements around the scope of their duties and the nature of their qualifications.

In a different vein, Thomasson (2017) addresses the tensions between professionals, managers and democratic accountability in public services. The specific study setting for this paper is a collaborative venture between municipalities. This is often called new public sector governance. This study setting adds an extra layer of complexity to management and governance processes. This is an important topic. It is described as a refinement here, but that is because it offers a glimpse into a bottom-up planning process where street level bureaucrats or operatives in this can advocate new working practices. This particular refinement raises big questions about the efficacy of complex, multi-party, layered activities for democratic accountability.

## Modernisation as Recycling

Everything modern is not new and innovative. Transferring ideas from one context to another could make them appear “modern” like for example the UK Next Steps Initiative in the 1980s where the relative independence of agencies was seen as modern while in Sweden this phenomenon had been present for decades or even centuries. What is modern is relative as shown by the fact that a popular textbook called *Modern administration* was published in Sweden already in 1966 (Gorpe). Changes in practices could also be described as swings of a pendulum, as waves, as fashion (Berggren 2013, p.116; Bergström 2014). There might not even be an infinite number of possible organisational structures and processes. Hood & Jackson (1991) show how a limited number of “administrative doctrines” recur over time.

Authorities are not unified and totally coherent units. They are simultaneously permeated by a number of different, and sometimes contradictory, organisational ideas (March & Olsen 1989). Trends make certain solutions to perceived problems popular at particular times. Often changes try to remedy

problems in the existing organization by moving in the direction of other solutions that actually have been tried before (cf. Smoke 2013).

For instance, centralized organizations tend to generate complaints about insufficient consideration of local knowledge and local needs for adaptation, while decentralized organizations will discover that they are not paying enough attention to the benefits of coordination and standardization. (Brunsson 2009:94)

This is why modernisation sometimes returns into old ideas, recycling them under other labels if necessary. In such a vein Olsen deals with “rediscovering bureaucracy” (Olsen 2005). Other proponents of the bureaucratic model of public service delivery include Schofield (2000) and Stazyk and Goerdel (2010). Similarly, Kjell Arne Røvik (2008, p.133f) talks about a “neo-rationalistic turn” because changes revive the instrumental and rationalistic thinking that dominated organisational ideas from the end of the 1940s to the beginning of the 1970s. Ideas of central planning and control that were the paradigm of the 1970s have returned to Swedish agencies as evidenced in, for instance, the Social Insurance Agency (Andersson et al. 2012). Within this strand of thinking there has emerged an argument that we live in a Neo-Weberian State (Bringseilius & Thomasson, 2017). This thesis is based on the contention that the impetus of NPM has stalled and key actors seek to fashion continuity and stability in government affairs rather than the turbulent disruption of NPM ideas. The Bringseilius and Thomasson (2017) thesis is that key facets of public life, including the recruitment process, the standardization of work and the promulgation of classic bureaucratic values all work together to reinforce bureaucratic norms and usher in a new era of stability and continuity in public services. This is a challenging thesis. There is evidence that NPM continues unabated (Hyndman & Liguori, 2016; Hyndman & Lapsley, 2016), contrary to the proposition that we live in a post NPM world. The prolonged global financial crisis which commenced in 2008 has had far reaching effects. Within the UK, the private sector banking failure created a public sector crisis, with NPM-type cost reduction and efficiency programmes (Hodges & Lapsley, 2016). Furthermore, within the Eurozone, the fiscal crisis resulted in NPM-type efficiency programmes, privatisations and cost reduction drives (Cohen et al., 2015). These findings run against the idea of a stable bureaucracy. Indeed, the idea of the Neo-Weberian State was first mooted in 2011, before the full effects of the global financial crisis had impacted on public services (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Furthermore, Pollitt (2016) appears to have abandoned the thesis of stability and the Neo-Weberian State. However, it may be that Scandinavian countries are exceptions to this fiscal turbulence which intensifies NPM practices. However, Mutiganda et al. (2017) report on NPM practices in the wake of government financial cut-backs and Fred and Hall (2017) identify novel practices in local government



which may be shaped by budget pressures. The stability and continuity thesis deserves further research to see if Scandinavian countries are indeed so distinct.

As noted above, there is a lot of recycling of old private sector ideas in public management reforms (Bromwich & Lapsley, 1997). Indeed, one of the most distinctive elements of this recycling of ideas can be found in Lean Management. The idea of Lean Management is rather old. It is attributed to the Toyota motor company, a development from the 1960s and even earlier (Womack et al., 1990) which predates the modernisation of the public sector of recent decades. However, the fundamental idea of Lean Management, to provide more with less resources has become something of a mantra for public sector modernisers. The adoption of Lean Management by public services is a classic case of the mimicry of private sector practice. The idea of shaping public services according to a factory model of production has not deterred its proponents. Indeed, there is almost an entire industry of management consultants, authors of guidebooks and a support industry of experts selling the merits of this latest fad in public services management which is, in fact, presented as novel and new despite being a recycled idea from decades earlier. Within the UK, there is an emerging field of scholars who are researching the nature, manner of implementation and effectiveness of lean ideas. For example, McCann et al. (2015) reported on the problematic nature of Lean Management in hospitals. The simplicity of Lean concepts did not transfer well to the complexity of the hospital setting. In Swedish public services, Lean has received less scholarly attention despite the interest of Swedish policy makers and managers. Some recent contributions though are Brännmark (2012) and Hellman (2016). This is a gap in our knowledge and an important area for future research.

## **Modernisation and the Future**

The present offers a complex landscape for crystal-ball gazing. The “loose fit” of ideas of NPM and new public sector governance may pull together or push in different directions. This will continue. In many countries, austerity programmes are reducing the size of the public sector. This will result in leaner public sector organisations. The pattern of development of new policies, and management practices has not followed a linear pattern. This can be seen as a generic feature of the public sector which will be repeated. One major implication of this perspective is that to survive, public service organisations have to become learning organisations to continue in a turbulent environment. In many cases resistance to change could be detected though, a sense of “We shall overcome”. If we ignore changes, somehow they will disappear. A certain amount of scepticism could of course be healthy. Change

should not do away with basic public values like due process, transparency and accountability.

But what are the characteristics of the organisation of the future? The idea of “liquid modernity” has been introduced by Clegg and Baumeler (2010). In their view the public organisation of the future may exhibit, or be expected to exhibit, the ability to react to situations with speed of movement and response. In this vision of the future, the “iron cage” of bureaucracy melts. The rigidity of organisations and networks are removed and individuals in organisations face challenges to improvise and to adapt. The short-term pressures of NPM combine with the destabilising influences of fragile networks. The sovereign state’s influence is attenuated by global markets and influences. This implies that organisational strategies will become emergent, as uncertainty becomes endemic. All pressures are for the here and now... of the moment, for the moment. Total transparency in a liquid glass cage.

The above vision is dramatic. Perhaps it might be seen as fanciful. But there are distinct Swedish examples which resonate with this vision of the future. First, Knutsson presents an analysis of a learning organisation (2017). This paper identifies the strength of organisations functioning as learning organisations to overcome obstacles in policy implementation. This is an important contribution to the efficacy of policy formulation and implementation. Finally, the paper by Fred and Hall (2017) identifies a phenomenon which resonates with the idea of “liquid modernity”. This paper discusses the idea of a “projectified public administration”. This refers to the increasing use of temporary organisations within municipalities. The particular characteristic identified in this study by Fred and Hall is the “temporary mind set”. In effect, senior policymakers are supportive of the casualization of public administration.

The above perspectives on modernising government have identified numerous facets of this endeavour which merit further research. These include:

1. The ambiguity of modernisation of government both as a process and an outcome
2. The extent to which modernisation is a continuation of NPM practices (Hyndman & Lapsley, 2016)
3. Examples of refinements of practices which reinforce persistent patterns of modernising behaviour
4. Whether Scandinavian states portray the characteristics of what has been called the Neo-Weberian State (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011) and whether this phenomenon has sup-  
planted the dominance of NPM practices

5. The efficacy of the multi layered concept of the contemporary public services landscape in which bureaucracies, managerialism and political practice coexist and meld (Lapsley 2017)
6. The practice of Lean Management in Scandinavian public services and the efficacy and effectiveness of its adoption
7. Whether Scandinavian agencies and government departments display the characteristics of the liquid organisation as depicted by Clegg and Baumeler (2010).

This research agenda is not exhaustive. But it reveals the complexity of political thought and action and its connectivity with ideas of public administration and public management and the need for interdisciplinary perspectives to make sense of these dimensions of modernisation in government.

Modernisation is a never-ending process where politicians and civil servants chase the perfect way to organise the public sector and its services. The perfect is elusive, alas, so the Sisyphus work has to go on.

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# Measuring Social Work

## *Quantity as Quality in the Social Services*

Teres Hjärpe

### **Abstract**

Social workers are increasingly having the quality of their work ranked according to quantitative indicators, based on the conviction that only measurements provide objective evidence regarding social interventions. This paper analyses the challenges that arise when recent performance-based endeavours of Swedish authorities meet everyday social work practice. Ethnographic fieldwork at a social service office revealed tensions between the confidence in measurements and situations unfolding around numbers in terms of misunderstandings, manipulations, conflicts, and disregard for problem areas perceived as immeasurable. These tensions can be understood from the sociology-of-knowledge perspective that numbers interact with the social context. As the quantitative logic of state initiatives collides with the qualitative practice of social work, further dimensions are added to the clarity that numbers are expected to bring about. The present findings add to previous research explaining why social workers seem to be uncomfortable within modern organizations in their current form.

## **Introduction**

This paper addresses the collision between “quantitative logic” and “qualitative practice” that occurs when governmental initiatives to measure, compare, and rank social work engagements meet everyday practices at a social services office.

Social workers today are increasingly having the quality of their work evaluated and ranked using quantitative indicators and performance measurements. For example, the extent to which a social worker employs standardized assessment tools may serve as a “process indicator” of the quality of the child and family investigation, and a social worker’s productivity may be assessed based on the time taken to complete an investigation. The average costs per child in institutional care who has completed secondary education may be used as an “effect indicator” (National Board of Health and Welfare 2014.a: 6; RKA 2012: 4). The development of such national indicators, along with several recent initiatives to support “evidence-based practice” and “good quality” within the social

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services, indicate growing reliance on measurements and figures. Statistical data, systematic measurements, and standardized and comparable information are often considered the key to progress within public service organizations (National Board of Health and Welfare 2012, 2014.b; SALAR 2009, 2013, 2014).

A focus on measurement is considered a distinguishing feature of modernization (Liedman 1997: 519; Timmermans & Epstein 2010: 74; Shore & Wright 2015: 22), with some authors stating that quantification is a constitutive aspect of modern life in which “The real easily becomes coextensive with what is measurable” (Espeland & Stevens 2008: 432). With the earliest roots in the Enlightenment’s ideals of precise, objective, rational, and comparable knowledge (as opposed to speculative, intuitive, and traditional knowledge), continuous development in many domains of modern life has favoured “knowing that” over “knowing how”, theory over practice, and objective quantitative data over experience-based or intuitive qualitative knowledge (Liedman 1997: 517; Johansson 1997: 15).

In particular, professional and organizational life is increasingly characterized by standard procedures and demands for measurable outcomes (Rose 1991: 674; Shore & Wright 2015: 23). In the field of social work, at least two parallel developments reflect an elevated importance of statistical and measured data compared to other kinds of information, with a distancing from things that are “traditional”, arbitrary, less transparent, or non-scientific. One of these currents, referred to as the evidence-based practice (EBP) paradigm, began as a disciplinary discussion about whether social workers’ methods actually impacted the clients. This was followed by requests – largely from the government – for systematized working methods, structured documentation, and evidence, often defined as measured effects of the social workers’ interventions (Gambrill 2011: 27–33). In this context, social workers who allow practice-based knowledge, experience, intuition, and flexibility to guide their work are often viewed as an ethical risk, with the potential for arbitrariness and extensive exercise of professional power (Cumming et al 2007: 239).

The other development has involved changes in the management of public organizations, including social services. Emerging ideas about professionals’ ineffectiveness, extensive personal discretion, and a lack of transparency within public organizations have fuelled an influx of corporate management models from the private sector, first appearing in England and North America during the 1980s (Hood 1995: 93, 99) and in Sweden during the 1990s (Forssell & Ivarsson Westerberg 2014: 204). Such management models include controlling and assessing work efforts, applying an economic cost-efficiency rationale. The replacement of qualitative and implicit standards and norms with formal quantitative standards and measures of performance is a key feature of what is now known as the New Public Management (Hood 1995: 96). Moreover, a controlling function was built into administrative routines, including the



introduction of a new kind of administrator – the manager – with the task of covering and auditing the routines. This emerging “management bureaucracy” has created new positions, functions, and even professions for administration, planning, controlling, auditing, and accounting. The focus has partly shifted from the task for which the organization was founded, to their rules, routines, and auditing (Hall 2012: 18–27).

Critics describe such developments as linked to a novel form of state control, with key elements including *auditing* (Power 1999: 91–93), *performance* (Svårdsten Nymans 2012: 16, 61), or *transparency* (Levay & Waks 2006: 19, 103). Such elements are proposed to be tools serving a neo-liberal form of governance in which the government indirectly influences how organizations and people think, function, and act. Theoretical approaches – such as *governmentality* (Foucault in Dean 1999), *technologies of government* (Miller & Rose 1990), or *audit society* (Power 1999) – each refer to a strong yet indirect or “hidden” form of governance. The government may typically establish measurable or standardized goals for an organization, but give the responsibility for achieving these goals to local rather than governmental actors (Svårdsten Nymans 2012: 61; Shore & Wright 2015: 22).

There is controversy regarding the extent to which “qualitative” human service activities can be quantified and described using the commonly requested types of measures. Some scholars are convinced that this can be accomplished as desired (Antilla 2007: 3; Elg, Gauthereau & Witell 2007: 114, 137). Others highlight the complexity of such tasks and the need for caution when translating human service activities into numbers (Levay & Waks 2006: 12), and some are highly sceptical of the very idea of quantitatively capturing social engagements (Liedman 2011: 59). In contrast with the more technical knowledge collected by specific measuring activities, some prefer to apply Aristotle’s concept of *Phronesis*, referring to a practical wisdom or “judgement ability”, and concepts such as *tacit* or *intuitive* knowledge (Svenaesus & Bornemark 2009: 39, 55).

Extensive research has focused on the implications of the “modern” prerequisites for human service professionals, among which a preference for measurements is only one part. Julia Evetts (2009, 2011) described how the social work profession is challenged by the organization itself when traditional “occupational professionalism” is supplanted by an “organizational” form of professionalism. Partnership, collegiality, professional discretion, and trust are diminished by the heightened emphasis on governance, standardization, and auditing (Evetts 2009: 249). When a framework for the social worker-client relationship is constructed based on organizational goals, the social workers’ professional judgment is questioned and their discretion is eroded (Rogowski 2012; Ponnert & Svensson 2015). Some authors lament the disappearance of the moral character that previously distinguished social work (Clark 2006).

Both new public management and evidence-based practice are associated with professionals being required to complete more administrative tasks, such as

documentation, reporting, meetings, and information production. Tasks specifically related to measuring activities are exemplified by the production, updating, and reporting of statistical data to various stakeholders (Carlstedt 2015; Hjärpe 2015) and to management (Hall 2012: 27). Consequences include less time with clients, unnecessary “just in case” documentation, and increased stress levels amongst professionals (Forssell & Ivarsson-Westerberg 2014; Light 2015; Thelander & Jacobsson 2016). Recent years have witnessed great discontent and even cynicism amongst social workers, and an exodus from organizations of authority-based social work, in direct response to the “bureaucratic” turn of social work (Kullberg 2011; Tham 2007). Rules, regulations, administrative requirements, and specialized organization forms have directed the work far from the social worker-client relationship and from the overall perspective on clients’ situations that comprise the core of social workers’ educations (Perlinski 2010; Pettersson 2014).

### **AIM AND PURPOSE**

While previous research in this field has addressed the bureaucratization of human service professionalism in general and of social work in particular, our present paper focuses on the encounter between quantitative logic and qualitative practice and how this transpires in the field of social work. This work was inspired by prior studies of how “laboratory logic” collides with the “logic of care” when applying standardized assessment tools (Björk 2013) and of how assessment tools both structure the client meeting as well as interrupt the social worker’s contact with the client (Martinell Barfoed & Jacobsson 2012). Similarly, our present study aims to explore the roles and potential influences of the use of numbers, indicators, and measurements to increasingly reflect and guide social work activities.

Despite the slightly different emphasis in the paradigms of evidence-based practice (measuring for knowing) and new public management (measuring for control of effectiveness), they both represent “cultures of objectivity” (Power 2004: 779). Compared to other kinds of information, numbers are viewed as objective and rational reflectors of reality, and are granted a higher status as pure facts, i.e. information free from human interference (Hall 2012: 37–38; Rose 1991: 674; Hammersley 2005: 86). Thus, the use of numeric data and transparent accountability are expected to “shape up” the practice. Such expectations are directed towards many different professional practices within the public sector, and recent reports describe some consequences for schoolteachers, judges, and academic faculty (Ahlbäck Öberg et al 2016: 102–105). It is of particular interest to examine this issue within social work, as it is one of the so-called “semi”-professions, distinguished by an unclear or broad knowledge base that has been questioned for its reliance on “intuition”, experience-based methods, and tacit knowledge (Brante 2014: 226, 239). Our present paper addresses the question of what happens when initiatives to measure, compare, and rank are applied in an on-going social work practice.

The analysis will highlight dimensions of measuring activities in social work drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork at a social service office where the management was adjusting and applying performance indicators. First, the story of measurements in relation to management and evidence-based practice will be outlined as a framework to understand the hopes and expectations attached to numbers. Subsequently, the data from a Swedish social service office will be analysed.

## Measurements in organizational and professional context

### NEW ORGANIZATIONS, NEW MEASUREMENTS

Measurements are not a new phenomenon in social work, but were rather a prerequisite for its emergence as a profession. In contrast to traditional poverty aid, social work developed as an independent discipline as the population became a measurable unit during the early 19th century. Extensive demographic studies of population growth and child mortality formed the basis for national preventive health programmes and child and family policies in which social workers played important roles (Sunesson 2006: 272). The fields of public insurance and public health emerged directly due to statistical descriptions of society, and knowledge about life and death regularities (Power 2004: 766).

Statistical representation also grew to be important in the construction of nation states during the 19th century, when new media forms stimulated public debate and national identification. New media enabled the spread of statistical data about a country's condition, including social and health aspects, with the intention of strengthening peoples' identification with their nation and creating public awareness and engagement in social problems (Höjer 2001: 249).

While statistical data was rooted in the very foundations of state-organized activities and of public mobilization to address social problems, the penetration of measurements into organizational and professional life is a more recent phenomenon (Shore & Wright 2015: 23). Recent decades have seen increasing requests within public sector organizations for measurements of social interventions, professional engagement, interhuman relations, and social processes with regards to effects, results, or outputs (Hood 1995: 94; Svärdesten Nymans 2012; Clarkson 2010: 171; Power 2004: 766). The social services are among the public organizations in which this development has been observed (Bergmark et al. 2008; Perlinski 2010; Berg et al. 2008).

Power (2004: 766) explains that ever since their appearance at the start of the 20th century, large formal organizations have faced challenges regarding management and administrative control and the need for performance assessment. However, as stated by Meyer and Zucker (1989: 136–145), public agencies serve a variety of mixed interests other than profit, and have thus traditionally been

judged on (or maintained by) ideals and processes – such as their intentions or how well they serve the commonwealth – rather than by using performance measures. According to Hood (1995: 94), the new public management appeared during the 1980s, as public accountability and public administration started along a new path and parallel projects were initiated across the European and northern American countries as a reaction against a former “ineffective” administrative doctrine (public policy and management; PPM). Paving the way for the NPM doctrine were critical ideas illuminating the ineffectiveness, extensive power, and discretion of the professionals as well as the lack of cost transparency (ibid.: 94). New accountability regimes inspired by private models placed important value on numeric data due to their perceived neutral, standardizing, and comparative features. Doctrinal components of NPM include replacing professional discretion with rules and measures and the practical implication of audits (ibid.: 96). NPM is often associated with the idea that anything can be measured and monitored (Bergmark et al. 2008: 40, Hanberger 2012: 12). The introduction of NPM initiatives to the Swedish public sector can be partly explained by the economic crisis in the 1990s, which prompted the import of cost-effective alternatives to reduce public spending (Forssell & Ivarsson Westerberg 2014: 206).

## **MEASUREMENTS AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE**

The evidence-based practice movement began within the medical discipline in the early 1990s (Hammersley 2005: 1), reaching social work several years later (Rosen 2006: 247). Critiques of reliance on routine and inflexible working methods (Sunesson 1985:8; Börjeson 1984, 2006:40) led to increased demands, not least from the government, that work methods should be supported by scientific evidence (Tengvald 2001: 23, Rosen 2006; 230). Eileen Gambrill (2011) explains that EBP arose as an alternative to an authority-based practice in which decisions influencing people’s lives were made based on tradition, anecdotal information, and a search for consensus within the profession rather than on documented research-based evidence of effectiveness. This resulted in great variations between professionals who treat similar problems differently, and clients not always being offered the most effective interventions (ibid.: 27). Evaluations, monitoring, documentation, and structured forms are required to distinguish and disseminate practices with proven effectiveness (Gambrill 2011: 33).

What comprises evidence remains a matter of debate between researchers, authorities, and practitioners (Rosen 2006). However, the request that judgments should be based on neutral and objective information is often interpreted as a requirement for measured, standardized, and comparable evidence. The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (2015) distinguishes between evidence-based and knowledge-based practice, stating that the former has a higher scientific status, including reference to measurements and a quantitative research design. Studies indicate that the introduction of “evidence-based”

standardized assessment tools has been furthered by parallel professionalization strivings among social workers (Martinell Barfoed & Jacobsson 2012).

### MEASURING SOCIAL WORK IN SWEDEN

Several current state initiatives in Sweden show increased emphasis on accountability, transparency, comparison, and ranking. For example, since 2011, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare has required that every municipality elaborate a *Quality Management System* to organize the planning, guiding, controlling, monitoring, evaluation, and improvement of their activities. This includes requirements for continuous delivering of statistical reports, and accounting for working methods and routines as “process maps” and in other standardized forms (National Board of Health and Welfare 2012). Documents on municipality web sites nowadays provide numeric data about the organization’s performance – for example, the number of reports and applications from the unit this month, the number of “re-actualizations”, the number of assessments per social worker employed at the unit, whether investigations were performed within the statutory timeframe, how long a user must wait for attendance, and the satisfaction rate among clients.<sup>1</sup>

Another initiative is the construction of national and regional statistical databases – with names such as Open Comparisons and Kolada – that can be used to compare the quality and performance of social and health services by applying measurable indicators. Such databases have gradually been developed following the release of an interim report from the Swedish government (SOU 2005: 110; SOSFS 2011: 9) emphasizing that municipalities should identify and use key indicators and comparative data to share knowledge and “good examples”, as well as for obtaining data for prioritizations.

The elaboration of “national indicators” of quality within social services is an on-going project that is executed with cooperation between state authorities and local managers. The “Handbook for the Development of Indicators” (National Board of Health and Welfare 2014.a) states that indicator-based comparisons and evaluations should be used to support decision-making at various levels (ibid: 9). The handbook also explains the distinctions between *structural* indicators, *process* indicators, *result* indicators, and *effect* indicator – which must all be measurable (ibid.: 11–13). Indicators already in use include the home service hours per user, the costs of disability-related interventions according to the Social Services Act, and the average duration of child and family investigations (RKA 2014, National Board of Health and Welfare 2014.a).

The very recent initiatives described in this section illustrate how ideas regarding the importance of measurements for increasing efficiency that

1 For example, *Jämförelseprojektet* Vellinge municip. 2015-05-18; *Öppna jämförelser* Avesta municip. 2015-05-18.

emerged during the 1980s and 1990s have been present, and even intensified, in recent reforms in Sweden.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretically, this analysis was inspired by scholars who, in the tradition of the sociology of knowledge, have analysed people's trust in numbers and the perception of numbers as "truth speakers". It is often maintained that even quantitative data – ascribed with objectivity and neutrality – are products of someone's interpretations, choices, interests, and negotiations (e.g. of definitions, measures, selections, category constructions, etc.) (Best 2001: 60–161; Power 1999: xiv; Timmermans & Epstein 2010: 69, 72). In Darrell Huff's classic book *How to lie with statistics* (1954), he discussed the tendency to place erroneous confidence in numbers. This book, as well as Joel Best's sequel (2001), includes various examples of intended and unintended manipulations, and inappropriate comparisons between different kinds of statistics caused by incompetence or disrespect (ibid.: 62, 113).

Not only are numbers a product of the social environment; they also influence the social environment and impact chains of actions and interactions. Espeland and Stevens (2008) describe the "doing of numbers" and "what gets done by" them (ibid.: 405) and its analysis entails distinguishing between numbers that *mark* (name and classify phenomenon, without measuring) and numbers that *commensurate* (give value to and compare phenomenon, measure). The latter is the more socially transformative form of quantification. Espeland and Stevens (2008: 404) state that "Numbers help constitute the things they measure by directing attention, persuading, and creating new categories for comprehending the words", and call for investigation of quantification in different contexts – such as the social work interventions examined in this paper. Moreover, they identify five primary dimensions that such inquiries might pursue: work, reactivity, discipline, authority, and aesthetics.

Michael Power (2004: 775), and others (Miller & Rose 1990; Rose 1991; Shore & Wright 2015) further argue that numbers are tools of a governing, controlling, and directing practice within public organizations. In their view, performance measurement systems serve to define performance, direct management attention, and induce behavioural change rather than to faithfully represent social phenomena (Power 2004: 776). Moreover, such measurements aim to modify behaviour in the interest of control and "to be legitimate, these numbers must pass themselves off as being about independent reality; they must appear natural" (ibid.: 776). Power also describes a cyclical process in which incompleteness of or lack of satisfaction with a certain measure is immediately followed by a search for a better measure that will eventually be accepted, initiating the cycle again (ibid.: 778).

Within this approach, authors commonly argue that statistics and the urge for better and more precise measurements are an inevitable part of society,

and thus one should not aim to get rid of numbers. Rather, authors encourage a critical view on all presented numbers. The purposes and meanings of quantification are established through the use of numbers and what gets done with the numbers. Therefore, a researcher should empirically investigate why, how, and by whom the numbers are being produced. It is also important to discuss the expected and the unintended consequences of different measuring initiatives (Power 2004: 780; Best 2001: 167–169; Timmermans & Epstein 2010: 78).

I additionally draw upon the concept of *pseudo-quantities*, defined by Sven-Erik Liedman (2013: 48) as “a quality that more accurately can be characterised verbally, either by description or by more expressive means” (cf. Power 2004: 776). Pseudo-quantities can be harmless and useful – for example, school grades can be used to acquire an overview of the student’s performance. However, a conversation with the teacher will likely provide more precise and nuanced information about the student’s abilities (Liedman 2013: 48). Undesirable consequences are possible when pseudo-quantities are gathered in indexes used for comparisons and rankings that can impact the choices and actions of citizens, politicians, funders, and professionals (ibid.: 49). In such cases, the originator of the assessment disappear and the subjective, tacit, and arbitrary engagement distinguishing the practice of deciding grades, choosing indicators, selecting and coding categories or valuing information becomes invisible. Dimensions that are lost in the translation of quality into quantity are no longer accessible to the reader and the information is instead perceived as neutral and comparable (Liedman 2013: 49, 56; Power 2004: 768).

The paradox of pseudo-quantities is that while “illusory exactitude appears to be more reliable than qualified expert judgement” (Liedman 2013: 61), they are actually per definition less exact, and are rather arbitrary descriptions of reality compared to more nuanced statements. Pseudo-quantities confuse rather than clarify the image of an activity (Liedman 2011: 72). Liedman coined the concept of pseudo-quantities as a tool to search for mechanisms and processes underlying an emerging phenomenon (ibid.: 45). Here I will use his concept as a means of illuminating the delicacy of measuring social engagements. While Liedman has demonstrated the relevance of pseudo-quantities in the field of education and research, here I explore how similar processes play out within the social services.

## **Ethnographic fieldwork of a social services management team**

Empirical data were collected through ethnographic fieldwork during fall 2013 and spring 2014. I observed and interviewed the management team of a child and welfare unit within the Swedish social services, and documents were collected. At the time of the fieldwork, the observed management team

participated in a national programme, comprising a course on “result-based management” that was executed by Sweden’s biggest employers’ organization for the public sector (SALAR) and commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs (2013). The course aimed to teach methods for constant improvements, EBP implementation, and systematic measuring and monitoring. In 2014, over half of the Swedish municipalities had participated in the course, and new courses had been negotiated for the following year as well as an expansion to other public sector areas. The course can be described as ambitious in the sense that it lasted for a whole year, including monthly seminars and lectures. Participants were expected to select an authentic problem and execute organizational changes applying the methods taught and with supervision by the course leader. Table 1 illustrates the occasions for data collection and what professionals and organizations were represented at these occasions.

Table 1. Occasions for data collection

Method	Occasion	Organizations and professions
Observations	Course seminars, 12 full days	Ministry of Health and Social Affairs National Board of Health and Welfare Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions Open Comparisons Social service managements from 11 municipalities: managers at different levels, administrative staff, controllers, Human Relations staff
	Project meetings at Child and Welfare office, 7 meetings	Head of Department Heads of Units, 2 Quality Coordinator Controller
	Team meetings at Child and Welfare office, 9 meetings	Employees at child and family investigation unit, 7 social workers Head of Unit Assistant Head of Unit Quality Coordinator
Interviews	Individual interviews, semi-structured, 5 interviews	Head of Department Heads of Units, 2 Quality Coordinator Controller
	Group interview, semi-structured, 1 interview	Quality Developer Head of Human Relations Finance Manager
Documents	Collected at above-mentioned occasions	



Field notes, interview transcriptions, and collected documents were all in Swedish. For our present analysis, selected extracts have been translated into English.

As a participant observer, I did not strive to be a “fly on the wall” or a fully participating member, which can be considered the two extremes within ethnography (Fine 1993: 281; Emerson et al. 2011: 1–3). At times, I participated in discussions – for example, when the managers discussed measurable goals for their case works (participant-as-observer). Other times, I used a more interview-like approach, asking questions to enhance my own understanding and contextualization (observer-as-participant) (Atkinson et al. 2001: 32). The observations focused on how members interacted in “naturally occurring” conversations and discussions, as well as on how the participants handled various situations (Silverman 2007: 51). I entered the field with an explorative approach and without predefined research questions. In line with what is sometimes referred to as “working backwards” (Becker 2008; Wästerfors 2008), the present findings concern a theme that emerged during fieldwork.

## Findings: negotiated yet powerful numbers

In line with the ongoing expansion of measuring culture, the observed course for social service management expressed high expectations for measurements and their potential to solve the challenges facing their organizations. These same expectations were applied to challenges as varied as combating homelessness, improving child and family investigations, and increasing the satisfaction rate of home care amongst the elderly. In the model for “systematic improvement”, one key component was the participants’ task to elaborate measurements and quantitative indicators for milestones and overall goals for their engagements. The managers were offered workshops, lectures, and supervision in statistics to explore how to better elaborate measures and indexes, what measurements can be used for, and how different kinds of data can be connected to acquire advanced information.

The logic behind both evidence-based practice and new public management was reflected in the course, with often-repeated messages such as “We must *measure* to *know* in order to *govern*” and “When other solutions fail, only measurements remain”. At the start of the course, numbers were already assigned a “representative” function as well as an “indicative” function, and were expected to create precise knowledge as well as enable comparisons, prioritization, and standard setting for the social problems in question. Numeric data would counteract inefficiency, arbitrariness, and subjective judgement.

However, the data identified situations and developments pointing in a somewhat different and contradictory direction. During fieldwork, various dynamics played out in relation to numbers, which were marked by unclarity,

negotiation, doubtfulness, and even conflict – indicating that even numbers seem to face human and social influences. These dynamics can be better understood from the perspective of sociology of knowledge, focusing on “the doing of numbers”, and from analysing the number construction and application.

Four such dynamics will be highlighted below. The first section discusses the representative potential of numbers, and demonstrates the participants’ struggles to find satisfactory measures. The second part examines numbers as ammunition, illustrating how they can be effective tools for accomplishing a goal. The third section illuminates a “decoupling” practice, in which publicly presented numbers poorly reflected the actual situation. The final part discusses a case that illustrates how governing by numbers can manifest itself in social work at a concrete level. This analysis aims to show the nuances and difficulties that appear throughout the unfolding of intended and unintended consequences of a measuring project within the social services, in parallel to the expectations of the rational and objective numeric measurement approach.

### **NEGOTIATIONS ABOUT NUMBERS AND WHAT THEY REPRESENT**

Scholars have noted that behind the construction of indicators, standards, and statistics lie human choices, preferences, and negotiations – an often neglected subjective aspect (Espeland & Stevens 2008; Timmermans & Epstein 2010). Upon setting a standard, proposing an indicator, or producing statistics, the measurements appear to be objective and producing comparable information. There is a tendency to forget the negotiation processes through which people decided which numbers to use, what they should represent, and how they should be valued against each other. The theoretical separation of “numbers that commensurate” from “numbers that mark” (Espeland & Stevens 2008: 403, 408) serves to highlight the more socially transformative act through which values are selected to describe phenomenon and relationships among objects, as difference is transformed into quantity.

Participants in the management course were invited to take part in what can be considered as a national commensuration project of quality measures for the social services. One aim of the course was to encourage the participants to report new standardized data to national statistical databases. The course leader expressed that the social services had ignored the potential of such measurements for too long. A government representative informed the participants that:

Comparisons and rankings are important tools to illuminate results and differences between municipalities, and to create data as a base for improvements. The government wants to work more intensively with open comparisons as indicators of quality. (Field note, course day 1)

Establishing comparable measurements and indicators for social services is an ongoing project executed by professionals, stakeholders, and authorities. The National Board of Health and Welfare published the first report on “open comparisons” in 2010, and new indicators have been added every year since then (National Board of Health and Welfare 2015). As the course participants elaborated measures for their case works, they were encouraged to find inspiration from already existing indicators as well as to suggest new ones for inclusion among the national indicators. This situation presented a good opportunity to study the processes that lead to the establishment of standards and indicators.

It is a delicate task to identify measures and indicators for social services activities, which was reflected in the participants’ ambiguous feelings towards the exercises. On one hand, some expressed positive feelings regarding how they contributed to structure and direction in the work. As Liedman (2013) has highlighted, pseudo-quantities can be appreciated for supplying “informative” and “concrete” information. Along these lines, the participants celebrated the predefined measurements that indicated when they were making progress towards the milestones. On the other hand, participants experienced frustration and struggles when trying to identify satisfying ways to measure the kinds of activities they were engaged in. Some complained that important dimensions were lost in this process. The practitioners expressed a counterpart to the scholarly critique of intentions to quantify “social” or “qualitative” processes (Svenaesus & Bornemark 2009; Liedman 2011, 2013):

But how do you measure a target such as a reasonable standard of living for all citizens; should we go out on the square and ask? And all the preventive work – how do you measure that? We can only say that it is probably because of what we do that we don’t have the same high numbers as another municipality ... but we cannot know that this is the cause. There are so many things that interact. (Field notes from group discussion)

Certain problem areas were sometimes perceived as impossible to measure, and therefore disqualified as a “workable” problem. One group chose to work with interventions for acute homeless persons who were already registered in social services databases and, therefore, favoured measurements taken before and after the intervention. Less reachable groups, including second- and third-hand contractors and people relying on black-market housing, were given lower priority with reference to the immeasurability of such cases:

It is because we cannot measure it/.../It is so difficult to capture it and to get the numbers right. We know that there are many people, especially adolescents, involuntarily living in insecure conditions but they don’t contact the social services. Since they have

housing they are not entitled to welfare, so they have no reason to contact us. There is no use in trying to measure interventions before and after. (Transcription from group interview)

When measurability is the main requirement, there is a risk that items that cannot be measured at that time or by those persons will be excluded from the agenda. This inherent weakness of quantitative methods has been previously discussed by researchers (Pierson 2007). In this case, the prioritizations resulted in acute interventions on behalf of preventive work. This analysis also showed that it is a difficult task to define outcomes or performance measures for social problems, and that some dimensions can get lost or simplified in the process. While this section has illuminated dynamics in the process of number construction, the following sections will discuss situations that occur around already established indicators.

### **NUMBERS AS AMMUNITION**

Joel Best (2001: 6) describes how social statistics play an important role in conflicts over the status of social problems or phenomenon. To demand resources and engagement from politicians and public servants, it is important to have numbers to establish the extension of a social problem. On the other hand, the authorities may use numbers to deny such needs. In a constant battle for resources and influence, charts and diagrams have become the most effective ammunition used by all competing parties, leading the author to name these battles “stat wars”. It has also been described how a crucial historical point in the modern gay right movements was when surveys of sexual behaviour in the United States statistically acknowledged the group as comprising a substantial proportion (10%) of the population (Espeland & Stevens 2008: 413–414).

Similarly, my present data indicated that the staff’s new skills in statistics production had immediate impacts on their work situation. The most impressive example was the unit’s successful negotiation for new positions after producing a chart describing the increase in their workload. The controller explained that:

We chose to look at the number of investigations opened, which had notably increased by 32 % since last year! And the resources had not been increased at all. This is the reason why we weren’t keeping up with the incoming investigations. We had the same amount of social workers with a lot more cases to handle. After showing this to the politicians, we were assigned three more positions. We haven’t previously had a tradition of showing them this kind of information. It is definitely a consequence of the course we are taking. We would never have produced these statistics otherwise. (Interview with Controller)

The respondent also explained that the management had not previously “ordered” information from him in such a way; he had only provided them with data based on his own judgement. From now on, the management will request information that serves their specific needs. The respondents perceived the training in statistics as the main factor in their success. They had previously tried to argue for more resources several times, without getting any support from the politicians:

No, it must be made very clear for the politicians; you have to describe that there is a difference in incoming cases using numbers and nothing else. Only then can they understand that the situation isn’t durable. When you just say it in words ... that we have so much to do ... they will just respond in terms of superficial pitying for the social workers. I mean, anything can be interpreted from words, if they are just words. (Interview with one Head of Unit)

When requesting additional resources, statistical data turned out to be successful ammunition to convey the message about an escalating workload. This example reflects the greater status of evidence that numbers have compared to other kinds of information. It also reveals the effectiveness of statistics when directed towards a specific purpose.

### **NUMBERS FAR FROM REALITY**

Numbers seemed to show a tendency to “live lives of their own” with a risk of reflecting the situation in focus poorly. Unreliable numbers could result from misunderstandings, conflicts of interpretation, or deliberate manipulations. The participants commonly created coding methods or categories that were too broad or too abstract, leaving the data open to different interpretations. This sometimes resulted in numbers that were meaningless, misleading, or even a cause for infected discussions. On some occasions, conflicts arose due to different interpretations of what a number actually represented. Numbers were also often unreliable when participants searched for information in databases – for example, even if statistics showed unavailable positions at a treatment clinic, the treatment position might actually be available; and data showing a municipality’s unemployment rate could not tell you whether a specific person actually was unemployed.

Pure manipulations – what Darrell Huff calls *statisticulations* (1954: 99) – seemed to be difficult to avoid when the course participants were working on their cases. The following example comes from a discussion between three managers, and illustrates how desirable results could be educed by using different measurement techniques. The managers were discussing the statistical data describing the unit’s average time to complete investigations for presentation on the municipalities’ web sites:

Manager 1: On average, it takes approximately 90 days to complete an assessment today, doesn't it?

Manager 2: Is it 90 days now? Then it is less than before ...

Manager 3: No, it is because we have started to measure in a different way. We used to measure only the completed assessments and we counted the days that they had been ongoing; then the numbers were different from now. The 90 days shown today is the average when we also include ongoing cases. It is a "here and now" number, so to speak. That number is a tricky one ... (Field notes, course day 5)

By including ongoing cases and temporarily including the present date as the final date, they could lower the average duration and produce a more favourable number. Such a strategy to elicit a "better" result is described by Huff as a statistical trick: "like the little dash of powder, little pot of paint, statistics are making many an important fact look like what she ain't" (Huff 1954: 14). Such "powdering" of reality is a means of presenting misleading information without qualifying as a lie; and no one can be held responsible for it. According to Power (2004: 774) and Shore and Wright (2015: 26), the audit culture itself opens up avenues for mismanagement and even corruption by creating conditions for strategic management with the exclusive goal of meeting performance targets. Rather than discussing changes related to social workers' prerequisites for conducting investigations, emphasis is placed on changes in measurement techniques. This situation contrasts sharply with the status that numbers seem to have and with the course leader's message that if you just measure, you will *know* the reality better.

### **NUMBERS AS PROTAGONISTS**

The above discussion between managers is an example of the neo-institutional term "decoupling" (Meyer & Rowan 1991; 57–58; Brunsson 1986: 173), i.e. when the actual practice within an organization is decoupled from what is presented to the outside world. This represents a strategy of responding to political ideas and decisions regarding standardization and transparency, and of legitimizing the organization, while simultaneously maintaining the potential for variety and flexibility within the practice. In the presented example, nothing "real" was changed, only the method of measuring the phenomenon. In other instances, data demonstrate how a focus on measurable outcomes influenced an organization's prioritizations and forced work in a certain direction. Fieldwork revealed several examples of how the "governing by numbers" described in the literature (Rose 1991; Power 1999, 2004; Espeland & Stevens 2008; Shore & Wright 2015) can manifest itself, and what this can mean for social work practice at a concrete level. One of those examples will be discussed in the following:

The average time to complete investigations is one of the suggested national key indicators for the quality of child and family welfare units (RKA 2012). Just before the fieldwork started, the Social Care Inspectorate had inspected the child and welfare office where the observations were made. The conclusions of this inspection included remarks about the office's failure to complete child and family investigations within statutory time frames. It was requested that the management improve this situation immediately and, thus, "reducing average investigation time" was selected as their focus during the course. One activity initiated by the management was the involvement of the social workers in constructing a detailed "flow chart" or "mapping" of the working process, with the aim of streamlining this process. The social workers openly protested this activity, and an infected discussion followed. The managers complained about the social workers' inability or unwillingness to "close" investigations. From their perspective, the social workers were too ambitious or "ceremonious" and often investigated circumstances that did not appear in the original report:

Some investigators believe that they must continue following up the families for a long time. I don't know whether this is due to a lack of faith in the treatment that they have referred them to, or in the schools. Anyhow, they seem to want to control the situation and to keep the case open so that they are entitled to continue calling the family to check that everything is going well. This is not how we should be working; we have to complete the investigations on time. There are only two possibilities: to end it with or without intervention. In case of the former, the full responsibility is passed to the unit that provides interventions. I find it strange if a social worker continues calling the family week after week if she has not found a reason for an intervention. (Interview with Head Manager)

The above quote reveals the management's aim to identify standardized "moments" at which a social worker had done enough, as a means of clarifying when an investigation should be closed. Moreover, management felt that when intervention is suggested, the case should be fully handed over to the unit or institution responsible for the treatment. Shore and Wright (2015) state that within audit culture, the governing body manifests itself through efforts "to produce responsible and calculating professionals who will calibrate their work and worth against their organization's performance indicators" (ibid.: 26) rather than against their clients' needs. The above example reflects an effort to reduce the social workers' uncertainty or ambiguity regarding a family's situation. However, Nigel Parton (1998: 6) describes an *unavoidable uncertainty* that is characteristic in child and family investigations (see also Ponnert 2013: 42–53). In fact, a key component of a social worker's expertise is the ability

to "rest" in ambiguity and uncertainty (Parton 2013:23) with the purpose of reflecting, questioning, and searching for knowledge and more information. Such a working method is grounded in knowledge of the complexity of the client and the surrounding world, which is why *active passivity* can be a fully appropriate strategy of action (Ponnert 2013:53).

This example represents as a situation where quantitative logic collides with the qualitatively oriented practice of child investigation. The quote reflects the managers' frustration with social workers who do not close cases despite a lack of evidence that the family requires an intervention or despite the fact that an intervention is ongoing. However, the social workers' views of when a case should be closed are connected to continued uncertainty regarding the family's situation, or a lack of confidence in the treatment or institutions to which their clients have been referred. This uncertainty is incompatible with the organization's need to complete investigations on time, or with the urge to *know* which option is "right" for the family. Thus, the social workers are perceived as insecure and "unable" to end their cases. Social workers' professional discretion is clearly challenged by the organizational logic, as previous research has suggested (Evetts 2011; Ponnert & Svensson 2015). Others have expressed this scenario as one where quality is challenged by quantity (Liedman 2013:61; Shore & Wright 2015: 26).

## Summarizing discussion

Recent state initiatives embrace high expectations that measurements, performance indicators, and statistics will solve challenges facing social services and "shape up" social work practices. Influential developments, including evidence-based practice and modern management forms in public organizations, invoke "cultures of objectivity" (Power 2004: 770) including the pervasive view that numbers are rational and neutral.

Previous research shows increased dissatisfaction and alienation among professionals, and highlights the bureaucratization of social work as a possible explanation. To explore this possibility in greater depth, I focused my present research question on numbers. Here I have asked what practices evolve around the initiatives to measure, compare, and rank social work? And how does an emphasis on numbers influence practices at a social services office? From a sociology-of-knowledge perspective, I join other researchers in the tradition of empirical investigation of both intended and unintended consequences of initiatives implemented "from above".

The present ethnographic data revealed tension between the status of numbers as guiding "truth speakers", and the emergence of reluctance and confusion as numbers are applied to practice with various implications for social work. Situations unfolded in which misunderstandings over numbers led to



conflicts, statistics were manipulated, problem areas were assigned lower priority due to their immeasurability, and work was forced in a certain direction due to the need to show desirable statistics. On the other hand, situations arose in which figures acted as important ammunition for the management to attain greater resources and influence. Such dimensions are better analysed within the framework of the sociology of knowledge (Huff 1958; Best 2001; Espeland & Stevens 2008), in which numbers are acknowledged as produced in and helping to produce the surrounding social context. Overall, the data reflect how subjects negotiate, choose, define, value, and fail in the very construction of the numbers, in line with Power's statement (2004:770) that "The surface of the measurements is visible and transparent, but in reality it reflects very specific and often transitory communities of practice in which values of measurement, audit, and control converge".

There also appears to be a limited extent to which the quality of a social phenomenon can be quantitatively described, as highlighted in Liedman's (2015) concept of "pseudo-quantities". The present data illustrated how participants struggled to find satisfactory measures for activities generally perceived as "qualitative", and the joint perception that important dimensions would be lost in this process. It can additionally be argued that an account of a child and family investigation prepared by the social worker or client would give superior information about the investigation's quality, rather than focusing the time that it took to complete the case (cf. Liedman 2015). The concept of pseudo-quantities was originally applied in the field of education, and can most likely also be useful for examining the process of creating national indicators for social work.

With regards to the governing or "figurative" (Power 2004: 771) dimension of numbers, statistics could act as powerful tools for directing or "forcing" social work in a certain direction. The intensified focus on completing child investigations within statutory time-frames and the associated repercussions, had implications for both the way an investigation was conducted and for the perception of what constituted a good investigation. In a sense, the new indicator suggests that a good investigation is one that is completed on time, allowing little permissiveness for doubts, ambivalence, grey areas, or insecurity on the part of the social worker. However, handling such nonspecific or insecure situations is a distinguishing feature of the profession of social work (Parton 1998; Ponnert 2013). Thus, the social work practice was affected when statistics (one kind of knowledge) became the main goal, limiting the social workers' discretion and judgement process (another kind of knowledge). The requirement to satisfy new measures and indicators created a tension between what some perceived as good practice and the discretion desired by others. Those observations are in alignment with previous research showing that "organizational" logic can challenge professional discretion (Evetts 2009, 2011; Ponnert & Svensson 2015).

Overall, the present study reveals that the embedment of numbers in human practice adds dimensions beyond the clarity and knowledge that they are expected to bring about. Upon their enactment in everyday social work, such numbers both capture and are captured by the interactions and activities within this practice. New dynamics appear during the acquisition of numbers and as a consequence of numbers, some of which embrace administrative tasks quite distant from the traditional core of social work: meeting clients, approaching problems from an overall perspective, and integrating educational knowledge with practical experience to make well-informed judgements. These dimensions can be understood as a consequence of quantitative logic colliding with qualitative practice. The findings of this study contribute to previous knowledge explaining why social workers seem uncomfortable within the new organizations in which they work.

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# Indications of Quality or Quality as a Matter of Fact?

## “Open Comparisons” within the Social Work Sector

Elisabeth Carlstedt & Katarina Jacobsson

### Abstract

Improving quality by auditing, ranking, and measuring the public sector is now a well-established practice. Quality measurements within social work are no exception, despite professionals' initial concerns. The aim of this paper is to analyze how quality is measured within the social services and how the measurement tool Open Comparisons (OC) is received by professionals. The material primarily consists of documents and interviews with managers and quality developers. In particular, this paper contributes to our understanding of the process in which *indications* of quality become established *measures* of quality, reified into documents, plans, and tables. Practitioners can use the OC results as guidance or rhetorical props or for displaying their organization in a “shop window.” Because of the transparency of the results, the prospect of pride – and the risk of shame for being one of the few municipalities that withholds information – may explain the great readiness to voluntarily provide the data necessary for OC. Nevertheless, questions are raised by practitioners about whether OC measures “quality that matters.”

## Introduction

Auditing, evaluations, rankings, and quality measurements of the public sector have become integrated tools to ensure accountability, improvement, quality, and transparency in publicly funded organizations (Power 1997; Sahlin-Andersson 2000; Shore & Wright 2004; 2015). This development largely derives from market-inspired New Public Management reforms, which have gained increased influence in the public sector. During the late 1990s, a number of changes occurred within the Swedish public sector, bringing the concept of quality into focus (Strannegård 2013). Virtually every area of the public sector is audited, from health care to higher education (Blomgren & Waks 2010), with the intention of ensuring transparency, control, and quality of organizational activities (Power 1997). In addition, an alarming lack of “systematic knowledge” in social work was announced (Bergmark & Lundström 2006), at which

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point the authorities launched the concept of Evidence-Based Practice (Alexandersson 2006). The ideas of New Public Management and Evidence-Based Practice represent parallel and sometimes intertwined threads that are said to share the common goal of improving quality within the public sector. Taken together, New Public Management and Evidence-Based Practice might explain what Lindgren et al. (2012) call the “quality measurement boom.”

The area of social work is now rather well acquainted with various sorts of quality measurement instruments, despite the fact that quality and outcome of social care have proven difficult to measure (e.g., Malley & Fernández 2010). This paper deals with one such tool, called Open Comparisons, an instrument for gathering and measuring data annually, based on standardized indicators of “good” quality. We pay particular attention to how this instrument is constructed, first by analyzing various documents, and second by examining how it is used and talked about among professionals within the social services, mainly those responsible for providing the data requested.

In 2006, the first Open Comparisons audited the quality of Swedish health care. Since then, Open Comparisons has grown to cover several areas of the public sector such as social services, education, public transportation, and many more. The objectives of Open Comparisons are extensive – in the words of the authorities:

*The purpose of Open Comparisons is to improve the quality of social services and home nursing health care by providing a pertinent ground for political decisions on different levels and an efficient tool for practitioners’ continuous development of best practice. It will also serve as the basis for follow-ups and evaluations of social service practices (National Board of Health and Welfare 2010b:6; our translation).*

Open Comparisons consists of a package of auditing techniques. One of them is a questionnaire distributed by the National Board of Health and Welfare to all municipalities in Sweden (National Board of Health and Welfare 2014a:29f). This questionnaire – its form, use, and function – is the topic for this paper, where we reference it as the “OC questionnaire.” When we refer to Open Comparisons and to “OC documents,” we also have this questionnaire in mind, along with its many manuals, instructions, and governmental decrees. As the name implies, Open Comparisons is *open*, accessible on the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare’s website. Open Comparisons also aims at enabling *comparisons* between the organizations participating in filling out the OC questionnaire (National Board of Health and Welfare 2014a:8). The results of the OC questionnaire are thus publicly displayed, visualizing more or less quality in various municipalities by colours: plenty of green boxes are desirable while red boxes signal poor quality. In this sense, Open Comparisons involves soft regulation (Jacobsson, Mörth & Sahlin-Andersson 2004).



Despite professional skepticism and researchers' concerns (e.g., Clarkson 2010; Moran, O'Connor & Borowitz 2013; Strannegård 2013; Blomgren & Waks 2010), the idea (and practice) of measuring social work is now well established, particularly at the management level (Hjärpe 2015). As with pre-school teachers who initially were skeptics and resisted statistics but then quickly and easily adopted the calculative and evaluative stance that was expected of them when their work was "LEAN:ed" (Thedvall 2015), the underlying logic of evaluation also seems to be unchallenged within the social work area. This is apparent in the fact that even though filling out the OC questionnaire is voluntary, the level of support suggests an institutionalized practice. For example, the 2014 child welfare OC questionnaire was associated with only a 5% drop-out (317 municipalities and specialized social service agencies were included in the sample) (Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare 2014a:32). There is a sociologically interesting tension between a skeptical and critical attitude towards the idea of measuring social work on the one hand and the professional obedience or change of heart that may occur when quality measurement is enacted in practice on the other hand. What happens to "quality" when it is pinpointed by the authorities and strived for by members in the field?

Organizational researchers have shown that establishing rankings and standards having the name-and-shame logic – that is, the risk of having a poor result on display – makes organizations behave in response to these rankings (e.g., Blomgren & Waks 2010), adapting to the standards presented in the measurement documents (Clarkson 2010). Power et al. (2009) call this organizational awareness *reputational risk*, which they argue will eventually permeate all organizational activity. Such awareness can lead to a general sense of vulnerability when it comes to accountability and assessment of organizational performance (ibid.). Still, reputational risk only partly explains the tension between a critical and obedient stance, mainly focusing on the adapting tendencies by the organization.

Unlike many researchers' inquiries about quality measurement at the organizational level (e.g., Behn 2003; Blomgren & Waks 2010; Clarkson 2010; Moran, O'Connor & Borowitz 2013; Fung et al. 2008), we will examine in detail the documents that constitute Open Comparisons, focusing on how quality measures are fleshed out and selected. We will demonstrate the process by which *indications* of quality become factual *measures* of quality. Furthermore, we will analyze how the professionals who deal with the OC questionnaire describe it and what they make of its content, showing that practitioners use the OC results for more purposes than initially intended. In short, the aim of this paper is to analyze how quality is measured within the social services with the help of the instrument Open Comparisons and how the documents and the results are received by professionals. Our inquiries thus relate two overlapping aspects:

- 1) *The documents per se*: How is the concept of quality defined and shaped? What is “the agency” of the OC documents?
- 2) *Accounts*: How do professionals describe and define quality and the instrument Open Comparisons? In what ways is Open Comparisons portrayed as useful (or useless) for professionals?

## A social constructionist framework

The theoretical and methodological framework for this analysis is based on social constructionism informed by ethnomethodology (cf. Gubrium & Holstein 2012). The notion of “member,” the shorthand term for “collectivity member” (Garfinkel 1967:57), is vital to ethnomethodology and refers to the shared competencies people have as members of society, a social group, or a local culture (ten Have 2002). Furthermore, “[t]he constructionist methodological stance distinguishes between the members’ *practical* project and the sociologist’s *theoretical* project” (Ibarra & Kitsuse 2003:21). Accordingly, the work of defining “quality”, finding “measurement techniques”, deciding on “indicators” – these are all tasks performed by members of the field of study, mostly by civil servants at the public authorities whose efforts eventually materialize in various documents. This association means that we view the terms “indicator” and “quality” as *members’ concepts*: we investigate how indicators and quality are constructed rather than using them as part of our technical (sociological) vocabulary. Likewise, the work performed by those who are subject to quality measurements – assisting with information, filling out the OC questionnaire, responding critically or approvingly to indicators and quality measurements – is also carried out by members (social workers, controllers, unit managers). A constructionist view on these tasks does not value some members’ accounts of “what quality *really* is” as more credible than others but asks questions about how such claims are made.

Our analytical vocabulary and approach thus include other concepts and (cl)aims than those circulating in the field among the social workers and managers we have interviewed. We use two specific lenses through which we interpret our findings: a sociological interpretation of the process of institutional fads (Best 2006) and a methodological stance in viewing documents as agents (Prior 2003).

### QUALITY MEASUREMENTS À LA MODE

Quality measurements in general, and Open Comparisons in particular, can be said to be “à la mode” in Sweden (Lindgren et al. 2012; Jacobson & Martinell Barfoed 2016), and in a broader sense, Open Comparisons fits well into Power’s (1997) Audit Society. Inspired by Joel Best (2006), we describe Open Comparisons in terms of an institutional fad (or trend). Best (2006) analyzes how an

institutional fad arises, is promoted, and eventually is adopted in an organization. It takes a problem and a solution for a new trend to arise. The solution (i.e., the new fad) must offer a new and efficient way to deal with the problem, as well as proposing an explanation of the problem in a credible, rational, and logical way (Best 2006; see also Abrahamson 1996).

When a trend has been launched, it enters the next expansive phase: surging. Because the new trend promises to solve old difficult problems, this phase is often characterized by optimism and excitement. Members' belief in change, progress, and rationality makes them inclined to embrace institutional fads (Best 2006). As Brunsson (2006) puts it: trends are accepted and spread by "mechanisms of hope".

Often, some individuals are not as enthusiastic about the new trend and tend to express resistance and skepticism, but once a trend is established, it is rarely an option for individuals to decline. The trend's capability of surviving depends in part on enthusiasm, which is why a critical approach hardly is encouraged. Even if the new trend is presented as voluntary, the expectations from colleagues and superiors – and, in our case, from the state authorities – may be experienced as coercive (Best 2006, cf. Abrahamson 1991:594 on *The forced-selection perspective*). However, the spread of a trend can be explained not only by management governing but also with an emotional aspect (Best 2006:82ff.). Trends can be fun, interesting, and challenging. In this case, for example, managers and administrators can be attracted by or caught up in the competitive character of Open Comparisons and the prospect of presenting a successful organization. We analyze our material against this backdrop for explaining the fast spread and adoption of Open Comparisons despite members' initial skepticism and critique.

## DOCUMENTS AS AGENTS

A new institutional trend is often launched in the form of various documents (for instance instructions, checklists, reports), and the Open Comparisons instrument is no exception (Jacobsson & Martinell Barfoed 2016). We employ a specific approach to these documents. In line with Lindsay Prior (2003; 2011), we contest the majority view of documentary data that documents are detached from social action. Rather than cold and passive containers of text, documents can be quite lively agents in their own right (Prior 2003); among other things, they tell people what to do, they stir up conflicts, and they evoke emotions (Jacobsson 2016). Human-created artifacts – such as documents of various kinds – can assume the appearance of agents or counter-agents in social activity. Many documents aim to get something done. By containing instructions or demands, the memo initiates what Prior (2003:67) calls *action-at-a-distance*. Documents not only represent the world but also create and re-create the world.<sup>1</sup>

1 For other approaches on documents as agents, see Cooren (2004) and Ferraris (2012).

This view of documents is supported by Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), which strives to explain how non-human “things” are vital to all forms of organizational life in their own right (e.g., economic, technological, scientific). Whereas ANT makes up a serious theoretical option for redirecting our understanding of the importance of text and documents in everyday life (Prior 2016), for the purpose of this article, we have settled for the starting point that documents can be viewed as agents. This stance has both methodological and theoretical implications in guiding the analysis. For instance, the authors of the documents (and their intent) are of less importance than the document itself. We rather ask questions directly of the document: What is accomplished by the document? How is the document used by participants?

Another aspect pointed out by Prior (2003) is the ability of documents to make vague, abstract, and elusive ideas visible and traceable. “Quality” is one such indistinct idea that can thrive on definitions and instructions “in black and white” (or, in this particular case, green and red), and it can be manifested through various tables and plans. “Indeed,” says Prior (2003:62), “the actual organization of care can only be made evident in plans, registers and written protocols”.

## Research design

The material selected for the present analysis is part of a larger body of material compiled by several researchers as part of a 3-year project on *Expanding documenting practices within the social services and health care*.<sup>2</sup> The total material includes field work at three sites within the social services and at three primary care units. In addition, observations in a monthly course in social work management over one year was conducted, along with interviews and recordings of meetings relating to the course (Hjärpe 2015). Taken as a whole, our fieldwork has yielded important background knowledge for understanding the role of Open Comparisons in everyday work. For instance, our observations show that Open Comparisons is of interest mainly to the managers. Ordinary social workers or primary care staff seldom mentioned Open Comparisons at all. For this analysis, only the field of social work is considered, and our material consists of official documents and interviews.

### DOCUMENTS

Apart from interviews (see below), the material consists of public “OC documents” (Comparisons of social child and youth care 2014) produced by the state authorities, the public and private employers’ associations, and a non-profit trade

2 Funded by The Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences (Dnr: P12-1045:1). The article is developed from the work conducted by Carlstedt (2015) within the framework of this research project.

association (Famna). Apart from the OC questionnaire, these documents consist of policy documents, handbooks, results, and reports. The documents are selected for covering the period during which Open Comparisons of Social Child and Youth Care was initiated (2009) and developed as commissioned by the government.

Table 1.

Document description	No. of pages	Issued by
Questionnaire for Open Comparisons of Social Child and Youth Care 2014	22	National Board of Health and Welfare (2014a)
National strategy for quality development through Open Comparisons, agreed upon by the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Association of Private Care Providers and Famna	28	National Board of Health and Welfare (2009)
Project plan on intensifying the work with Open Comparisons	5	National Board of Health and Welfare (2010a)
Plan of action regarding the work with Open Comparisons 2010–2014	26	National Board of Health and Welfare (2010b)
Document produced by the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Association of Private Care Providers, and Famna, in which they describe and define Open Comparisons	3	National Board of Health and Welfare (2011)
Handbook for analyzing and implementing the results of Open Comparisons	70	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (2013)
Excel files where the respondents' answers are presented as green (positive) and red (negative) boxes in a table	x	Web page of National Board of Health and Welfare (2014) <sup>3</sup>
Report presenting the results of Open Comparisons of social child care 2014, including the questionnaire and indicators	93	National Board of Health and Welfare (2014a)
Handbook for developing indicators	27	National Board of Health and Welfare (2014b)

No particular document has been given preference over another. The thematic analysis of the OC documents focused on how indicators and measurements are defined, as well as how the professionals are supposed to use the Open Comparisons according to the authorities.

3 <http://www.socialstyrelsen.se/oppnjamforelser/barnochunga> (downloaded 2014-09-10).

## INTERVIEWS

To access focused talk about Open Comparisons, we conducted interviews with eight people who were experienced in collecting information for Open Comparisons by filling out the questionnaire distributed by the National Board of Health and Welfare. Eighteen unit managers and “quality developers” (most of them social workers by training) were asked via e-mail to participate, and 10 of them declined. During the interviews, the interviewer kept the OC questionnaire at the table, allowing the interviewee to browse through the document. At times, the interviewees offered to go through and comment on their own filled-out versions, and at times, the blank OC questionnaire served the purpose of bringing the document to the fore. Most of the interviews were conducted by Carlstedt, and all of them were audio recorded. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. Quotations presented in this paper have been translated into English in a manner that preserves the original meaning and style. Names of places and other revealing details have been altered to preserve anonymity. The thematic analysis of the interviews focused on what “knowledge” about quality the OC questionnaire conveys to the interviewees, as well as if, and how, they think Open Comparisons influences their practice.

## Research findings

The analysis is divided into two parts: *Making quality measurable* (based on documents) and *Quality at work: from measurable to useful (or useless) for practical purposes* (based on interviews). In the first part, we start out with the official OC documents, asking how “quality” is approached while we discuss how the OC questionnaire is constructed and how the survey results are presented by the authorities. Our task in this section is to analyze the processes in the documentary sources by which vague ideas of quality are turned into measurable “indicators of quality” and eventually become boiled down to simply “quality”. The second part takes the interviews with practitioners as a point of departure when examining how quality and the public Open Comparisons results are talked about and used by the practitioners for practical purposes.

### MAKING QUALITY MEASURABLE

When analyzing the logic behind the OC questionnaire, the descriptions of the purposes with Open Comparisons, and how it is expected to be used in the field, at least three assumptions about “quality” are evident:

- 1) Quality is definable.
- 2) Quality is operationalizable.
- 3) Quality is measurable.

First, in its most basic form, quality is said to be equivalent to the rather imprecise concept of *Good care* (National Board of Health and Welfare 2014b:9). In

contrast to a “subjective” view on quality (i.e., patient or client satisfaction), quality is constructed as consisting of objective properties, distilled in “dimensions” of quality and “characteristics” of those dimensions. Thus, good care consists of six different *dimensions*, which taken together are assumed to constitute good quality. The selected dimensions of quality are (1) Knowledge-based work, (2) Safety, (3) Individuality, (4) Efficiency, (5) Equality, and (6) Availability (National Board of Health and Welfare 2014b:10). Each dimension is elaborated into characteristics, striving to explain the content of a dimension.

Second, whereas the term “measurement” commonly is used for indisputable things, such as temperature or weight, “indicator” is used as a simplifying operationalization of complex theoretical concepts (Lindgren 2014:57f). Thus, immeasurable aspects of quality have to be excluded, and what cannot be measured has to be peeled off. The process of operationalization consists of constructing measurable indicators that are meant to reflect or give evidence of the specific quality dimension and ultimately add knowledge to the main question as to whether there is “good care” or not. Quality indicators are based on requests for specific working methods, and each indicator is tied to a quality dimension of *Good care* (National Board of Health and Welfare 2014a:9; 2014b:9). Below, we illustrate the process by which questions for practitioners are formulated and from what quality dimension they are derived. This example is based on the OC questionnaire’s last two questions:

Table 2.

Question	Quality dimension	Characteristics	Indicator name (requested working method)
<p><b>Question 19</b> If the child has its own social secretary, how can the child get in contact with the social secretary?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Via e-mail <input type="checkbox"/> Via text message <input type="checkbox"/> Via telephone <input type="checkbox"/> Other, name what:</p>	Safety	Care shall be safe. Risk prevention shall prevent injuries. Organizational activity shall also guarantee the legal rights of the individual.	Several alternative ways of contacting the social secretary daytime.
<p><b>Question 20</b> Do you give written (or if the child cannot read, verbal) information to every child placed in foster care about the child’s rights and contact information for the case worker and the Health and Social Care Inspectorate (IVO) where the child can report complaints?</p>	Safety	Care shall be safe. Risk prevention shall prevent injuries. Organizational activity shall also guarantee the legal rights of the individual.	Information given to children placed in foster care regarding the child’s rights and contact information of those responsible.

(Drawn from National Board of Health and Welfare 2014a:45-46; 2014a:92-93; 2014b:10; our transl.)

4 In our view, considering the indicator (“Several alternative ways of contacting the social secretary daytime”) and the following question, “availability” seems to be a more appropriate quality dimension than “safety”.

The OC questionnaire consists of 20 questions. Several indicators (and consequently the questions) regard documents: are there written agreements, plans, assessment instruments, and manual-based interventions? As pointed out by Prior (2003:62), elusive “things” such as work or quality can be made visible and traceable with documents. From an organizational point of view, this means that what is documented is given great priority because “care” can be lastingly manifested only in plans, agreements, evaluations, etc. The existence of the requested documents thus signals that the organization “has” quality.

Third, and related to the second assumption, quality is constructed as measurable. The results of the OC questionnaire are mostly not presented with numerical values, but in the more simple form of yes (green) or no (red). Practitioners are asked to check boxes to disclose information as to whether they have the requested quality indicators or not. The results are compiled in a report issued by The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (National Board of Health and Welfare 2014a), and the conspicuous colourful tables are published on the web site. The table below shows a segment regarding whether the municipality offers standardized group support in various forms for parents. The municipalities are listed on the y-axis, and the requested indicators on the x-axis:

Figure 1.

Socialstyrelsen		Manualbaserade insatser i öppenvård				
"x" = sekretess (1-3 personer) "y" = kvot med stor statistisk osäkerhet pga små tal (färre än 20) * (tom cell) = bortfall  För att förstå och tolka resultaten rätt läs i bilagan till rapporten "Öppna jämförelser social barn- och ungdomsvård 2014. Nationella resultat och metod" som du hittar på Socialstyrelsens webbplats.		Tillhandahåller manualbaserat föräldrastöd i grupp som biståndsbeslutad insats	Tillhandahåller manualbaserat föräldrastöd i grupp som service insats	Tillhandahåller manualbaserad psykosocial behandling som biståndsbeslutad insats	Tillhandahåller manualbaserad stödgrupps- verksamhet som biståndsbeslutad insats	Tillhandahåller manualbaserad stödgrupps- verksamhet som service insats
Kristinehamn	17	Ja	Ja	Nej	Ja	Ja
Filipstad	17	Nej	Ja	Nej	Nej	Nej
Hagfors	17	Nej	Nej	Nej	Nej	Ja
Arvika	17	Nej	Ja	Nej	Ja	Ja
Säffle	17	Nej	Ja	Nej	Nej	Ja
Lekeberg	18	Nej	Nej	Nej	Nej	Nej
Laxå	18	Nej	Nej	Nej	Nej	Nej
Hallsberg	18	Ja	Ja	Nej	Nej	Nej
Degerfors	18	Nej	Nej	Nej	Nej	Ja
Hällefors	18	Nej	Ja	Nej	Nej	Ja
Ljusnarsberg	18	Nej	Ja	Nej	Nej	Ja
Örebro	18	Ja	Ja	Nej	Ja	Nej
Kumla	18	Nej	Ja	Nej	Ja	Ja
Askersund	18	Ja	Ja	Nej	Nej	Ja
Karlskoga	18	Nej	Nej	Nej	Nej	Ja
Nora	18	Nej	Nej	Nej	Nej	Ja
Lindesberg	18	Nej	Ja	Ja	Nej	Ja

(Extract from Excel file<sup>5</sup>)

5 <http://www.socialstyrelsen.se/oppnajokforelser/barnochunga> (downloaded 2014-09-10).



The text in the left top corner reads: “To understand and interpret the results correctly, read the appendix to the report ‘Open comparisons social child and youth care 2014, National results and method’ [sic], which you will find on the web site of the National Board of Health and Welfare” (our transl.). This report actually has three appendices, starting at page 28 and ending at page 93, covering a detailed description of the methods and statistics used and giving an even more detailed account of the indicators chosen. It is thus a rather indigestible text and – as we have noticed in the field – it is more likely that the simplified colour scheme attracts more attention. Despite the disclaimer presented in the top corner of the Excel file, the concept of quality (initially with the rather vague definition of *Good care*) has now been boiled down to green and red columns in a table, visualizing each municipality’s amount of quality. The processes of defining, operationalizing, and measuring quality focus on making an abstract concept visible and (ac)countable with the result that it becomes reified (cf. Berger & Luckmann 1979). Quality becomes quantity: something to have more or less of.

To trigger an institutional trend, Joel Best (2006) stresses the importance of practitioners’ finding the new trend logical, rational, and credible. In our own efforts to penetrate the OC documents, we often found them quite difficult to follow. Furthermore, our experience is that social workers seldom consume reports, handbooks, and appendices regarding Open Comparisons. The mere volume of pages – the detailed descriptions of prerequisites and tables, the basic data, and sources of error, etc. – seems exhausting. Nevertheless, the massive production of documents on Open Comparisons, the persistent drive to implement this procedure for quality measurement in more and more areas, and repeated statements that Open Comparisons is a tool in great demand by workers in the field (e.g., Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2009:6) are all features that may work convincingly in themselves: “important people must have done some serious thinking here.” However, new ideas do not necessarily spring from an actual demand from those affected by the new idea (for example, as mentioned before, Open Comparisons was rarely mentioned by social workers during our fieldwork). The launching of new methods and strategies seldom simply fills a well-defined need from those working in the field but is often advocated by influential individuals: “novelties have a hard time spreading unless they first gain acceptance at the top” (Best 2006:40). This is particularly the case in centralized institutions where a few key people set the policies. The launching and spreading of Open Comparisons can thus be said to tap into the zeitgeist of New Public Management and the increasing use of different auditing techniques (cf. Power 1997).

### ***Indicating or proving quality?***

We will end this part of the analysis by pointing out what seems to be linguistic slippage in the descriptions of “quality”, “indicators”, and “measurements”. Let us give an example:

An indicator is a measurement that shows (indicates) an underlying relationship or development. Indicators are used to measure and follow up the quality of organizational structures and processes, as well as their results (National Board of Health and Welfare 2014a:9).

In the first sentence, an indicator is defined as something that indicates a probable – but not certain – correlation between the existence of the indicator and what is said to be social service quality. In the second sentence – and this is where the slippage occurs – indicators are said to measure quality: the existence of the indicator *is* quality. According to Eliasson-Lappalainen and Szebehely (1998), these taken-for-granted correlations between requested ways of working and quality are common within quality measurements; the very existence of the indicator, in and of itself, is believed to constitute “real” quality. Such assumptions are rarely given support in research and clinical experience (*ibid.*).

It should be mentioned that a less certain view of quality appears in the OC documents. Challenging and sometimes contradictory constructions of quality flicker by and seem to serve as “disclaimers” to the otherwise solid fact constructions presented in the documents. For instance, it is stated that quality is relative and depends on individual assessment or experience of the service provided (National Board of Health and Welfare 2014b:10). Such statements constitute a small part of the documentary material; they are few in number and rarely discussed. The overall impression is an image stating that quality is definable, operationalizable, and measureable in a rational and logical way. The measurement results can then be used as valid, reliable, and effective information, which gives the organizations a requested tool in the pursuit of “more” quality, at least in the form of more green boxes in Open Comparisons.

### **“QUALITY” AT WORK: FROM MEASURABLE TO USEFUL (OR USELESS) FOR PRACTICAL PURPOSES**

In the second stage of the analysis, we turn to the interviews conducted with professionals who had experience in filling out the OC questionnaire, to examine what knowledge about “quality” the OC questionnaire and results convey, and if (and how) that knowledge is perceived as useful to the practitioners.

Comparisons, accounting requirements, and rankings are expressions of so-called soft regulations (Blomgren & Waks 2010). Open Comparisons is obviously not only an instrument for measuring existing quality but also an instrument for launching and pushing for prescribed routines and methods (i.e., indicators). Given the request for such indicators and goal of influencing organizational decisions regarding quality development (cf. National Board of Health and Welfare 2010b:6), we can conclude that Open Comparisons is expected to *do something with* (or to) the practitioners (cf. Prior 2003). By “enlightenment

and persuasion”, Open Comparisons is intended to make organizations act in a certain way (Lindgren et al. 2012:46). The presumed soft guiding and voluntary regulation might be viewed not only as normative but also as mandatory and binding (e.g., Blomgren & Waks 2010; Clarkson 2010; Lindgren 2014). As one of our unit manager interviewees told us, the pressure to implement the requested indicators can be strong:

Interviewee: Speaking of Open Comparisons, take BBIC as an example [a standardized system for investigating children’s situation, cf. ICS: Integrated Children’s System]. If we are 33 municipalities in [the region], and we are one of three municipalities that doesn’t have BBIC, then you’ll understand the kind of high pressure we’re under to also have the BBIC.

An institutional fad is often launched and spread through different documents (Best 2006). Therefore, using a new strategy often means using documents. However, as Prior (2003) argues, the users of a document are not solely passive recipients of the written content. Rather, as both documents and users have agency, the relationship between production and consumption is dynamic. Documents are never to be regarded as fixed objects but as situated collective products. The user of a document and the purpose of using it can define and change the very nature of the document (Prior 2003; cf. White et al. 2009). The following analysis aims at discerning different ways in which this producer–consumer relationship is expressed.

### ***Guidance and rhetorical props***

Open Comparisons is said to “improve the possibilities” to achieve more quality<sup>6</sup>, to “point out the direction” towards more quality<sup>7</sup>, or “support”, “promote”, and “stimulate” more quality<sup>8</sup>. The direction of the indicators (that red or green equals “a good or a bad result”) is said to give “information about what should be pursued to achieve good care”.<sup>9</sup> The rhetoric of the documents implies that Open Comparisons should be viewed almost as a key to (this year’s) quality and that implementing the indicators is on par with “implementing quality” (cf. Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions 2013). Some of the interviewees express a similar approach to Open Comparisons; as one interviewee simply put it: “It shows you that this is what you’re supposed to do”. The essence of this “guiding perspective” suggests a belief in

6 National Board of Health and Welfare 2014b:8.

7 National Board of Health and Welfare 2014a:9.

8 National Board of Health and Welfare 2010b:5; National Board of Health and Welfare 2011:1; Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2009:8.

9 National Board of Health and Welfare 2014b:19.

the rationality of the new promising strategy (cf. Best 2006). When Open Comparisons is regarded as a guide, the indicators are described as “good”, “adequate”, and “up to date”. One interviewee says that she now understands that “this isn’t just a burden, it’s actually useful”.

The guidance perspective is characterized by a strong belief that indicators equal quality, as well as a faith in the authorities’ stipulated pathway. One interviewee browses through the OC questionnaire while commenting on its content:

Interviewee: [...] And then there are standardized assessment methods [referring to a question in the document], well, I think that’s good because it’s evidence-based, so... There’s not a lot to say, really, because then that’s the road we’re taking, that means that they’re good to work with.

Willingness to accept new solutions to old problems requires that the solutions continuously develop (Best 2006). This is certainly the case with Open Comparisons: the indicators may change or be slightly different from year to year. From the guidance perspective, the survey questions can be seen as a first indication of what this year’s quality “is” and what needs to be done this year to have “good” quality.

Interviewee: I mean, that’s why it’s great that we get this [survey] when there’s still time to stick your finger in the air to see where the wind blows. Because then we see, I mean, “my god, we need to do something here.”

“What gets measured gets done” is somewhat of a measurement mantra, attributed to management researcher Peter Drucker (Lindgren et al. 2012:24). It is assumed that to measure is to know and that the new knowledge demands action. From the guidance perspective, the new knowledge about quality initiates the task of implementing the indicators one does not already have. However, policy makers, managers, and politicians might not have the same perception of quality. In these cases, the indicators can be used as “rhetorical props” (cf. Prior 2003) to accomplish the change one desires. Open Comparisons can be used as an ally of interest, underpinning “knowledge” or “facts” that work to the professional’s advantage:

Interviewee: We know what’s in the air, we know in which direction we want to go, and it’s not always that the politicians want the same thing. But if we get a result that shows that everybody else is doing this except for us, then it would be pretty easy to walk up to the politicians and say “this is-” like “we *have* to do this” kind of.

The *name-and-shame* logic and the unwillingness to end up last in the rankings can be used by professionals as arguments for improving their work. By using the indicators as a reliable source of knowledge, the professionals can benefit from the “facts” conveyed by the OC documents.

### ***On display in the shop window***

The guidance perspective relies on practitioners’ voluntarily adopting and implementing the definition of quality promoted by Open Comparisons. However, some formulations in the documents suggest that despite what is presented as voluntariness, there are some more mandatory aspects of Open Comparisons:

Recurring attention will create a climate that makes it difficult for organizations with relatively poor results to neglect improving these (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2009:10).

A picture of Open Comparisons as a public shop window emerges where the organizations will have their “bad” or “good” results exhibited to the public (cf. Alvesson 2006). Accessibility and transparency regarding the results of the measurement are prerequisites of *naming and shaming*, the governing logic of Open Comparisons, by which the organizations are assumed to feel obligated to implement the indicators to avoid risking their reputations (cf. Blomgren & Waks 2010; Power et al. 2009). *Reputational risk*, as Power et al. (2009:302) point out, is not a “real” organizational risk. Rather, it is “human-made,” a social product created in human interaction and communication. Still, according to the authors, reputational risk is gaining increasing influence in organizations.

The fact that the measurement results are presented in the “shop window” evokes different emotions depending on whether the results are “good” (many green boxes) or “bad” (many red boxes). Most interviewees agree that green results are positive; there is prestige in being able to let others – the media, politicians, and managers – see the green boxes in the table. Green results seem to indicate that the workplace is in the lead and can evoke feelings of pride (cf. Best 2006:38):

Interviewee: Or, the opposite, that we are the only ones doing something. You could point that out as well, “I mean, look, we’re ahead of most of them, it’s just us and [Bigger city 1] and [Bigger city 2] that are doing this.” I’d be pretty proud.

Problems may arise when the professionals do not agree with the given definition of quality, but still, as one interviewee puts it, want to be “obedient”:

Interviewee: I mean, I think basically, as municipalities we are obedient. I mean, we’re not different from anyone else when we

want green dots. Of course we don't want red dots, right? We don't want anyone to think we're doing something wrong, or not doing good. Then there is this problem that we don't always agree with the authorities on whether these are the most important things. And, and that's not always easy. [...] But I mean, you could still say very clearly that if we get red dots, at the organizational level, we will get it written on our noses: that "you'll have to fix this."

Others' perception of the organizations' quality, reputation, and legitimacy seem to be important factors to consider for professionals (cf. Alvesson 2006; Power et al. 2009; Blomgren & Waks 2010). Conflicts may emerge between the state authorities' construction of quality and the professionals' own perceptions of quality. In this sense, the measurement of quality seems to challenge professional autonomy and control (cf. Bezes et al. 2012; Power et al. 2009; Bergmark & Lundström 2006; Blomgren & Waks 2011).

A consequence of this auditing "panopticon effect" (Lindgren et al. 2012; cf. Foucault 1979) could be that those who are subjects of the audit "internalize" the measurements' controlling function and judge themselves according to others' definitions of "desired" behavior (cf. Shore & Wright 2000:77). When Open Comparisons is regarded as a shop window, the motivation for implementing the indicators seems to be tied to the risk of being criticized for having bad results or the possibility of boasting about good results, rather than actually believing that the indicators improve quality.

Power et al. (2009) argue that when the results of the audit or measurement are completed and published, the organizations no longer have any power to influence others' perception of them. But before publication, there is some space for maneuvering. To protect their reputation, some interviewees say that they "polish" their answers somewhat when they fill out the questionnaire. In the extract below, the interviewee reads out loud from the OC questionnaire and recounts how she would answer the question:

Interviewee: [...] "On September 1, 2013, did you have a comprehensive plan for the social secretaries' professional development?" [questionnaire question]. Yes, we did, didn't we. Then again, it wasn't up and running. [...] Very ambitious! And it's still not really put into action. But it is there!

Interviewer: It's there, but it's not used?

Interviewee: Yes, it is there! Well, this is about, I mean, what am I supposed to answer? I would've said yes. And my boss definitely would've said yes! But...

Interviewer: But what are they looking for in the questionnaire? Do they want to know that there is a plan or do they want to know if it's used?

Interviewee: No, but exactly! And that's the question. I mean... That's how it always is when you get it like this. That, what do you... We *have* a plan. And I mean, they [the authorities] would certainly know that I answer in a way that is good for us.

Answering the OC questionnaire in this way is an example of creative accounting (Lindgren et al. 2012). Creative accounting could be a manifestation of what Alvesson (2006:29) calls a key trend in today's society: acts of illusion, "a fading interest in 'substance' and an increased interest in conveying images and ideas that give a semblance of something positive" (our transl.). By using creative accounting, the organizations can signal legitimacy, up-to-dateness, and willingness to develop. On the other hand, "creative accounting" may also be a matter of handling uncertainty and complexity or the sense that one true answer simply does not exist. One interviewee explains this predicament as a matter of working with various truths:

Interviewee: I mean, there is one truth on paper and another truth in reality. There is one truth here, on my floor, with the management, and it's completely different down there [with the case workers]. [...] So, it's like, it's hard to say that you can find one truth. Because there are so many. You just have to pick one.

Rather than contributing information for an instrument that is measuring social work quality, according to this view, answering questions for Open Comparisons is depicted as a practice in itself with its own specific purposes; these are questions for the management floor, which is located at a rather long distance from the case worker floor and the messy workdays they face. When "doing the questionnaire", it may seem reasonable (and true) to answer the questions as the interviewee sees fit, for the benefit of the organization.

### ***Doubt and distance***

Open Comparisons is used as a guide for expected social service supply on a national level but also as support for arguing with politicians for more or reallocated resources. The transparency of the results seems to give rise to emotions of pride and shame, but simultaneously there are statements expressing less worry about others' opinions. Such statements are linked to doubts about whether Open Comparisons really can measure "quality that matters". One interviewee thinks that the indicators focus on the wrong things:

Interviewee: The question should be, if I have all of this [the indicators], would that make a nice shop window? It doesn't say anything about quality, or what it's like for the person that's here to get help. But if I have all the right papers and agreements and stuff, we can show, "yes, we got it." But what about the person that's supposed to get help? What about every child? We don't know that.

Criticism towards the quality definition can be a result of the fact that only the measurable gets measured and that the practitioners themselves (or the service users for that matter) do not get to define what good quality is (Lindgren et al. 2012:26; cf. Eliasson-Lappalainen and Szebehely 1998). Critical expressions point out failures or difficulties in measuring quality with the help of Open Comparisons. For instance, one interviewee questions the manual-based work that is requested and says that quality is something you *do*, not something on paper. Another interviewee criticizes the indicators' focus on form rather than substance. He says that it would be perfectly possible for his organization to "have" the indicator that requires a documented agreement on "regulating external cooperation" with other local authorities, without actually cooperating in practice:

Interviewee: I mean, we could have a, we could have a written, managerially decided agreement on cooperation that says that each of us mind our own business. And both parties sign it. Mind our own business! Then we would've met the authorities' demands. But it doesn't say anything about [...] if we do something together. It just says that we do our thing and they do theirs.

Another way of expressing doubts towards Open Comparisons is by downplaying its importance. One interviewee says that it is not essential to get green boxes as long as "it works", that mistreated children are taken care of, for example. Professional knowledge and competence are set against pre-specified routines, giving highest priority to the former. The decision to provide care for a mistreated child depends on professional skills, claims one interviewee:

Interviewee: But I don't think that because there is a routine, but because that's an experienced social secretary who sees that "this is a child that we have to investigate, what it needs, what needs the child has." Then it doesn't matter if we have a routine!

A distanced and skeptical approach towards Open Comparisons may be caused by the fact that the practitioners do not agree with the quality definition itself or that the results themselves are difficult to make sense of.



Interviewer: What do you think it [the result] could be used for?

Interviewee: That's a good question. When we have looked at... uhm...when we address the answers when we get [the result], "now it has been evaluated" or "ok, now we have gotten all the responses" and then you look at it: "red, red, red." Well, we don't have it, but is that bad? Or when something is green, "is that good?" Do we have routines? Yes, we do, but is it actually working? No, we don't know that, because that answer is not provided. [...] For us, when we see the results, it's like, "ok, what are we supposed to do with this?"

How various working methods and documentary systems are used and what results they yield are areas not covered by Open Comparisons. Lindgren (2014:104f) suggests that quality measurements can be carried out as a form of "procedure or ritual", something that modern and efficient organizations simply do, even though they seldom produce visible results. In the excerpt below, the interviewee suggests that Open Comparisons does not spark any interest among the professionals who are working directly with the clients:

Interviewee: I don't know if any of our co-workers, if you were to ask the social workers "have you looked at the Open Comparisons, have you looked at the results?" I don't think anyone has, that they visited the authority's website to have a look. Instead, there are executive staff members and people explicitly working with these questions that will look [up the results]. It doesn't matter to the social workers at social child care that these reports exist. You just do your job anyway.

## Conclusion

Open Comparisons constructs quality as definable and reasonable to measure with the help of specified indicators. Developing these indicators requires reduction. An abstract and "slippery" phenomenon – such as quality – is reduced to measurable indicators, meaning that any immeasurable aspects of quality must be ignored (Eliasson-Lappalainen & Szebehely 1998:142). Particularly, quality is reified by means of linking it to documentary objects: plans, tables, signed agreements, and so on. Many aspects that people in general would associate with quality are simply not included: the *doing* of quality – based on intentions, wishes, convictions, interaction, relations, professional ability, knowledge, experience, and other complex phenomena – is not measured. Thus, as complex as the instrument of Open Comparisons may seem,

undeniably it is a rather simple tool for quality assessments. The questions do not focus on what is actually done, or if the indicators of quality are used at all (i.e., working methods, documentary routines, etc.), but merely on whether or not they exist within the organization. “Having” the indicator is on par with “having” quality (see National Board of Health and Welfare 2014b:11). Accordingly, Open Comparisons may be viewed as an effort to capture and pinpoint an elusive phenomenon rather than being an objective instrument for measuring more or less quality.

By way of introduction, we asked ourselves why Open Comparisons has won such great support despite critique and concerns raised by researchers and professionals (e.g., Clarkson 2010; Moran, O’Connor & Borowitz 2013; Strannegård 2013; Blomgren & Waks 2010). Almost all municipalities are voluntary participants in providing data on their work routines to their employers and the controlling body of National Board of Health and Welfare. An obvious answer to our question would read something like “professional obedience to recommendations from state authorities in a climate where New Public Management prevails”. But viewing Open Comparisons in terms of an institutional trend, or “fad” in Best’s (2006) words, that is involving and all-absorbing to certain categories of employees, directs us to conduct the analysis not only from a top-down perspective but also by paying attention to how professionals deal with and talk about quality measurements. Practitioners who are to implement this new quality are not passive recipients and executors of the quality measurement ethos; they will not only obey but also challenge the documents’ agency, or use it for practical purposes. For this reason, the official intentions and values of Open Comparisons most likely change to some extent once it ends up in the organization (cf. Prior 2003).

The emphasis on “continuous improvements” in the OC documents is reflected in the “guidance perspective” among our interviewees; that is, when the OC questionnaire in itself is taken as an alert for what kind of social services the authorities require from the organizations. Still, the professionals describe Open Comparisons in terms of a shop window, indicating rather low expectations of “real” quality improvements. This doubtful position as to whether Open Comparisons measures “real” quality can be linked to the competitive aspect: “when everybody strives for good results, there is reason to believe that we are not the only ones polishing our answers”. Furthermore, despite all of the working hours and technical resources put into Open Comparisons, it seems as if its alleged benefits are difficult to appreciate by individuals other than “people who work with those kinds of questions” (i.e., managers, controllers, quality developers, etc.). For this group of professionals, however, Open Comparisons can be all the more attractive because both negative and positive results can be used as rhetorical props for convincing

politicians as well as staff about preferred working methods and to play down the importance of undesired ones.

These ways of using Open Comparisons suggest that professionals are quite inventive in adapting the new trend for various purposes. The transparency of Open Comparisons certainly falls under the name-and-shame logic (e.g., Blomgren & Waks 2010), but the other side of the coin – pride – can also be a reason for the broad support for Open Comparisons. High scores can give an impetus to staff and management by providing energy and confidence. In this sense, quality measurements in the shape of Open Comparisons may grow into a practice in itself where its correlation with other realities – for example, case workers' meetings with clients – is subordinated to the value of comparing oneself in the light of others – comparisons whose differences are neatly affirmed in an Excel sheet.

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# Modernising Management Processes in Elderly Care

Jean C. Mutiganda, Giuseppe Grossi & Lars G. Hassel

## Abstract

This study investigates the process of modernising the management of elderly care services by using competitive contract tendering, referred to as CCT, for the first time in Finland. The conceptual approach is based on the framework of circuits of power. Data, based on document analysis, interviews, meetings observation and continuous interactions with key informants in their organisational settings, are from intensive field research conducted in a Finnish city from 2008 to 2013. Findings show that the process of introducing CCT to modernise management of public elderly care exposed that political decision makers and public managers lack professional skills to limit procurement risks in designing and implementing the CCT process. As a result, the total costs of using CCT to outsource aged care services became much higher than expected. A contribution is to show the ways in which modernisation of public services by using free market mechanisms, such as CCT, is a field of inter-organisational circuits of power whose outcome cannot be assumed to save costs to the community when political decision makers and public managers are incompetent and unable to think and act as business minded actors.

## 1. Introduction

This study investigates the process of modernising the management of elderly care services by using competitive contract tendering, referred to as CCT, for the first time in Finland. CCT is a private sector method of outsourcing goods and services that relies on competition between buyers and/or suppliers (Arlbjørn and Freytag 2012). CCT became mandatory in European Union (EU) countries in the mid 2000s after the adoption of an EU Directive nr 2004/18/EC. The directive requests member countries to modernise their public service management by operating competitively (Arlbjørn & Freytag 2012). Recent studies have shown however, that CCT does not always reach the expected outcomes of lower costs, higher quality and value for money in public sector organisations

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(Milne et al. 2012, Bergman & Lundberg 2013, Terje & Gisle 2008, Burger & Hawkesworth 2011, Whitford 2007). Gaps exist in the literature, examining how private sector organisations use their market power to influence the outcome of CCT in public sector organisations (Wallis et al. 2010). Power is the capacity of a person or organisation to influence the thoughts and actions of another person or organisation (Lukes 2005). Public sector decision makers include elected politicians and public managers with the authority to manage the daily activities of public sector organisations. The aim of this study is to address this gap in the literature, by analysing factors that can hinder the power of public decision makers to modernise the management of public services and save costs to the community by using CCT. The expected implication for practitioners and policy makers is to show ways in which using CCT to modernise management of public services cannot be assumed to improve the financial performance of the outsourced services.

The conceptual approach of this study is based on the framework of circuits of power suggested by Clegg (1989). Clegg (1989) has argued that power is not a one-way process based on the capacity to allocate resources, meanings and membership (Hardy 1996), but a multidimensional one in which power and resistance constitute many circuits (Clegg 1989). A circuit of power refers to a structure of power that is interrelated and has autonomous mechanisms to influence the thoughts and actions of holders of other circuits of power, or to control their outcomes depending on circumstances (Clegg 1989). The framework provides the conceptual tools to analyse how circuits of power among organisational members interact to shape organisational actions (Lapsley et al. 2011, Smith et al. 2010). This study argues that the strategic power of a private sector organisation forms a circuit of market power that interacts with the circuits of power of political decision makers and public managers in a CCT setting (Silva & Backhouse 2003).

The research question is: How do political and managerial circuits of power fail to prevail over the circuit of market power during the process of introducing CCT in a public sector organisation?

A field study was conducted in the public aged care of a city in Finland, referred to as the City, from 2008 to 2013. Data was gathered through document analysis, interviews, observations of meetings and continuous interactions with key informants in their organisational settings (Yin 2008). The City presented an interesting research site for this study because it had recently introduced CCT to outsource aged care services financed by public funds. The rationale behind the introduction of CCT was to save costs and improve the quality of public services. CCT replaced previous procurement methods based on direct negotiations with local providers of aged care. Because the process of competitive tendering was international, it introduced new circuits of market power into the local market, which confronted the political and managerial circuits of the City.



Research findings show that the process of introducing CCT to modernise the management of public elderly care, exposed the lack of professional skills for political decision makers and public managers to limit procurement risks in designing and implementing the competitive tendering process. As a result, the total costs of using CCT to outsource aged care services were much higher than expected. A contribution of this study is to show the relevance of analysing political and managerial decision-making in CCT as an arena of multiple circuits of power whose outcome can be detrimental to the financial performance of outsourced services. A practical implication is to question the relevance of modernising the management of public sector organisations by using sophisticated free market mechanisms, such as international CCT, when elected political decision makers and public managers are incompetent.

The next sections provide a review of recent literature on competitive tendering, the framework of circuits of power, and its operationalisation. They are followed by research methods, summary of findings, discussion, and the conclusion.

## **2. Competitive tendering and the framework of circuits of power**

This section presents a review of recent competitive tendering studies and explains the framework of circuits of power, and its operationalisation.

### **COMPETITIVE TENDERING**

Competitive tendering is open or selective. Open competitive tendering allows any person or organisation that complies with tendering criteria to submit a bid (Eriksson 2008). Selective competitive tendering restricts the right to submit bids to pre-selected persons or organisations. Pre-selection can be based on previous contractual relationships, market knowledge, professional reliability, financial credibility or political concerns (Eriksson 2008, Bergman & Lundberg 2013). This study focuses on open competitive tendering because it provides more information for the analysis of how CCT becomes introduced into a public sector market. Designing and implementing open CCT is a demanding and cumbersome process due to the workload required to develop criteria to evaluate and select bids (Bergman & Lundberg 2013).

Each EU country has implemented the 2004 EU directive differently, depending on national needs and realities (Gelderman et al. 2006). In Finland, the Public Procurement Act (2007), referred to as the 2007 Act, enacts all provisions of the EU directive as mandatory national law (Tynkkynen et al. 2012). Implementation of the EU directive at organisational level imposed new conditions for actions on public managers and political decision makers operating in local markets (Pirvu & Bâldan 2013). Differences between old procurement

practices and new ones require public managers to react professionally and skilfully in order to minimise procurement risks (Pirvu & Băldan 2013, Adedokun et al. 2013). Depending on contexts, public sector organisations can resist complying with legal requirements for competitive tendering, making it difficult for public managers operating in different sectors to learn from each other (Gelderman et al. 2010). Many studies have shown that competitive tendering can save costs in new markets in the short term (Burger & Hawkesworth 2011, Dylst et al. 2011). In the long term however, winners of competitive tenders can regroup into networks to maximise profits, leading to monopolies in local markets with negative effects on prices (Terje & Gisle 2008, Eriksson & Pettersson 2012) and quality of services (Rönnbäck 2012). Political decision-making processes also explain the failures of competitive tendering to achieve expected outcomes, because politicians often lack the expertise to deal with companies that have high standard selling strategies (Eriksson & Westerberg 2011, Whitford 2007, Adedokun et al. 2013).

### **THE FRAMEWORK OF CIRCUITS OF POWER**

Power relationships among different organisational actors, such as public sector decision makers and private sector actors, form different circuits that can affect the inter-organisational process of introducing and implementing change (Ribeiro & Scapens 2006). Clegg argues that circuits of power are threefold: episodic, dispositional and facilitative (Clegg 1989). *Episodic circuits* represent the power to influence the actions of persons or organisations to act in an uncharacteristic way. (Clegg 1989). For example, the power of public managers and corporate executives to shape the agendas of meetings in which decisions to allocate resources are made, is episodic (Ribeiro & Scapens 2006, Lapsley et al. 2011). This study refers to the episodic circuit of power as a circuit of power of the City's public managers. *Dispositional circuits of power* represent the power to reward or punish, or to approve or deny something (Clegg 1989). For example, the power of judges to issue court rulings is dispositional (Clegg 2002). The power of politicians to approve the actions or suggestions of public managers is also dispositional (Lapsley et al. 2011). This study refers to the dispositional circuit of power as belonging to the City's elected politicians. *Facilitative circuits of power* represent dominance over production and innovation (Clegg 1989). For example, the ability to use ideology and ethics to influence the interpretation of rules, constitutes facilitative circuits of power that technical experts can use to resist or promote organisational change policy (Davenport & Leitch 2005, Backhouse et al. 2006, Silva & Backhouse 2003) and the outcomes of change (Smith et al. 2010). A business organisation with a dominant market position has facilitative circuits of power to take over competitors (Clegg 2002). This study identifies the facilitative circuit of power as a circuit of market power that belongs to local and international companies specialising in selling aged care services.

While episodic and dispositional circuits of power are essentially hierarchical, positions in facilitative circuits of power shift, depend on contexts and circumstances. For example, a minority government can co-opt opposition parties into the government to achieve a stronger facilitative circuit of power to obtain a majority vote on budgetary policies (Lapsley et al. 2011). Facilitative circuits of power are usually based on the ability to build networks and alliances and to use accounting information strategically in order to reach organisational goals (Carter et al. 2010, Davenport & Leitch 2005). When making a decision however, episodic, facilitative and dispositional circuits of power that have been activated, interact in the so-called obligatory passage point through which one of the circuits of power prevail over the others (Clegg 1989).

Critics argue that the framework of circuits of power is not helpful to analyse the pace and outcome of change when the circuits of power have passed through the obligatory passage point (Backhouse et al. 2006, Silva & Backhouse 2003). Pace refers to the time taken to implement a change, and outcome refers to the results of the change (Liguori & Steccolini 2011, Liguori 2012). For example, instrumental and ceremonial dichotomies can be used to analyse the outcome of the change. Revolutionary and evolutionary dichotomies can illustrate the pace of change. A ceremonial outcome occurs when the change process has not succeeded in changing the patterns of thoughts, actions and power relationships that the process of modernisation aimed to change (Bush 1987, Hyvönen & Järvinen 2006). In the opposite scenario, that is, when organisational actors have started to use the best available tools, skills and knowledge to solve the problems faced by an organisation in which the change has taken (or is taking) place, this outcome is instrumental (Bush 1987). This study tests instrumental and ceremonial outcomes by analysing whether public managers and political decision makers use sound accounting and operational information to minimise competitive tendering risks or not. The pace of the change process can be evolutionary, that is, progressive towards positive outcomes (Burns & Scapens 2000) or revolutionary, that is, radical and rapid but with no guarantee of achieving substantially better outcomes than the previous system (Bush 1987, Dillard 2002).

## **OPERATIONALISATION OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Operationalisation of the theoretical framework of this study has four steps. First, the relationship between episodic and dispositional circuits of power (Clegg 1989) in designing invitations to submit competitive bids and setting bid evaluation criteria is analysed. Second, the examination of the facilitative circuits in the CCT process follows. Third, the study analyses how political decision makers use their dispositional circuits of power to approve bids that public managers have selected, and how they conclude business contracts with winners of the CCT process. Fourth, the study analyses the pace and outcome of the CCT process from a financial critical approach.

### 3. Research method

This study uses the intensive field research method (Sayer 1992). With a purpose to contribute to theory, intensive field research offers multiple methods to collect data that discovers and corroborates how organisational actors think and interact with each other (Ahrens & Chapman 2006) and how circuits of power among them interact (Davenport & Leitch 2005, Backhouse et al. 2006).

The field study was designed to collect data showing relationships between inter-organisational circuits of power in introducing and managing events. An event is anything that takes place in the empirical field within the time frame of the research and has a relationship with the researched issues (Hedaa & Törnroos 2008). Data is based on interviews, document analysis, meeting observations and continuous interactions with key informants in their organisational settings (Yin 2008). Interview questions are developed to discover how events occurred in a particular setting and context and how actors reacted to those events.

Mechanisms that lead to an event may not be apparent or visible in the empirical field (Sayer 2000). For example, circuits of power are abstract concepts that cannot be observed or measured directly. To overcome this difficulty, data collection focused on how actors influenced the decision making of other actors (Smith et al. 2010) and the mechanisms political decision makers used to monitor and approve the decisions of public managers (Murray 2009). Meeting observations and interviews with key informants helped to identify and understand relationships among episodic, dispositional and facilitative circuits of power in decision-making processes taking place during the CCT process. Information from document analysis provided the tools to analyse the obligatory passage points in evaluating bids and concluding business contracts with competitive winners. The study used the test of instrumental and ceremonial outcomes by analysing critically whether the rationale behind the actions of public sector decision makers was to protect their status and power relationships at the expense of the costs of aged care services (Bush 1987). Revolutionary and evolutionary paces were analysed by using a chronological approach to examine the timeframe of implementing the CCT process and its outcomes.

Interpretation of the data sought to discover the meaning that field actors gave to their actions and why. To this end, the researchers reconstructed the basic conditions leading to events that took place in the organisation analysed (Danermark et al. 1997). For example, the data analysis focused on why, how, when and where an event occurred and was approved, while under similar conditions but in different circumstances, another did not. Analysis also focused on how public managers documented and reported cause and affect relationships to political decision makers (Page 2004, Roberts 2002).

In using these methods, this study overcomes the difficulties of prior similar research based on longitudinal case study and action research (Silva & Backhouse 2003, Backhouse et al. 2006, Davenport & Leitch 2005).

The City was chosen as the research site because it provided first-hand data about how it implemented competitive tendering for aged care services since late 2007. Knowledge of the local market, the possibility of interacting with political decision makers, local entrepreneurs and the media during the CCT process and beyond, are practical and methodological factors that also influenced the choice of the City.

As with other municipalities in Finland, the City has local governance autonomy and an obligation to provide care for the elderly using public funds (Tynkkynen et al. 2012). Political leaders at different hierarchical levels of the City are elected democratically for a four-year term. *The council* is the highest political governing body; it sets the governance policies of the city and approves its budgets and annual financial reports. *The audit board* is the second political body that monitors the decisions and actions of public managers in their organisations. The audit board prepares and submits an annual audit report to the council, expressing opinions on whether the official annual financial reports should be approved or not. The audit report is part of the City's annual financial reports. *The executive board* is the third political body. Its role is to monitor the implementation of council decisions.

Each City department, such as education, social and health care, public infrastructure, and logistics is run by an elected political board reporting directly to the executive board. Daily management of the City's affairs is delegated to public managers appointed by the mayor on approval by the council. The council appoints the mayor. Public managers are accountable to the political boards and issue regular reports to them.

The City's financial stability depends on local tax revenues, in addition to state subsidies that the central Government allocates on a per capita basis every year (Häkkinen & Lehto 2005). The social and health care boards' budget varies between 40% and 50% of the City's budget. The board has regularly overspent its budget. Overspending a delegated budget is a managerial and political hot issue, because the Municipal Act (1995) requires a balanced financial situation in each municipality within a four-year period corresponding to the term of elected political leaders (Vinnari & Näsi 2008).

Until the end of 2007, the procurement of aged care services was based on direct negotiations with local health care organisations in the City. The City negotiated price levels with each provider once a year. Because of the increasing costs of social and health care services and the relative decrease of municipal tax revenues, local politicians put considerable pressure on the director of social and health care services to look for ways to outsource aged care services at an affordable cost. The director believed that the implementation of competitive tendering for aged care services would introduce market prices and save costs. The Public Procurement Act, effective June 1, 2007, enforcing the EU directive on mandatory competitive tendering, provided a

legal basis on which to institutionalise competitive tendering for aged care services.

Data collection began with document analysis in 2008. Analysis concerned the legal framework of the 2007 Act; minutes of social and health board meetings, budgets and financial reports of the social and health care department and the consolidated financial reports of the City. The aim was to understand the relationship between planned costs and actual expenditures and how social and health care public managers explained their decisions and actions to the social and health care board. One of the authors observed four meetings of the social and health care board during 2009–2011, in which decisions regarding the procurement of social and health care services were discussed, made or approved. These meetings revealed the relationship between episodic and dispositional circuits of power among public decision makers.

To analyse the role of episodic, dispositional and facilitative circuits of power in the CCT process, the researcher interviewed the director of social and health care, the manager of aged care services, the chairperson of the social and health care board, the internal auditor, the external auditor, two members of the social and health care board, and a member of the audit board in charge of monitoring the activities of the social and health care board. Facilitative circuits of power of competitive bidders were analysed along with strategies that public managers used to evaluate competitive bids, and how information that successful bidders provided to the city complied with bid evaluation criteria. To increase the validity of the data, the researcher discussed competitive tendering with a City's lawyer and an independent specialist in Finnish competition under social and health care law. To analyse relationships between the pace and outcome of the CCT process, one of the authors regularly observed meetings of the audit board from 2009 to 2013. The audit board invited all public managers, including the mayor, chief financial officer, chief planning officer, a new procurement manager, administrative head, technical head, and the head of human resource management to explain the reasons for their actions in planning and using the budgets of their units or departments, how they reached their operational goals, outsourcing systems and outputs, and challenges faced when trying to avoid overspending their budgets. Interview material and information gathered from meeting observation were used to analyse how the budgetary and financial reports of each unit are used as instrumental or ceremonial tools to manage public services competitively.

To critically analyse alternative ways that the City could outsource aged care services from private organisations, interviews with chief executive officers and the heads of the executive boards of two organisations that specialise in aged care, as well as four members of the executive board of one of the organisations were used.

An interview with a member of the Finnish Parliament and analysis of a national TV broadcast were used to understand the political impact of facilitative circuits of power of multinational health care companies that have established business networks in Finland since 2007. Participation in meetings lasted around 60 hours. Recorded interviews lasted about 17 hours. Continuous contacts with interviewees improved the understanding of the data and its interpretation (Sayer 1992, Yin 2008).

#### **4. Summary of findings**

The CCT process began towards the end of 2007 when the City called internationally for competitive bids. More than 10 local organisations and a multinational company responded. In early 2008, the social and health care board approved the proposal of the social and health care director and the manager of aged care services to select a multinational company and a local organisation as tender winners, and to conclude five-year service contracts with them effective from 1 January 2009. A local company whose offer was rejected initiated legal proceedings against the city for unfair competition. However, this claim was later amicably withdrawn.

Meanwhile, the multinational company that won the tender lacked building and health care personnel in the city. Consequently, a company that formed part of the business network of the multinational company built a new aged care centre in the city. When building activities were almost finished two years later, the multinational company and its business network company used their operational dominance to negotiate additional contracts with the city to rent and maintain the new building. The new arrangements were not part of the competitive tendering process and had not been planned for in the City's budget. Public managers explained to the social and health care board however, that additional contracts were necessary to best serve the interests of the elderly. The board approved the additional contracts.

As a result, the total costs of services that the City purchased from the multinational company and its business network were much costlier than the services provided by local companies. At local and national levels, politicians and the media critically questioned the relevance of using private sector methods, such as competitive tendering, to outsource welfare services, including public aged care. Critics argued that selecting foreign multinationals that do not pay tax on profit in Finland as competitive bidders, overlooks the need to promote local entrepreneurs who provide reliable quality services to the elderly at reasonable prices and pay tax on any profit in Finland.

## 5. Discussion

Confirming the framework of circuits of power (Clegg, 1986), episodic and dispositional circuits of power between political decision makers and public managers, interacted with the facilitative circuits of market power in the obligatory passage point of introducing CCT in the City. The financial outcome of introducing CCT became detrimental to the total costs of aged care services however, because public managers and political decision makers were incompetent and unable to limit procurement risks arising from the facilitative circuit of power of an international business organisation that won the tender.

### **THE PACE OF CIRCUITS OF POWER IN DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING CCT**

Public managers were under political pressure to reduce costs of outsourcing aged care services when the CCT process started. A member of the social and health care board explained:

... The problem was that our board's budget was not enough to cover the costs of outsourced aged care services ... local providers of these services kept raising their prices ... Negotiations with local organisations were hard ...

Entry into force of the 2007 Act introduced coercive pressure into the City to modernise the management of public aged care services by using competitive tendering (Wallis et al. 2010). The coercive pressure gave authority and legitimacy to elected politicians and public managers to start a revolutionary change (Bush 1987) by abandoning the outsourcing of the aged care services through direct negotiations with local organisations. The director of social and health care explained:

... According to the new public procurement law, it was compulsory for us to organise competitive tendering of aged care services ... Direct negotiation with key service providers has become illegal ...

The legal obligation to operate competitively and political pressure to cut costs of public aged care services gave public managers a stronger episodic circuit of power, based on the power to attribute a practical meaning to the new law (Clegg 1989). Public managers used this circuit of power to influence the agenda of a meeting in which a decision to launch CCT process was made in the late 2007. A board member explained:

... Public managers convinced our board that competitive tendering was mandatory... I opposed it myself ... but was in the minority ...

The manager of aged care services confirmed this finding:



... There was a lively debate in the board meeting including voting... However, our proposal to start the process of competitive tendering prevailed ...

The event of voting illustrates the confrontation between episodic and dispositional circuits of power among public managers and political decision makers in which a decision to modernise the management of aged care services by using CCT took place. In the City, the episodic circuit of power of the public managers prevailed. Previous studies have shown that political decision makers use their dispositional circuit of power to attribute meaning to the actions of organisational actors (Smith et al. 2010, Lapsley et al. 2011). This study argues that in addition, the power to attribute meaning can be symbolic in political settings dominated by episodic circuits of power of public managers when the episodic circuit of power is based on a legal argument.

When the formal political decision to modernise the management of aged care services by using CCT was taken, the incompetence of public managers to design and implement an open competitive tendering process on a large scale, by inviting and evaluating bids from any company operating in the EU zone, started to surface. The manager of aged care commented:

...When the ... board made a decision to start ... competitive tendering... technical aspects were not an issue ... However, I had no toolbox ready for use ... I had no previous background ... in this specific matter ... We were simply not ready ...

The director of social and health care confirmed:

... My colleagues and I have substantive expertise in social and health care management ... but not in organising competitive tendering in this field ...

The incompetence of the public managers explains the technical weakness of their episodic circuit of power during the early stages of introducing CCT to the City. Previous studies have shown that organisational actors who want to launch an organisational change process need to know what they want to change and how thoroughly they want to change it practically (Coyte et al. 2010, Liguori 2012). Public managers in the City failed to meet these criteria. For example, the aged care service managers did not know how to set and measure the quality standards of services that they wanted to outsource. The director of social and health care explained:

... There are ... so many laws and recommendations ... about quality of health care services ... We have to consider all of them ... But what is quality? ... and how do we measure it? ...

Previous literature has shown that organisational members at different hierarchies are likely to resist the change when they realise that they do not have enough skills to fulfil the new duties as expected by hierarchy (Backhouse et al. 2006, Silva & Backhouse 2003). Resistance to change did not happen at the City's top organisational level, however, because the political decision makers with a dispositional circuit of power to approve or revise the actions of the public managers were not aware of the public managers' incompetence to design and implement open competitive tendering appropriately. The head of the social and health care board explained:

... Our board made the decision to organise competitive tendering. After this the public managers in charge ... had the duty to organise the implementation of this decision ... We expected them to do this correctly ...

Uncertainty in setting CCT standards weakened the public managers' episodic circuits of power to design a tendering process that minimised procurement risks (Kotabe & Mol 2009). The manager of aged care services confirmed that they could not use the City's management accounting and control systems to set cause and affect standards between price levels and quality of services among bid evaluation criteria (Bergman & Lundberg 2013). For example, the process of evaluating a bid was based solely on information submitted by bidders, rather than pre-defined benchmark standards that the bids should reflect. The manager of aged care services explained:

... My colleagues and I used a model developed on an Excel worksheet to evaluate bids... We assigned a grade to each evaluation criterion ... such as aged care price levels, service quality standards, daily costs for feeding an elderly person and monthly rent for an apartment in which an elderly person will stay ...

In consequence, public managers decided to choose bids that offered the lowest costs to the City. The manager of aged care services explained:

... A company that offered the lowest cost for aged care services could obtain maximum points on this criterion ... that is 60% of all other criteria ... quality standards accounted for 20% ... rent and feeding costs accounted for 20% ...

Evaluation criteria confirm that the aim of using CCT to modernise the management of aged care services in the City was to obtain the lowest cost services. Although evaluation of quality standards was subjective, it permitted a company that is well informed about how to design an appealing bid to obtain 20% of the total evaluation points. An audit board member commented:

... The question is about how a company ... that had no personnel, workshop or building in the city could obtain maximum grades on quality standards ... Local companies with established workshops and good quality services did not ...

The manager of aged care services responded:

That company has workshops somewhere else in Finland ... and abroad ... and quality certificates ... There was no reason we should give it lower grades on quality.

This finding suggests that a company that had good skills in designing a bid offering the lowest costs to the City and promising quality services could use this bid strategically as a facilitative circuit of power (Smith et al. 2010) to win the tender. Winning the tender in this way means that the facilitative circuit of power of the winning bidder has prevailed in the obligatory passage point (Clegg 2008) over episodic and dispositional circuits of power of public decision makers during bid evaluation.

This study argues that a facilitative circuit of power can be strong enough to prevail in obligatory passage points on the basis of well-defined promises rather than actual financial performance and the quality of services in practice (Clegg 1989). The director of social and health care commented:

... A multinational company can afford hiring the best experts to write a bid that outperforms the bids of local companies ... We have to consider what is written in bids during bid evaluations ...

As a consequence, in contrast to previous literature, a facilitative circuit of power does not necessarily need to be based on techniques of production or innovation (Ribeiro & Scapens 2006) but can be based on how an organisation uses its strategic power (Carter et al. 2010) to enroll holders of episodic and dispositional circuits of power into a strategic agreement (Lapsley et al. 2011).

### **OBLIGATORY PASSAGE POINT AND OUTCOME OF CCT**

Selected bids led to the conclusion of competitive tender contracts for aged care services between the City and two private sector organisations, one local and one multinational. The manager of elderly care explained:

We selected two bids as winners ... and made a proposal to our board to approve them ... There was a lively debate in the board ... but they approved our selection ...

After approving the selected bids, political decision makers delegated authority to conclude formal contracts to public managers. Contract formalisation is a major step in which buyers and sellers can set mechanisms to minimise

procurement risks that were not foreseeable during competitive tendering (Eriksson 2006). The internal auditor commented:

... The risk was that our public managers and political decision makers were not aware of what they were doing ... and what they needed ... They have no skills to deal with competitive tendering contract issues... that involve multinational business organisations ...

Delegation of authority to public managers, did not increase their episodic circuits of power to limit competitive tendering risks in concluding procurement contracts, because of their lack of professional skills to use appropriate management accounting and control systems in the CCT process (Davenport & Leitch 2005, Ballesteros-Pérez et al. 2013). As a consequence, the multinational organisation used its operational dominance based on high standard skills in business contracting as a new facilitative circuit of power (Clegg 1989) to dominate its business relationship with the City. The internal auditor explained:

... A mistake that the city made was to not ask competitive bidders to include information about additional costs other than taking care of the elderly and feeding them ... such as costs for maintaining the building of the aged care centre, ... cleaning and heating indoor spaces that the elderly use in common ... and who was going to pay for them ...

The audit board member gave further comments:

... All local companies that submitted bids included building maintenance costs and costs of heating and cleaning common places in the building in monthly rents charged to the elderly ... The multinational company did not do this because the invitation to submit bids did not specify this detail ...

Not including all the costs that are necessary to provide basic care services to the elderly allowed the multinational company to offer lower prices for aged care as a strategy to win in competitive tendering. When the main contract for aged care was concluded, the City was obliged to conclude additional contracts to rent and maintain a new aged care building centre belonging to a business network of the multinational company. A board member commented:

... Our board had no other choice but to conclude additional contracts to rent and maintain that building so that the elderly could live there ... at affordable costs for them ... The city pays additional charges ... to the owner of that building ...

The internal auditor confirmed that the total costs of the aged care package that includes the main contract of aged care and additional contracts concluded

with the multinational company and its network organisations are costlier than contracts concluded with local organisations. This finding shows that although the decision to modernise the management of elderly care services by using CCT was revolutionary (Bush 1987, Wolfram 2012), its substantial outcome remained ceremonial (Bush 1987, Hyvönen and Järvinen 2006).

A board member explained:

... During the board meeting in which we approved these additional contracts ... board members did not really know what else to do ... It was like ... we cannot do anything else but approve ...

Not having any other option but to approve the mistakes of the public managers shows that the dispositional circuit of power of the political decision makers was also ceremonial (Bush 1987) in concluding business contracts with the multinational organisation. An alternative solution would have been to use legal means to cancel the main contract with the multinational organisation. Cancelling the main contract would have activated instrumental financial performance potentials of an open competitive tendering (Ballesteros-Pérez et al. 2013). Political decision makers and public managers declined to litigate, however, because it was not clear if the City would have won the claim. A board member commented:

Politicians ... and public managers ... do not like to be told that they have acted wrongfully ...

The audit board member gave further clarification:

... The city's lawyer is not expert in competition law ... and in business litigation ... That is why our annual audit report recommended that the city opens a new position for a procurement manager with legal training in competitive tendering ...

From a critical perspective, the ceremonial outcome is a result of using inadequate management accounting and control tools, and inappropriate skills to design and implement competitive tendering that can minimise procurement risks (Eriksson 2008). Episodic and dispositional circuits of power among public decision makers failed to counteract the facilitative circuits of power that the multinational company used to dominate its new business relationship with the city. This finding provides additional elements that explain why the modernisation of public services by using private sector procurement methods, such as open competitive tendering, often fails to deliver expected outcomes in the public sector (Barton 2006, Roberts 2002, Page 2004, Diggs & Roman 2012).

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to analyse factors that can hinder the power of public decision makers to modernise the management of public services and save costs to the community by using CCT. The research question was how political and managerial circuits of power fail to prevail over the circuit of market power during a process of introducing CCT in a public sector organisation. The empirical part of the study was based on intensive field research conducted in a Finnish city, referred to as the City, from 2008 to 2013. Data was gathered by document analysis, interviews, observation in meetings and continuous interaction with key informants in their organisational settings.

Confirming the framework of circuits of power (Clegg 1989), research findings show that political and managerial circuits of power failed to prevail over the circuit of market power during introduction of CCT in the city, because public decision makers lacked professional skills to design and implement a competitive tendering process that minimise procurement costs proactively. Professional weaknesses of public managers to deal with international outsourcing contracts, offered opportunities to a multinational business organisation to use its technical know-how strategically by offering the lowest price levels as a facilitative circuit of power to prevail in obligatory passage points (Clegg, 1989). The multinational organisation had designed its offer in such a way, however, that it required the City to purchase additional exclusive services afterwards at a higher cost than expected. This study argues, as a result, that although the process of using CCT to modernise the management of elderly care services in the City was revolutionary (Bush 1987), its financial performance outcome was ceremonial (Hyvönen & Järvinen 2006).

A theoretical contribution is to show the ways in which modernisation of public services by using free market mechanisms, such as CCT, is a field of inter-organisational circuits of power (Clegg 1989, Carter et al. 2010) whose outcome cannot be assumed to save costs to the community when political decision makers and public managers are incompetent and unable to think and act as business-minded actors. A major practical contribution is to explain how and why the event of saving costs to the community by using CCT never took place as expected in the City.

As in any other field study, the empirical findings of this study cannot be generalised directly to other organisations. Its theoretical framework can be applied validly in other studies. Strategies through which public sector organisations can use CCT to save the increasing costs of public services merit further research.

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# Consulting or Holding to Account?

## *Riksrevisionen as an Agent of Change in Swedish Public Administration*

Thomas Carrington

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the impact of the performance audits of a national audit office, Sweden's Riksrevisionen, on the public administration it audits. It does so by investigating how the auditee perceives their relationship with the auditor in terms of accountability and consulting with the aim to explore the role of the national audit office as an agent of change in the entities of the public administration. Riksrevisionen is found to take a consulting approach in their performance audits and the stronger the relationship is perceived as consulting, the higher the propensity to change. The same relationship is found with regard to the accountability relationship when the accountability pressure is perceived internally in the organization. When the accountability pressure is external no relationship with change can be corroborated.

## **Introduction**

Public sector auditing provides both comfort (Power, 1999) and discomfort (Justesen & Skærbæk 2005; 2010). It provides comfort by allowing people to know that those responsible for public funds are monitored and that improvements, presumably, are suggested when necessary. Discomfort it provides by revealing ineffective and inefficient use of public funds, revelations which enable elected officials to hold those responsible to account. Whereas the production of comfort is, perhaps, best described as a ritual (Pentland 1993; Power 1999), the impact of the production of discomfort is more visible. The impact of an audit in the audited entities is in many cases even measurable (De Lancer Julnes 2006; Morin 2001; 2014; Raudla et al. 2015; Reichborn-Kjennerud 2013; Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen forthcoming; Van Loocke & Put 2011).

Change can however come about in different ways. Change can be forced upon the auditee by principals holding it to account (Jensen & Meckling 1976). The auditee can also choose to change by holding itself accountable (Bovens

1998). These changes are less visible from the outside but still a result of the discomfort of the processes of accountability (Bovens 1998; Messner 2009). All change does however not have to be a result of the production of discomfort, as the production of comfort is not merely a ritual (Carrington & Catasús 2007). Auditors are not only agents of accountability; they can also act as consultants (Jacobs 1998; Johnsen et al. 2001). As a consultant, the auditor's job is to advise the auditee and propose changes before, and thus often instead of, reporting shortcomings in the performance audit report.

How and to what degree performance auditors focus on improvements vary considerably. In financial auditing the choice span between the improvements made in the course of the audit (cf. Wallace's 1980) to an outright and complementary (or integrated – cf. Jeppesen 1998) consultancy operation (Zeff 2003a; 2003b). In performance auditing the range of choices is between bringing about change through direct involvement (consulting), at the one end, to reporting findings in such a way that the audited entity feels compelled to change by its own accord (accountability), at the other (Jacobs 1998). The type of impact to expect from the performance audit of a national audit office should thus depend on the strategic choice it makes between a “financial audit” and a “performance audit” approach (or a portfolio of, or hybrid between these approaches) (Jeppesen et al. forthcoming) and the degree to which it see its role as providers of accountability and/or consulting.

This paper investigates how change can be understood as a matter of how auditees perceive their relationship with the auditor in terms of accountability and consulting, with the aim of exploring the role of the national audit office as an agent of change in the entities of the public administration. This aim is explored by an analysis of data from a survey of 116 civil servants in government agencies who have experienced performance audits by the Swedish National Audit Office, Riksrevisionen. It does so by posing the research question: How do the audited entities perceive Riksrevisionen and to what extent does this perception affect the auditees' propensity to make changes as a result of the performance audit?

This question is particularly topical in the Swedish setting as performance auditing in Swedish public administration has undergone a change, from a situation where Riksrevisionen were accountability-focused (Bringselius 2015) and produced compliance-oriented performance audits (Grönlund et al. 2011) to a situation where it is mandated to focus on traditional “3E” performance auditing (Act 2002:1022 on state audit) and requested to focus on support rather than accountability (Bringselius 2015).

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The next, and second, section of the paper presents the previous research on the impact of performance audits and the theoretical framework and hypotheses of this paper. The third section provides a background of the Swedish National Audit Office,

Riksrevisionen, and its performance audits. The fourth section describes the method and data of the study. The fifth section presents the results of the survey and the sixth a discussion of these results. Section seven concludes the paper by highlighting the main conclusions and contributions of the paper.

## The impact of performance auditing

Almost all countries have a supreme audit institution<sup>1</sup> (SAI) charged with undertaking performance audits of the country's public administration. The target of these audits are typically the administrative level as the political level is beyond the mandate of appointed Auditors General. Parliament, not auditors, holds government to account (Boven 2005). The national audit office (NAO) holds the administration accountable. Still, the research on how SAIs hold public sector organizations accountable is limited. Van Loocke & Put's (2011) review on the subject found only fourteen such studies. In these studies, impact was typically defined as instrumental and short term (*ibid.*). Studies of actual changes reported by those being audited are even more rare. Two recent studies however report on the recall of perceptions and accounts of actual changes made as a consequence of the performance audits of the respective national audit offices of Norway and Estonia.

Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen (forthcoming) – studying the impact of performance auditing in Norway – explores two perspectives on what makes auditees make changes as a result of a performance audit: The cultural-institutional perspective and the rational-instrumental perspective.

The cultural-institutional perspective (Meyer & Rowan 1977; March & Olsen 1989; Brunsson & Olsen 1993; Scott 2008) focuses on the likelihood that institutionalization and socialization may make auditees more likely to accept changes that conform to and are compatible with the cultural norms and institutional identities present in the organization. Suggested changes that do not fit with already planned changes and assessments made by the auditor which the audited civil servants do not agree with may therefore be resisted. Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen (forthcoming) are able to corroborate this hypothesis – that the more the audited entities had already planned to make the recommended changes, the more changes they will make – but not a second – that the more the audited civil servants agree with the SAIs' assessments, the more changes they will make.

The cultural-institutional perspective is best understood as a reaction to the rational-instrumental perspective. In this perspective “the purpose of the audit is to facilitate administrative accountability and improvement” (*ibid.*: 7). Government agencies are hypothesized to make changes based on the SAIs' audit reports, a hypothesis which they are able to corroborate. This because: “The

1 These tend to be organized either as national audit offices, as in Sweden, or as courts of audit, as in, e.g., Spain.

auditees are expected to obediently make changes adhering to the conclusions in the SAls' audit reports because the SAls are performing independently and legitimate control of the public administration on behalf of the Parliaments" (ibid: 7). But they are also expected to make changes because it is rational from an agency theory perspective (if the agent does not follow the recommendation of the auditor it may be punished by the principal) (Jensen & Meckling 1976), as well as from a perspective of improvement and organizational learning (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen forthcoming).

Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen (forthcoming) acknowledges the notion that there may be a conflict between accountability and learning oriented audits (cf. e.g. Behn 2001; Dubnick 2005; Lonsdale & Bechberger 2011; van der Meer & Edelenbos 2006) but leave it at that with a note that "The audit reports may be used for holding someone to account and for recommending changes" (p. 7). Raudla et al. (2015) – studying the impact of performance auditing in Estonia – however address this claimed incongruity head on by testing the hypothesis that "There is a trade-off between the two functions of performance audit: if the performance audit is perceived to be about accountability, it is less likely to be perceived as being used for improving operations in the audited organizations." (Raudla et al. 2015: 220). They are not able to corroborate the hypothesis.

Raudla et al. (2015) however find that whereas only the perceived expertise of the members of the audit team and the perceived quality of the audit report had a statistically significant effect on reported actual change as a consequence of the audit, the degree of change was related to six different measures of perceived usefulness. This is an interesting result as it prompts us to question both how to, on the one hand, measure improvement and accountability, and, on the other, to explore the relationship between reported actual change as a consequence of the audit and perceived usefulness of the performance audit.

## **Theory and hypotheses**

As detailed above, previous research has discussed and tested (Raudla et al. 2015) whether the two main intended outcomes of performance auditing – improvement and accountability – are congruous with each other or whether there is a trade-off between the two. Yet, improvement is a subjective concept and what is perceived as improvements to parliament or society may not be perceived so by the audited public sector agency; and vice versa. Hence, changes made as the result of the auditee being held to account because of the performance audit may lead to improvements. Similarly, a performance audit focusing on finding and suggesting improvements can lead to changes that some actors perceive as deteriorations. Better then, this paper suggests, is to oppose accountability with consulting and focus on these concepts as relationships between the auditee (the audited public sector agency) and the auditor (the national audit office).

## ACCOUNTABILITY

Focusing on the relationship between the auditee and the auditor also crystallizes what – in this study – is meant by accountability. It is not uncommon in the literature on performance auditing to equate accountability with the process of holding the agency to account by the parliament or by the parliament via the government. It is also used to mean the holding of ministries to account. Raudla et al. (2015) does for instance investigate whether performance audit was used to hold the ministries and agencies accountable for their actions and Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen (forthcoming) hypothesize that the more the reports are used to hold ministers accountable, the more the auditees will make changes. There is nothing wrong with these perspectives but given the particular data of survey studies, in this case self-reported data on the perceptions of different aspect pertaining to accountability, the focus ought to be on situations where the accountability is more of an active (more akin to “responsibility”) than a passive (and often coercive) kind (Bovens 1998).

The accountability investigated in this paper is what Sinclair (1995) calls personal, as opposed to structural, accountability: “Accountability in the structural discourse is spoken of as the technical property of a role or contract, structure or system. Territories are clear and demarcated, accountabilities uncontested [...]. In contrast, the personal discourse is confidential and anecdotal. In this discourse, accountability is ambiguous, with the potential to be something that is feared or uplifting” (Sinclair 1995: 224). Messner (2009) in similar terms talks about the accountable self in his search for the limits of accountability. Drawing on Butler (2001; 2004; 2005), Messner investigates the ethical aspects of accountability and – although not directly pertinent for this paper – it highlights that an accountability relationship entails choices that has to be made. The auditee must act in a way that they perceive to be in line with what is expected of them.

Sweden is a particularly suitable setting to explore this kind of accountability relationship in as it has a form of government that does not allow the responsible minister to make decisions in individual cases. The minister (government) sets the rules and (typically yearly) gives general directives for the agencies but beyond that the agencies experience a rather strong independence. Thus a performance audit report by Riksrevisionen has to be interpreted by the audited agencies to a stronger extent than in other countries. Any new or changed rule or guideline by the government as a result of a performance audit also has to be dealt with by the agencies themselves. (For an in depth account of the challenges that results from this autonomy, see Svärdsten 2012.)

Nevertheless, if the agency comes under pressure from external actors to change this is perceived as an accountability pressure (Sinclair 1995; Messner 2009). In these situations, we expect the auditee to be more likely to make changes as a result of the performance audit report.

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** If auditees experience an external accountability pressure, it will increase their tendency to make changes.

Accountability pressures can, however, also manifest themselves within the agency. If the auditee experiences that they have to do more work as a result of the performance audit or that costs and resources become more strained this may make the auditee more inclined to make changes. Changes to the management's agenda as a result of the performance audit may make prioritizing and risk management more difficult, which likewise may make the auditee more inclined to change. This can be the result of the civil servants' perceiving the auditor to take an overly detailed approach to adherence to laws and regulations. These pressures are the result of the auditees direct or indirect reactions to the performance audit and thus a different manifestation of the same personal accountability discussed above.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** If auditees experience an internal accountability pressure, it will increase their tendency to make changes.

Common to both hypothesis H1 and H2 is the proposition that any eventual changes are made for the sake of someone else. This entails an accountability relationship with the auditor.

## **CONSULTING**

A consultant has a very different relationship with their client than an auditor has with their auditee. Hence the evergreen debate about auditors' independence (Briloff 1966; Simunic 1984; Hope & Langli 2010). Proponents for an independent auditor claim that an auditor that is not independent will not be as effective in finding errors or wrongdoing as an independent auditor (Carrington 2014). Moreover, an auditor that is not independent may be less likely to report findings that may have negative consequences for the auditee (*ibid.*). On the other side of the debate are the arguments that it is wasteful to not let the auditor, who already know a lot about the auditee, also suggest improvements (this argument can be found both for financial [*ibid.*] and performance [Justesen & Skaerbek 2010; Funkhouser 2011; Lonsdale & Bechberger 2011] auditing) and (particular to public sector auditing) the argument that performance audit should concern itself more with learning and improving performance than with compliance, which are seen as problematic to reconcile (Behn 2001; Dubnick 2005; Lonsdale & Bechberger 2011; van der Meer & Edelenbos 2006). As mentioned above, Raudla et al. (2015) could however not find support for the hypothesis that there is a trade-off between accountability and improvement.

Raudla et al. (2015) did however explore the relationship between reported actual change as a consequence of the audit and perceived usefulness of the performance audit as two dependent variables. Perceived usefulness is presented as an alternative impact-measure of change. It could however be argued



that perceived usefulness is an antecedent of change. If the civil servants of the audited agencies find the audit to be contributing to improvements in the organization, if they want to make changes based on the audit report and if they find the report useful in general, these are all indicators of a consulting relationship with the auditor. If the auditee finds the performance audit useful, improvements are more likely to follow.

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** The stronger the auditees perceive a consulting relationship with the auditor the more likely they are to make changes.

## Performance auditing in Swedish public administration

The Swedish national audit office, Riksrevisionen, is a young organization. It was established in 2003, after an – at times – heated debate, as the result of a merger between Riksrevisionsverket (RRV), an agency under the government, and The Parliamentary Audit, the latter with an origin that can be traced back to 1809 (Isberg & Mattson 2014). Riksrevisionen is part of the parliamentary control of government. This is a role it shares with formalized questions to ministers, the Parliamentary Ombudsmen, the Committee on the Constitution, and the no-confidence vote, which – if an absolute majority is reached – can bring down the government. One aspect of this parliamentary control role is to hold the public administration to account. Another is to evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness and economy, i.e., the traditional “3E” performance of these organizations (Bringselius 2015). Fulfilling this role Riksrevisionen produces around 25–30 performance reports per year (Riksrevisionen 2015; Jeppesen et al. forthcoming).

Riksrevisionen may be a young organization but that does not mean that it, or rather its predecessors, was late to performance auditing. Riksrevisionen/RRV/The Parliamentary Audit was on the contrary on the forefront of the development of performance auditing (Angleryd 2014; Furubo 2014) probably because RRV and the Parliamentary Audit did not undertake traditional financial audit (ibid.). This largely internally developed, and internationally influential approach to performance audit (ibid.) was however largely abandoned at the birth of the new organization Riksrevisionen for a more compliance- and accountability-seeking approach (ibid.).

When Riksrevisionen was created, the new audit institution conformed closer to the INTOSAI ideal than its predecessors. Most importantly it was fully autonomous. Sweden did however diverge from the standard SAI model by not introducing a public accounts committee (PAC) (Bringselius 2015). Instead a board for the audit office was first introduced and later replaced by a standing parliamentary committees (ibid.). The choice to not include a PAC as way to disseminate

performance reports to parliament is noteworthy as it has been argued that a PAC model works better for a style of performance audit that is confrontational in its meeting with the auditee (Bringselius 2015). Riksrevisionen's approach to performance auditing entails a much more collaborative relationship with those audited.

This approach is however a rather recent development. When RRV merged with the Parliamentary Audit into Riksrevisionen the previous improvement leaning model was then replaced with performance audits that had as its goal finding a person or organization that could be identified and held responsible for the performance or lack thereof (Bringselius 2015). This however led to criticism. Particularly, Riksrevisionen was accused of being too political (*ibid.*). Another criticism was that the reports were much too compliance focused (Grönlund et al. 2011). The board model also meant that the performance audit reports had a low impact in parliament and that Riksrevisionen therefore had to go through the media to get attention for their reports, prompting some to interpret Riksrevisionen's statements as hyperbolized (Gullers 2007).

This led to a reformation of Riksrevisionen's relations with Parliament and its audit approach. The board model was replaced with a standing parliamentary committees solution to which Riksrevisionen now communicates its findings. Nowadays, Riksrevisionen is expected to focus on support rather than accountability. It is even written into law (Act 2002:1022 on state audit) that Riksrevisionen should focus their performance audits on the traditional "3E" performance audit.

## Method and data

The data for this study comes from answers to a survey distributed during the autumn of 2014. The questionnaire for this study was designed as part of a Nordic study, which surveyed five Nordic countries (cf. Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen forthcoming). The questionnaire was originally designed, tested and deployed in Norway. A Swedish translation of this questionnaire was made from the Norwegian original and an English translation of the Norwegian questionnaire. Some adjustments were made with regard to the Swedish legal and institutional setting but otherwise it was conceived to be identical with the Norwegian original (*ibid.*). The respondents were asked to answer questions about performance audit(s) that they themselves had been exposed to. The respondents were asked to provide their answers on a five point Likert scale.

## Sample and data collection

The questionnaire was distributed via email and the responses were collected by means of a commercial web-based service (SurveyMonkey). The questionnaire

was first delivered to the respondents on October 20, 2014 and the last usable response was received on November 19 the same year. The questionnaire was distributed with the help of Riksrevisionen. Riksrevisionen annually make their own survey, which they distribute to their contact persons at the entities that they have previously audited. In this survey we did however want to come in contact with as many people as possible who, on the receiving side, had worked with Riksrevisionen's performance audits. This typically included the contact person but was not limited to her or him. Moreover, in most cases Riksrevisionen did not send its questionnaire directly to the contact person but to the official email address of the entity, which, if the entity is a governmental agency, is required by law to register and deal with the email. For this survey we therefor sent an email to the contact persons using the email addresses provided by Riksrevisionen in which we, in general terms, described the survey and asked them for their email address and if they would consider answering our survey together with a request to inform us of other potential respondents and their email addresses.

We received 245 names (contact persons) from Riksrevisionen. Some of these persons were no longer working for the organization in which they had been audited by Riksrevisionen and where in most cases not possible to come into contact with. In some cases, the organization as such did no longer exist. Nevertheless 83 of the 245 names (34%) that were contacted responded to our initial email. These 83 contacts resulted in email addresses to 178 persons who had in some capacity worked with Riksrevisionen's performance audits at an audited entity. Out of the 178 questionnaires that were distributed we received 116 responses, corresponding to a response rate of 65%, eight of these we received after a reminder email was sent to the people who had not yet responded. Of the 116 responses 30 answers were missing to the question of change, bringing the usable responses down to 86 and the response rate to 48%.

## **Variables and measures**

The dependent variable in this study is the auditee's tendency to make changes as a consequence of the performance audit. This variable is measured by the survey question "To what extent was change made as a consequence of performance audit?"

Six questions were asked as measures for the independent variable of accountability. These six questions were divided and merged into two composite measures. The first accountability construct consists of two questions: "To what extent did the audited entity become overly prudent in their management practices in light of the facts reported in the media?" and "To what extent was the reputation of the audited entity affected as a consequence of the media interest?". (Cronbach's alpha: .689.) This construct is intended to capture the perception of an agency relationship.

The second accountability variable is made of four questions: “To what extent have more controls and thereby more work come as a consequence of the performance audit?”, “To what extent have you seen an increase in cost and use of resources after the performance audit?”, “To what extent has the performance audit contributed to a shift of objectives, which complicate management priorities, and risk assessment?”, and “To what extent did Riksrevisionen’s use of government regulations in the audit criteria led to a too detailed control”. (Cronbach’s alpha: .806.) This construct is designed to measure direct negative consequences of the audit for the audited entity, i.e., capturing aspects of the relationship between the auditor and the auditee that indicates an accountability role for the auditor.

A third independent variable, that seeks to capture the experience of a consulting relationship, is a composite measure made up of five questions: “To what extent did the employees wish to make changes based on the performance audit report?”, “To what extent was the performance audit report an important source of information for you in your work?”, “To what extent did the performance audits of Riksrevisionen contribute to improvements in the audited entities?”, “To what extent were your comments regarding Riksrevisionen’s interpretation of the audit evidence sufficiently taken into account?”, and “To what extent did you find the performance audit useful?”. (Cronbach’s alpha: .874.)

## Results

Descriptive statistics of the variables used in this study and their bivariate correlations are documented in Table 1 and Table 2 shows the frequencies for the dependent and independent variables used in the regression model.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

	1	2	3	4
<b>1. The extent to which the audited entity made changes as a consequence of the assessments in the performance audit</b>				
<b>2. External accountability pressures</b>	.23* (N = 78)			
<b>3. Internal consequences of accountability pressures</b>	.52** (N = 81)	.44** (N = 80)		
<b>4. Consulting</b>	.51** (N = 86)	.05 (N = 80)	.32** (N = 84)	
<b>M</b>	2.93	1.53	1.9	3.4
<b>SD</b>	1.18	0.73	0.89	0.97
<b>n</b>	86	80	84	112

Note. Spearman’s rank order correlation coefficients. \*Significant at the .05 level. \*\*Significant at the .01 level.

Table 2. Dependent and independent variables

	<i>n</i>	To a very small extent (%)	To a small extent (%)	To some extent (%)	To a large extent (%)	To a very large extent (%)
<b>1. The extent of changes</b>	86	15	19	33	26	8
<b>2. External accountability pressures</b> (quantized means)	80	54	25	14	2	0
<b>3. Internal consequences of accountability pressures</b> (quantized means)	84	40	32	21	4	2
<b>4. Consulting</b> (quantized means)	112	4	23	38	51	18

The second row in Table 2 shows to what extent the responding civil servants replied that the audited entities made changes as a consequence of the performance audit they experienced. About a third of the respondents reported that changes were made to a large (26%) or very large (8%) extent as a consequence of the performance audit reports. This should be compared to responses to an identical survey question posed to civil servant in Norway (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen, forthcoming) where almost half of the surveyed civil servants reported that changes were made to a large (36%) or very large (12%) extent and Estonia (Raudla et al. 2015), where changes to a large (18%) and a very large (3%) extent were less common. Adding the medium range changes (33%) brings the number of respondents that report changes more substantial than “small” to 67%. This should be compared with 78% in Norway (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen forthcoming) and 59% in Estonia (Raudla et al. 2015). This leaves as many as 34% of the respondents reporting changes made as a consequence of the audit only to a small or very small extent (21% in Norway [Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen forthcoming] and 35% in Estonia [Raudla et al. 2015]).

It can also be observed (row three, Table 2) that the responding civil servants do not experience external accountability pressures from the media. None report external accountability pressures to a very large extent and only 2% to a large extent. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents did however report having experienced external accountability pressures to some (14%) or a small extent (25%). Nevertheless, when adding the 54% representing those who only to a very small extent (or at all – this was the “lowest” value they could report) to the 25% who felt external accountability pressures to a small extent, as many as 79% of the respondents reported that they did not feel any substantial external pressure from the media, such as negative reputation or becoming overly cautious.

For the respondents' experience of accountability pressures that are manifested internally in the organization – such as having to put up with an overly detailed and rules-oriented audit, increased costs and more work as a result of the audit – the image is similar, albeit not as extreme. Still, as many as 72% reported not having experienced any substantial internal accountability pressures as a consequence of the performance audit (i.e., reported the consequences to be only to a small or very small extent) and as few as 6% reported the extent to which they experienced negative internal accountability pressures to be large or very large.

Instead, the responding civil servants, to a larger extent, reported having experienced the performance audit as having been useful in a different way, indicating a more consulting oriented approach to the audit. As many as 69% experienced the audit in consulting terms to a large (51%) or a very large (18%) extent. Only 4% answered to a very low extent and the share reporting “to a low extent” was 23%.

The independent variables described above were used in a multiple regression analysis of changes made as a consequence of the performance audit report (see Table 3). No problems with multicollinearity were implied as all the independent variables correlated less than .50 (see Table 1) and all variance inflation factors (VIFs) were below the commonly accepted threshold of 5. The number of usable responses for the regression analysis is 78, due to missing data on some variables.

Table 3. The auditees' propensity to make changes as a consequence of performance audit (n = 78)

	Standardized coefficients		
	$\beta$	t	Significance
<b>Constant</b>	-	0.184	0.854
<b>2. External accountability pressures</b>	0.81	0.816	0.417
<b>3. Internal consequences of accountability pressures</b>	0.37	3.516	0.001**
<b>4. Consulting</b>	0.38	3.967	0.000**

Note. Adjusted  $R^2 = .38$ .  $F$  statistic = 16.930. Significance of  $F = .000$ .  $VIF \leq 1.38$ .  $VIF$  = variance inflation factor. \*\*Significant at the .01 level.

Table 3 demonstrates that although  $\beta$  indicates a strong relationship between external accountability pressures and their inclination to make changes as consequence of the audit, this relationship is not statistically significant. There are however statistically significant relationships (at the .01 level) between, on the one hand, internal consequences of accountability pressures and the auditees willingness to make changes as a consequence of the performance audit and,

on the other hand, auditees experience of the performance audit as consulting and the propensity to make changes as consequence of the audit. In other words, the more the auditee experiences consequences of internal accountability pressures or perceives the performance audit in terms of consulting, the more likely the auditee is to make changes.

Table 4 shows the hypotheses and the results of the regression analysis in terms of corroboration. In this analysis, the hypothesis that auditees experiencing external accountability pressures will have an increased tendency to make changes (H1) was not corroborated. This indicates that increased accountability pressures from external parties (in this case the media) does not lead to a higher propensity to make changes as a consequence of the performance audit.

Table 4. Hypotheses and Empirical Corroboration

	Hypothesis	Corroboration
<b>Accountability relationship</b>	H1: If auditees experience an external accountability pressure, it will increase their tendency to make changes.	No
	H2: If auditees experience an internal accountability pressure, it will increase their tendency to make changes.	Yes
<b>Consulting relationship</b>	H3: The stronger the auditees perceive a consulting relationship with the auditor the more likely they are to make changes.	Yes

The hypothesis that auditees experiencing internal accountability pressures will have an increased tendency to make changes (H2) was however corroborated. This means that the more civil servants experience negative internal consequences as a result of the performance audit the more they are willing to make changes. This indicates that accountability relationships (and the auditor as an agent of this relationship) do matter for civil servants' willingness to make changes. For this to happen the accountability relationship must however first manifest itself in tangible internal consequences. H3 – the stronger the auditees perceive a consulting relationship with the auditor the more likely they are to make changes – was also corroborated, indicating that the more a civil servant experiences the performance audit as a consulting relationship the more willing they are to make changes as a consequence of the audit.

## Discussion of the role of Riksrevisionen and auditee change

This analysis adds to our understanding of what explains change as a consequence of a performance audit in the auditee by indicating both the perception of an accountability relationship and a consulting relationship as explanations.

This corroborates the previous research that stress the importance of a consulting style approach to the performance audit for bringing about change in the audited organizations (Lonsdale & Bechberger 2011; Morin 2003; Van Loocke & Put 2011). Furthermore, it also lends support to the research that point out the importance of an accountability relationship with the audited organization to inducing change (Skærbæk 2009). This support is however not unqualified as support was only found for internal accountability pressures, not external. These findings complicate rather than solve the question of whether there is a trade-off between a performance audit with an accountability approach and a performance audit with an improvement approach. The solution that the design of this study suggests – i.e. to bracket the notion of improvement and instead focus on change and whether this can be explained by an accountability and/or consulting approach – has provided promising results but needs to be further analysed and tested.

A further observation worth discussing is that Swedish public administration agencies do not make as many changes as a consequence of Riksrevisionen's performance audits as one might expect from previous research in Norway, which found a higher level of change (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen forthcoming) – a level that the Norwegian study found low (ibid.)! The lower level of change in Sweden could however be explained by the different national cultural-institutional settings (Bringselius 2015). Swedish government agencies have a higher degree of freedom and autonomy than their Norwegian counterparts and may thus not feel equally compelled to follow the changes suggested or implied in the performance audit reports. Another possible explanation of the low rate of change is that Riksrevisionen is a young institution and that its recommendations, therefore, do not carry the same weight as in other countries. In other countries, such as Estonia, which also lacks a long tradition of Anglo-Saxon style audit institutions, the rate of changes made as a consequence of the performance audit can be even lower (Raudla et al. 2015).

This could also be part of the explanation for why auditors in Sweden to a very low degree experience external accountability pressures. Sweden does not have a public accounts committee and therefore rely on other means to communicate results to Parliament. Bringselius (2015) argues that this is in part due to “the wish to preserve a political culture focused on collaboration and pragmatic improvement, rather than confrontation and accountability debates” (p. 1). Bringselius argues that Sweden has been successful in this regard. In the questionnaire sent to the civil servants several questions were included to capture the accountability pressures from parliament on ministers and (more apropos for this study) from parliament and government on the auditees. None of these measures did however produce any statistical significant data and were thus not included in the analysis. The means for these variables were however lower even than for that of the construct for external accountability pressures,



which was included in this study; i.e. accountability pressures from the media. This further supports Bringselius' reasoning.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the hypothesis that auditees experiencing an external accountability pressure will increase their tendency to make changes cannot be corroborated. The tested composite measure has a slightly low Cronbach's alpha of .689 and the included questions are by themselves either not statistically significantly correlated with the dependent variable or have a correlation that is statistically significant only at the 0.5 level. The failure to corroborate a hypothesis about a relationship between the degree of perceived external accountability pressures and the extent that auditors are willing to make changes as a consequence of the performance audit report is nevertheless noteworthy. The Norwegian study (Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen forthcoming) referred to above, tests hypothesis very similar to the external accountability thesis put forward in this paper and they are able to corroborate such a relationship. Again, the explanation can be the differences in legal and institutional framework. Whereas Sweden was a latecomer to the currently accepted best practice of how to structure an independent Supreme Audit Institutions and has abstained from introducing a public accounts committee, Norway, in comparison, resembles an INTOSAI poster child.

The other construct for accountability however also indicates that these kinds of accountability pressures are low and yet the hypothesis that experiences of internal accountability pressures will increase auditees' tendencies to make changes can be corroborated. The auditees do however report slightly higher internal manifestations of accountability pressures than external, which may be part of the explanation. A more theoretically appealing explanation may however be that the internal manifestations of accountability pressures better capture the accountability relationship than do self-reported views of perceived pressures from the media (or ministers or parliament). Yet another explanation could be that this construct rather than merely capturing internal accountability pressures also captures more rational-instrumental explanations (cf. Reichborn-Kjennerud & Johnsen forthcoming).

In light of the institutional and regulatory changes affecting performance auditing in Sweden it is however not surprising to note that not only do most auditees experience the audit in terms of a consulting relationship but that the hypothesis that the stronger the auditees perceive a consulting relationship with the auditor the more likely they are to make changes can also be corroborated. Although this paper does not claim to test whether there is a trade-off between accountability and consulting (improvement) it is evident that both relationships can exist together. Hence, although operationalized differently, this paper lends support to the results by Raudla et al. (2015) that there does not seem to be a trade-off between accountability and improvement in practice. Improvements can however be the result of an accountability relationship

(Skærbæk 2009) why any statements about Raudla et al.'s hypothesis must be restated as discussing the congruity between accountability and consulting relationships.

## Conclusions

This study shows that civil servants in government agencies in Sweden see their relationship with the Swedish national audit office, Riksrevisionen, primarily as a consulting relationship. This corroborates previously reported preliminary findings that the requirements that Riksrevisionen take a more supportive approach in their audits have been headed by Riksrevisionen (Gullers 2011; Bringselius 2015). Without longitudinal data, a change cannot be confirmed but the very low scores for negative experience due to accountability pressures reported by the civil servants indicates an absence of the compliance (Grönlund et al. 2011) and accountability focused audits (Bringselius 2015) reported before the changes in the law on state auditing that changed the performance audit approach (Bringselius 2015).

The study also demonstrates that Riksrevisionen's performance audits lead to changes in Swedish public administration. Arguments have been made in the previous research that if the SAI is to bring about improvements in the audited organizations it needs to take on a more consultative role (Lonsdale & Bechberger 2011; Morin 2003; Van Loocke & Put 2011). This study supports these arguments by showing a clear relationship between auditees perceiving a consulting relationship with the auditor and the readiness to make changes as a consequence of the audit. Qualitative research has however also found that auditors embracing their accountability role can be an effective way of bringing about change in the audited agencies. In this paper, we find support for this but only when the accountability pressures manifest themselves internally in the audited organization, not when the accountability pressures take an external form, such as perceiving that the performance audit, via the media, gives the agency a bad reputation.

Some limitations of the range and reliability of these conclusions must be acknowledged. Firstly, this study only report on and analyse data from Sweden. Political, legal and cultural-institutional differences between countries will affect how the national audit office is perceived. Changes in the mandate of (laws governing) the audit office can change the audits produced significantly (Bringselius 2015). This also extends to the number of changes made as a consequence of the performance audit. A comparison with Norway, where more changes are made, and Estonia, where fewer changes are made, are good illustrations of this. Secondly, the study of direct effects of performance audits on changes made in the audited organizations is only in its infancy. How to understand what drives or influence change is still not fully understood. Neither is how to measure it.

Future research therefore primarily ought to engage in comparative research. This could isolate the effect of national cultures and institutions making it easier to corroborate or otherwise identify more generalizable effects. Furthermore, this study only addresses the impact of the performance audit on change in government agencies as a consequence of how civil servants experience the performance audit and in particular how this experience can be categorized in terms of accountability and consulting relationships. Future studies would do well to also address other kinds of impact, such as that on parliamentary debates and agendas, government policy, media attention or public perception. A stronger consulting approach may, for instance, lead to less discomfort in public administration and to more change. But this may also lead to a parliamentary and/or public perception that the national audit office has become too cosy with its auditees<sup>2</sup>, whereas a stronger accountability approach may lead to more discomfort in the public administration and less<sup>3</sup> change but a more comfortable parliament and public.

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2 During 2016 all three auditor generals in Sweden resigned. In at least one of the cases, the media uproar preceding the resignation was sparked by a perceived lack of independence of the kind discussed here.

3 Or maybe more change! (See Skaerbaek 2009.)

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# What Qualifications does Good State Audit Require?

## *The Profiles of Ten Auditors-General*

Louise Bringselius & Marja Lemne

### **Abstract**

The professional profiles of the Auditors-General have gained scarce attention in scholarly work. Yet, these profiles may have major consequences for the choices that are made at the Supreme Audit Institution (SAI), for example in terms of audit approaches. This article builds on the case of the Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO). In Sweden, there is no public list of qualifications for the appointment of the Auditor-General and no access is provided to the details of the appointment process. Therefore, we have chosen to explore changes with regard to what competences are given priority, by examining how the profiles of the first ten Auditors at the Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO) have changed. The study covers the period 2003–2015. The review shows that the profile has changed from that of a specialist to that of a generalist and that qualifications generally have increased. Five explanations are outlined, based on an overview of the history of the SNAO. The SNAO has been subjected to heavy criticism over the years, including disclosures in 2016, leading to the resignation of all three Auditors-General. Findings indicate that this may be a reason for the increasing demands. This may, however, also indicate a more general change of discourse in state audit, where focus is shifted from autonomy issues to issues of quality and competence.

This article discusses implications from different competences with the Auditor-General, based on a review of the professional profiles of the first ten Auditors-General at the Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO), appointed in the period 2003–2015. The Swedish National Audit Office (*Riksrevisionen*, hereafter referred to as the SNAO) was formed as late as 2003, with the ambition to serve as a role-model for SAIs in other countries. The reform was preceded by rigorous preparations, in terms of both organization design and legal arrangements. It was also supported by the two previous state audit bodies, whose employees were incorporated into the new institution. One of these was RRV, a semi-autonomous agency under the Ministry of Finance. The other institution was the Parliamentary Auditors (*Riksdagens revisorer*), taking assignments from, and reporting to, members of the Swedish Parliament. None of these

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were autonomous in the sense required by international standards, in particular those articulated by the *International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions* (INTOSAI) and the main aim with the forming of the SNAO was to finally have an SAI in compliance with these standards.

Despite high ambitions and careful preparations, the first 14 years of the SNAO (2003–2017) have been lined with internal conflict and recurring public criticism. The latest criticism was a series of disclosures in the major Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* in the summer of 2016, where it was revealed how the Auditors-General had promised positions to applicants before the selection process had begun, how external stakeholders (including the Governmental Offices) had been invited to comment on audit drafts and how an Auditor-General had interfered in the audit of an issue where he had been involved in his previous role as Director-General. The articles also showed how the three Auditors-General had cancelled a number of audits, without any explanations, as they took on their posts. The disclosures and the debate that followed lead to the resignation of all three Auditors-General and Swedish Parliament is currently preparing for a Parliamentary investigation of the governance and organization of the SNAO (see Sveriges riksdag, betänkande 2016/17:KU14, accepted in Parliament Nov. 16, 2016).

Following the first years of criticism, after the SNAO was formed in 2003, some have pointed towards the qualifications of the first team of (three equal) Auditors-General and their lack of experience from senior managerial positions. The Committee on the Constitution in the Swedish Parliament is responsible for proposing which persons to appoint to Auditors-General. Parliament then makes the final decision. However, the appointment process is closed and we have not been able to get any documents or accounts to analyze this process. Thus, we instead use a framework with four categories to analyze changes to the profiles of the Auditors-General in Sweden since 2003. These categories are: Academic Degree/s; Career Background; Political Background; Age when Appointed/Resigning. Special emphasis is devoted to their career backgrounds. We have been able to retract the CVs of the Auditors-General from various sources – some from the SNAO and some from these people themselves.

Our findings suggest that the profiles of the Auditors-General have changed from that of a specialist to that of a generalist and that qualifications generally have increased. Different explanations and implications are discussed. In particular, two explanations are developed. First, these changes may be understood as a way to encourage the Auditors-General to allow auditors more professional autonomy and to promote a more motivating work climate at the SNAO. The SNAO was subjected to extensive criticism in these areas during the first years, both in internal employee surveys and in the media. Second, changes may aim at increasing the quality of audits and the general legitimacy of the SNAO. As the SNAO was formed, some argued that there were those who wanted this to



become a weak institution, in order for the party in office to avoid criticism. By ensuring that recognized and highly qualified people are appointed as Auditors-General, the risk for this may be reduced.

More generally, findings indicate that increased institutional autonomy may come with increasing demands relating to the competence of the Auditors-General, since they have a great amount of power at their hands. However, findings also indicate, given the events in 2016, that serious managerial misconduct (see report by Axberger 2016) may also appear in a group of extremely qualified Auditors-General. Reasons for this is yet to be explored.

On a secondary note, findings also reveal that several of the Swedish Auditors-General have served as officials in the Ministry of Finance, commonly at the Budget Department. On the positive side, this means that they are also known to the networks of the administration and that they have useful experience from the Government Offices. On the negative side, there is a risk that their independence may be compromised, as they are set to audit their former colleagues. More generally, there is a strong concentration to the central administration in Stockholm and the Auditors-General have rarely been recruited from a recent career outside the capital.

The paper is organized as follows. It starts with an introduction to the literature on state audit and Supreme Audit Institutions. This is followed by a section depicting the research design. The case of the Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO) is introduced and the profiles of the ten Swedish Auditors-General during the years 2003–2015 are then reviewed. In particular, the first set of Auditors-General (2003) is compared to the current set of Auditors-General (2015). A section with a discussion follows and the paper is closed with conclusions.

## State Audit and the Auditor-General

State audit is actually conducted by a number of different bodies, of which the Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) is only one. However, the SAI is typically the only *autonomous* state audit institution. By securing this autonomy in the Constitution, policy-makers attempt to avoid that its work becomes politicized. Considering that the SAI audits the performance of the administration and the effectiveness of various policy initiatives, reports can be politically sensitive. Yet, the SAI must not become too autonomous either, meaning that it loses its relevance. This balance, between relevance and independence, is delicate, as often described in studies (Gendron et al. 2001; Jacobs, 1998; English & Guthrie 2000; Funnell 1994 and 1998; and White & Hollingsworth 1999). The SAI must also manage the temptation to become ‘overly’ critical in order to point at its own value and legitimacy, as it is pressured to prove that it provides with value (Bringselius 2014a; Talbot & Wiggan 2010).

These challenges are faced in particular in performance audit, where there is room for different approaches, interpretations of results, etc. At the SAI, two types of audit are conducted: Financial audit and performance audit. Financial audit has its basis in an established profession and there are carefully outlined standards for this work. About half of the auditors at the SNAO work in this area. However, performance audit reports tend to gain considerably more attention both in media and among the stakeholders of the SAI. At the same time, this can take many different forms, and there are few standards. Therefore, the Auditors-General will often need to focus rather extensively on this type of audit.

This article is focused primarily on the professional profiles of the Auditors-General. Interestingly, there is no consensus on what competence should characterize these individuals, nor the performance auditor. As a contrast, the professional requirements of a financial auditor are more fixed. This is also reflected in the research literature on professions and professionalism, where there is a long standing discussion on what defines the audit profession in general (Moore, Tetlock, Tanlu & Bazerman 2006; Anderson, Maletta & Wright 1998; Holma & Zaman 2012). This is rarely applied to the performance auditors working at an SAI (cf. Brown & Klerman, 2012), despite the fact that performance audit reports can be very politically sensitive. Some guidance is provided by the international organization for SAIs, the INTOSAI, but more importantly, unique practice has developed in each and every country in this area. By exploring this practice, we argue, we can also learn more about what is considered 'good state auditing' (cf. Gustavsson 2015). This will also partly reflect the different administrative traditions in different countries and the different roles that SAIs can have. Despite advocating high professional autonomy for performance auditors, the INTOSAI avoids specific directions with regard to, for example, suitable educational and professional background. The INTOSAI states (INTOSAI 2004, p. 12):

As stated in the Auditing Standards, performance auditing is not overly subject to specific requirements and expectations. While financial auditing tends to apply relatively fixed standards, performance auditing is more flexible in its choice of subjects, audit objects, methods, and opinions. Performance auditing is not a regular audit with formalized opinions, and it does not have its roots in private auditing. It is an independent examination made on a non-recurring basis. It is by nature wide-ranging and open to judgments and interpretations. It must have at its disposal a wide selection of investigative and evaluative methods and operate from a quite different knowledge base to that of traditional auditing. It is not a checklist-based form of auditing. The special

feature of performance auditing is due to the variety and complexity of questions relating to its work. Within its legal mandate, performance auditing must be free to examine all government activities from different perspectives (AS 4.0.4, 4.0.21-23 and 2.2.16). (INTOSAI 2004, p. 12)

What we can learn from the INTOSAI guidelines, in terms of professional profiles, is primarily that the auditor needs a profound understanding both for the public administration and for the audit work in itself;

SAI personnel should have a good understanding of the government environment, including such aspects as the role of the legislature, the legal and institutional arrangements governing the operations of the executive and the charters of public enterprises. Likewise, trained audit staff must possess an adequate knowledge of the SAI's auditing standards, policies, procedures and practices. (INTOSAI 1998, p. 36)

The INTOSAI does not provide any guidelines with regard to the qualifications of the Auditor-General, although these can influence the choice of audit areas as well as audit designs, but also ultimately the identity of auditors. For example, Skaerbaek (2009) shows how auditors can function both as modernizers and as stabilizers in the administration. Presumably, the Auditor-General can be expected to meet the profile outlined in the quotation above, but we do not have any detailed suggestions. This article is focused on the qualifications of the Auditors-General.

We argue that good state auditing is not only a matter of institutional autonomy or consensus on audit approaches, but the qualifications of both auditors and Auditors-General is equally important. The importance of these qualifications may even be emphasized when the SAI is granted full autonomy in the Constitution, since this typically means that great deal of power will be placed in the hands of the Auditor-General. He or she will then be in charge of Human Research policies and decide what competence should be promoted and recruited, into the performance audit practice, which is more open to different interpretations than financial audit.

By reviewing the professional profiles of the Auditors-General, we can also try to understand the relation between the SAI and its stakeholders. They may interpret good state auditing differently from the Auditor-General and the SAI and this may be a source of conflict and distrust. Thus, the values and knowledge ideals that the Auditor-General comes with, may not only shape the internal organization and its audit, but also external relations and thus ultimately the legitimacy of the SAI. Naturally, the powers of the Auditor-General can be adjusted in different ways. For example, the Norwegian SAI has a model with

a 'Board of Auditors-General', called 'Riksrevisjonens kollegium'. The Auditor-General is Head of this group. Another way of reducing risk is to have a model with three parallel Auditors-General, such as that in Sweden.

In order to analyze how the profiles of the Swedish Auditors-General compare, we use a framework with four variables: (1) Academic Degree/s; (2) Career Background; (3) Political Background; (4) Age when Appointed/Resigning. Each of these variables gives an indication of the role that the Auditor-General is expected to take, including what type of audits or knowledge Parliament wishes to have.

First, the academic education of an Auditor-General is interesting because it provides a norm for auditors at the SAI. It indicates what type of knowledge is considered important by Parliament, also among SAI auditors. Type of knowledge can be understood as a matter of objectivist or interpretive knowledge (Hoerner & Stephenson 2012), but it can also be understood as a matter of different perspectives. When an Auditor-General has a background in political science, for example, other aspects may be considered than those promoted by an Auditor-General with a background in law studies. Furthermore, the level of education is also of interest. If the Auditor-General is requested to have a doctoral degree, then it may be that this Auditor-General also will require that auditors have an equally high degree, or produce reports with a quality similar to that found in research or vice versa.

Second, the career background of an Auditor-General is relevant partly because it indicates what kind of role the Auditor-General is expected to take within the SAI. With the profile of a generalist, with extensive experience from roles as Director-General or similar, in different settings, the Auditor-General can be expected to work on some distance from the actual audit process and thus allowing more autonomy to the auditors. With the profile of an audit specialist, the Auditor-General can be expected to become more involved in the audit work, thus reducing the autonomy of professionals and functioning as a senior auditor (Bringselius 2014b).

Third, from the perspective of autonomy and objectivity it is also relevant to consider the political background of the Auditors-General. By this we refer to partisan background, meaning formal positions on appointment by political parties. Sweden has a tradition of attempting to clearly separate policy-making from policy-implementation, as part of the model with semi-autonomous agencies (Andersson 2004). This dualism has increasingly become the ideal also in other Western countries over the past decades, but it is currently being challenged, as a consequence primarily from a perceived loss of political influence (Spicer 2010; Svava 2001). In the case of SAIs, political autonomy is considered imperative. Yet, in some countries, such as Norway, the Auditor-General typically is a former member of Parliament. In Sweden, the general view has been that an Auditor-General should not have a pronounced partisan background

– but this is not stipulated in the Constitution or in any other legal acts. Interestingly, nor do the INTOSAI standard (INTOSAI Resolution A\_66\_209, p. 1) with ‘eight pillars defining the independence of Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs)’ say anything regarding whether a political background is appropriate or not for an Auditor-General. As concerns the heads of the SAIs, this merely states:

The condition for appointment of SAI heads and members of collegial institutions should be specified in legislation. The independence of heads of SAIs and members of collegial institutions can only be ensured if they are given appointments with sufficiently long and fixed terms with removal only by a process independent from the executive. This allows them to carry out their mandates without fear of retaliation. (INTOSAI Resolution A\_66\_209, p. 1)

Because the Auditors-General enjoy extensive discretion in Sweden, there is a risk that a pronounced political background would raise concerns relating to objectivity and legitimacy.

Fourth, we have included age when Appointed/Resigning as a separate category. Age is associated with a number of – often negative – stereotypes, as depicted by Posthuma and Campion (2008). A common stereotype is that people of higher age are more dependable, stable and honest (Hedge et al. 2006). In the case of Auditors-General, these qualities are likely to be considered important, in particular considering the centrality of autonomy concerns. When a person is appointed Auditor-General as the last position in his/her career, he or she will not need to consider opportunities for a continued career in the central administration and this adds to his or her autonomy, meaning that s/he will not be overly sensitive to criticism. It may also be that seniority in terms of age develops into a norm for Auditors-General. In certain professions and for certain positions, for example in the central administration, people are simply expected to be of a rather high age (Lawrence 1988).

## Research Design

This study is based on an investigation of the Swedish SAI, the SNAO. A historical perspective, stretching back to the forming of the SNAO in 2003, is adopted. The SNAO is interesting because it was formed in a process which was very carefully outlined, with extensive preparations of both organizational aspects and judicial aspects. The ambition was that the SNAO should serve as a role-model for other SAIs in the world. The SNAO is also very active supporting the development of SAIs in other countries, in particular in the third world. One of its predecessors, RRV, had an international reputation as standard-setting in

the field of state performance audit. The former Auditor-General at RRV, Inga-Britt Ahlenius, played a central role in this development, but she was also concerned with the lack of institutional arrangements to support the autonomy of the institution and therefore she was an eager supporter as well as one of the initiators for the reform in which the SNAO was formed in 2003.

The SNAO is, however, also interesting because its first 5–7 years have been lined with conflict and criticism (Bringselius 2008, 2013; Ahlbäck Öberg & Bringselius 2015). In the next section, we will describe the 12 years briefly. It has sometimes been argued that the discontent among both internal auditors and external stakeholders during the first years can be referred to changes agreed by the first set of Auditors-General and their leadership styles (Bringselius 2013). This gives us further reason to look at the profiles of the Auditors-General and try to understand why these specific individuals were chosen.

This study is based primarily on a careful scrutiny of the profiles of the ten people who have been Auditors-General at the SNAO during the period 2003–2015. Information on these profiles has been sought in various sources. Initially, the SNAO only had the CVs of the current three Auditors-General, but they have been helpful in preparing CVs also for Antemar, Landahl and Norgren. We have contacted Lindell and Larsson and asked for their CVs, unfortunately without any success. Information on their profiles has therefore been retracted from various sources, such as LinkedIn (social media), Wikipedia, press releases, and the book *Vem är det? (Who's Who?)*. Grufberg sent us his CV. In terms of career background, our English summary, found in Table 1, includes only top positions held over a longer period of time.

We were initially planning to also study the recruitment process itself, but we have not been able to retract any formal information on this through the Swedish Parliament (Committee on the Constitution), nor from the SNAO.

## The Swedish National Audit Office

The Swedish administration is different from what is common in many other countries in the sense that its Government Offices are relatively small. Instead, the administration, with its semi-autonomous executive agencies, is rather large. There are also ad hoc government commissions appointed to prepare for policy-making (Lundberg 2014). In addition, executive agencies, as well as sector-specific auditing bodies, are responsible for conducting large parts of the investigative work requested by the Government (Bäck et al. 2015; Lemne 2010; Wockelberg 2003).

This model makes the SNAO an important institution, providing policy-makers and administration with essential information. However, it also makes the appointment of the Director-Generals of the agencies an important instrument at the hands of the Government, apart from judicial instruments and

decisions on agency funding. The general debate concerning these appointments has from time to time been rather intense (Bäck et al. 2015; Larsson & Lemne, forthcoming). This resulted in changes to the process for the appointment of Directors-General in Sweden in 2007. Since then, positions are advertised openly, requirement profiles are established for all positions, and external consultants are used as support. This new recruitment reform was later more thoroughly described and characterized by the Government in a report to Parliament two years later with the following wording. Requirement profiles should include, it was said, 'specific requirements based on the organizational needs, as well as general requirements such as documented leadership skills and good communication capabilities' (Government Report Skr 2009/10:43, page 20). There is, however, not at all the same transparency when the Swedish Parliament appoints Auditors-General or similar. Instead, these appointments are confidential.

In Sweden, the appointment of the Auditors-General is initially handled by the Committee on the Constitution in Swedish Parliament. The committee then proposes a candidate to Parliament, who makes the final decision. So far, all decisions have coincided with the proposed candidates.

Very little has been written on the role of the Auditor-General in the legal acts concerning the SNAO. The Parliamentary Committee preparing for the reform in 2003, establishes that the Auditors-General needed broad qualifications in order to be able to meet the different stakeholders of the SNAO. In their suggestion to Parliament in 2000, they explained:

According to the Parliamentary Committee, the personal qualifications of the Auditors-General must be very high. The person who is Auditor-General shall have high integrity and enjoy a good reputation both within the administration and among policy-makers, since the Auditor-General will work in the borderland between administration, economy and politics, which means a number of interfaces towards important bodies in society. According to the Parliamentary Committee, this means that the Auditor-General must have good professional as well as personal qualifications, probably acquired over a long term service on high levels within the central administration. (Framställning och redogörelse 1999/2000:RS1, p. 42)

The Swedish Auditors-General cannot be removed, unless they 'no longer meet the requirements for the appointment or if the Auditor-General is responsible for serious negligence' (Regeringsformen 13 kap. 8§).

Integrity can be interpreted as lack of political background, but there is no writing that explicitly prevents this. Yet, this was pronounced already as the SNAO was formed, not least by Ahlenius (the Auditor-General at the RRV, who

very much promoted the reform). She explained, in a research interview from 2002 (see Bringselius 2008, 2013):

This reform is not implemented until this organization has three professional managers and not three old politicians. It is incredibly important for the institution that those who will be appointed managers cannot be suspected of any other loyalty than that of the audit assignment, meaning there must be no old attachments to any political party or anything else. If you destroy this from start, then you will have positioned this as a place where you can allow former policy-makers a final retreat and then it is all ruined. It is of enormous importance, completely crucial, that those who are appointed are professional and that you thereby maintain respect for the audit assignment and the professional leadership of this organization. (Interview with Inga-Britt Ahlenius 5 Dec 2002)

Ahlenius also emphasized that state audit was a very special type of work. 'Audit is something different from research', she explained, but she also emphasized that it was different from evaluations.

At that time, the reform was subjected to political resistance from the party in office, the Social Democrats. This was confirmed by, for example, the Parliamentary Director Anders Forsberg, in a research interview from 2002:

The Parliamentary committee went against the will of the government party in this. The Social Democrats were against the change all the time. RRV has assisted the Government with many investigations, which the Government had paid for. These investigations have provided with a large part of the funding of RRV. When we finally could agree on a suggestion, all six parties were united, but the Social Democrats were still against. (Interview with Anders Forsberg, 4 Dec 2002)

After a number of adjustments, the Social Democrats finally agreed on the reform. One of these adjustments was the shared leadership at the SNAO, meaning that three Auditors-General would lead the institution in collaboration. The different periods in office for the past ten Auditors-General are outlined in Table 1. As this shows, there have basically been three different constellations that have lasted over a longer period of time. This is marked with Team 1-3 in Table 1.



Table 1. Auditors-General at the Swedish National Audit Office (Riksrevisionen) 2003–2015

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Team 1	Kjell Larsson												
	Lennart Grufberg												
	Eva Lindström												
Team 2	Karin Lindell												
	Claes Norgren												
	Jan Landahl												
	Gudrun Antemar												
Team 3	Margareta Åberg												
	Susanne Ackum												
	Ulf Bengtsson												

Based on previous research (Bringselius 2008, 2013, 2014a), as well as reports from a parliamentary commission (Swedish Parliament 2008/09:URF1, URF3), a brief summary of the first 12 years at the Swedish NAO will now be provided, before we turn to the profiles of the Auditors-General. We will return to this historic overview in the discussion section.

**Year 2002–2003.** This period was characterized by thorough preparations for the reform. Parliament emphasizes that nothing must go wrong and that each and every one of the current auditors is important for the SNAO to turn out successfully. Auditors were highly involved in preparations for the reform, including discussions regarding organizational design, performance auditing, etc.

**Year 2003–2007.** The three Auditors-General emphasize that they themselves decide on organization, audit approach, etc. and they announce a number of changes that challenge the opinions of the auditors, including a new performance audit approach focused on compliance audit. Auditors report on an extensive managerial hierarchy, little professional autonomy for performance auditors, a complex and difficult organization design, lengthy quality control process, a demotivating organizational culture and authoritarian leadership style among the Auditors-General (Swedish Parliament, 2008/09:URF1, URF3). Finally, the Swedish Parliament decides to start a Parliamentary commission, including Members of Parliament from all political parties at that time represented in Parliament.

**Year 2008–2011.** The Parliamentary commission presents two highly critical reports on the issues at the SNAO (Swedish Parliament 2008/09:URF1, URF3). The reports challenge the new approach that the three Auditors-General have called for in performance audit and call for some changes to the legal acts regulating the operations of the SNAO. In particular, the meaning of performance audit was redefined<sup>1</sup>, the process for channeling reports to Parliament was changed, and it was agreed that the Auditor-General who had been in office longest would be solely responsible for all administrative matters at the SNAO. In 2010, Eva Lindström, the last of the first three Auditors-General, left her position (according to schedule). Attitude surveys at the SNAO revealed that the in-house situation had improved. However, the internal organization was still considered highly hierarchical and inefficient. During this period, the process for the appointment of Director-Generals in Sweden was reformed and transparency was increased, but there was no discussion with regard to the appointment of Auditors-General.

**Year 2012 and onwards.** In 2013, the SNAO was subjected to criticism as it turned out that it had to turn to Parliament to ask for additional funding, as it failed to meet its budget. Apart from this, there has not been much critique against the SNAO during this period. In 2015, a major restructuring of the organization, including the appointment of new department managers, took place. This also included changes to the approach adopted in performance audit, for example meaning that audits no longer need to focus on problems and misuse of public money. Instead, audits can now result in both praise and critique. Furthermore, more people with doctoral degrees are now being recruited and a schedule for auditing all the major policy areas in the yearly Government bill has been set up, as suggested by Swedish Parliament in its reports from 2007–2008 (Swedish Parliament 2008/09:URF1, URF3).

In July–September 2016, the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* published a series of articles, revealing serious misconduct from the side of the Auditors-General, including lack of compliance with formal policies and legal acts, but also actions indicating a more general lack of judgement. In addition to this, they had implemented a large organizational change, leading to reduced productivity and heavy criticism from the organization. The events which were disclosed were later analyzed in a report by Professor Hans-Gunnar Axberger (Constitutional Law, Uppsala University, and former Parliamentary Ombudsman at *Justitieombudsmannen*), who was appointed by one of the Auditors-General in question. Axberger's report is extremely critical and it declares that:

1 The Auditors-General objected to this in a comment to the proposition, but Parliament decided to implement the change through despite this.

The Auditors-General and others have described the culture of the Swedish National Audit Office as formalistic and characterized by fear of making mistakes. Results from this investigation indicate the opposite, namely an informal management culture, where personal considerations and internal praxis is given privilege over legal frameworks. Lawyers have found it relatively difficult to make themselves heard within the organization; nor does the function of the registrar seem to be respected at all times. [...] Already from start, the Auditors-General appear to have had a very liberal approach to both legal frameworks and policy documents. (Axberger, 2016, p. 138)

Following these disclosures, all three Auditors-General chose to resign in the summer/fall of 2016. Their replacements will be appointed in spring 2017, and Swedish Parliament has also appointed a broad parliamentary investigation on the constitutional arrangements around the SNAO.

Finally it should be mentioned that, apart from the changes enforced in 2010/2011 (despite objections from the Auditors-General), Swedish Parliament has been highly cautious not to interfere in the work of the SNAO in any way. There is no Public Accounts Committee in Sweden and the Auditors-General themselves decide what to audit and reports are presented to the standing committees in Swedish Parliament.

## **The Profiles of the Auditors-General 2003–2015**

In Table 2, an overview of the profiles of the first ten Auditors-General at the SNAO is presented, based on the framework suggested in the first part of this article. We will comment on findings and trends in each of the dimensions in the following.

Table 2. The profiles of the first ten Auditors-General at the Swedish National Audit Office

	Period	Academic Degrees	University	Career Background (Some main positions)	Prior Partisan Background	Age when Appointed/resigning	Party in Office when Appointed
<b>Kjell Larsson</b>	2003–2006	Bachelor in Business Administration	Uppsala	Head of audit department at RRV (the former SAI) International Assignments, e.g. in European Commission	No	57/60	Social Democrats
<b>Lennart Grufberg</b>	2003–2008	Master of Laws	Stockholm	Assistant Under-Secretary, Ministry of Finance Deputy Director-General at the Swedish Tax Agency Head of the Sundsvall Administrative Court of Appeals For a short period Chairman of the Board of the Swedish Supervisory Board of Public Accountants	No	58/63	Social Democrats
<b>Eva Lindström</b>	2003–2010	Bachelor in Economics	Stockholm	Assistant Under-Secretary and later Head of the Budget Department at the Ministry of Finance.	No	46/53	Social Democrats
<b>Karin Lindell</b>	2006–2009	Bachelor in Law	Uppsala	Various positions in the court system Director-General at the Swedish Consumer Agency and at the Consumer Ombudsman	No	58/61	Social Democrats
<b>Claes Norgren</b>	2008–2015	Bachelor in Economics	Stockholm	Deputy Director-General at the Swedish Central Bank Director-General at the Financial Supervisory Authority and at the Swedish Competition Authority	No	54/61	Conservative coalition government
<b>Jan Landahl</b>	2010–2015	Bachelor in Business Administration	Gothenburg	Assistant Under-Secretary Ministry of Finance Deputy Director-General at RRV (former SNAO) Department manager at the Swedish National Debt Office	No	60/65	Conservative coalition government
<b>Gudrun Antemar</b>	2010–2013	Bachelor in Law	Stockholm	Special Magistrate exam Position at the Ministry of Justice Various positions in the court system Permanent Secretary of Parliament's Justice Committee Head of National Board for Consumer Disputes Director-General at the Swedish Economic Crime Authority	No	52/62	Conservative coalition government
<b>Margareta Åberg</b>	2014–2017	Bachelor in Law	Stockholm	Special Magistrate exam Head of Courts in Sundsvall and Gothenburg Various positions in the court system as well as in the Government offices Expert in the Government Offices Head of the DG Office at the Swedish Data Protection Authority	No	55/58	Conservative coalition government
<b>Ulf Bengtsson</b>	2015–2016	Master in Political Science. Licentiate degree*	Gothenburg	Head of Budget Department at the Ministry of Finance Director-General at the Swedish Armed Forces and at the Swedish Agency for Government Employers Auditor at RRV	No	59/60	Coalition of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party
<b>Susanne Ackum</b>	2015–2016	Master in Economics PhD in Economics	Uppsala	Head of Economic Department at the Ministry of Finance Head of a research institute (FIEF) under a union association (LO) Director-General at the Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy (IFAU) State Secretary at the Department of Finance	Yes	55/60	Coalition of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party

\* A licentiate degree is a half PhD.

## **COMPARISON 2003–2015**

In the following, a summary of the main features of these CVs is provided. We kindly ask the reader to accept that this means that some details, short employment periods, etc., may have been left out.

### ***Academic Degree/s***

The Auditors-General have degrees from four fields: Business Administration (4), Economics (1), Law (4), and Political Science (1). Interestingly, it was not until 2015 that the two Auditors-General with degrees from Political Science and Economics were recruited. In all constellations of Auditors-General, there has always been at least one with a degree in law. The two Auditors-General appointed in 2015 (Ackum and Bengtsson) are the only ones with a doctoral degree – one has a 2 year degree (licentiate, meaning a half PhD, title used only in Sweden) and the other has a full PhD. The first eight Auditors-General had only Bachelors or Masters exams, i.e. basic academic education. The two Auditors-General who resigned before their appointments had expired, Antemar and Lindell, were both women and had degrees in law. They were also both the ones that were latest recruited when they resigned, in the team of Auditors-General (see Table 1). Half of the Auditors-General have been women.

### ***Career Background***

It was not until Lindell was appointed Auditor-General in 2007 that the SNAO had an Auditor-General with more extensive experience from a position as Director-General for a Swedish executive agency. After this, it has become standard for Auditors-General, except for those with a background in law, where they instead have had senior positions in the court system. The position as President of a Court may be compared to that of a Director-General. Åberg had this background. Grufberg was President for a Court of Appeal only for a few months, since he was appointed Auditor-General very soon after starting. This leaves Larsson, Grufberg and Lindström as the only ones without solid experience from a role as Director-General or similar. Larsson had a background in the audit profession, previously serving also as a middle manager in the area of financial audit at RRV, so far the only one with this background.

In total, six out of the ten Auditors-General have worked at the Government Offices. Out of the four remaining, two chose to resign before their appointments expired (Lindell and Antemar). Lindström, Landahl, Bengtsson and Ackum have all had leading positions at the Ministry of Finance – and all, except for Ackum, at its Budget Department.

None of the ten Auditors-General has a background in the municipalities or from the regional administration (public health care etc.). These areas are not within the primary scope of audit for the SNAO, but some audits yet cover these areas. Most of the Auditors-General had the main parts of their career

backgrounds in the Stockholm area. Nine of them have also taken their academic degrees from universities in this area.

### ***Political Background***

None of the first Auditors-General had a (pronounced) background in a political party. At this time, in 2003, this was considered imperative (Bringselius 2008, 2013). This can be compared to Norway, for example, where the Auditor-General has a partisan background (Christensen et al. 2002). Lindström was appointed State Secretary by the Social Democratic government four years *after resigning* from the SNAO, but she did not have any political assignments prior to this. She was then recruited as State Secretary for the Social Democratic party (Socialdemokraterna) in the autumn of 2014. Landahl explained (interview 17 Jan. 2014) that the recruiters were very clear that he must not have a political background, when he was recruited. In 2015, for the first time, an Auditor-General with a political background was appointed. She had been State Secretary for the conservative party (Moderaterna) at the Department of Finance. She did not, however, have a *pronounced* political background. The recruitment of Ackum indicates that a limited partisan background is no longer considered as problematic as it was in 2003. Personal and professional qualifications are today considered more important.

### ***Age when Appointed/Resigning***

Only one (Eva Lindström) of the Auditors-General was less than 50 years of age when appointed. Most have been more than 55 years old. When resigning, all except for Lindström and Antemar (who resigned before her appointment expired) were more than 60 years old. However, only Landahl has left in order to retire. The current Auditors-General were, when taking on their positions, 54, 55 and 59 years old.

## **COMPARISON OF THE TEAMS 2003 AND 2015**

In 2003, three Auditors-General were appointed at the same time, although for different periods. In 2014–2015, the case was similar, meaning that three Auditors-General were appointed within a short period of time. Two of those were appointed at the same time, in 2015. See Table 1 above. This makes an excellent case for comparing these two teams, to understand how ideals concerning the professional profiles of the Auditors-General have changed over this 12 year period.

In Table 2, the professional experience of the first and last sets of Auditors-General is mapped. The first three Auditors-General were Lindström, Grufberg and Larsson. The current Auditors-General are Åberg, Bengtsson and Ackum. As this table shows, the current team has broader qualifications, but less experience from hands-on audit work. In 2003, Lindström saw it as an advantage that her two colleagues had experience from audit. She explained:

Both Kjell and Lennart have advantages in that they know audit. I have an advantage in that I have very up-to-date knowledge from the Governmental Offices and contact with Parliament. I can contribute with that. I think it is good when you are not too similar, in this sense. (Interview Eva Lindström, 20 Nov 2003)

A common criticism in 2003 was the lack of experience from positions under the Swedish Parliament, among the Auditors-General. In particular auditors from the Parliamentary Auditors (Riksdagens revisorer), one of the two former SAIs in Sweden, were critical in this regard. (Bringselius 2013). Today, the experience from audit work is more limited, according to Table 3. We have chosen to count also Susanne Ackum to those with experience from audit work, since she had been the Director-General of the Institute for Evaluation of Labour Market and Education Policy (IFAU).

The review shows that the current team of Auditors-General stand out as more of generalists than the team in 2003, but also as more qualified. The average age when appointed was 53.7 in the first team and 56.0 in the current team.

Table 3. Comparison of the professional profiles (career and academic degrees) of the first team of Auditors-General (2003) and the team appointed 2014-2015

	Audit/Evaluation	Senior roles in the government offices or parliament	Extensive experience as a Director-General or equivalent	Research
<b>First team (2013)</b>				
Kjell Larsson	Yes			
Lennart Grufberg	Yes	Yes		
Eva Lindström		Yes		
<b>Current Team (2013)</b>				
Margareta Åberg		Yes	Yes	
Susanne Ackum	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ulf Bengtsson	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

## Possible Explanations

There can be many different explanations for the changes to the professional profiles of the Auditors-General in Sweden. Five possible explanations are outlined in the following. The reader is asked to note that this is an exploratory study and that further research is required in order to test the propositions provided in the following.

## 1. PROMOTING BROAD AND INTERPRETIVE STUDIES

Most of early the Auditors-General have a degree in business administration, law or economics, but it was not until 2015 that the SNAO had an Auditor-General with a degree in political science. Traditions in different academic fields differ. In the social sciences, broad interpretive approaches tend to be more common than in, for example, law or economics, and a similar distinction can be made in public sector audit or evaluation (Hoerner & Stephenson 2012). Ideals such as these can affect how the Auditor-General positions himself or herself with regard to performance audit and how s/he chooses to develop the audit practice. There is extensive room for interpretations, when it comes to defining both what is 'good performance audit' in SAIs (INTOSAI ISSAI 3000-3100), and what qualifications the Auditor-General should have (INTOSAI Resolution A\_66\_209). Possibly, changes to the academic profiles of the Swedish Auditors-General can be understood as a way to promote broad and interpretive audits, rather than narrow compliance-focused audits. There has been an explicit wish, from the side of Parliament (Swedish Parliament 2008/09:URF1, URF3), that SNAO performance audit should adopt a broader perspective in its audits and also cover areas that reach over different policy-areas. On the other hand, two out of the current three Auditors-General have backgrounds in areas with a more positivist or objectivist tradition, namely law and economics.

## 2. PROMOTING AUTONOMY

In the recent years, the Auditors-General in Sweden have typically been of an age making this the final position of their careers. This can be understood as a way of securing the autonomy of audits, since they will not rely on a continued career. However, as suggested by Lawrence (1988), it may also indicate that a norm has developed where these individuals are expected to be senior in terms of age, considering the potential impact of these individuals.

Lindström, one of the first three Auditors-General, was the only one who had not yet reached an age for retirement when her appointment as Auditor-General expired, and she chose to accept a political appointment a few years after leaving. At that time, any connection with politics was considered highly inappropriate for the Auditors-General of the SNAO, in the Swedish debate (Bringselius 2013). From this perspective, Lindström's continued career may have been seen by some as problematic – thus further suggesting that Auditors-General preferably should be of an age meaning that they can retire after leaving this position.



### **3. PROMOTING IMPROVEMENTS OF LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE**

Changes can be understood as partly a reaction to the rather extensive criticism that the SNAO has been subjected to, regarding both the quality of SAI reports and the leadership of the first team of Auditors-General (for detailed accounts, see Bringselius 2008, 2013; Ahlbäck Öberg & Bringselius 2015, Swedish Parliament 2008/09:URF1, URF3). This criticism includes parliamentary concerns that the Auditors-General have been too involved in the various SAI audits, thereby curbing the professional discretion of performance auditors at the SNAO (Swedish Parliament 2008/09:URF1, URF3). With more experience from top management positions, the more recent recruitments could be expected to find it easier to develop a motivating organizational culture. The recruitment of Auditors-General with more leadership experience started with the recruitment of Lindell in 2007.

### **4. PROMOTING AUDIT QUALITY AND IMPACT**

Changes may be understood as a way for Swedish Parliament to help increase the legitimacy of the SNAO (cf. Holm & Zaman 2012) and to reduce the gap between the performance audit practice and academic research in this area. One way of doing this is to recruit Auditors-General with research experience, such as Ackum, and in general very high qualifications in different areas. By recruiting also auditors with doctoral degrees and the ambition may also be to more generally increase the quality of audits. Such recruitments have also been part of the restructurings taking place in 2015–2016.

An alternative interpretation is that the appointments can be seen as resulting from an increase in legitimacy which already has taken place. When the SNAO was formed, there was political resistance against the reform and some claimed that there were those who wanted this to become a ‘weak’ institution, in the sense that it would not be allowed to have much impact. For this reason, some were concerned that the first Auditors-General would be people with weak profiles (Bringselius 2008, 2013). By today appointing Auditors-General with a stronger profile, the wish may be to strengthen the standing in society for the SNAO.

The qualifications of the first set of Auditors-General was subjected to criticism by employees already when the SNAO was formed in 2003 and some argued that the appointment of these specific individuals was a way of deliberately weakening the institution (Bringselius 2013). The forming of it had already been subjected to extensive political resistance, as we have explained. By appointing more qualified Auditors-General, the ambition may be to increase the standing of the SNAO in society and thereby also the impact of its work. This makes the appointment of the Auditors-General a potentially very strong instrument in the hands of Parliament, with serious implications for public scrutiny and democratic accountability.

## 5. RESULT FROM NEW DISCOURSE AROUND STATE AUDIT – FROM AUTONOMY TO QUALIFICATIONS

In more general terms, results can also be interpreted as indicating a shift in the discourse around state audit in Sweden, from autonomy issues to issues relating to quality. As the SNAO was formed in 2003, quality was taken to spring more or less automatically from autonomy. Results from this study indicate that quality is now seen as equally important matter, which requires a separate focus. When the SNAO was formed in 2003, it was assumed that performance auditors would continue to have rather extensive autonomy in their work. As the SNAO developed, the professional discretion of these auditors decreased, however, despite protests. At the same time, the discretion of the Auditors-General increased (Ahlbäck Öberg & Bringselius 2015). This development made it increasingly important to ensure that the Auditors-General were qualified. Swedish Parliament wanted the auditors to regain their lost discretion, according to the two critical parliamentary reports from 2008 and 2009 (Swedish Parliament 2008/09:URF1, URF2).

## Discussion

This article has compared the profiles of the first ten Auditors-General at the Swedish National Audit Office and discussed both explanations and implications of a number of trends that can be found in the material. All then Auditors-General are highly qualified. However, the study shows that qualifications have increased, today including also degrees and experience from research and (solid) experience from positions as Director-Generals or similar. Furthermore, our review indicates that the Auditors-General appointed in 2014-2015 have more of a generalist profile than the first set of Auditors-General (although experience from research may be taken as evidence also for specialist knowledge). The differences become evident in particular when comparing the first team of Auditors-General, appointed in 2003, with those appointed in 2014-2015. For the first time, there are now two Auditors-General with experience from research. The third Auditor-General is the first of those with a Master in Law, to also have a degree as judge (2+4 years additional education after Master in Law). Finally, for the first time, there is today an Auditor-General with a degree in political science.

These changes indicate a gradual change of attitudes in Swedish Parliament, or at least in the Committee on the Constitution, regarding what qualifications are required among the Auditors-General to promote 'good state audit' (or to achieve other goals). We have outlined five possible explanations for this pattern, but there can also be other plausible explanations. First, changes may aim at promoting broad and interpretive studies, rather than narrow compliance audits. Second, changes may result partly from an ambition of changing this position

from being a step in the middle of the career, to being a final step ending a (successful) career, this way further securing their autonomy. Third, changes may be the result of an ambition to promote auditor autonomy and increase job satisfaction at the SNAO, areas where it had been subjected to extensive criticism during the first years. Fourth, changes may be the result of an ambition to increase the impact of state audit. With highly qualified and publicly recognized Auditors-General, the SAI is likely to get a higher standing than it would be with more low-key persons heading the institution. Fifth, changes may be the result from a changing discourse around state audit in general, where personal qualifications today are being considered as equally important as institutional autonomy. Autonomy has been a central concern in both theory and practice in this area.

It is also, however, interesting to note how concentrated the background of the Auditors-General has been to the Stockholm area and in particular to the Ministry of Finance. With years of experience from various positions in executive agencies in central government, most of which situated primarily in Stockholm, or in the Government Offices, it is likely that these individuals have developed a wide network among the very institutions that they are supposed to audit. This network is likely to include also friendships. The impact of this on the actions of the Auditors-General can be discussed, but in order to secure the autonomy and objectivity of state audit, an alternative would have been to widen the geographical recruitment base also to other regions in the country. The SNAO has indeed two (previously three) regional offices outside Stockholm (Jönköping and Uppsala), but the auditors at these offices only work with financial audit, not performance audit. Some of the problems that arose in 2016 were related to the networks of the Auditors-General and how these networks had affected the autonomy of the SNAO (see Axberger).

In general, the Swedish Parliament has been reluctant to influence the work of the SNAO, out of respect for the autonomy of this institution. As this study shows, however, the profiles of the Auditors-General have changed over time, indicating that these appointments have been used to some degree as a tool to secure the quality of state audit. In the Swedish case, this has been important in particular given the recurring criticism facing the SNAO through the years since this was formed in 2003. In a model from 2014, also building on the Swedish case, Bringselius (2014b) argues that the profile of the Auditor-General will affect how he or she interprets the role. When the Auditor-General has the profile of an expert, he or she will tend to focus on the details of the audit work and see his or her signature on the report as representing a personal guarantee of its quality. When the Auditor-General has the profile of a general manager, however, he or she will take a more distanced position to the audit work, allowing the auditors more extensive professional discretion. Instead, focus will be on administrative development and developing external relations. The signature on reports is then seen as symbolic. See Table 4.

Table 4. Two interpretations of the role of the Auditor-General. Translated from Bringselius (2014b, p.132)

	<b>The Auditor-General as an expert</b>	<b>The Auditor-General as a general manager</b>
<b>Primary basis for appointment</b>	Experience from the audit profession or similar assignments	Experience from positions as a general manager
<b>Primary role</b>	Developing and controlling the audit work and its output	Developing and controlling operations on an administrative level and developing the external relations of the SNAO
<b>Signature in audit reports</b>	Personal guarantee for the quality of audits	Symbolic, representing the institution

As we have explained, during the first years after the SNAO was formed, auditors at the SNAO complained that they had very little influence on the audit work, as the Auditors-General were involved on a very detailed level. Today, this kind of criticism is less common and an explanation may be the changes pointed out in this study, meaning that the Auditors-General today are more of generalists than specialists.

## Conclusions

This article shows that securing the autonomy of the Supreme Audit Institution is only one of several requirements, when attempting to secure the legitimacy of state audit. Another important aspect is what type of competence is required among both auditors and the Auditors-General. This article has examined how and why the profiles of the first ten Auditors-General at the Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO) have changed, over the period 2003–2015. The review shows that the profile has changed from that of a specialist to that of a generalist and that qualifications generally have increased. We have outlined five possible explanations. These show how changes to the qualifications of the Auditors-General may aim at increasing the quality, autonomy, legitimacy or impact of state audit, or to improve the internal organizational climate. In all these areas, the SNAO has been subjected to criticism. Findings indicate a more general change of discourse in state audit, where focus is shifted from autonomy issues to issues of quality and competence. In particular, we note, that the profile of the Auditor-General is likely to affect what kind of role he or she takes within the SAI, building on a framework suggested by Bringselius (2014b).

Also events in 2016, when disclosures by a major Swedish newspaper lead to the resignation of all three Auditors-General have been discussed. This indicates that top qualifications are actually no guarantee for professional behaviour or good judgement. This further complicates the issue of how to find an

Auditor-General who can mantle the extensive powers connected to this position in countries such as Sweden.

In the future, we hope to see more research on why individuals with different backgrounds are appointed Auditors-General in different settings and at different points in time. We also hope to find more research on the role-shaping of the Auditors-General in internal and external relations.

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# Professionalization vs Democratic Control

## *Are They Mutually Exclusive in Collaboration for Local Service Provision?*

Anna Thomasson

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how collaboration is perceived as reducing political control and influence thus creating issues of accountability, and to what extent this can be linked to resistance towards collaboration. This will be accomplished by investigating collaboration for joint service delivery as a phenomenon in the water and sewage sector in Sweden. By doing so we will be able to illustrate how there is a tension between on one hand professionals and their interests in providing high quality services and on the other hand political interests to keep control over investments and strategically important decisions. What the study also shows is how policy implementation does not necessarily have to be a result of political initiative, but also can be the result of a process initiated by street-level bureaucrats, especially if they have the support from managers and the board of directors.

## **Introduction**

Collaboration and the formation of governance networks for public service delivery is a widespread reform in the public sector. Research shows how collaboration can help solve research dependency issues, create synergies and gather competence necessary to solve wicked and complex issues (Huxham, 1996; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002; Osborne, 2006; Hilwert & Swindell, 2013). Even though collaborations and networks are frequently used and regarded as a fruitful way to manage the challenges facing public service provision, not everyone has jumped on the bandwagon and attempts to collaborate are far from always successful.

Previous research shows that even though collaboration has merits, it also has challenges (Huxham, 2003; Emerson et al., 2011) and these challenges are regarded as being more or less similar regardless of the type of collaboration. What especially seems to be an issue is the impact collaboration in networks or

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larger organizations has on political governance and the ability for local politicians to oversee and influence the content of the services provided (Skelcher et al., 2011; Durose et al., 2015). How to secure good governance and accountability in situations where public service is provided by organizations operating at an arm's length from the political governance has been discussed in relation to quangos and hybrid arrangements (Romzek 2000; Mulgan, 2000; Hodge & Coghill, 2007; Greiling & Spraul, 2010; Willems & van Dooren, 2012; Grossi & Thomasson, 2015). Issues of accountability in complex settings and networks have also been recognized by policy implementation scholars and then particularly the challenge of securing goal congruence in horizontal networks (Keiser & Soss, 1998; Meyers et al., 2002). Due to the nature of horizontal networks, street level bureaucrats get more freedom to interpret policies and adapt them to specific situations or conditions in the workplace, leading to more room for what in the literature is referred to discretionary behavior (Lipsky, 1980; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; May & Winter, 2007) increasing the discrepancy between policies and practice.

Thus issues of accountability have been addressed in different types horizontal settings, but have, according to Sullivan and Skelcher (2002), been overlooked in studies of various forms of collaboration for public service provision, and the results from the few studies that do exist are inconclusive (Marthur & Skelcher, 2007; Jaffares & Skelcher, 2011; Durose et al, 2015), thus more studies are considered to be necessary (Meerkerk et al., 2015; Durose et al., 2015).

Consequently there is a need to look further into the issue of control and governance in relation to accountability and democratic deficiency in collaborations. The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate how collaboration is perceived as reducing political control and influence and as creating issues of accountability, and to what extent this can be linked to a resistance towards collaboration. This will be accomplished by investigating collaborative joint service delivery in the water and sewage sector in Sweden. By doing so we will be able to illustrate how there is a tension between, on one hand, professionals and their interests in providing high quality services and, on the other hand, politicians and their interest to keep control over investments and strategically important decisions. Further, this study explores how this tension between local politicians and professionals creates an obstacle to collaboration and/or impairs the legitimacy of joint service delivery. Thus while previous studies have recognized the tension between politicians and professionals (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1983 and Lipsky, 1980; May & Winter, 2007), this study expands our knowledge by analyzing this tension in a collaborative setting and by showing how the tension is not the result of a top-down implementation of policy, but rather the result of a policy implementation initiated by professionals with support in national regulations.

In the next section of the article the theoretical back-drop of the study is presented. This is followed by a presentation of the method used for the study and of how the data was analyzed, as well as a presentation of the result of the empirical analysis. The article is concluded with a discussion of the results and the contribution of the study and its implications along with a presentation of suggestions for future research.

## **Governance and governance networks**

The idea that through collaboration wicked and complex problems can be solved is far from a novel one (Kickert, 1997 et al.; Rhodes, 1997: 2010; Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998) and with the spread of the phenomenon we have, during the past decades, seen a growth in the literature concerning governance networks (Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012). The increasing inter-dependency among organizations has created a need to focus more on issues concerning coordination and collaboration in larger networks and to do so from a resource dependency perspective (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Osborne, 2006). Collaborating across organizational boundaries in larger networks has therefore been put forward by scholars as an attractive alternative to the market oriented solutions that emerged in the wake of NPM (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Osborne 2006).

### **THE ISSUE OF CONCEPTUAL AMBIGUITY**

When looking at the literature concerning collaboration through the use of governance network, one soon reaches the conclusion that not only does the field suffer from conceptual ambiguity, but the different concepts used refer to a wide range of different types of collaboration. The definitions range from including almost all types of collaboration (Huxham, 1996) to more exclusive focus on specific types of collaborations (see for example: Ansell & Gash, 2008 p. 544). To provide a more extensive overview would thus be too excruciating and not very fruitful since it would only confirm what many scholars already have concluded: the field suffers from conceptual ambiguity (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002; Emerson et al., 2011) which makes it difficult to navigate within the field (Huxham, 2003).

One distinction might however be of importance and that is the one between governance and governance networks (Klijn, 2008). While governance is described as the process of organizing horizontal relationships between governmental organizations and other organizations, governance networks are regarded to be the horizontal relationships between governmental and non-governmental organizations in which public policy making and implementation occurs (Klijn, 2008: 511). To make this distinction between governance and governance networks is of relevance given the focus of this study. Hence the backdrop of this study will be in the distinction between governance and

governance networks provided by Klijn (2008) combined with his more inclusive definition of governance networks.

### **WHAT WE KNOW**

Klijn (2008) as well as Klijn & Koppenjan (2012) provide us with an overview of the research within the field of governance networks. One of the areas that has attracted interest from various scholars is the question of under which conditions collaboration occurs, with a focus on analyzing service delivery processes, co-ordination and efficiency within networks, and in relation to that, organizational forms and structures. Here we find researchers as Huxham (2003), Hilvert and Swindell (2013) and Bryson et al. (2006) who analyze and discuss how to through collaboration it is possible to achieve synergies and advantages that individual organizations are unable to accomplish on their own.

Another area of interest has been to identify and analyze the relations between actors involved in the network and governance processes (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2011; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012). Here we find studies investigating how the distribution of power influences outcome and organizational processes (Provan et al., 2009) as well as studies focusing on issues concerning accountability and democracy in horizontal networks (Skelcher et al., 2011; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012; Durose et al., 2015).

Yet other researchers have focused on the role of the manager. Focus within this field has mainly been to analyze the complexity of networks, as well as how value and content (different actors in the networks have different interests and focuses) can be secured and improved in horizontal collaborations (Klijn, 2008). Here we find for example research by Vangen and Huxham (2003) focusing on trust building in collaborations as well as research focusing on how through managerial efforts outcomes of collaboration can be improved (Johnston et al., 2010; Klijn et al., 2010; Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011; Edelenbos et al., 2012; Verweij et al., 2013).

One needs to bear in mind that the areas identified above are not mutually exclusive, rather they overlap. Besides overlapping, there are also tendencies of convergence between the fields (Klijn, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012). Given the purpose of this article the focus of interest will be governance processes and issues concerning how accountability and democratic values are secured in horizontal collaborations. Therefore, a more in depth description of these areas will be provided in the next section.

### **ACCOUNTABILITY IN GOVERNANCE NETWORKS**

The issue at hand is how democracy can be secured in governance networks where relationships and policy making occurs on a horizontal level, while established democratic systems rest upon the notion that accountability is claimed

in hierarchical relationships. Networks thus challenge the power of the elected body as networks are regarded as self-organizing and autonomous entities (Mathur & Skelcher, 2007; Skelcher et al., 2011; Durose et al., 2015). Other researchers are of the opinion that due to extensive stakeholder involvement in networks, policy making and service delivery occurs closer to the users and the society (Skelcher et al., 2011). In other words, networks are regarded by these scholars not as eroding democracy but as improving it. Yet others regard networks as strengthening the ability of political governance and democratic institutions to solve and implement solutions to complex issues (Skelcher et al., 2011). There could thus be advantages with delegating power and responsibility to professionals, and delegation of power could mean that a more long-term focus on complex issues can be secured as the exposure to political terms decreases (Durose et al., 2015). Mathur & Skelcher (2007) as well as Meerkerk et al. (2015) therefore call for further studies of how governance networks influence democracy as well as the relationship between citizens and governance networks.

On the other hand, if we turn our focus to research on policy implementation we can see how discretionary behavior among street-level bureaucrats, as employees working in the front-line of public services are referred to, might have a negative influence on compliance with policy and regulations (Lipsky, 1980; Meyers et al., 2001; May & Winter, 2007). There is a debate as to what extent discretionary behavior among street-level bureaucrats is to be regarded as positive or negative. From a positive stand-point discretionary behavior improves client service as employees use their experience and expertise and adapt decision-making to current situations (Lipsky, 1980; Keiser & Soss, 1998; May & Winter, 2007). On the other hand, deviation and lack of compliance with policy and regulation creates a gap between politically decided policies and goals and risk unequal treatment of clients between – as well as within – organizations (Lipsky, 1980). This might create issues of accountability, lack of legitimacy for policies and organizations and also lead to geographical differences in service provision (Keiser & Soss, 1998; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000). Hence, there seems to be a tension between on one hand the policy level and on the other hand the level of street-level bureaucrats already within a hierarchical organizational setting. The question is how the relationship between these two levels develops in a horizontal collaboration where the autonomy of the street level bureaucrats is increased. This question is far from resolved and due to the potential impact the nature of this relationship can have on accountability it deserves to be further investigated.

## Method

The sector chosen for this study is the water and sewage sector in Sweden. The reason for choosing this sector is the challenges the sector faces today, challenges that can be described as complex issues that could potentially be solved through collaboration. Collaboration has also, according to the Swedish Water and Waste Water Association (SWWA), been investigated by many municipalities as a potential way forward. In several cases these investigations have, according to SWWA, led to the formation of joint organizations for service production, however equally common is it that collaborations never are realized. Also, there is a large group of municipalities that are more hesitant towards collaboration and joint service provision. The sector thus seems to be, in many ways, divided. On one hand we have the advocators of collaboration and on the other we have the ones reluctant to or resisting the solution. The sector therefore contains examples of collaboration as well as examples of municipalities that have decided not to collaborate.

Due to the explorative nature of the study combined with the comparative approach taken, a multiple case-study approach was chosen (Yin, 2013). Including several different cases with different characteristics (size, geography, and political governance) was considered to be an adequate approach in order to generate through a case comparison what Yin (2013) refers to as theoretical replication and increase our understanding of collaboration as a phenomenon. Due to the comparative nature of the study the aim is not to go in-depth into one or two cases, but to capture the situation in several municipalities and then to compare them with each other. Consequently, this study is based on a study of the situation in several different municipalities. All in all six cases of collaboration and seven cases of non-collaboration have been studied.

In focus for the comparison is how the political governance and top management assesses the situation and status of the service in question, and the ability to live up to service delivery requirements and quality standards. The focus is thus on the interface between political governance and accountability and democracy in relation to organizations created for joint service delivery (Klijn, 2008; Klijn & Koppenjan, 2012). More precisely, two types of collaboration for joint service delivery are in focus for the study and their characteristics correspond with what Sullivan & Skelcher (2002) refers to as joint committees and partnerships organized as companies (some precautions are necessary here due to the differences between the Swedish and UK systems).

Joint committees are created by local governments voluntarily with the purpose of delegating certain functions to these committees. The members of the committee are appointed by the partners. In Sweden the appointment follows the result of general elections. Also limited companies are created voluntarily by the local governments and, as in the case of joint committees, the partners appoint members to the board. Usually boardmembers are selected among local politicians and mirror the results of general elections. The main

differences between the types of collaborations are the legislation and governance mechanisms. In both cases however, the services are provided by organizations operating at an arm's length from the political power. The political influence is limited to appointment of members of the board/committee, the type of services and to what extent those services are delegated to the organizations created.

The cases selected were selected mainly by using data and information from SWWA. The information regarding the cases has mainly been collected through interviews with local politicians and people in managerial positions within the water and sewage services in municipalities and network organizations. Besides interviews, focus groups with representatives from the sector have been conducted on five different occasions. The intention with the focus groups was to discuss the challenges facing the sector as well as the advantages and disadvantages of collaboration and how collaboration can be used as one way to manage future challenges. Interviews as well as focus groups were conducted during the years 2013–2015.

The analysis of the data from the case studies has been conducted in the following three steps. As a *first step* the interviews were transcribed and thereafter the information was organized along the following themes: challenges facing the services, analysis of the situation, the assessment of the situation made by civil servant and local politicians, and finally advantages and disadvantages associated with collaboration. In this first step the municipalities were divided into two different groups, one group consisting of municipalities advocating collaboration and another group consisting of municipalities resisting collaboration. As a *second step* a cross-case analysis was conducted within the two groups of cases. Finally, as a *third step* the two groups were compared and analyzed in a cross-case comparison focusing on challenges facing the municipalities as well as motives behind the decision to collaborate or not to collaborate.

In parallel, and as a supplement to the case studies, a survey comprising all 291 municipalities in Sweden was conducted in 2015. The purpose of the survey was to map how Swedish municipalities organize their water and sewage services. The response rate was 86% and the questions asked were:

1. Do you collaborate with other municipalities?
2. What services are included in the collaboration?
3. How is the collaboration organized?
4. How many municipalities are included in the collaboration?

After the survey was conducted, we were also able to, with data from SWWA and the homepage of municipalities, gather information regarding the municipalities that had not responded to the survey, thus the data consists of information regarding all 291 municipalities in Sweden. The data from the survey has been used as a backdrop for this study.

## Collaboration in the Swedish water sector

### INDUSTRY CHARACTERISTICS

Water and sewage services in Sweden are controlled by a municipal monopoly and private ownership of infrastructure is not allowed. Further, the services are subjected to the so called “cost based principle” meaning that municipalities are not allowed to generate a profit from water and sewage services or build up a capital. Consequently, due to the regulation the involvement from the private sector in the water sector in Sweden is limited. The decision to raise or lower a fee is a political one taken by the general assembly in a municipality.

Sweden has in total 291 municipalities. Approximately 210 of those 291 municipalities have less than 30 000 inhabitants and as many as 80 municipalities have fewer than 10 000 inhabitants (Statistics Sweden). Municipalities in Sweden are thus in general small. Also, large parts of Sweden are sparsely populated and thus even though a municipality has few inhabitants the municipalities are geographically vast with large distances to cover. The large distances are a factor that increases the cost of service provision and also makes it difficult to attract employees with necessary and sufficient competence. Another challenge is a large turnover of staff, especially when it comes to attractive positions and positions that require a specific degree. This applies also to the water and sewage sector.

Adding to these more general challenges are the ones more specific to water and sewage services. One being the fact that service provision is fragmented since the responsibility is divided between 291 municipalities, all with their own specific prerequisites. As a consequence, the level of fees for water and sewage services differ between municipalities, ranging from an estimated cost of 247 Swedish crowns per household and month in the municipality with the lowest cost to an estimated cost of 1230 Swedish crowns per household and month in the most expensive municipality (SWWA).

Combined, the above identified challenges have had the consequence that water and sewage services in smaller municipalities generally lack the resources necessary to manage strategic planning, investments or unforeseen events. There are thus several challenges that especially small municipalities are struggling with which makes these organizations vulnerable and unable to secure the quality of the service delivery in the future.

Besides the local challenges, there are challenges that are of a more regional or national character that all municipalities, regardless of size, are facing. These challenges consist of a need to adapt to climate changes, to comply with environmental regulation and to adapt new techniques.



## Types of collaboration

As a response to the challenges facing municipalities, particularly smaller municipalities, there has been during the last fifteen years a gradual increase in the number of municipalities initiating inter-municipal collaboration for joint service delivery either through joint committees or as partnerships organized as companies. The main differences between the judicial forms relates to how the organizations are governed. Limited companies are governed by a board appointed by the owners and in Sweden these are normally selected among local politicians. Joint statutory arrangements on the other hand are governed as a municipality with an assembly and a board composed by local politicians. In both cases however, the joint organization operates at an arm's length from the political governance of the municipality.

### PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF COLLABORATION

According to the results from the cases studied, managers who have been a part of the transition from working in a small municipality to being a part of an organization for joint service delivery report about how collaboration improves working conditions. Having colleagues and being able to specialize within one's field of interest is regarded as one important benefit. The fact that the organization is more professional and specialized in water and sewage related issues and legislation is another. Other advantages mentioned by CEOs and top managers are that a larger organization is less vulnerable and that collaboration has improved access to critical resources and enabled them to focus on long term goals and plans for how to improve the infrastructure.

Having a board or assembly composed of local politicians whose only focus is water and water related issues is another of the advantages that was brought up in previous studies (Thomasson, 2013). The tendency for local politicians in Sweden is to focus more on high profile issues such as childcare, elderly care and schools, and less on technical infrastructural services. To have a board or an assembly in this political climate focusing only on water related issues and to operate in an organization separated from the municipal bureaucracy is considered by managers to be a privilege, especially as it tends to give water related issues more room on the political agenda. The increase in political attention and focus on water and sewage related issues are a likely explanation to why the level of investments has been reported to increase in municipalities that collaborate when a joint service organization is formed.

An increase in the level of investments does, however, require an increase of fees due to the cost based principle. As mentioned, the fee is decided by local politicians in the municipal assembly and those are likely to be less acquainted with water related issues. Despite a general assumption that collaboration generates economies of scale and thus a more efficient use of resources, when there is a request to raise fees suspicions are raised. That collaboration leads to a more

efficient use of resources might also be the case. However, when at the same time the level of ambition increases it is likely that initial effects from collaborative advantages are evened out. A request to raise the fee for water and sewage services is therefore often reported to meet resistance followed by questions regarding how efficient the collaboration really is.

Local politicians on the boards and assemblies of the joint organizations however tend to support suggestions made by the management of the joint organization and, in several of the organizations studied, have been lobbying among their political peers in the municipal assembly for a vote for an increase of fees. That might be a result of the fact that they have a more in-depth knowledge about the services since they get first-hand information. It could also be a consequence of them being unable to question the often technically advanced calculations made by managers and engineers employed by the organization.

To sum up: the perceived and reported benefits from collaboration are several and several of the benefits perceived are related and can thus be regarded as a possible way to face several of the challenges municipalities are facing, local as well as regional. The latter since joint organization enables a regional focus to be taken on climate change. Resistance does however exist, especially at the political level and the source of that resistance is the topic of the next section.

## **RESISTANCE TOWARDS COLLABORATION**

When talking with people with experience from collaboration it is easy to believe that collaboration is the one solution that will fix all the problems that the water and sewage sector in Sweden is facing. In spite of this, a survey conducted for this study showed that only 115 of a total of 291 municipalities collaborate on water related issues with other municipalities. That is fewer than those 210 municipalities that have less than 30 000 inhabitants. Why don't all municipalities jump on the collaboration bandwagon given its perceived effects and the challenges the sector is facing?

When managers and engineers in the smaller municipalities participating in the case studies were asked about collaboration, the majority of them expressed an interest in collaborating with neighboring municipalities through a joint service organization. The few that hesitated or showed reluctance argued that smaller organizations have advantages in terms of shorter lines of communication and easier access to other areas of the municipal organization. They also state that they feel that the governance level is perceptive and understanding of their needs.

The opposite is reported from those organizations where managers and engineers are advocating collaboration. In these municipalities the situation is regarded as critical. Lack of resources combined with the challenges they face have generated a situation where the staff feel that they barely manage daily

operation. It is not only the financial resources that are lacking, but also human resources. The main problem seems to be that responsible local politicians do not recognize the needs of the organization and thus not understand the need to collaborate. Rather, in these cases local politicians regard the services to be well functioning (they have clean water in the tap) and thus see no need for organizational change or to raise fees. This in spite of the fact that employees of the organizations claim that they have problems complying with national legislation due to lack of resources.

There are also examples of when local politicians are reluctant to initiate collaboration due to a fear of losing control over the services to a larger organization led by a strong profession. Also, there is an issue of trust. Trust among involved actors at the governance level seems to be crucial for collaboration to be initiated. On several occasions during focus groups and interviews stories were told about collaborations that were realized after five or ten years of discussions among local politicians at the governance level. Surprisingly, the explanation given to why collaboration suddenly occurs after years of discussion is often that there are new people in leading positions in the municipalities and that the new people in leading positions have a good relationship while the former leaders did not. Personal relations and trust building thus seems to be another critical factor for collaboration to take place in the sector studied.

## **Discussion**

In the Swedish water and sewage sector collaboration is used as a means to get access to resources necessary to solve complex issues. Organizations in the sector see how, through the pooling of resources, they can increase quality and provide a more sustainable service in a way that corresponds with previous research (Lowndes & Skelcher, 1998; Osborne, 2006; Huxham, 2003; Bryson, 2006; Crosby et al., 2010; Hilvert & Swindell, 2013). One can even argue, in the light of the challenges facing the sector, that collaboration is the more responsible solution. Yet it is currently not the most salient issue in the ongoing collaboration debate. Instead what appears to be more important, when deciding whether to collaborate or not, is the issue of political control and influence. These issues were not only raised by municipalities that resist collaboration, but also by municipalities that have entered into a collaboration and feel skeptical towards the strong position a large organization led by professionals has in relation to local politicians.

The distance between the joint service organization and the political governance renders civil servants and top managers more power over service provision at the expense of local politicians. To make a decision that decreases your own power and influence is never easy, especially considering that the

responsibility for service provision remains at the political governance level. The suspicion among local politicians reported in the case studies and during focus groups can accordingly be regarded as a consequence of how collaboration alters the chain of command as also discussed in previous studies (see for example: Klijn, 2008).

The contributions of this study thus tap into more recent research on governance network focusing on issues concerning accountability and democracy in relation to governance processes (Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011; Skelcher et al., 2011; Durose et al., 2012; Meerkerk et al., 2015). However – and contrary to what some scholars have argued – that accountability might not be an issue in governance networks (Skelcher et al., 2011; Durose et al., 2015), this study shows that it can be. Especially when joint organizations operating at an arm's length are the means through which collaboration occurs. In that situation, compared to more loosely coupled networks, strong and large organizations are created and these organizations do not include a variety of stakeholders (Skelcher et al., 2011). On the contrary, the distance between stakeholders and service providing organizations increases as the production and delivery of services are moved from smaller municipalities to larger organization.

Related to the issue of accountability in network research are issues raised regarding lack of goal congruence networks addressed by scholars within the field of policy implementation (Keiser & Soss, 1998; Meyers et al., 2001). Within policy implementation, research deviations between the policy developed by politicians and what is actually implemented are that as policies cascade through the organization they are at each level interpreted and adapted to those interpretations. Finally, when policies reach street-level bureaucrats they are subjected to what is referred to as the discretionary behavior of these bureaucrats: how they adapt policies to fit with their current working conditions, their view of their role as professionals, and how they regard the need of individual citizens/group of citizens (Lipsky, 1980; Meyers et al., 2001; May & Winter, 2007). There is thus a tension between the interest of politicians at different levels of the system and professions working within that system and this tension have a negative impact on goal congruence, especially in more complex organizational settings like networks (Meyers et al., 2001).

It is however not only in relation to accountability and goal congruence that this study builds on previous research on policy implementation, but also in relation to the nature of the tension between politicians and street-level bureaucrats. Previous research on policy implementation takes its point of departure in the notion that new strategies and policies are developed based on political initiative (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Mushero, 2000; May & Winter, 2007). The result from this study however shows another trajectory for the development and implementation of strategic goals and policies. The focus groups, case studies as well as previous studies on collaboration in the Swedish

water and sewage sector (Thomasson, 2013) show how policy and strategic development does not originate from politicians or cascade down through the different levels of the system. Rather it is initiated by managers and street-level bureaucrats in municipalities. It is the professions that advocate collaboration and it is also the professionals supported by managers that advocate collaboration and that push for an increase in the level of investment. For the profession to argue in support of the services they are responsible for is in line with the interest among street-level bureaucrats to protect the service they provide and to rely on their expertise when it comes to deciding what citizens need as identified in previous research (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; May & Winter, 2007). What is novel is that this is what spurs policy and strategic change and not political ambitions or goals.

Also interesting is that when they do this they use national guidelines and regulations as leverage with local politicians, saying that without these changes they won't be able to comply with the regulative framework without an increase in the level of investment. Here local politicians, according to information gathered during focus groups and interviews, often feel like they are taken hostage as they find it difficult to argue against what is proposed by the profession due to the nature of water and sewage services as being technically advanced. This is the root of the tension between the two groups.

That the profession uses national regulation as leverage is interesting, especially as previous research on policy implementation provides us with another story. Previous research instead shows how the tendency for street-level bureaucrats is to oppose national guidelines and are how they are more likely to adhere to goals and guidelines developed by local politicians, especially if these oppose national regulation (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000).

The tension between professionals and local politicians leads us to the issue of trust in collaboration. Part of the resistance against collaboration reported in this study can be translated to lack of trust for potential partners as well as professionals. The issue of trust can be traced also in the material from the case studies, especially considering how in several cases collaboration was reported to have failed due to the fact that leading politicians were unable to come to an agreement. The issue of trust in collaboration is not new and has been studied by scholars over the years (see for example Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Klijn, 2010). Lack of trust has its roots in the fact that when entering into collaboration one takes a risk and that risk is related to uncertainty, and the fact that control of service provision is delegated to an external organization (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). Trust is thus something that needs to be managed for collaboration to succeed. One way to mitigate the risk and to start building trust suggested by previous research is to gradually increase the extent of the collaboration (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). In that way the risk in the beginning, when trust is not yet established, is lower and gradually, as

trust emerges among the collaborating partners, the degree of collaboration can increase.

To sum up: what seems to be needed is to find a balance between on one hand political control and on the other hand professionalization in joint service organization, much as described in research on policy implementation (Lipsky, 1980; May & Winter, 2007). This study does not provide any specific answers to how to achieve such a balance and it was not the purpose to do so. Nevertheless, one possible way forward seems to be improving accountability processes together with finding ways to improve trust between professionals and politicians

## Concluding remarks

The purpose of this study was to investigate how collaboration is perceived as reducing political control and influence and to what extent this creates resistance towards collaboration within governments. The result of the study shows a tension between on one hand professionals and their interest in providing high quality services and on the other hand the political interest to keep control over service provision and the level of investments in order to secure room to maneuver politically. This tension creates a resistance among local politicians towards collaboration in joint service production in spite of the fact that collaboration in several cases has proven to be successful. The resistance towards collaboration could be problematic since it might result in differences between municipalities regarding the level of quality of service received by clients as well as the fees paid (Keiser & Soss, 1998; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000).

That there is a tension between professionals and politicians is not new – it has been discussed previously in literature concerning policy implementation (Lipsky, 1980; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2000; May & Winter, 2007). What is new is that in this study it is put into the context of governance networks and collaboration for joint service delivery and how it, in this context, helps us understand issues of accountability and trust in governance networks. Also new is the discovery that policy implementation is not necessarily the result of political initiative and how these policies then are implemented through the levels of the system. Rather, the results from this study show an opposite trajectory as policy and strategic goals can originate also from street-level bureaucrats, through the support from managers and board members and by using their expertise and national guidelines and regulations as leverage with local politicians. This adds to the tension between professionals and local politicians as the latter feel that they don't have the knowledge to oppose strategies proposed by professionals and thus end up being taken hostage. Consequently, local politicians either oppose collaboration or question the legitimacy of joint service organizations. The tension between politicians and professionals thus

acts as a hindrance towards collaboration. The result of this study therefore culminates in another question: how to reduce the tension and the resistance against collaboration in order to facilitate collaborations when they are needed?

One possible way to do so could be to work on ways to secure accountability and mitigate risk for democratic deficiency in horizontal relations. This is not only relevant for joint service production and collaboration between public sector organizations which was the focus of this study, but is probably also likely to be of relevance in all types of horizontal relations. The result of this study thus contributes to more recent research within the field of governance networks (Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011; Skelcher et al, 2011; Durose et al, 2012; Meerkerk et al, 2015).

One does however needs to bear in mind that the results presented here are based on a study conducted in one specific sector and with focus on one specific type of collaboration. More studies investigating the issues of accountability by focusing on other types of collaborations as well as other sectors and contexts are thus called for. Especially interesting would it be if these studies focused on the tension between politicians and professionals.

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# Balancing Stability and Change in the New Weberian State

Louise Bringselius & Anna Thomasson

## Abstract

Attempts at modernization typically include change. We argue that, in a long term perspective, these change attempts tend to be balanced with reforms or measures aiming at stability. Many of the measures that are taken today, after years of New Public Management (NPM) reforms, aim at securing continuity and quality within the existing structures, meaning a public administration characterized by stability and continuity. This quest for stability serves as a cornerstone in the New Weberian State (NWS), connecting back to the classic bureaucratic values which have been more or less put aside during the past decades. In this article, we argue that stability is the new “modernity” in the public sector, thus pushing us away from the changes connected to the NPM ideas. This also includes a shift from output-related aspects to aspects concerning input and process. Three factors aiming to secure stability in public organisations are highlighted: Recruitment (input), standardization of work (formal process), and public sector values (informal process). These mechanisms are today increasingly being used to consolidate previous changes and achieve stability in the public administration.

## Introduction

With modernity as a leitmotif or agenda, it is easier to attract attention to specific ideas and concepts. As Røvik (2008) and many others (e.g. Brunsson, 1993; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) have drawn our attention to, there is a huge market for these types of modernization ideas and also personal incentives for managers to frame new ideas as both rational and modern. This is a way for them to gain legitimacy. As Fred and Hall (2016) establish, temporary, forward-looking approaches, such as limited projects, typically appear appealing to policy-makers for this reason.

During the past decades, marketization reforms have pushed the public sector closer towards the private sector and its working practices. Some changes have followed directly from the marketization reforms. Other changes have come as indirect consequences. The latter would include the strong emphasis

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on performance measuring. Changes reach from the governance level to the micro level of public organizations; from policy-making to the values, practices and working conditions of the street-level bureaucrat. Marketization, as well as many other changes implemented during the past decades, are commonly referred to as New Public Management (NPM) reforms (Hood, 1991). With NPM, change has been the panacea of any problem in the public sector.

Today, we argue, the opposite trend is also gradually unfolding, meaning a trend towards stability. With this trend, the public sector is described as something distinct from private sector organizations. One of the cornerstones of this new tale of our time is the idea of stability as a fundamental feature of the bureaucracy. This idea connects back to classic Weberian theory, where central ideals for the public sector are, for example, consistency, legality and transparency (Udy Jr, 1959). It is increasingly recognized that change must not always be equal to improvement or development. Instead, change always comes with a certain amount of risk. It is not obvious that the public sector should accept this risk, considering that public sector organizations are responsible for the future and the quality of life for some of the weakest groups in society, such as children, elderly, and disabled people.

Thus, it is becoming increasingly obvious that the public sector should not embrace every opportunity to change, but also make sure to preserve the stability which builds legitimacy and confidence in the administration over time. The concept New Weberian State (NWS) has been suggested (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011) to describe the current revival of classic bureaucratic values as a reaction against NPM, which rather connects to market values. There balance between these values – market values, bureaucratic values, but also professional values – constantly varies in the administration (Freidson, 2001). For many years, there has been a strong focus on market values. Today, there is again an increasing interest in professionalism and bureaucracy and what these values or “logics” may have to offer.

We argue that many of the contributions to the public management literature today, in one way or another, deal with the challenges of stability versus change and that stability is actually the new “modernity” in the public sector. We build our argument around the idea of the *New Weberian State* (NWS). We outline a model with three central mechanisms in the NWS, aiming to secure stability in public organisations: Increased requirements in recruitments; Elaborated procedures to secure service quality; Increased attention to public sector values and culture. Implications for future research in public administration are discussed.

## Modernity as change

In organization theory, there is a special stream of literature focusing on how *management fads* emerge and how they are disseminated. This also includes discussions on how these ideas are *translated* as they move between different contexts. One of the early contributions to this (mainly Scandinavian) tradition of Neo-institutional theory was made by Meyer and Rowan (1977), who pointed out how managers seek legitimacy by implementing these ideas, meaning by seeking change. This also means that ideas often are labeled as modern in order to appear attractive – or simply because those who embrace them would interpret them as novel and revolutionary. This development is fueled by a discourse in society where it is assumed that organizations, individuals and societies are compelled to change in order to thrive. This has been common in particular in the private sector, as thus it has also been a central assumption in many NPM reforms.

Gioia et al. (2000) talk of *institutionalized elements*, referring to those ideas which have established a broad support among its stakeholders, and therefore are broadly recognized as symbols for success. These elements are similar to facts, in the sense that people tend to see them as correct in an objective sense, without questioning them. This is one reason why isomorphism is common in organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This is how trends like NPM spread and gain a wider acceptance. When NPM emerged it was in a time when the public sector was criticized for being too bureaucratic and inefficient and the private sector with emphasis on efficiency and value for money was regarded to be a role model. For public organizations to regain legitimacy, market oriented reforms advocated by NPM consultants were considered to be an attractive solution as those reforms represented what were considered legitimate at that time among stakeholders.

Now, several decades later, the situation is the reverse. Recent decades' focus on output and performance turned out to not be the panacea everyone hoped for. Instead market oriented reforms with their focus on output and performance have gradually become more and more criticized, as the difficulty in measuring output, especially in service organizations (Power, 1997) has been evident. This has led to an increased focus on what is measurable and on performance audits instead of evaluations, as audits are considered to be more objective (Power, 1997; 115). Consequently there is a risk, as discussed in some of the papers in this issue, that what can't be measured gets measured and that things that are not suitable for auditing are made auditable (Power, 1997).

What happens as an effect of NPM reforms is that organizations that have implemented these reforms and are subjected to this critique feel that their legitimacy is threatened. Their reaction is to try to regain that legitimacy by finding a way back to those institutionalized elements that are accepted by stakeholders (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000). Some have argued that this is New Public

Governance (NPG) and that NPG will replace NPM like they argue NPM replaced the predecessor Progressive Administration (PA) (Hyndman & Liguori, 2016).

It is interesting, however, that as change occurs and new trends catch on, this does not necessarily mean that old reforms and values are erased, rather reforms are placed above previous reforms like layers (Hyndman and Liguori, 2016). Thus, to regain legitimacy by relying on other things than output does not necessarily mean that there is a need to renew public organizations and once again change focus. To regain legitimacy is perhaps not only about finding new values, it could also be about finding the way back to old values and the roots of public sector services: bureaucracy. Building on the results from the study by Hyndman and Liguori (2016) that might be accomplished by taking a step back and letting market oriented reforms become integrated with values that previously implemented reforms represented. By integrating older bureaucratic reforms with more current market oriented reforms instead of creating new layers to the organization, a balance might be found that can enable public organizations to regain legitimacy.

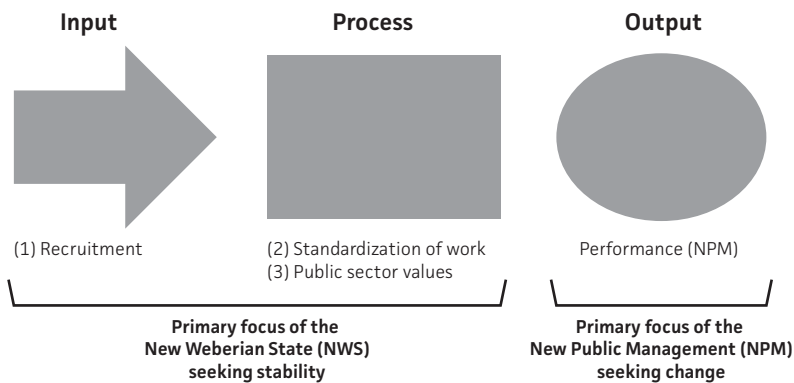
We will in the next section show one way forward and argue that those elements that are accepted by stakeholders are what we identify as the three central mechanisms of NWS and the increasing focus on parts of the organization other than output and performance.

## Stability and Change in the New Weberian State

The NWS is a rather new and underdeveloped concept. In particular, there is a need to define (1) what is new to the Weberian state, and (2) how it can be distinguished from NPM and professionalism. Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011, p. 19) describe the NWS as “an attempt to modernize traditional bureaucracy by making it more professional, efficient, and citizen-friendly”, reflecting “a more optimistic and trusting attitude towards the state apparatus than the NPM”. They compare NWS to NPM, Networks and Governance, as four models or ideals for the public sector. In the NWS, “authority is exercised through a disciplined hierarchy of impartial officials” (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011, p. 22). This builds on the ideas of Max Weber and his rational bureaucracy. Two central paradigms in the NWS are *transparency* and *performance measurement*, they claim (p. 25). We would suggest that *stability* is added as a third paradigm to this distinction. Where modernity is defined as change with NPM, modernity is defined as stability with the NWS. This is partly because the two models have different aims. The primary aim with the NPM reforms is to increase efficiency and flexibility. With bureaucracy and the NWS, there is a stronger focus on quality issues, and in particular issues relating to legality and equal treatment. This is also why the NWS focuses more on the input and process aspects of organization, whereas NPM is focused on the output aspects. Figure 1 illustrates this relationship. This

model also includes three central mechanisms in the quest for stability in the NWS. We shall describe these in more detail.

Figure 1. Relation between NWS (seeking stability) and NPM (seeking change)



Aiming at stability, it has been increasingly recognized that competence must be secured in recruitments to public organizations. During the past decades, characterized by NPM reforms, there has been a strong focus on output control, meaning performance measurement. The assumption has been that this is the best way to motivate individuals to perform, as also suggested by public choice theory with its focus on incentives. Research on public service motivation (Georgellis, Iossa, & Tabvuma, 2011) suggest that extrinsic rewards and controls may actually have detrimental effects on public sector professionals. This challenges the previous human resource management approach in the public sector and today there is an increasing focus on the input and process aspects. With input, recruitments are central and competence is sought. The process aspect includes particular formal standards to secure the quality of the work of street-level bureaucrats, but also culture and values which also guide behavior in the process dimension. Thus, we would suggest that there are three central mechanisms in the NWS: (1) recruitment, (2) standardization of work, and (3) public sector values. As Figure 1 shows, the first is an input variable and the latter two are process variables.

## RECRUITMENT

It has become increasingly recognized that not just anyone can be recruited as a public sector professional and then incentivized to perform according to plan. Instead, both the qualifications and the values of these individuals must be secured. With the NWS, the idea is that these officials should be able to remain in office for a long period of time, perhaps even their whole lives. With NPM, employees were expected to come and go and temporary employment terms were often raised as ideals, including outsourcing solutions and work on consultancy basis.

## **STANDARDIZATION**

With the standardization of work, the ambition is to secure the quality of the work of public officials, meaning that citizens are treated in a transparent, correct and equal way. Equality before the law is central, as is transparency. An example of this is the Swedish Social Insurance Agency, where the work of the social security officers has undergone quite extensive standardization of work. In this case, the officials welcomed this standardization, as it provided them with useful support in their work and a sense of security (Bringselius, 2011). However, they also asked to be involved more in the development of standards. This is sometimes referred to as “soft autonomy” (Levay & Waks, 2009), and we expect this to be a common procedure in the NWS in the future, as the strong professions in the public sector demand influence.

## **PUBLIC SECTOR VALUES**

Today’s growing interest in defining the identity and “soul” of the public administration, may be understood as a reaction against a development where this had become so blurred that the administration risked its democratic legitimacy. Against this background, there is a growing interest in defining public sector values and administrative culture. This is also an informal way of governing the work of street-level bureaucrats, as part of this cannot be standardized but will build on their professional judgement (Lipsky, 1980). Today, scholars (e.g. Crilly, Zollo, & Hansen, 2012; Hupe, Hill, & Nangia, 2014) call for studies on what factors, for example culture and motivation, may influence how these bureaucrats translate public policy into decisions.

## **Searching for Legitimacy**

The search for legitimacy is central to the public administration. This has fueled the NPM trends and this is also one of the driving forces behind the NWS trend. A gradual adaptation takes place, in relation to the discourses and ideas currently prevailing in society. Thus, even though there is a movement away from NPM and market oriented reforms, these reforms still take place, but they are to be gradually adapted in order to secure legitimacy. One way is through an increasing focus on competence. To focus on competence corresponds with the elements of NWS and with the need to look at input and processes and not only at output in order to secure service quality.

As illustrated in Figure 1, NPM focused on output, while NWS in the quest for stability focuses on input and processes. In this closing article we argue that what can be seen in public sector is a striving for stability and how this is manifested by the values of NWS. Looking at the contributions of this special issue it becomes apparent how the three central mechanisms of NWS previously identified and discussed are reoccurring. Those are; Increased requirements in



recruitments; Elaborated procedures to secure service quality; Increased attention to public sector values and culture.

When it comes to recruitment we can see from the contributions of this special issue several examples of increasing focus on qualifications as public service provision becomes more specialized. What also is noticeable is how the increasing level of specialization among civil servants influences the relationship between political governance and professions. Perhaps especially noticeable is a tension between a focus on securing competence and quality in service provision and traditional political governance when organizations try to find a new form of stability.

When it comes to the second factor, procedures to secure service quality, we have in this special issue been able to detect a tension between NPM-oriented reforms with focus on making things auditable (Power, 1997) and the NWS focus on service quality and the recent years' increasing criticism against measuring output. We can thus also see in these articles the tension between NPM and NWS values.

The third factor, finally, public sector value, indicates an ongoing struggle within public organizations to find stability in the transition between what was previously considered legitimate and what is currently considered legitimate. Public sector organizations today experience some degree of identity crisis, as they search for new ways to define the role of these organizations in a society where private and third sector organizations are also competing to provide publicly funded services. A shared base of values and norms for this public mission is sometimes called for, for example as concerns transparency.

## Conclusions

As this article shows, an interesting aspect relating to modernity is attitudes to stability and change. Modernization projects typically build on a strong element of change, thereby also connecting to the assumption that basically *any* change will lead to improvement. Attitudes to stability and change are closely related to the distinction between the New Weberian State (NWS) and New Public Management (NPM). Building on a growing criticism against the consequences of some of the NPM reforms during the past decades, stability is gradually becoming the new modernity in the public sector. This development includes a shift from output to input and process. In particular, this article has highlighted three factors which are gaining increasing attention as we approach the 2020s, namely recruitment, standardization of work and public sector values. There is reason to welcome this development. In the future, consolidation can be expected, meaning seeking less change and more stability.

On that note, we welcome more research focusing on aims towards stability rather than change in public organization as well as other initiatives taking debate beyond NPM and into the future.

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# Advocacy Coalition Learning

## *Biases and Heuristics in Policy Implementation*

Hans Knutsson

### **Abstract**

Policy implementation is a complex process and the theoretical problem has been approached in different ways for a long time. Perspectives have converged around governance, negotiation and adaptation and the learning perspective is increasingly acknowledged. This paper explores how policy implementation may be understood from a learning perspective, affected by universal tendencies for humans to draw biased conclusions from specific events. The Advocacy Coalition Framework is used as a point of reference when applying concepts of learning and decision-making biases and heuristics. From a set of three separate events of a continuous implementation of the 1994 LSS Act (The Act Concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments), empirical illustrations are forwarded based on both primary and secondary data sources. The paper contributes to the field of policy implementation, first of all, with authentic empirical representations of policy implementation as a learning process. Second, the paper supports the ACF learning tenets about the importance of actors, forums, conflicts, and stimuli. Thirdly, it indicates that ignoring the inherent human tendencies of biased decision-making may leave explanations and understanding of policy implementation incomplete.

## **Introduction**

In 1994, the LSS Act (LSS, 1993; The Act Concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments) was introduced in Sweden. The Act had wide parliamentary support, with an intention to reform the care for individuals with different disabling impairments (Government Proposition, 1993; Riksdagen, 1988). The previous model of large-scale, institutional care was replaced by an order where persons with certain functional impairments got to select personal assistants to help in much smaller settings mainly at home. Since its inception it has been subject to feverish debates in media, controversial court rulings, and, not least, an overwhelming growth in volume and cost. The implementation has not been straightforward, and for this reason it stands out as suitable in exploring learning aspects of the rather multifaceted

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implementation process. Empirical implementation problems in relation to the LSS act abound. Late in 2015, faced with the strongest pressure from refugees ever, the Swedish Minister of Finance explicitly pointed out the LSS Act as a primary cost-saving item by which the overwhelming refugee situation could be financed. Those threatened by the announcement raged (GP, 2015).

Things inevitably change and alterations to any policy need to be made. Still, there is an implicit understanding of trust and promise in public policy – what you say is compared to your actions. Policy implementation is a complex endeavour, though, and the problems associated with it have likely rendered many a disappointed voter. The same problems have also gained much attention from academic quarters. The theoretical problem has been approached in different ways since the 1970s. Policy implementation has been framed as, broadly speaking, a top-down compliance problem (e.g. Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973), a bottom-up compliance problem (e.g. Lipsky, 2010 [1980]), and a policy-action, multi-actor relationship (e.g. Barrett & Fudge, 1981).

Today, the problem is framed as a governance problem (Hill & Hupe, 2014) and negotiation and adaptation among different coalitions have taken centre stage (P. A. Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). Stressing the adaptive character of policy implementation, the learning perspective has been increasingly acknowledged, albeit mainly recognized at an overall conceptual level. There is a dwelling need and interest for improving the understanding of policy implementation. The rationale of this paper is an increasing attention paid to the concepts of adaptation and learning in the field of policy implementation (Heikkilä & Gerlak, 2013; Jenkins-Smith, Nohrstedt, Weible, & Sabatier, 2014; Schofield, 2004; Weible, Heikkilä, Deleon, & Sabatier, 2012).

Learning is in essence about actions and feedback from them (c.f. Argyris & Schön, 1978; Cyert & March, 1963). Feedback as an object of study is used as such in policy implementation studies (Mettler & Sorelle, 2014) but occurs in a wide variety of academic fields, e.g. economics, psychology, sociology, and anthropology (Richardson, 1991). Not least psychology research has greatly influenced the way decision-making is understood in terms of feedback and learning. In many controlled experiments, feedback has been analysed as subjects' responses to different problems. This research links action and feedback with human propensity for biased interpretations of experiences: the ambiguity of experience complicates adaptation, i.e. learning (March, 2010). This complication is consistent with biases and heuristics dealt with in psychology research (see Kahneman, 2011 for an overview; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974 for details). Three prominent complications for human decision-making are the “availability” bias, the “representativeness bias”, and the “anchoring effect” (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). These biases represent a human inclination to base our decisions on recent, proximate, and familiar observations and adapt our behaviour accordingly. We are prone to letting clearly experienced

events guide our interpretation and inference rather than considering underlying realities. Biases are translated into heuristics, by which we simplify complicated causal relationships, thus making it easier to decide. “Experiments in causal attribution show people tend to assume each effect has a single cause and often cease their search for explanations when a sufficient cause is found; usually base rates and situational factors are ignored.” (Sternman, 1994:308). The biases and heuristics are located in human conceptions of reality, why it should be present also in the processes of policy implementation. In the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014), these strands of learning and adaptation are tied together, and the framework therefore will be used for guiding the exploration of policy implementation in this paper.

The aim of the paper is to explore biases and heuristics in policy implementation. It is centred on the case of the Swedish Act Concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (LSS, 1993) and is an attempt to search for ways in which policy implementation may be studied from a learning perspective, affected by universal tendencies for humans to draw biased conclusions from specific events. First, a theoretical positioning of the paper is made, linking policy implementation to learning and decision-making. Then, the methodology of the study is presented, followed by an empirical account of three different “events” in the implementation of the LSS act. The events are consecutively analysed one by one, followed by a concluding discussion. The paper contributes first and foremost with an empirical account of the gradual changes made to the LSS Act during implementation. Moreover, the study offers a discussion about potential research approaches for developing the understanding of policy implementation. It connects learning to the concepts of biases and heuristics, and suggests that these concepts be brought to the fore when studying the processes of policy implementation.

## **Policy implementation, learning, and decision-making**

Policy implementation has been called the subject of “misery research” (Rothstein, 1988) for its elusive and complex nature, often ending up in disappointment. Matland (1995) has elaborated on the complexity and ambiguity of policy implementation. Complexity and ambiguity is aggravated by a “multiorganizational” view on policy implementation (Hjern & Porter, 1981) and a limited attention capacity of human beings (March & Olsen, 1975). If what needs to be done is not within the ordinary set of activities for a particular organization involved in the implementation of a policy, the implementation may be affected negatively. So what should be concentrated upon when looking for how adaptation and learning affects implementation?

All learning takes place inside individual human heads; an organization learns in only two ways: (1) by the learning of its members, or (2) by ingesting new members who have knowledge the organization didn't previously have. But what is stored in any one head in an organization may not be unrelated to what is stored in other heads; and the relation between those two (and other) stores may have a great bearing on how the organization operates. (Simon, 1991:125).

The quote connects organisational learning and human understanding with the study of policy implementation. What is done invokes reactions of some sort and affects the common understanding of events within a defined organization and group. If the reaction is intended, all is well. If not, adaptation is required. Learning is in this respect a matter of adapting from observed causality. March (2010) sees adaptation as a general condition when human beings experience things. When your experiences do not match what you expected to experience, you have the opportunity to alter the way you think and act, you could learn.

The Advocacy Coalition Framework [emphasizes] the importance of bureaucratic discretion and the consequent differential effect of implementation as a result of this discretion. (Schofield, 2004:292).

From the Schofield statement above, it is relevant to continue exploring the links between policy implementation, organizational learning, and individual understanding and discrete decision-making. The main concepts in the respective fields are presented below. All three research areas are wide and contain several subfields. The presentation is aimed at giving a general overview of the fields and at providing a language and mode of thinking. First, the field of policy implementation is approached, landing where Schofield (2004) has pointed out intersection between the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014; P. Sabatier, A, 1986; P. A. Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993) and organizational learning (e.g. Argyris & Schön, 1978; Cyert & March, 1963; Easterby-Smith & Lyles, 2011). Second, it is shown how organizational learning is related to individual learning (Nonaka, 1994), where the concepts of biases and heuristics (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) affect the analysis into individual understanding and learning. Then, concluding the section, the Advocacy Coalition Framework is lined out, in an ambition to tying together the three previous theoretical fields.

## **POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

Matland (1995):154 defines policy as "the programmatic activities formulated in response to an authoritative decision. These activities are the policy designer's

plans for carrying out the wishes by a legitimating organisation, be it a legislature, a judicial agent, or an executive body.” Implementation could be considered all that happens “between the establishment of policy and its impact in the world of action” (O’Toole, J, Jr., 2000:273). The two terms explicate the difference between “policy and action” (Barrett & Fudge, 1981). This difference is at the core of policy implementation research: how are ideas turned into practice?

Several reviews of the field have been made. O’Toole, J, Jr (1986) reported a rampant conceptual plethora. Matland (1995) presented a field subdivided into a top-down and a bottom-up way of looking at policy implementation. In an attempt to reconcile the two streams of thought, he forwarded an “ambiguity-conflict” categorization of how policies are seen to be implemented. According to Schofield (2001), three generations of implementation research may be discerned. The first generation was preoccupied with a rational and linear (“top-down”) model of implementation, “distinct and separate from formation [of policy].” (2001:249). The second generation searched for key success factors, variables that explained implementation success. It paid more attention to the “street-level” explaining how the actual work of civil servants defined – bottom-up – the policy in question and, hence, its success. The third generation moved towards “dynamism in implementation processes”. (2001:250). A bibliographic review of the policy implementation field has been made by Saetren (2005). It shows how implementation research has prospered in general, although it has become largely wanting in the traditional public policy and public administration journals. Since then, Hill and Hupe (2014) have made another comprehensive overview of the particular field of public policy implementation. Needless to say, the field still exists, and Hill and Hupe (2014) argue for a current “governance” paradigm in policy implementation, pointing towards a focus on multiple actors and diverging objectives among them. This is the Schofield (2001) dynamism, which emerged with the early steps towards the reconciliation of top-down and bottom-up perspectives in the third generation implementation research. One early candidate in the third generation was the Advocacy Coalition Framework, ACF (P. Sabatier, A, 1986).

The ACF (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014) describes a set of interrelated areas that explain how a policy is formulated and implemented. Four factors determine the outcome of a policy implementation process – external events, internal events, policy-oriented learning, and negotiated agreements between incumbent advocacy coalitions. An *advocacy coalition* is a group of “actors from various public and private organizations who share a set of beliefs and who seek to realize their common goals over time” (P. Sabatier, A, 1986:39). Several coalitions may exist simultaneously and implementation is a function of the agreements negotiated between them. Agreements, thus, may be seen as mutual adaptation, i.e. learning.

Policy-oriented learning in the ACF is a function of *forums* (institutional arrangements facilitating actors to meet); *level of conflict* between coalitions (where intermediate levels are most conducive to learning); *attributes of the stimuli* (type of information and experiences from it); and *attributes of actors* (belief systems, resources, strategies, network contacts). From this viewpoint, policy implementation meets learning where different actors agree or disagree on how the policy should be formulated and implemented. Conflict resolution implies a change of “actions or rules for action” (March, 2010) on behalf of one part or the other, i.e. a certain degree of learning takes place. A resolution, however, hinges upon the way experience is interpreted by different actors. This seems not to be merely a matter of belief systems but also of basic human biases.

Alterations to a policy are initiated by actor coalitions. A coalition acts in relation to other coalitions. The policy beliefs, resources and strategies of coalitions may be subject to negotiation before governmental decisions are made and institutional rules, resource allocations and appointments are changed, rendering certain policy outputs and subsequent policy impacts. Outputs and impacts feed back to the coalitions. This point, where feedback is experienced and interpreted, creates the basis for new decisions, the locus of learning.

### **LEARNING OF ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS**

Fiol and Lyles (1985) offer a general definition of the concept of organizational learning as “the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding.” (1985:803). In relation to policy implementation, “[learning] can be thought of as the cognitive adjustments in the form of change or reinforcement in what we value, see, and understand in the world and how we behave.” (Weible et al., 2012:8). This definition fits well into the more practical definition suggested by March (2010): “learning takes place when the observation of associations produces changes in actions or rules for action. Learning serves intelligence when those changes improve the actions or the rules.”

Organizational learning covers a vast area of research, comprising several different strands of development. Easterby-Smith and Lyles (2011) divide the area along two dimensions – theoretical/practical, and process/content oriented research. The distinct part “organizational learning” is located in the “theoretical” category and should be particularly distinguished from the concept of learning organization (e.g. Senge, 1990), which is about process-oriented practices of learning. Classic contributions to the field of organizational learning are Cyert and March (1963) and Argyris and Schön (1978). Cyert and March showed how rules, procedures and routines guide decision-making in organizations: they viewed organizational learning as adaptive processes by which the organization is in line with its environment. Organizations learn through short-term feedback in relation to expectations. Expectations are embedded in



the rules, procedures and routines of the organization, in the ACF found in the belief systems of actors and coalitions: in the long-term, experiences gradually shape these. This is quite similar to the subsequent idea of Argyris and Schön (1978), which also is preoccupied with action and feedback, although framed in the terms “single-loop” and “double-loop” learning. This kind of experiential or action-based learning reinforces established knowledge in “single loops” of feedback from their actions. From time to time, the established knowledge is challenged in a second, or “double”, feedback loop, questioning the rationale of current action. Relatedly, Fiol and Lyles (1985) distinguish between *cognition development* and *behaviour development*. These form two general types of learning, lower-level and higher-level learning, where lower resembles “single-loop” learning and higher looks more like double-loop in character. March (2010) adheres to this dichotomy:

The first mode—which might be called ‘lowintellect’ learning—is one in which actions associated with success are replicated with little or no effort at causal understanding. The second mode—which might be called ‘highintellect’ learning—is one in which explicit efforts are made to understand the causal structure of the events of experience and to derive action implications from that understanding. (March, 2010:26).

The definition stresses learning, the improvement ambition and the creation of knowledge and understanding. However, the definition is silent on the links between individuals and organization. Nonaka (1994) suggests one way to unite them. He defines knowledge as “justified true belief”, created in social interaction between individuals. His argument is that knowledge creation should be approached from both an ontological and an epistemological viewpoint. The ontological stand taken is that the knowledge is negotiated and agreed upon in “communities of interaction”. When approaching the nature of knowledge creation, his epistemological dimension of knowledge, he makes a distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge can be verbally articulated, tacit knowledge cannot. According to Nonaka, different types of knowledge are transformed within, and shared between, individuals in “communities of interaction”. What is justified true belief in the community becomes knowledge. In order to establish a common understanding knowledge needs to be shared in “communities”. Hence, the attention that the ACF gives to negotiation, forums, stimuli, conflict levels, and actor attributes resonates well with basic tenets in organizational learning and knowledge creation. Following the ACF, coalitions learn through individuals, by way of feedback from actions taken, in forums or “communities of interaction” (Nonaka, 1994) which are populated with actors of different opinions and understanding (belief systems) of the policy.

Opinions being different may be traced back to what Levinthal and March (1993) call “myopia of learning”, where local ideas are confirmed and serve as a basis for future action. This is also stressed by the human biases of *availability*, *representativeness*, and *anchoring* (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), making people prone to considering easily retrieved points of reference representative and thus maintaining a “low-intellect” (March, 2010) approach to learning. “Availability” refers to the tendency of humans to rely comfortably on the information at hand, however flawed it may be. “Representativeness” extends the availability bias, saying that single random observations become representative of the issue in question. “Anchoring” refers to how people evaluate observations in relation to available points of reference rather than to base rates and average values. These complications from human bias are developed in Levinthal and March (1993), who argue that learning is restricted by “myopia” in space and time, which traps organizations either in repetitious failure or in behaviour that has been historically successful.

In the ACF, experienced, and potentially biased, feedback is observed in terms of attributes of stimuli and in the level of conflict between coalitions.

The difficulties for actors to agree are exacerbated by the fact that there is not only the immediate feedback from an action to consider, but also second- and third-order consequences to argue over. Sterman (1994) refers to this as “dynamic complexity”:

The decisions of any one agent form but one of many feedback loops that operate in any given system. These loops may reflect both anticipated and unanticipated side effects of the decision maker’s actions (Sterman, 1994:297).

Thus, learning hinges upon feedback, which is complex and subject to individuals’ biases, which lead to heuristics, i.e. simplified explanations to the course of events. Such heuristics spread in coalitions and form common knowledge, “justified true beliefs”. This knowledge drives advocacy coalitions to call for changes in a policy and/or its implementation. From this conceptual framework, the implementation of the LSS act will be explored, in line with the methodological design presented in the next section.

## **Conceptual framework, data collection, and analysis**

The paper is a qualitative exploration of the implementation of the Swedish LSS Act (LSS, 1993). It focuses the empirical and theoretical relationships between policy implementation, organizational learning and individual decision-making. The analysis is interpretative and contributes to the long-lasting discussion of what affects policy implementation.

The analytical frame of reference is based on the Advocacy Coalition Framework (P. Sabatier, A, 1986; P. A. Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Weible, Sabatier & McQueen, 2009). The use of frameworks as point of departure when exploring social systems, intentionally designed and operated (Elster, 1983 in Ghoshal, 2005) is suggested by Ostrom, Cox and Schlager (2014). They differentiate between “frameworks”, “theories” and “models”. The framework frames research problems:

A framework, unlike theories or models, does not specify relationships among variables in order to predict and explain phenomena of interest. A framework plays a different role in developing knowledge. It provides the most general list of variables that should be used to analyze different types of phenomena of interest and represents an effort to identify the universal elements that any theory relevant to the same kind of phenomena would need to include. (Ostrom et al., 2014:270).

Thus, the overall list of variables present in the ACF allows different theories to add to the explanation of the phenomenon being studied. Theories consist of distinct concepts and relationships between them and may as such hold several different models of how these relate to each other. Models, in turn, are the specific relationships between two or more variables and the expected effect they may have on each other.

In this paper, basic models of experiential learning are tentatively added to the ACF framework for the sake of analysis. The object of analysis is “events”. Events are defined by Weible (2014):5 as “anticipated and unanticipated incidents ranging from elections to scientific discoveries to chronic and acute societal dilemmas and crises that may result from a public policy or provide an opportunity for achieving political objectives related to public policy.” The empirical setting is the Swedish political system, predominated by electorate, parliament, agencies, private assistance companies, municipalities, interest groups, media, and functionally impaired people – the main actors/coalitions identified. Events for this study have been identified by actor, action, and consequences. This means that events presented are not external to the policy system, i.e. no general societal changes are considered events. Events are actual actions taken by an actor coalition, inducing change. The choice of events has also been guided by access to information, both official government publications, primary interview data, and secondary data from various public channels such as the Internet, TV, and newspapers.

Data has been collected from publicly available documentation, spanning from academic studies to public inquiries and area-specific articles in the press. Moreover, two key informants have been interviewed for first-hand description

of events. One is a senior owner of a private company providing personal assistance. This person also did work as a municipal provider from the outset of the reform, and before that also worked as a social care worker in one of Sweden's larger cities prior to the LSS reform. This long and varied experience makes this informant particularly apt for describing the evolution of the reform from an inside perspective. The second person is an interest group representative, responsible for the area of personal assistance in one of the main employer organisations for private providers of services, mainly within public welfare services. This person has long experience of the development of the LSS act and has regular formal contacts with both government and agency representatives.

The three different events are used as a basis for exploration. Data is qualitative and organized by first presenting events and their subsequent consequences. The description and consecutive analysis is framed by the four key concepts in the ACF's analysis of learning: actors, forums, conflicts, and stimuli. This step-wise description is then analysed for signs of biases and heuristics in the policy implementation process. The analysis, thus, is exploring plausible indications of biases and heuristics in the events. It has no presumption of determining neither causalities nor correlations. From the analysis, the agenda of an advocacy coalition is discussed and problematized in terms of biased decision-making. The discussion ends with suggesting core empirical questions and related research challenges.

## **An empirical exploration – the LSS disability act in Sweden**

In 1994, the Swedish Act Concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (LSS) replaced a long period of institutionally oriented care for disabled persons. The reform was directed towards cognitively and physically impaired children and adults. LSS is a law of rights, meaning that anyone meeting the conditions is entitled to help, without financial considerations. Its most characteristic trait is how each person is to be included in everyday life by way of a personal assistant. An important condition for the personal assistant solution to work is the discretion that the disabled person has in the choosing of assistants. The right to choose personal assistants stretches from the actual recruitment, via weaker labour contracts (two-week notice for termination at all times), to the possibility of running a company or hiring personnel by themselves. Initially, there were no restrictions on private firms in establishing commercial provision of personal assistance, which created a market for personal assistants and, with that, selection opportunities.

Already in the government proposition in 1993, readers might have had premonitions of future implementation problems:

”The total additional cost for the reform is appreciated to be 1 600 million kronor. In line with the so called financing principle it is suggested that adjustments towards municipalities and counties are made, corresponding to the economic consequences of the reform suggestions.” (Government Proposition, 1993:4).

The quote sets out two things: first, there is an estimate of the costs of the reform. Second, there is put forward a government obligation to compensate municipalities and counties for cost increases. Personal assistance is applied for either at the municipality you live in, or at the SIA. Municipalities are responsible for assessing and meeting needs up to 20 hours a week, above that it becomes an SIA responsibility. Thus, there are actually two public principals of the LSS Act, where the municipalities should not carry any additional costs due to the changes in the care for the target group of the reform.

The LSS act has been subject to much attention over the past 20 years. The cost of the legislation has increased from less than 2 billion SEK for 4 000 persons the first year to almost 30 billion SEK for 20 000 persons (out of which 4 000 persons are subject to municipal funding) in 2015. The individual person granted financial means for personal assistance is remunerated with a number of hours per six months, times an hourly standard rate. The remuneration is in most cases administered by the provider of assistance, be it a municipality, a private firm, or a cooperative. The provision of personal assistance was initially dominated by municipal providers, but has been gradually replaced by private firms, in 2015 with a market share of about 45 %. There has been a growing suspicion that remunerations overcompensate providers, in particular the private profit-seeking firms. In 2012, an inquiry concerning the remuneration model for personal assistance was conducted by the Swedish Social Insurance Inspectorate (SSII). The director general of the SSII stated the following in the final report:

[The] hourly standard rate renders high tensions due to large differences in cost levels between municipalities and cooperatives on the one hand and private firms on the other. [Partly] these differences also depend on lower overhead costs, but the standard rate construction has the effect that rationalizations by the providers do not gain the public sector, as the standard rate is set in relation to the providers with the highest costs. (ISF, 2012).

This inquiry was followed by another public inquiry in 2013, aimed at “maintaining, long-term, the quality objectives of personal assistance according to the Act Concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments (1993:387), abbreviated LSS, and to come to grips with the revealed problems of the current model of hourly remuneration.” (SOU, 2014).

The resulting recommendations were primarily concerning a redesign of the remuneration model, separating it into a basic part and a supplement part, to be applied for separately.

The LSS act is an ample case for policy implementation studies, but for the sake of exploration, three individual events are selected and presented in condensed form. Each event originates from a coalition in a policy subsystem, and has a clear action-orientation. First, an action meant to restrict the spending of remuneration is presented, followed by an action that concerned a stricter assessment of the needs of persons with impairments. The last event presents how a certification requirement was introduced. All events affected the implementation of the reform and the subsequent analysis focuses what may have induced the actors to take action.

### **EVENT 1. GOVERNMENT REDUCING FREEDOM FOR PRIVATE PROVIDERS TO USE REMUNERATION**

In 2008, 15 years after it was enacted, the LSS act was adjusted in order to stop private providers of personal assistance spending money on things other than personal assistance (SOU, 2007). It appears as though it was an appropriate action:

There was nothing standing in the way, there was plenty of money and it was lavishly spent. Nobody could understand what it really should cost. (Senior owner, 2015).

Up until then, firms could also save surpluses for future spending like travels or a wide variety of expenses, all tax-deductible costs. Two things were changed. First, accumulation of surpluses was no longer allowed; surpluses were to be paid back every six months. Second, approved expenses were listed and the firm was clearly made responsible to the tax agency to comply with the new rules (SOU, 2007). Reports of fraud played a role, which could be observed in the inquiry (SOU, 2007:49f):

We can state that the reports and discussions about misused remuneration continue, also that it is still hard to assess the scale of it. Therefore [it] is important to take the warning signals seriously so that the government could, as quickly as possible, make arrangements with the assistance remuneration in order to promote an appropriate use of the assistance remuneration.

The media coverage has been intense and may be illustrated by the number one daily paper in Sweden, *Dagens Nyheter*, who reported in 2010 that “there is cheating going on with the remuneration to personal assistance. And it will continue until we get a minister who has the courage to deal with the problems instead of passing them on.” (DN, 2010). However, the scale of fraud is

still disputed and scientific inquiry has failed to establish a reliable estimate: in 2012, a heavily criticized government inquiry estimated the annual fraud to 2–3 billion SEK, based on expert assessments made without any solid empirical evidence. Internal civil servants in the SIA say that the numbers are “likely to be wrong” (SVT, 2015).

Two actors stand out; the government, taking action, and private firms providing personal assistance, the main target of the action. However, in the background there was still the impaired individual, either being deprived of assistance due to fraud by the providers, or losing accumulated surpluses saved for e.g. recreational trips. The forum for the actors was parliament, but media also played an important role before the legislation was changed. The attributes of the stimuli referred to were continuous reports of fraud, and the level of conflict was escalating from the part of the government, whereas private companies continued to engage in fraud, in an undetermined scale.

The media attention in combination with the inability to determine the scale of fraud indicate that both the availability bias and the representativeness bias may be influencing the action taken by government. The media description is readily at hand and in the absence of facts, the heuristic of an embezzling industry of private providers of personal assistance is created.

## **EVENT 2. THE SIA CHANGES ITS INTERPRETATION OF THE LSS ACT**

In 2009, the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) ruled in favour of the SIA in a case from 2007 (SAC, 2009). In that case, a municipality had changed their way of assessing needs in accordance with the LSS legislation, which was then appealed to court. The change originated from new SIA internal guidelines, stating how assessments should be done within the agency (SIA, 2007). Personal assistance was given for basic needs of eating, personal hygiene, and getting dressed. Originally, if the disabled person needed help in any part of those activities, the full activity was approved assistance. The new way to assess the need for assistance focused on the intimate and “integrity-sensitive” parts of the activities and approved assistance only for those distinct parts, even if they were integrated in a longer process (SIA, 2007). The case in the verdict concerned a person who could bring his food to his mouth by himself and therefore did not get assistance for getting to the table or preparing the food, something he was not capable of on his own (Assistansköll, 2009).

In the SAC verdict, there are three actors present: an appealing individual, a defendant municipality, and the SIA being a reference case. It is explicitly referred to in the internal SIA guidelines (SIA, 2007), which guide the assessment of a person’s need of personal assistance. Herein, the premises are carefully argued for, premises which the defendant municipality used as a reference point in their needs assessments. The guidelines contain an interesting caveat, though, which reveals an underlying conflict between the government agency

level and the municipality level: “the need of help for basic needs should not, in other words, be of such a kind that it is not an action that just as well could be taken by the municipality home care.” (SIA, 2007).

Since 2007, this practice has been the prescribed standard operating procedure in the SIA and has been spreading to municipalities ever since. Practically, and financially, this means that more people do not reach the 20 weekly hours of basic needs. That is the limit above which the SIA bears the responsibility of personal assistance, and for applications below 20 weekly hours, municipalities assess, decide and pay for the personal assistance. Accordingly, SIA is increasingly relieved of the responsibility of personal assistance. At the same time, this is affecting the level and character of support and service that the impaired person gets. If municipalities find the need to be outside the realm of the LSS Act, there are other, often cheaper, arrangements to make for persons with impairments :

There ought to be a Berlin wall between our different legislations, [municipalities] always choose the cheapest option if given an alternative. (Senior owner, 2015).

There have been numerous accounts from disapproving politicians, stating that the court ruling and the consecutive change of practice in the SIA deviate from the intentions of the legislation. Complaints have also come from the municipality employer organization SALAR (SAC, 2009). This, however, indicates the complexity of the issue: SALAR is, on behalf of its member municipalities, opposing to the practice changed by the SIA since it moves responsibility from state to municipality. Once there, the same strict guidelines are used, suspiciously in order to substitute expensive personal assistance with cheaper home care.

The actors involved in this event are on one hand persons with impairments in need of personal assistance, but on the other hand this appears also to be a tug of war between the two principals in the LSS Act, the municipalities and the state agency, SIA. The forum where they all meet is in court, where a new interpretation and execution of the legislation is approved and sanctioned. The conflict is about the interpretation of the LSS Act, whereas the stimuli mainly appear to be cost increases for the reform.

This event contains a reaction to cost increases and an increasing burden brought upon municipalities. It shows how the “law of rights” characteristic of LSS is compromised. Cost increases become the centre of how the reform is viewed, which may be related to the anchoring bias. The very low initial cost of the reform works as a reference point, making the current level seem extreme. Higher points of references could be expected to moderate the actions taken by government, as would any deliberation around the opportunity cost of personal assistance. However, this is conspicuously absent in both public investigations and media coverage.



### **EVENT 3. GOVERNMENT REQUIRES AUTHORIZATION FOR PROVIDERS OF PERSONAL ASSISTANCE**

Since 2011, every provider of personal assistance is obliged to report operations to the NBHW, the National Board of Health and Welfare (Government Proposal, 2010). Private companies have to be approved by the agency. The main condition is an installed quality assurance system, but in the proposal it is also stated that "furthermore considerations of how to dampen the costs for personal assistance are presented" (ibid.:17). About a third of the existing private providers did not get approved as the law came into effect and a large share of the impaired persons with personal assistance had to shift to a different provider. The industry consolidated and a few large companies grew even larger.

The quality system required by providers is centred on documentation, most importantly a particular "implementation plan". In that plan, the personal assistance approved by the SIA is to be translated into concrete activities, described in terms apt for measurement and follow-up. The NBHW was initially responsible for auditing the LSS act. However, in 2013, the Health and Social Care Inspectorate (IVO) was formed as a new separate auditing agency, responsible also for the LSS act auditing. Thus, the SIA assessment of the needs of persons with impairments is turned into practical action, action to be overseen and followed up by the IVO agency.

[The authorization requirement] has also meant, although to a surprisingly small extent, that authorizations have been pulled back. IVO is a quite new agency which still is in a learning phase and also, allegedly, suffers from too few resources to initiate inspections. [We] meet with IVO in what we call dialogue forums, but we're having difficulties reaching them, getting them to understand the specific conditions for personal assistance. (Interest group representative, 2015).

This event is clearly involving the government and private for-profit companies. Also government agencies are involved in the event, although more in terms of resulting consequences of the event. The forum is the parliament, where the conflict between the SIA and private providers is resolved by alterations in the LSS Act. The conflict and the stimuli forwarded by the government revolve around quality concerns, but again cost increases seem to drive events.

In this event it is indicated how available information about unscrupulous private providers of personal assistance engage in fraud. One way to reduce the impact of these actors has been to demand a quality assurance system. The weak control of the system suggests that the main ambition with the action was to eliminate as many unscrupulous firms as possible. The easily retrievable picture of the embezzling firm encompasses two probable biases, availability and

representativeness. The anchoring bias complements the two, again creating a heuristic rather than a truly informed decision-making premise.

### EXPLORATIVE ANALYSIS OF EVENTS

Events are summarized in table 1 below. The table illustrates that there are links between the various events, not immediately apparent when studying the events in isolation. The links may be regarded instances of potential or actual policy-system learning.

Table 1. Events in the LSS implementation process

Original policy intention (LSS 1993:387, 5§): "Operations following this act shall promote equality in life conditions and full participation in social life for those mentioned in 1§. The goal shall be to give the individual opportunity to live like others."

Event	Policy action	Consequences	Heuristics and biases
1.	<p><b>Government reducing freedom for private providers to use remuneration</b></p> <p><i>Actors:</i> government, private providers.</p> <p><i>Forum:</i> parliament.</p> <p><i>Conflict:</i> misuse of remuneration.</p> <p><i>Stimuli:</i> reported frauds.</p>	Cost reductions, deterring fraud.	Highly available media reports of frauds, representing all private providers in the industry.
2.	<p><b>The SIA changes its interpretation of the LSS act.</b></p> <p><i>Actors:</i> the SIA, municipalities, courts, functionally impaired people.</p> <p><i>Forum:</i> court system.</p> <p><i>Conflict:</i> interpretation of legislation.</p> <p><i>Stimuli:</i> cost increase for the reform.</p>	Stricter interpretation of legislation, reduced approval of personal assistance hours.	Increasing the costs of personal assistance compared to initial very low cost.
3.	<p><b>Government demands authorization for providers of personal assistance</b></p> <p><i>Actors:</i> government, agencies, private providers.</p> <p><i>Forum:</i> parliament.</p> <p><i>Conflict:</i> quality of the personal assistance.</p> <p><i>Stimuli:</i> lack of professionalism, cost increases.</p>	Reduction of the number of private providers by more than 30 %. Consolidation of the industry, where large firms grew larger still.	Unscrupulous firms eliminated, decreasing the volume of embezzlement and fraud, slowing an unduly cost increase.

In the previous section, the three events in the implementation process of the LSS act were analysed by relating a certain policy action to subsequent

consequences. The consequences are illustrations and not the only consequences possible. It has, however, shown how an action by one actor influences how another actor reacts and how this creates the “dynamic complexity” suggested by Sterman (1994). The feedback loops are sometimes distant and indirect and not necessarily only involving the actor that took action in the first place. These causal complexities may actually aggravate the need for heuristics – simplified explanatory models – when actors need to take action.

There are biases present in the events. Media and initial cost references may have contributed to conclusions being drawn too quickly from vague and fragmented evidence. Gradually, this has formed a view of the LSS Act as a costly reform where private companies deceitfully enrich themselves from the tax payers’ money. Learning has occurred but on a biased interpretation of experiences. Theoretically, there seems to be a potential in moving from this informed suspicion to a better understanding of the mechanisms of learning in policy implementation. The workings of biases and heuristics in human experiencing suggest that in the ACF approach to policy implementation, actor attributes and stimuli attributes are strong candidates for further development and study.

There are signs of bias (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) in the decision-making in all three studied events. Heuristics may be suspect in affecting the actions taken by parliament, government and the SIA agency. The first sign of bias is related to media. “Reports” are referred to explicitly in the public inquiry, acknowledging the importance of what is easily retrieved as grounds for action. It could be that media reports of fraud and embezzlement permeate much of the public actors’ concerns with the continuous implementation of the LSS Act. It would not be hard to think that the media attention both informs decision-makers directly, but also indirectly by influencing public opinion and thus generating expectations from the electorate. Second, the representativeness of the frauds is possible to question. Futile attempts to assess the overall losses from frauds have been made, but the exposure and outrage in combination may create a biased understanding of the actual situation. Third, anchoring is in play. The initial cost estimate of the LSS Act was 1.6 billion SEK. This has most likely worked as an anchor. Nowhere is it discussed how much the previous system cost, and the opportunity cost of the reform is not apparently included in public inquiries or in the media reports.

Still, the fact remains that the annual cost increase exceeds 13 %. It seems necessary to respond to such a development. However, already in the three events presented, an obvious reluctance to change the legislated rights of persons with impairments emerges. Rather, the government, agencies, and municipalities approach the cost issue by incremental changes to the various parts of the system of personal assistance. Thus, instead of reforming the LSS Act, the negotiated implementation of the original reform continues, and the struggle may well be infested by biases.

## Conclusions and discussion

The study offers an authentic empirical representation of policy implementation as a learning process. The analysis supports the ACF learning tenets about the importance of actors, forums, conflicts, and stimuli. It also indicates that inherent human tendencies of biased decision-making deserve to be considered in the development of explanations and understanding of policy implementation.

After 22 years, the LSS Act is still being implemented. The top-down, rational implementation idea does not appear to be applicable to this case. The bottom-up – street-level – perspective also seems to miss the high parliamentary and governmental involvement in the continuous LSS implementation. The Advocacy Coalition Framework resolves the two by studying actors, forums, conflicts, and stimuli in the process of implementation. The events analysed above suggest that there is yet another analytical layer to be considered. The experiences from actions and their consequences must be interpreted and assessed. Economic theory has traditionally taken a rationalistic and normative view on decision-making, but the descriptive validity of such a theory is questioned (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). The study of implementation may benefit from observing the actions taken from a closer perspective, taking into account biases in how experiences form the basis for decision-making. Not only actions need to be studied, but also reactions and the biases these may be succumbed to.

Hupe et al. (2014) discuss the choice of what “dependent variable” to study when concerned with implementation. The instinctive choice would be the stated policy objective. Referring to Winter (2006), Hupe et al. (ibid.) forward the idea of actor performance as a contender. What is done by incumbent policy actors? Choosing this as the dependent variable to be explained still leaves the reasons for the action to be explained. A particular policy actor’s behaviour could never be the ultimate object of analysis in policy implementation studies. It could be a specific sub-study of implementation, but policy actors’ behaviour rather is an intermediate dependent variable, a function of something deeper. This suggests a multi-level analysis, where behaviour is examined in relation to the policy actor itself, and biases and heuristics being a candidate for a dependent variable to be observed and explained.

The study, thus, offers not only an empirical account and theoretical support of the Advocacy Coalition Framework in analysing policy implementation. It also discusses potential research approaches for developing the understanding of policy implementation, as it connects learning to the concepts of biases and heuristics. The study suggests that these concepts be brought to the fore when studying the processes of policy implementation.

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# A Projectified Public Administration

## *How Projects in Swedish Local Governments Become Instruments for Political and Managerial Concerns*

Mats Fred & Patrik Hall

### **Abstract**

Over the last couple of decades an increasing use of temporary organizations has been observed in public administration, a development sometimes referred to as projectification. This article explores the political-administrative rationality of projectification by studying the initiation and implementation of a project funding system regarding social investments in a Swedish municipality. In the article it is argued that projectification is driven by the administrative leadership with the aid of devoted civil servants. Projects are also attractive to politicians because of the temporal, forward-looking character of politics itself, i.e. that the time conception of project management and politics is basically similar. The article shows that the critique against projectification in terms of increasing short-termism is somewhat beside the point, since politicians and top managers rather seem interested to introduce more short-termism in public administration. Projectification, however, does not represent a profound organizational change but rather introduces a new mind-set with potential long-term effects.

### **Introduction**

Over the last couple of decades an increasing use of temporary organizations has been observed in public administration (cf. Andersson 2009; Godenhjelm et al. 2015; Pettigrew et al. 2003). Sahlin-Andersson and Söderholm (2002: 15) argue that tasks are increasingly organized in temporary forms, but also that “many processes are presented and understood as projects”. The increasing use of projects is sometimes linked to the characteristics of the “late modern” age, with features such as contingency, unpredictability and rapid change (Andersson 2009: 189). In order to handle these challenges public organizations address them by new and flexible means, such as short-term projects. The argument from project advocating organizations and project funding systems is that projects will increase innovativeness and deliver sustainable contributions

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to strategic goals (cf. Godenhjelm 2016; Svensson et al. 2013). Projects are also “perceived as a controllable way of avoiding all the classic problems of bureaucracy” (Packendorff & Lindgren 2014: 7) since they are able to deliver both controllability and adventure (Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm 2002). However, the proliferation of short-term projects may also seem paradoxical in an age when long-term policy objectives are emphasized more than ever (cf. Skerratt, 2012).

This article will develop the argument that this seeming paradox of “short-termism” within policy areas in need of sustainable solutions is dependent upon a bureaucratic adaptation to a political and managerial logic. Through the projectification of activities, public administration, rather than being occupied by routinized behavior, makes itself an instrument for strategic purposes and signals clearer than before that it actively performs a political agenda. This shapes a new form of accountability within public administration, where individual public administrators become “responsibilized” (Rose 1999: 214–215) as project managers for a distinct, temporally delimited activity – the project. Through such a form of accountability, long-term objectives are translated into a managerial rationality: the intentions of leadership (political and managerial) are to be promptly taken care of in a clear, orderly and transparent manner. Since the permanent bureaucracy persists, traditional forms of accountability to elected politicians, the citizens and the laws do not vanish but are rather supplemented by a form where the individual public administrator as project leader is held to account to the managerial level, a form of “light” version of the principal-agent model (Broadbent et al. 1996). This theory of projectification within public administration will be explored empirically through an investigation of the implementation of a social investment fund in one municipality within the strongly decentralized political system of Sweden.

Social investment funds are project funding systems initiated within local government as a response to an “investment” perspective on social policy. The very concept of “social investment” seems to derive from a report which the famous welfare system researcher Gøsta Esping-Andersen prepared for the EU Lisbon summit in 2000 (Hansen & Triantafyllou 2011: 201). A social investment perspective implies that social policy should be seen as an investment. By making early investments in people’s lives, public organizations avoid future costs (Nilsson 2014). Social investment has been described as an emerging paradigm for social policy and has spread across the western world the last couple of years (Morel et al. 2012). The European Union is advocating a social investment perspective and endorses it through different initiatives and project funding systems. In Sweden, the social investment approach has generated networks and processes on the national, regional and local levels. In the Swedish setting, these actors and networks have one thing in common: the practical outlet of their work is project related activities. Social investment funds represent a projectification of a wide range of social issues such as homelessness, youth

unemployment and neuropsychiatric rehabilitation. The political interest in this issue is high, and differs considerably – at least in outlook – from the strongly institutionalized way of dealing with social issues in the welfare state of Sweden. It follows that the research aim of this article is explorative: to use a contemporary development in political-administrative relations in local government and the fashion for “projects” in order to advance our understanding of projectification as a phenomenon. The research question is: which are the driving factors behind the increasing projectification in one municipality in Sweden?

The article is organized as follows. First, contemporary research on projectification is briefly presented, followed by the development of a perspective on projectification in politically governed organizations. Second, our case study methodology is described. Third, the generalized project model of the chosen municipality is extensively described, based on the fact that social investment funds are translated as project activities. Fourth, the introduction of social investment funds is described. In the last section follows a concluding discussion where the results of the study are related to the perspective of projectification presented in the next section.

## Projectification

Political science research on the consequences of projectification in the public sector has been surprisingly limited (cf. Andersson 2009; Janowicz-Panjaitan. et al 2009; Jensen et al. 2013; Sjöblom & Godenhjelm 2009; Söderlund 2011). Partly, this is due to the fact that project management has been confined to engineering and business management: “Project management has trickled down from these sectors to public administration gradually and rather silently” (Sjöblom 2009: 166). Research on project activities has traditionally been defined through its focus on single projects as units of analysis, often with an evaluative aim, whereas the general consequences of projectification within the public sector have been neglected (cf. Packendorff & Lindgren 2014).

Projectification – the increasing use and proliferation of project organizations – has been understood as a fashion, something which signals innovation, entrepreneurship, action and determination (cf. Brady & Hodbay 2011), or as something that can simplify or reduce complexity in organizations (Sjöblom 2006), and has been described in terms of programs or project portfolios where projects are bundled into groups of activities aiming to implement or develop a strategic effort (cf. Bergman et al. 2013; Maylor et al. 2006). When first introduced by Christopher Midler in 1995, the concept of projectification was described as a process in which a company transforms parts of its activities to be handled by autonomous project teams, within a restricted time frame and budget. Midler refers to projectification as the process which took place in a series of changes in the structure for organizing new product development

at Renault, as they moved from a classical functional organization to “autonomous and powerful project teams” (Midler 1995: 363). Midler identifies several organizational challenges due to projectification. Perhaps the most significant was the adaptation of the rest of the organization and its supply networks to the new structures. Projectification is, following Midler’s argument, both a transformation of activities into projects and an adaptation process of the environment. The two-folded character of Midler’s definition of projectification creates a potential tension between the projects and the permanent organization.

According to Ibert (2004), the main difference between projects and permanent organizations is temporal. The time conception of the permanent organization is cyclical – phenomena are repeated, recurring time and time again (Burrell 1992) – whereas the project follows a linear time conception leading from a starting-point to termination (Ibert 2004: 1530). These different conceptions have an impact on the organizations in several aspects. The future is framed in terms of strategies and goals in which the present is viewed as a passing phase from the past to the future, while ordinary activities are characterized by repetition and routine where more or less the same activities are repeated every day. Ellström (2009) describes this in terms of different logics where the ordinary activities are colored by a logic pursuing production (efficiency, stability and fast results) while strategies, rhetoric formulations and plans for the future are in line with a logic enforcing ideas of development (reflection, risk-taking and innovation). In a linear time conception organizational outcomes and impacts are projected, already in the planning phase of a project, into the future. This future-oriented perspective, which characterizes contemporary western social life as well as reform politics, has fostered concepts and activities that anticipate conditions that have not yet occurred, but still are able to control the activities of people and legitimize political acts (Koselleck 2004: 160). Thus, in a projectified organization, individual public administrators as project leaders become directly subordinate to the linear, strategic purposes of their (political and/or managerial) peers.

Such a view of projects as instruments to instantly realize the goals of management has been developed by Courpasson (2006). His analysis of project management within the French banking sector and in the field of Human Relations Management shows that projects build new forms of vertical loyalty between managers, project managers and project teams which bypass traditional power structures in the organization (such as formal units) as well as forms of horizontal solidarity. Transformed to the political sector, the leadership which wants fast and short-term action to be implemented in the permanent organization is the political and bureaucratic leadership, while individual public administrators may make an important career step by showing willingness to lead projects which realize political intentions (Courpasson & Clegg 2006). Temporary organizations within the public administration may have the same consequences in terms of power as the ones analyzed by Courpasson

– at least they create a new type of relation between politics and administration where the latter becomes instrumental to short-term political purposes even in sectors where other work practices have prevailed, such as the routinized procedures where individual cases are matched with professional norms and legislation by way of professional discretion within the social sector, what March & Olsen (1989) famously call “norms of appropriateness”. If this is the case, projects are not only task- and goal-oriented, but also (perhaps even primarily) politically and strategically oriented. Hence the bureaucracy becomes instrumental for political and managerial purposes.

By instrumentalization for political and managerial purposes, we mean, first, a form of rationality where public administration does not work according to organizational routines or institutional norms within specific sectors such as social work or health care, but rather enacts and becomes accountable to the contemporary policies developed by politicians and top managers. Of course, political direction has always guided public administration, but what is new is the linear and short-term activation of the bureaucracy in strategic and delimited projects. Second, instrumentalization in the form of projects also means a new kind of visibility, where different work tasks are defined, connected to specific people (project managers and teams) with delimited tasks, mandates and time frames, and made transparent. Third, this implies a business-like, top-down intervention in ordinary work where potential project managers and project teams prioritize work for their peers over professional discretion. Fourth, and connected, the very concept of “instruments” relates to a managerial rationality where the organization is not a historical or even “eternal” entity (the “permanent” organization) but is destabilized and made into a temporal tool for the goals of management (Courpasson & Clegg 2006). In a political setting, projectification means an adaptation to the political time frame. If such an interpretation of projectification is correct, the critique against increasing “short-termism” and problems with implementation in the “permanent” organization is somewhat beside the point, since the goal of project management actually is short-termism. This political interpretation of projectification will here be tested against the case of projectification in a Swedish municipality.

## Methodology

The methodology used for this article is an illustrative case study with an ethnographically inspired approach (Ybema et al. 2009). The initiation and implementation of social investment funds in a Swedish municipality is a good case for the study of processes of projectification. It is an initiative inspired by the EU social fund system which advocates and enables project activities on sub-national levels. However, unlike the EU funds, the social investment funds are owned and organized by the municipality.

Our case is Eslöv, a medium-sized municipality located in the southern part of Sweden with approximately 32 000 inhabitants and an organization with about 2400 full time employees. It is an average Swedish municipality when it comes to size, population, age, median income, unemployment rates and proportion of entrepreneurs (ekonomifakta.se 14 dec. 2015). Eslöv is one of the front runners of social investments in Sweden. In 2014 they were appointed “Public Health Municipality of the year” by the Swedish Association for Public Health Work (Eslöv.se dec. 2015) which was due to their work with social investments in the area of public health. Furthermore, its public administration works with a general project model (more below). The investment funds consists of fairly small projects (in terms of money and people involved) where people work part time on the projects and part time at a department somewhere in the organization. This leaves good room for project knowledge and experiences to travel beyond the boundaries of the projects, and it is also a projectification process that the political and administrative leadership may influence more directly.

One important feature of the case study is that it often focuses on processes – events over time. Another characteristic of the case study is the use of different empirical material (Yin 2008). To capture the time aspects of a process in a case study design, a retrospective perspective is often used where a process is traced back in time (Bennett & George 2001). This approach often leads to a case where processes are subsumed in chronological phases reinforcing the notion of decisions as a rational process (Johansson 2011). As a response to that critique, one can follow processes as they unfold or occur in real-time. Johansson (2011) argues that real-time studies are required to study interaction and interaction patterns between actors, something which is of great importance for our understanding of complex processes. One way to study ongoing processes is to interview people continuously and parallel to the process (ibid., cf. Sahlin-Andersson, 1989). In this study we have interviewed 33 respondents starting with the first interview in late 2012 and ending in early 2016.

Table 1.

Empirical material	Quantity
<i>Interviews</i>	
Politician (chairwoman of Eslöv City Council)	1
Civil servants in Eslöv	17
Civil servants in other municipalities	6
Civil servants at regional or national level	8
Consultant	1
<i>Field notes from:</i>	
observations of meetings	
fieldtrip to Norrköping	
two conferences (one national, one regional)	

Some of the interviewees<sup>1</sup> have been interviewed several times during this period and we have met the civil servants in Eslöv continuously; in meetings, seminars and conferences. Each interview lasted 30–120 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards to be analyzed. The purpose of the interviews was to understand how people at different levels narrate about and make sense of their work (Czarniawska 1998) with projects and social investments. In addition to interviews we conducted a series of observations of meetings and conferences, and also studied what Silverman (2013) calls “naturally occurring data”; audit reports, web pages, power point slides, meeting minutes and policy documents concerning social investment and project organization. With this multitude of empirical material we have analyzed both the employees’ own interpretations of their work, our observations of their practices in relations to other organizations and official statements from the organizations. These documents and the transcribed interviews and filed notes have been read thoroughly with the purpose of identifying possible driving factors of projectification from how the actors themselves create a sense of order and social structure (Gubrium & Holstein 1997:44–45) of the project organization and the introduction of social investments. This means that the analysis is built on the actors’ own narrations of why they work with projects and social investments.

## Swedish public health work and social investment funds

The strategic aim of social investment funds should be to affect the entire municipal organization as a whole regarding organization, governance, resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation (Nilsson 2014: 216).

Social investment is a new and growing phenomenon in Swedish local government and because of this also relatively unexplored scientifically. Sweden, as all Nordic countries do, has a welfare state that is universal and tax-financed. It aims to provide a high level of quality service and benefits for all citizens, independent of their status in the labor market (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002). With social investment, Morel, Palier and Palme (2012) argue that we now are witnessing an “emerging paradigm” possibly replacing, or at least adding to, earlier paradigms – Keynesian and neoliberal social policies. Sweden is described as a country that spends more money than most European countries, outnumbered only

1 The person responsible for the social investment work, the person responsible for the project model, a project manager responsible for several projects and the senior advisor at Forum for Social Innovation has been interviewed at more than one occasion.

by Denmark, on “investment oriented social expenditure” such as childcare, education and rehabilitation (Ferrera 2013) and actors and agencies are developing and advocating social investment on national, regional and local levels.

The quotation above comes from Ingvar Nilsson, Swedish professor in political economy and consultant, who over the last couple of years has trained over 50 municipalities in social investments and socio-economic calculations and has been traveling more or less the entire country to hold lectures and seminars. He is accordingly to be seen as a dominant policy entrepreneur for the Swedish contextualization of the concept. In brief, a social investment perspective implies that social policy should be seen as an investment and public organizations ought to make early investments in people’s lives to avoid future costs (Nilsson 2014). The first Swedish municipal social investment fund, inspired by Ingvar Nilsson, was initiated in 2007 in the city of Nynäshamn. In 2015 about 100 (out of 290) municipalities have (and about 60 is considering starting) one or more social investment funds, ranging from SEK 2 million to SEK 400 million (Balkfors 2015). Whether the municipality is governed by a right-wing or a left-wing majority appears to make no difference when it comes to if they have an investment fund or not (Hultkrantz 2015). According to the senior advisor at Forum for Social Innovation,<sup>2</sup> Sweden is unique when it comes to initiating social investment funds on the sub-national level (interview). No other country has that amount of social investment activity within local government.

However, the social investment work in Swedish local government is embedded in a multi-level context. If we zoom out from our particular case (Eslöv), in the immediately surrounding area we find a “thematic group” consisting of representatives from six municipalities, the Skåne Association of Local Authorities and Region Skåne, which organizes conferences and goes on field trips. Region Skåne has a social investment fund for project activities and is responsible for a project aiming to develop a municipal model for social investment. This project consists of four municipalities in Skåne and is run by Ingvar Nilsson. On the national level, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) is also developing and advocating the concept of social investment through projects, publications, networks and conferences – conferences at which representatives from Eslöv attend and present. From 2008 until 2015 three agreements regarding social investment have been met between SALAR and the Government (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs) resulting in three projects following each other and growing each time in terms of scope and resources. And finally, on the European level, the EU is advocating a social investment perspective through several initiatives such as a social investment package and a project funding system (Morel et al. 2012).

2 A collaboration between academia, industry, government and non-profit organizations who promote the idea of social innovation and social entrepreneurship.



From this short overview, it may be concluded that social investment funds are initiated within local government organizations as a response to a social investment perspective on social policy which is developed by a multitude of governing actors on different levels. Eslöv is but a small part of this structure of implementing an idea whose time seems to have come (Kingdon 2003). The social investment perspective promotes a more active, strategic orientation from leadership – on the municipal level both politicians and top managers. The cyclical time of professional discretion within the limits of the law is to be supplemented with a linear perspective of making strategic and delimited investments which are to be implemented by the professions within public administration. In the following, we describe and analyze this process in Eslöv from the introduction of a generalized “project model” to the arrival of the social investment perspective.

## A project model in Eslöv

Project activities have expanded rapidly over the last couple of years in Eslöv:

Suddenly it all exploded – everybody started to talk about projects, even about stuff that were not projects, and that was great!  
(interview with city manager).

Eslöv has been working with projects for a longer time in the more technical departments of the organization, i.e. those concerned with infrastructure, buildings, traffic and IT (Ibid.). But even “softer” policy areas such as health, social care, work and livelihood have increasingly been subject to temporary organizational forms, not least due to EU funding where temporary organization is mandatory. But according to the city manager, the head of development as well as the development strategist, the strong focus upon projects in later years has also been boosted by the development of a project model. This project model is said to be a response to a vague organization with ambiguous decision making procedures:

Before there was a committed civil servant carrying on by himself, or a group of civil servants driven by certain questions. We had one group engaged in youth policy and one about gender equality, for instance, and these groups often had no mandate and vague, if any, official assignments. They initiated a lot of work but when presenting the results of their work to the executive managers the response was like: “this is not what we want, we never asked for this” and so on, and all this created a lot of frustration and negativity in the organization (interview with development strategist).

The head of development gives a similar account of the history behind what later on became the project model, but adds that the “decision-making procedures in the organization were ambiguous” and that this was particularly evident when it came to projects. Some sort of guidelines or routines for how to deal with those issues were requested, she argues (interview). The development strategist talks about the project model as a solution to a fragmented organization in need of a significant re-organization, but an organization without the energy and resources to implement it:

Organizationally, we are heading towards more hierarchy. This very flat organization does not function anymore. The society has changed and with that the demand for the opposite has aroused. You want more hierarchy but at the same time to have influence on working procedures and the capacity to do something, and I think that the particular structure from the project has exactly this: clearly defined project owners, project leaders who lead distinct groups with defined tasks. [The project model] should act as a bridge between these two systems. The project model is implemented in the old organization, because you do not want to change the organization, since organizational change is costly (interview with development strategist).

The conditions for introducing the project model as an organizational tool was rife since large parts of the employees have attended courses in project management in recent years. In these courses, civil servants brought assignments from their daily work to develop. The consultant responsible for the course illustrates how ordinary activities are re-labeled as project activities:

People in these [public] organizations are doing lots of work in the project form but they don't always label it as projects for some reason, but they are projects, and they [the organizations] benefit immensely from the project form. So we bring that with us [into the project management courses], we take their day-to-day work and tweak it a little bit to fit the project format, and that also gives them some tools to help them understand how everything holds together (interview with consultant).

The project management courses have left the municipality with a highly skilled staff when it comes to project management. All courses and programs have resulted in an organization where “there are even more project managers than there are projects” (Ibid.):

We received such good response from the employees that they started to put pressure upward in the organization, on the

executive managers asking them questions like how much resources do I have for this project? When exactly do you need it to be finished? Why? etc. and these are all good questions that the project format help you to ask (Ibid.).

The development strategist and the head of development arranged a course for executive managers “concerning the ordering of a project and the role of project owners” (interview), and even the politicians have received an introduction in project management and the project model. Thus, all organizational levels have been in some contact with project management ideas. As shown here, a more linear model of top-down implementation is not only demanded by managers but also by the employees. However, the “permanent” organization is not changed; rather, an alternative model of implementation is introduced in the already existing organization, but the new model is said to bring the managerial level and the ordinary work tasks in closer contact to each other.

### **THE PROJECT MODEL BECOMES AN ORGANIZATIONAL POLICY**

The project model was developed together with the consultant. The model has the status of a policy for the entire organization – and is also a model that all social investment projects are to use. People receiving funds from the investment fund also have to undertake a project management course in which the model is introduced. The project model is described in a 23-page long document called *Guidelines for projects*. At the first page it is stated that the project model is not exclusively a tool for projects – “It is always useful” (Guidelines 2014: 5):

...the daily work should also have clearly defined objectives, a plan for the use of time and resources, be documented and, to some extent, be limited in time and scope (*Guidelines 2014: 4*).

The model consists of four phases: idea, preparation, realization and evaluation. Each phase in the model has document templates attached, prescribing what to take into consideration and what to achieve at each step – project proposal, project plan, status reports, final report etc. There is also a gatekeeper at each step who is supposed to be a person with authority to make decisions whether or not to continue with the project. The preparation phase, in which a project plan is produced, is given most attention in the *Guidelines*: “the preparation phase is the most important phase since all planning for the project is done here” (*Guidelines 2014: 6*). The reliance on planning as a means to reach organizational goals, or as a tool for correcting organizational errors, is a recurrent theme in our interviews. The city manager describes how implementation failures can be solved through better and more planning (interview). The development strategist argues that “there is a need to invest more time in

planning, to sit down from the beginning, and create a plan, what would we like to achieve?" (interview). There is also pressure from departments within the municipality to work more according to plan and through the specific project model:

...if you compare the softer policy areas, especially education, where you can initiate a huge project without a visual plan, no target scenario and no procedures on how to go about it, with construction and real estate where you have plans stating exactly how things will turn out with a margin error of perhaps 3 mm, one becomes absolutely appalled. They know nothing about how to run a project in the soft sector (interview with manager, Service department).

The "harder" policy areas (infrastructure, buildings, traffic and IT) have a long tradition when it comes to organizing work in project form, and people responsible for the project model, including the city manager, have a background in these departments. Eslöv's leading politician confirms that the technical-oriented departments of the organization have a long tradition of project work, but acknowledge the diffusion of the project format to other parts of the organization and embraces the clarity it brings:

They [the technical departments] work a lot with projects /.../ There is orderliness, they know exactly what to do and they have been to us [the City Council] and reported and it is a true joy listening to them [...] Our manager of the industry department also runs a couple of projects according to the model, and she reports to us what she is doing [...] Through the work of the model, her work can be presented in an orderly fashion; it then becomes easy for her to communicate with us, what she is doing and where she is in the plan (interview with chairwoman of the City Council).

A common language, between different departments and professionals or between civil servants and politicians, is referred to as one major benefit coming from the project model:

...it has become easier to agree upon what to do and also easier to understand each other across borders. The benefit of our project model is that you have to think before you act, everyone is on board and everyone speaks the same language (civil servant).

The development strategist responsible for the project model argues that the perhaps most significant feature of the model is this common language and exemplifies with two specific concepts in the model: "impact objectives" and "deliverables", concepts which he and the head of development have introduced

to the politicians through a project management course, and he argues that politicians and civil servants ought to use the same language regarding what should be done and when (interview).

Besides the four phases, the *Guidelines* also consists of information on how to handle budgets, subprojects, how to conduct a stakeholder analysis, instructions for what it means to be a project manager, a project owner or part of a project team. There is also a specific section on communication:

...a project that nobody knows exist is in some sense a failed project [... and] there is a great value, from a professional development perspective, to disseminate the project. We also have a responsibility towards the citizens to show how taxes are being used (*Guidelines* 2014:15).

It is important, it is argued, to communicate projects, to make them visible, both within the organization, to other civil servants and politicians, and also to the citizens.

The project model appears to be well known, at least in the central parts of the organization: among politicians, and civil servants at management level, as well as among civil servants working with cross-sectorial questions and/or organizational development. One civil servant describes how regular activities around the organization now are organized as if they were projects with a clearly defined project plan, project leaders, project owners and tasks with clearly defined goals (interview). Yet another example of the dissemination of the model and the use of a specific language is given by the city manager (interview) who describes the department working with exploitation of land and how they started to view their work in a project perspective – with the help of the project model – which had them re-formulate their function as a department and by that also changing their practices and presentations of their work.

Furthermore, the project model and its *Guidelines* function as an unofficial policy in the municipality. It is the head of development and the development strategist who pushed for a political decision regarding the model. The idea has been to “ratify the project model as Eslöv’s model and to ensure that no one starts a project without it” (interview with Head of development). The city manager did not initially see the project model as a concern for the political leadership – “how we organize ourselves around this [implementing political goals] is not a political issue to me” (interview). The head of development, however, argues that “the model could function as a tool of governance in relations to other departments. If we can refer to the model as an official policy it also becomes a great tool of power” (interview). Even if there is no formal, political decision, the interviewees claim that this is hardly necessary due to the wide use of the model. One of the managers claims that “there is an unspoken agreement to use the model” (interview).

There are two interesting traits in Eslöv's work with project management. First, the generalized project model is conceived as bringing order, clarity (not least linguistic), rationality and a more structured hierarchy into an organization which is portrayed as partly lacking these features earlier. The more innovative and flexible traits often related to projects is not to be found in the stated motivations for organizing Eslöv in the project form. To the contrary, it is a hierarchical order which is envisaged. The daily work becomes "strategized" as an activity which fulfils temporal goals set on the political or managerial level, although strongly demanded, as it seems, by the civil servants further down in the organization. Second, Eslöv's project organization is driven by the higher levels of the public administration, but political approval is still seen as important. When politics is involved, the project model becomes something more than implementation and the structured handling of administrative affairs. The relation between politics and public administration will now be described in the case of social investment funds.

## **The project model in action – Social investments**

Since June 2012, Eslöv has a program for social sustainable development under which its budget for social investments resides. The idea with the budget is to cover initial costs for organizational development, to increase cross-sectorial collaboration and to make use of good ideas in the organization (Eslöv welfare policy 2013). In order to receive funds from the social investment budget the initiative has to be a collaborative endeavor between at least two departments, it has to be innovative, engage in one of the three prioritized objectives stated in the welfare policy and it has to lead to long-term effects and be built upon scientific- or practice-based reliable evidence (Ibid.). The investment budget was initiated in the beginning of 2013 and has SEK two million for each year designated for project activities. Anyone employed in the municipality, after approval from the closest executive, may apply for funding from the investment budget. A committee, consisting of administrative managers, reviews and prepares the applications for a final decision taken by the City Council.

When asked why Eslöv introduced a social investment budget in the first place, each interviewee referred to Ingvar Nilsson (see above):

We were well over 200 people from the organization listening to him and it was almost like a revival meeting. He is so sensible, so extremely wise, so when walking out of there, we were many who said, we really need to get this going here (interview with chairwoman of the City Council).

About the same time as Ingvar Nilsson visited Eslöv (2012), the managers from all departments in the organization visited a hearing where the financial

manager from the City of Norrköping talked about the initiation of their social investment fund. During this period Eslöv also hired a new public health strategist. The assemblage of Ingvar Nilsson, inspiration from Norrköping, and the new public health strategist appears all to have been important aspects of the initiation of the social investment budget.

We all had experiences of working with overarching “plans of action” prescribed from above and did not want that kind of top-down perspective. The public health specialists are out in the organization at different departments. There is where we find the primary knowledge. So we were all in agreement about a bottom-up perspective. Then it all fell into place and seemed natural – our bottom-up perspective, the seminar by Ingvar Nilsson and the inspiration from Norrköping. The idea with a social investment fund seemed so obvious, when the idea came from so many different sources at the same time. So we gave the politics a proposal to connect a social investment fund to the program for social sustainability (interview with public health strategist).

A decision was taken by the City Council in November 2012 to initiate a social investment budget (KS.2013.0245).

### **PROJECTIFICATION OF SOCIAL INVESTMENT FUNDS**

A lot of emphasis has been placed upon economic issues and administrative technicalities when it comes to setting up the social investment budget. The financial manager argued that a municipality cannot hold a fund due to municipal accounting regulations (interview). For this reason the fund, in Eslöv called social investment budget, is a regular post in the ordinary budget, financed as other activities through tax revenues and general government grants (Ibid.). The difference however, is that the funding is designated to project activities. All social investments in Eslöv are materialized as temporary project activities. The projects are quite different in character but have at least some form of connection to public health. Several of the projects originate from older projects, from ideas which have been “floating around” in the organization for a while, or are inspired by projects in other municipalities.

The direct connection to the regular budget and the temporary approach may contain risks of not being prioritized the next year. Hence it becomes important to show results. One of the civil servants explains this conundrum and its effects:

If there is no immediate result we might get canceled. It is hard to work long-term within the ordinary budget and even harder to do that in the form of a project, when it is even more related to specific funds in a one-time initiative (interview).

These discussions on “immediate results” have pushed ideas of evaluation to the front in Eslöv. Ingvar Nilsson is arguing for socio-economic calculation and evaluation as the way of showing good results but: “how do you measure the socio-economic benefits of young people eating more breakfast or getting a better access to public services” (civil servant), as two of Eslöv’s social investment projects are aiming to do? SALAR tries to enforce ideas of Randomized Control Trials (RCT) to deliver evidence of good practice, but municipalities in general and Eslöv in particular seem to lack resources as well as the knowhow to enact RCTs (Balkfors 2014). The discussions around evaluation in our interviews, as well as at conferences, appear to deal mostly with matters of how to show result in order to avoid cancellation rather than how to learn from or change practices.

I feel some kind of pressure to measure effects because everyone is talking so much about it, and I’m wondering for how long we can talk about “learning” and “the development of our organization” to the politicians. Perhaps they won’t prioritize our social investment budget, and perhaps they think it doesn’t lead to anything and that they then could use the money for something else instead (interview with public health strategist).

The importance of showing results is also put forward by the city manager who describes it in terms of visibility. However, she argues that Eslöv’s work on public health has been more visible in relation to both politicians and the citizens since the social investment budget was implemented in the municipality. Thus, due to the investment budget, she claims that public health issues are more prioritized now than before (interview).

The work with the social investment fund in Eslöv is strongly connected to the overall project model since the fund is organized as projects. It is even reasonable to claim that the fund is co-opted into a strategic, linear and temporal mode of dealing with social problems. Hence the fund is also expected to install order and calculability into the “softer” areas of the public administration, in particular the area of public health. This makes “social investments” subject to the same kind of evaluative discussion as other project activities (such as EU-funded ones), but this time in a stronger version since it is supposed – according to Ingvar Nilsson’s model – that results in terms of costs and benefits are possible to calculate. However, as seen in the quotation from the city manager, the problem with calculating measurable results seems subordinated to the success in making public health issues more visible to politicians as well as citizens in the municipality. This being said, the social investment fund has hardly been revolutionary – the project activities are linked to other types of project activities which Eslöv was already carrying out.



## Concluding discussion

It seems that projectification in Eslöv, to a large degree, is driven by the administrative leadership with the aid of devoted civil servants within the organization. The goals of projectification relates strongly to the linear time conception discussed earlier in the article. Rather than doing the same thing over and over again, it is important for the leadership to rationalize why an activity is done, what goal it has and when it should end. The project model emerges almost as a form of organizational ideology which unites the organization in spite of the fact that no formal re-organizations have been made (Fred 2015). By doing this, the managerial level comes closer to the performing level, providing a picture of an organization which is not based on repetitive routines and administrative rules of thumb, but rather on the fulfillment of delimited managerial and political strategies; a kind of “strategization” of the municipal organization. However, as stated, this development is not only directed top-down; enthusiastic – perhaps aspiring? – civil servants act as entrepreneurs for the project model on “the floor”. Organizational reforms are often related to resistance of various kinds, but in this case we find an opposite trait, where many civil servants serve as translators of a model according to which they may be governed more strategically and tied more directly to political priorities (Lundholm et al. 2012).

In theory, the project model means a reinforcement of hierarchical order in a sector with a strong tradition of decentralization, for instance in the form of professional discretion. This order is effectuated by the model itself where three phenomena are worthy of notice: accountability, transparency and the relatedness of the time conception within project management and politics. First, projectification implies that new relations of accountability are introduced between managers, project managers and project teams. Due to the limited duration of projects, the personnel become more dependent upon the management level (and, ultimately, the political will to decide on new investments). On the other hand, the personnel demands to be “responsibilized” in this manner and seems to be eagerly striving for a more thorough implementation of the project model. Second, activities become transparent in new ways, which is particularly clear in the case of the funds. As witnessed in a quotation from the chairwoman of the City Council, politicians appreciate the communicative aspects of narrating bureaucratic activities in the coherent and transparent fashion of the project model. Interestingly, she seems to hope that the “softer” parts of the administration will learn from the orderly habits of the “hard” parts. An element of transparency is also the demand for a “common language” which may unite the organizations.

Third, political commitment for projectification generally, and social investment funds specifically, may be important in the long-term. The municipality partly breaks with a model of implementation where the politicians set the goals and the public administration may choose the means of implementation

themselves. Even if the administrative leadership is to be seen as the driving force behind projectification, political support seems important for the organizational restructuring which projectification implies. Social investment funds are a special case where political interest is high, not only in Eslöv (Balkfors 2015; Hultkrantz 2015). The funds imply a new kind of cross-sectorial thinking which seems to be more attractive to the political level than the “old” organization. Furthermore, as Kingdon (2003: 79) notes, projects are attractive to politicians because of the temporal, forward-looking character of politics itself, i.e. that the time conception of project management and politics itself is basically similar. Launching a new, fresh project is always more interesting than evaluating old ones, since politics (like project management) is future-oriented. However, in practice, the concrete changes should not be exaggerated. The social investment fund probably still has a limited effect and project budgets are small compared to the ordinary ones. Projectification does not represent a profound change but rather introduces a new mindset with potential long-term effects which are too early to judge.

This article has shown that the critique against projectification in terms of increasing short-termism is somewhat beside the point, since politicians and top managers rather seem interested in introducing more short-termism in public administration. A reason for this, which was developed in the theory section, is the political as well as managerial interest in using (parts of) the public administration as an instrument to instantly realize strategic orientations. In a limited way it is possible to speak of a politicization of public administration, not in the form of ideology, but rather in making bureaucrats and their activities visible as fulfillers of political projects. This may be a reason behind the popularity of projectification among both politicians and top managers, despite the wide-spread criticism against the phenomenon. Even if the importance of individual projects – such as social investments – definitely should not be exaggerated, this new way of conceiving the public administration may have important effects for “permanent organizations” in the long run.

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## Jubileumsessä. Fahlbeckska stiftelsen 100 år

Hösten 2018 fyller Fahlbeckska stiftelsen, huvudman för *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift*, 100 år. Detta vill vi uppmärksamma genom en serie jubileumsessäer, som fritt låter sig inspireras av innehållet i det kärnfulla och bitvis ödesmättade gåvobrev som Pontus Fahlbeck, tidskriftens dåvarande redaktör, utformade i slutet av första världskriget. Förutom de obligatoriska instruktionerna om skötsel, organisation och ekonomi och det angelägna i att slå vakt om tidskriftens politiska oväld och vetenskapliga självständighet, anger Fahlbeck i urkunden en riktning för den framtida publicistiken. Han skriver:

Blott i en punkt skall jag tillåta mig att angiva ett önskemål för det vetenskapliga arbete, som jag hoppas genom denna stiftelse främja, utom och jämte de uppgifter, som ovan angivits. Det gäller det stora ämnet om folks, staters och kultururs förfall och undergång.

Och fortsätter:

Den fruktansvärda kris, som den civiliserade världen genomgår, kan väcka farhågor för, att de folk, som närmas därav hemsökas, stå inför ett sådant öde. Men manspillan och annan ödeläggelse i krig ersätts snart inom ett livskraftigt folk, blott icke inre sjukdom kommer till. Ty mestadels när folk och kulturer gingo under, var orsaken därtill jämte yttre våld inre brister, sjukdomar i känsla och vilja. Sådana ha redan yppat sig i krigets spår ej blott uti de krigförande länderna utan i alla. Rättsbegreppen hålla på att fördunklas, varigenom samhällsordningen hotas i hela Europa, därest kriget skulle länge fortgå. Men värre än dessa kanske övergående sjukdomstecken äro andra, som redan länge vittnat om folklig ohälsa. Sådana hos de flesta kulturfolk framträdande tecken äro en materialistisk livssyn med kapitalism ovan till i samhället och socialism nedan, samt det s.k. tvåbarnssystemet. Härtill märkas för Sverige särskilt den ringa äktenskapligheten och det stora antalet utom äktenskapet födda barn; bristande nationalkänsla med därav följande stor emigration och försvarsolust; vidare statskänslans och statslydnadens undanträngande i det allmänna livet och rättskänslans i

det enskilda av partikänsla och partilydnad. Det är många och svåra sjukdomstecken, som kunna konstateras inom Sveriges folk och hos alla folk i närvarande tid. Statsvetenskaperna kunna ingen högre uppgift ha än att häremot söka bot, om bot står att vinna. Men förutsättningen för det är i första hand att känna det onda, icke blott i det enskilda fallet utan i allmänhet. Att studera denna mäktiga företeelse, staters förfall och undergång genom tiderna, dess förebud och förlopp, från Grekland och Rom och ännu äldre kulturer till våra dagars folk och stater, samt upplysa och varna – det är den uppgift, som jag såsom mitt vetenskapliga testamente lägger denna stiftelse särskilt på hjärtat.

Frågan är om *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* har lyckats leva upp till förväntningarna på denna punkt. Mycket talar för att inriktningen på tidskriften under årens lopp varit en annan än den Fahlbeck efterlyste. Oberoende av hur man ser på saken, är det i dessa jubileumstider angeläget att återigen försöka förvalta arvet från gåvobrevet och med förnyad kraft lyfta fram den breda, episka tematiken i citaten ovan. Detta gör vi genom att bjuda in skribenter från vårt eget ämne, men även skribenter från näraliggande ämnen som historia, ekonomisk historia och antikens kultur och samhällsliv, liksom nationalekonomi, statistik och juridik. Dessa olika discipliner ingår inte bara i Fahlbeckska kollegiet, utan utgör också, tillsammans med statsvetenskapen, kärnan i det som kallas vetenskaperna om staten.

Vi väljer medvetet essäformatet eftersom det lämpar sig väl för breda, principiella synteser och analyser. Vi välkomnar inte bara enskilda bidrag utan också kommentarer och kritiska reflektioner med anledning av tidigare publicerade texter.

Den sjätte essän i serien är skriven av historikern Peter Fibiger Bang och har titeln "Imperium og Republik, Verden, Europa og Rom – et essay om moderne statsdannelse i et oldtidsperspektiv".





# Imperium og Republik, Verden, Europa og Rom

*Et essay om moderne statsdannelse i et  
oldtidsperspektiv*

Peter Fibiger Bang

Og hvis der efter det romerske verdensrige ikke er fulgt et nyt imperium, som har kunnet vare ved og hvor verden har kunnet holde sin kraft, styrke og fremragende egenskaber forenet, så ser man ikke desto mindre, at disse kvaliteter nu er fordelt blandt mange nationer, hvor man lever stærkt og forbilledligt.<sup>1</sup>

Europæisk historie er formet i et paradoks. Europa ses som regel som arvtager til antikkens Rom og dog er det netop fraværet af et nyt samlende imperium, der mere end noget andet karakteriserer det europæiske. Ingen magt havde siden antikken formået at etablere et nyt stabilt herredømme over kontinentet, som Machiavelli bemærkede det i 1500-tallet. Europas stater og politik har udviklet sig i en spænding mellem kontinentalt imperium og frie stater.<sup>2</sup> I århundreder har man diskuteret og analyseret samtidens politik i lyset af den romerske erfaring. Nationalstaten har for længst vist sig at være utilstrækkelig som eneste ramme for det moderne liv. Ikke desto mindre har transnationale organisationer haft svært ved at tage over. Europa befinder sig lige nu i en dyb krise udløst af en konflikt mellem bestræbelserne på politisk union og nationale statsdannelse. Hvordan kan en mulig fremtid se ud, hvordan kombinere enhed med mangfoldighed? I denne situation af desorientering og rådvildhed er det tid til at tage et skridt tilbage fra øjeblikkets begivenheder, vinde afstand og se tingene i et større og dybere perspektiv. Nogle vil måske mene, at det kan opnås ved en mere rigorøs teoretisk refleksion. Men problemet er, at den øjeblikkelige krise netop afspejler de forhåndenværende teoridannelsers

- 1 Machiavelli, *Discorsi II*, proemio (oversat fra italiensk af denne signatur efter Machiavelli 2000: 133. Begrebet er naturligvis *virtú* som her gengives med "kraft, styrke og fremragende egenskaber"). Tak til Jacob Tullberg og Uffe Østergaard som begge generøst læste og kommenterede på en første udgave af dette essay, til Anne Marie Leander Touati for at opfordre mig til at skrive det og til Magnus Jerneck for at sørge for at det også skete.
- 2 Bang 2005b giver i kapitlet "Europa og klassikken" en stor syntese over det spændingsfyldte forhold i europæisk kultur- og idehistorie mellem antik og Europæisk nutid.

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begrænsning. Der er ingen vej uden om fornyet historisk overvejelse, med andre ord det er i komparationen og den historiske sociologi vi må finde nye pejlemærker for analysen af statsdannelsesprocessen.

Men hvis det er selve grundlaget, der skal genovervejes, hvad er da mere nærliggende end at genoptage dialogen med den romerske fortid? Gennem den sidste generation har en række antikhistorikere søgt at genlæse den romerske erfaring i lyset af den historiske sociologi og nuancere dens modeller, hvis horisont normalt har været præget af den europæiske udvikling over de sidste 1000 år.<sup>3</sup> Nu, mere end nogen sinde, er det tid til at overveje, hvad resultaterne af den øvelse kan bidrage til forståelsen af Europa og den øjeblikkelig politiske krise, hvilke implikationer rummer de for vores analyse af det europæiske? Hvordan ser da den nuværende europæiske politiske situation ud i perspektivet fra den romerske statsdannelsesproces, det vil være spørgsmålet for dette essay. Republik og imperium/frihed og fred, hegemoniets stabilitet og civilisation, her er de romerske temaer for de to næstfølgende sektioner inden Europa i den sidste del analyseres som et udtryk for kosmopolitisk civilisationsdannelse og nationale republikker. Men udgangspunktet må, som altid og allerede antydnet, være Machiavelli, når emnet er statens ræson og den romerske erfaring.

## Rom: republik og imperium, frihed og fred

Hvis det nemlig ikke var lykkedes at etablere et nyt blivende imperium, så kunne Machiavelli allerede i 1500-tallet konstatere, at der i stedet var opstået en række selvstændige stater og nationer. Hver især havde de den fornødne styrke til at stå alene. Dog ikke i hans samtids eget Italien. For Machiavelli blev svaret på den misère at vende sig mod studiet af fortidens romerske republik. Her kunne de italienske stater hente inspiration og lære at skabe politiske institutioner, som skulle gøre dem tilstrækkeligt stærke til, at de kunne stå sig i konkurrencen mod de omgivende stormagter. I sine *Discorsi* eller *Refleksioner* analyserede han sin samtids politiske udfordringer på baggrund af Titus Livius' store værk *Ab Urbe Condita*, altså fra byens, dvs. Roms grundlæggelse. Det enorme historieværk blev skrevet under Augustus (63 f. Kr.–14 e. Kr.), grundlæggeren af det romerske kejserdømme, men er berømt for sine fortællinger om det tidlige Rom, lang tid inden imperiet voksede sig rigtigt stort. Det var på baggrund af disse fortællinger om den romerske stats tilblivelse og mange institutionelle reformer og tilpasninger, at Machiavelli udstak direktiver for sin tids politik og i samme ombæring udlagde et kraftfuldt republikansk spor, som

3 Bang & Scheidel 2013 giver et aktuelt overblik over disse bestræbelser. En række centrale værker, e.g.: Hopkins 1978; Finley 1983; Flaig 1992; Schiavone 2000; Eich 2005; Morris 2009 og Monson & Scheidel 2015.

løber op gennem vestens og modernitetens idéhistorie.<sup>4</sup> Republikken er blevet den moderne politiske form, simpelthen. Bølge efter bølge af afkolonisering er skyllet hen over kloden siden 1700-tallet og har gjort den til nutidens globale norm.

Men samtidig med at det republikanske program om at sikre frie og uafhængige stater gennem indre opbygning af stadig stærkere institutioner har gået sin sejrsgang gennem verden, så er dets begrænsninger blevet stadig tydeligere. Som universel forklaringsnøgle til nutidens og fortidens statsmagt er det utilstrækkeligt, det kan ikke stå alene. Den vestlige statsdannelsesproces lader sig bedst opsummere i Charles Tilly's berømte diktum "war made the state and the state made war". Den flerhed af stater, som Machiavelli iagttog, blev låst fast i en nådesløs militær konkurrence og våbenkapløb. For at overleve var staterne tvunget til generation på generation at opbygge og forøge deres indre organisatoriske kapacitet. Det var nødvendigt for at kunne mobilisere de stadig mere opskruede ressourcer, som evnen til fortsat at kunne stå sig i krigsfordrede. Efterhånden var man nødt til at mobilisere endog den brede befolkning til krigsindsatsen.<sup>5</sup> Omdannelsen af bønder til soldater og borgere var blevet foregrebet af de antikke bystater eller republikker. I de mest succesrige havde befolkningsflertallet af bønder formået at frigøre sig fra de aristokratiske jordbesiddere og blevet forfremmet til fuldgældige borgere. Dermed stod de til rådighed for bystatens hær. De antikke bystater havde ofte været i stand til militær mobilisering af meget store dele af deres borgerbefolkninger. Deres sprog om patriotisk at kæmpe for folket og borgerfællesskabet talte derfor direkte til de senere europæiske statsbyggeres behov.<sup>6</sup>

Der var dog én afgørende forskel. Den antikke bystat var langt mere begrænset i sin udstrækning og borgerbefolkningerne meget mindre. Hvad man i antikken havde formået på relativt små populationer, skulle nu "gentages" og blæses op i meget større skala.<sup>7</sup> På den led kom den europæiske statsdannelsesproces hurtigt til at række langt ud over den antikke erfaring. Ja, på mange måder fremstår den europæiske udvikling som en anomali. Mange steder kan man i historien se stater indgå i skarp konkurrence og tvinge hinanden til at forøge deres kapaciteter. Det ser man fx både i den nærestlige, den mediterrane og den kinesiske oldtid. Men konkurrencer fungerer som udskilningsløb og normalt ender det jo med, at én deltager står tilbage som vinder. Sådan

4 Pocock 1975 er den klassiske og vedblivende fundamentale diskussion, Skinner 1998 en god og kort introduktion. Van Gelderen & Skinner 2002 er en stor artikelsamling, som dækker den republikanske indvirkning på den tidlige moderne politiske diskurs i alle dens forskellige aspekter.

5 Tilly 1992.

6 McNeill 1986: 35-41. Finley 1983 og 1980; Hopkins 1978, kap. 1 om bondens frigørelse fra aristokratiets kontrol, efterfølgende integration i bystaten som borgere og den dermed forbundne høje mobiliseringsevne.

7 Gellner 1983: 13-14.

gik det flere gange i oldtiden, hvis historie kan skrives som en pendulsvingning mellem små stater og etableringen af store, universelle imperier.<sup>8</sup> Men ikke i Europas tilfælde. Her opstod der et usædvanligt mønster. Mens ingen magt formåede at samle Europa under et nyt imperium, så forårsagede den intense rivalisering blandt staterne i stedet opbygningen af oversøiske koloniriger. Erhvervelsen af kolonier skulle styrke staterne i den interne europæiske konkurrence. I længden løb processen dog helt løbsk og udløstes i de to verdenskriges selvdestruktive ragnarok. Da støvet begyndte at lægge sig, var det slut med europæisk dominans. Kolonirigerne blev afviklet over få årtier, mens to globale supermagter formede verdensordenen.<sup>9</sup> I Europa stod programmet derimod på genopbygning og stabilisering. Den altfortærende og altødelæggende konfrontation måtte afløses af samarbejde. De små og mellemstore stater kunne ikke længere stå alene, stærke overnationale politiske organisationer var nødvendige for at tøjle konkurrencen og sikre et mere fredeligt miljø.<sup>10</sup>

Netop freden er imidlertid som historisk grundfortælling forbundet til imperiets orden, PAX. Behovet for at forstå typer af politisk organisering, der rækker ud over den europæiske (republikanske) erfaring med små og mellemstore kompakte stater, har derfor ikke overraskende afledt en fornyet interesse for imperiet som organisatorisk magt- og statsform. Et radikalt eksempel er Francis Fukuyama's nye *Origins of Political Order*, der undersøger udviklingen af statsmagten gennem historien. Her forbigås den antikke bystat i analysen af det historiske forløb. I stedet tages der udgangspunkt i oldtidens Kina og foreningen af dets mange stater i et stort imperium. I 221 f. Kr. erobrede det første kejserhus Qin sine sidste rivaler og slog sig op til herskere over "alt under himlen" - *Tanxia*. Her så verden for første gang den moderne stat, hedder det.<sup>11</sup> Bortset fra, at man jo dermed nok strækker betydningen af "det moderne" ud over, hvad begrebet meningsfuldt kan holde til, så afspejler det en tendens i bestræbelserne på at vinde en mere global forståelse af historiens gang. Mange ender med at udskifte en eurocentrisk, med en sinocentrisk tilgang.<sup>12</sup> Men det er synd og skam. For oldtiden rummer en mere global og rummelig fortælling. Hvad enten man ser mod Kina i øst, Middelhavet i vest eller lader blikket hvile på Mellemøsten midt imellem, konfronteres man med dannelsen af store agrare imperier med universelle aspirationer. De nærrede alle forestillinger om

8 Barjamovic 2013, om den nærløstlige oldtid. Eckstein 2006 & Hui 2005, skildrer henholdsvis antikens Middelhavsverden og den såkaldte krigene staters periode i det førimperiale Kina som statsystemer præget af intens og dynamisk rivaliseren. Men konkurrence, førte som i det nærløstlige tilfælde, til universelt imperium. Eich 2015 for en syntese over sammenhængen mellem militær konfrontation og statsdannelse for hele oldtiden.

9 Darwin 2007.

10 James 2006, kap. 7 for en lærerig diskussion af EU projektet og dets historie i et imperieperspektiv.

11 Fukuyama 2011, kap. 7.

12 Conrad 2016: 177 om den nye globalhistories sinocentriske tendens.

at dominere deres verden og rækkevidden af deres magt blev hyldet som grænseløs. Herskeren over disse universelle imperiedannelser var, med et persisk udtryk, en kongernes konge.<sup>13</sup>

Holder vi os til den østlige kinesiske og vestlige romerske variant, var det karakteristiske for Qin-statens styrke det samme som republikkens, nemlig at bønderne var gjort tilgængelige for militærtjeneste gennem deres frigørelse fra feudale jordrotter. Begge stater kunne derfor stille enorme infanterihære og i længden overvinde deres rivaler.<sup>14</sup> En genlæsning af den romerske erfaring skulle altså nok kunne bidrage til at udvide og nuancere vores forståelse af statsdannelsesprocessen i historien – ikke mindst fordi romersk historie jo i modsætning til den europæiske mandede ud i dannelsen af et stort imperium, som samlede hele Middelhavsverdenen. Livius' værk dvælede måske nok på overfladen ved den tidlige romerske histories krigeriske og republikanske opbyggelighed, men det var for at lave en fortælling for kejsertiden og verdensriget. Julius Cæsar havde stejlt proklameret, at forsvaret af hans ære og værdighed krævede, at han gik over Rubicon og startede en af de romerske borgerkrige.<sup>15</sup> Den form for selvhævdelse og enegang ledte kun til ødelæggelse, kunne Livius vise. Gennem opbyggelige historier illustrerede han, hvordan romerstaten trivedes, når aristokraterne tøjlede deres ambitioner og underkastede sig fællesskabets interesser og beslutninger. Ved at indgyde respekt for fortidens traditioner, de fædrene skikke, skulle den aristokratiske identitet tæmmes eller for nu at tale i Norbert Elias' termer, domesticeres. Det er dét civilisationsprocessen drejer sig om.<sup>16</sup> Republikkens grundlægger, Brutus der stoisk overværede henrettelsen af sine egne sønner, efter de havde deltaget i en sammensværgelse for at få kongedømmet tilbage, eller Cincinnatus, diktatoren der redede staten og derefter atter nedlagde sin magt for at vende tilbage til sit beskedne bondeliv, utallige er Livius's inspirerende fortællinger, en uudtømmelig fond af eksemplarisk dannelse til sin egen og eftertiden.<sup>17</sup> Med kejserhoffet som et omdrejningspunkt udviklede imperiets eliter en skrift- og bybåret kosmopolitisk civilisation, som det stadig er værd at studere for bedre at berede os til at

13 Bang & Kolziejczyk 2012 forsøger at udkaste det universelle imperium som en ramme for førmoderne globalhistorie; Bang & Bayly 2011 samt Scheidel 2009 & 2015 undersøger disse imperier komparativt.

14 Rosenstein 2009, Scheidel 2009: 15-16.

15 Caius Iulius Caesar, *Bellum Civile* (Borgerkrigen) I, 77 (ut eius existimationem dignitatemque ab inimicis defendant).

16 Bang 2011 diskuterer Norbert Elias's civilisationsproces i forhold til det romerske kejserhof og dets demonstrative dyrkelse af de "fædrene" skikke. For Elias var moderniseringsprocessen og civilisationsprocessen nært forbundne. Men den sidste gik langt forud for den første. Spawforth 2007, Winterling 2004, Wallace-Hadrill 1996 for en række Elias inspirerede analyser af oldtidens hoffer og den romerske kultur.

17 Livius, *Ab Urbe Condita*, II, 5 (Brutus, republikkens første konsul, overværer henrettelsen af hans sønner); III, 26,3-29,7 (Cincinnatus).

forstå de udfordringer og begrænsninger, der følger med udviklingen af transnationale politiske organisationer.<sup>18</sup>

## Hegemoniets stabilitet: civilisation

Fundamentet for den romerske civilisationsproces udgjordes af hæren. Som kejsertidens historiker par excellence, magtens illusionsløse betragter, senatoren Tacitus mindeværdigt bemærkede, så kunne ”der ikke være nogen fred mellem folkene uden soldater, ingen soldater uden sold og ingen sold uden skatter.”<sup>19</sup> Her er for så vidt opskriften på den såkaldt militære-fiskale stat, sådan som vi kender den fra senere europæisk historie. Men romerne var kommet frem til deres formel ad en anden rute.<sup>20</sup> Mens europæisk histories militære-fiskale stat finansierede sin hær ved stadig dybere administrativ gennemtrængning af sit hjemterritorie for derigennem at forøge skatteprovenuet, så betalte den romerske republik for sine aktiviteter med indtægter fra de mange erobringer. Efter en ødelæggende sejr over kongeriget Makedonien i 168 f. Kr., var disse blevet så store, at man herefter ligefrem helt kunne undlade den periodiske opkrævning af skat på borgerbefolkningens jordbesiddelser. I stedet for stedse stærkere penetration i dybden, udviklede staten sine institutioner gennem ekspansion.<sup>21</sup> Det ydre pres, som drev de europæiske stater til at forøge deres kapacitet, var langt mindre i den romerske proces. I den forstand markerer 168 f. Kr. ikke blot det øjeblik, hvor imperiet endegyldigt kom til at finansiere Republikken, men også det vendepunkt, som historikeren Polyb identificerede, hvor romerne nu havde etableret sig selv som Middelhavsverdenens uimodståelige hegemon. Der var ingen magter tilbage, som for alvor kunne matche Rom.<sup>22</sup>

Fra da af var det nok så meget intern konkurrence og konflikter, der drev udviklingen af statens militære rygrad. Den politiske elite konkurrerede indbyrdes om magten i Republikken. En vigtig vej til succes gik over ydre erobringer. Samtidig betød den nærmest konstante krigsførelse, i stadig fjernere egne, at soldaternes tjenestetid blev længere. Oprindeligt havde den romerske hær været en milits af jordejende bønder. Men soldaterlivet blev mere og mere professionaliseret og det store træk på mandskabsressourcerne betød, at

18 Bang & Turner 2015 er en komparativ studie af udviklingen af kosmopolitiske elitekulturer i både det romerske rige og i Han dynastiets Kina.

19 Tacitus, *Historie* IV, 74 (min oversættelse af: *nam neque quies gentium sine armis neque arma sine stipendiis neque stipendia sine tributis haberi queunt*).

20 Hele denne sektion bygger på og opsummerer hovedlinjerne i den argumentation, omkring det imperiale monarki i et statsdannelseperspektiv, jeg gennemførte i Bang 2013. Heri kan også findes yderligere henvisninger, mens jeg nedenfor har begrænset mig til et absolut minimum af særligt centrale bidrag til forståelsen.

21 Bang 2005; Tan 2015 for en ny analyse af den romerske republik og dens beskatningsregime.

22 Polyb(ios), *Historier* I, i, 5-6 og videre I, ii-iii.

man i stigende omfang benyttede sig af jordløse rekrutter. Efter endt tjenestetid skulle de have noget at leve af, helst en lille gård et sted i Italien. Problemet var imidlertid, at det romerske og italienske aristokrati havde benyttet indtægterne fra imperiet til også at udvide sine jordbesiddelser og importere tusindvis af slaver til at dyrke jorden. Skulle veteranerne have jord, måtte aristokraterne afstå noget af deres. Det vakte sjældent begejstring og senatet forsøgte som regel at blokere for forslag om jorduddelinger. Dermed var der pludseligt åbnet for, at hæren kunne blive et redskab i den politiske kamp. Soldaterne støttede nu deres general i kampen om magten i forventning om efterfølgende belønning. Resultatet blev en række blodige borgerkrige mellem skiftende generaler og stadig større hære.<sup>23</sup>

Marius, Sulla, Pompejus, Caesar, Antonius, Augustus, listen af generaler er langt fra fuldstændig og ville formodentligt have været endnu længere, hvis ikke Augustus havde fundet en løsning på den underlæggende konflikt. Da den unge Caesar arving stod ene tilbage efter sejren over Antonius og Kleopatra i 31 f.Kr., grundlagde han en ny orden.<sup>24</sup> Som tak lod han sig på bedste autokratiske vis tildele æresnavnet Augustus, den ophøjede. Langt vigtigere end udviklingen af en ny herskersymbolik var det imidlertid, at han arbejdede sig frem til en løsning på hærsørgsmålet. I korte træk, og uden alle mellemregninger, så blev det romerske militær endegyldigt omdannet til en professionel stående hær. Med i sejren over Antonius fulgte også Egypten, den mest produktive region i Middelhavsverdenen. De rige skattebetalinger fra den nye provins øgede statens finansielle råderum betragteligt. Den fiskale basis var på plads for en ny hærordning. I forhold til borgerkrigens ekstreme mobilisering skar Augustus ned på antallet af soldater. Men der var langt fra tale om en generel demobilisering. Under våben beholdt man fortsat en styrke på måske op mod 250.000 mand og den skulle være permanent, ikke som hidtil rekrutteret til specifikke felttog. På den tid ville det have været den største stående hær i hele verden. Legionærerne fik en fast årlig sold og skulle gøre tjeneste først i 16 år, som snart blev til 20 og med tiden 25 år. Endelig, i stedet for jordtildelinger, blev veteranerne efterhånden tildelt en kontant hjemsendelsesbonus. Samlet set løste det den politiske strid, som havde lagt til grund for borgerkrigene. Soldaterne fik økonomisk sikkerhed, når de trak sig tilbage. Aristokraterne stod ikke hele tiden overfor truslen om at se deres jordbesiddelser konfiskeret. Det var så stort et gode, at den italienske elite accepterede indførelsen af to mindre afgifter på arv og på auktionssalg til at medfinansiere hjemsendelsesbonusen.

23 Brunt 1962 er en klassisk og stadig fundamental behandling af jordsørgsmålet. Se De Ligt 2012 for en gennemgribende gennemgang af sørgsmålet om Italiens og den romerske stats borgerbefolkning.

24 Ingen bør snyde sig selv for glæden ved at læse Syme 1939, skrevet med nerve og passion og udfoldet på en baggrund af 1930ernes fascistiske diktaturer. Det er og bliver den klassiske analyse af overgangen fra republik til principat. Osgood 2006 opdaterer traditionen fra Syme.

Konflikten var blevet afmonteret og hærens interesser var blevet tæt knyttet til monarkiets fortsatte beståen. Den nye orden stod på et solidt fundament.

I længden krævede den også en mindre intens mobilisering. Længere tjenestetid sænkede det samlede antal af rekrutter som skulle gennem militæret. Langt de fleste tropper blev garnisoneret i provinserne på stor afstand af Rom og gradvist i løbet af et århundrede gled man over til at hente de fleste rekrutter i de områder, hvor legionerne var stationeret snarere end fra Italien. På sigt blev den Italienske krigsmaskine dermed afmonteret og afløst af en mindre intensivt rekrutteret rigshær. Den hegemoniske position som den romerske republik havde vundet sig blev endegyldigt transformeret til et territorialt herredømme med kejserdømmets indførelse. Provinsernes udstrækning blev skudt helt frem til Rhinen og Donau og snart var ringen lukket, så riget omfattede hele Middelhavsverdenen. Den eneste nogenlunde jævnbyrdige modstander var Partherriget, som sad på Mesopotamien og Iran. De romerske kejsere fortsatte med at kappes med herskerne over dette Perserrige. Men ingen af disse magter var villige til at risikere alt for en endegyldig sejr. Kejsertiden så fortsat ekspansion, men det var et marginalt fænomen. Det afgørende karakteristikum var konsolidering af magten ovenpå republikkens vilde erobringsfase.<sup>25</sup> Hærens opgave var nu at sikre og stabilisere herredømmet over det enorme territorie. Indenfor riget faldt byrden og omkostningerne ved krigsførelse betragteligt og den romerske fred kunne sænke sig.

Forskellen mellem den tacitæiske udgave af den fiskale-militære stat og den tidlige moderne var, at den romerske hersker havde absorberet hovedparten af de potentielle konkurrenter. Kejseren var så at sige blevet monopolhaver indenfor levering af beskyttelse.<sup>26</sup> I modsætning til hans tidlige moderne kolleger var han ikke tvunget til stadigt at forøge skatterne for at betale for en stadig mere bekostelig krigsførelse. Tværtimod, indenfor riget i sin helhed, faldt omkostningerne ved at producere beskyttelse og håndhæve freden. Gevinsten kunne da fordeles på flere måder. F. C. Lane, den store amerikanske handelshistoriker, identificerede to fundamentale alternativer. Da staten jo i meget består af hærorganisationen, kunne den opføre sig som en junta og lade overskuddet komme militæret til gode, fx ved at lade hæren vokse. Nogle argumenterer da også for, at den romerske kejserlige hær var alt for stor og i længden udgjorde

25 Se Woolf 2012: 185–188 for en skarp formulering af forskellen mellem erobrersstat og "tributært" imperium.

26 Bang 2007 er et "skælmisk" forsøg på analytisk at omtolke imperiets historie i lyset af F. C. Lane's forståelse (1958) af spørgsmålet om beskyttelsesomkostninger i præindustrielle samfund. Hans er fortsat den skarpeste og mest nuancerede teoretiske behandling af den problemstilling. Tilly's kritik (1985: 175–177), at Lane's analyse begrænses for meget af hans udgangspunkt i neoklassisk økonomisk teori, forekommer forfejlet. Lane's anliggende var netop at springe den traditionelle neoklassiske ramme, og han analyserer da også hele spørgsmålet om "beskyttelse" som et monopolanliggende. "Kunderne" kan altså ikke rigtigt frit vælge deres leverandør. Men på den anden side er der fortsat et element af konkurrence. Han havde også et klart blik for, at monopolhaveren kan dele sin profit enten med militæret eller med en aristokratisk elite, fx gennem uddeling af embeder.



en møllesten om halsen på staten. Fiskalt var kejserdømmet en kolos på lerfødder.<sup>27</sup> Men ser man på rigsmønten, den romerske *denarius*, så viser sølvindholdet sig at være forbavsende stabilt. Over de første par århundreder foregår der en let forringelse. Men det er først i løbet af Marcus Aurelius' regeringstid (161–180), at der begynder en udvikling, hvor møntens stabilitet undermineres. Antallet af legioner er faktisk kendt for hele perioden og de udgør således vores mest sikre tidsserie. Her er billedet tilsvarende. Deres antal er stabilt. Det samme gør sig gældende for soldaternes sold. Kun én gang blev deres grundsold forøget, og forøgelsen modsvares mere eller mindre af møntens forringelse. På skattesiden er det romerske kejserdømme da også karakteriseret ved stabile og relativt lave skatter. I nogle provinser kan det romerske herredømme endog have medført en reduktion.<sup>28</sup>

Det leder os så til det andet alternativ. Hvis den romerske hær som organisation var forbløffende stor for sin tid, så var rigets administrative apparat bemærkelsesværdigt spinkelt.<sup>29</sup> Det skyldes, at man i stedet havde overladt det til lokale, hovedsageligt jordejende eliter at administrere den imperiale fred og inddrive skatterne. Riget var organiseret i massevis af små og mellemstore bystater. Her tjente rigets eliter i rådene og sørgede for, at imperiets dagligdag fungerede. Men det tog de sig naturligvis betalt for. Kejserne præsiderede over en orden, hvor et relativt beskedent skattekrav, gjorde det muligt for imperiets aristokrati at blive stadig rigere og koncentrere flere og flere ressourcer på sine hænder. Man ser det ved den store mængde af pragtbyggerier som disse eliter finansierede rundt omkring i rigets utallige byer - til stor gavn for vor tids arkæologer og fornøjelse for os andre. Meget taler endog for, at den centrale imperiale stat tabte terræn i rigets økonomi, samtidig med man altså var i stand til fortsat at finansiere en af de største stående hærstyrker i førmoderne historie. Det var ikke uden grund, at Gibbon udråbte kejsertidens 2. århundrede e. Kr til den epoke hvor "the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous." Der manglede simpelthen den stribe ulykker, forbrydelser og over lange stræk krige som normalt udgør det grundstof historikeren skriver på.<sup>30</sup> Imperiets stabilitet syntes så tæt på «the end of history," som det næsten er menneskeligt muligt. Der var, som Fukuyama bemærkede det om demokratiet efter Murens Fald, ingen alternativer.<sup>31</sup> Resultatet blev en kosmopolitisk og

27 Eich 2009.

28 Monson 2012 argumenterer for en (måske for) drastisk reduktion i den skat som statsmagten opkrævede i Egypten efter den romerske magtovertagelse.

29 Garnsey & Saller 2015, kap. 2.

30 Som Gibbon skrev om Antoninus Pius' regeringsperiode "His reign is marked by the rare advantage of furnishing very few materials for history; which is, indeed, little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind" (1993: 89, citatet ovenfor følger kort efter på s. 90 og opsummerer adoptivkejsernes periode).

31 Fukuyama 1992.

sofistikeret civilisation, der bandt imperiets aristokratiske eliter sammen på tværs af kulturelle og lokale skel. Den romerske verden var én, imperiet var universelt og til sidst overtog man en ny religion til at spejle rigets enhed, *Pax Romana*, *Pax Christiana*.<sup>32</sup>

## Europa: Kosmopolitisk civilisation og nationale republikker?

Konfrontationen med den romerske erfaring frembyder altså to konkurrerende fortællinger om Europa og staten. 1. Den republikanske, dynamisk og rivaliserende, som dominerede mellem Reformationen og Den Anden Verdenskrig. 2. Den imperiale civilisation, baseret på fred, stabilitet og orden. Den store udfordring for det nutidige Europæiske projekt er, hvordan man kan forene de to? I efterkrigstiden har man fokuseret på freds- og samarbejdsfortællingen, mens man har oplevet, og i dag måske mere end nogensinde før, at være i konflikt med ambitionen om den individuelle stats autonomi. Hvordan dog overskride den modsætning? Hvordan kombinere frihed med fred? Her rummer fortællingen om det gamle imperium måske endnu en erfaring, som kan give os en retningsfornemmelse. I sin *Politik* bemærkede Aristoteles, at det kun var starter af forholdsvis overskuelig størrelse, der kunne regeres ordentligt. Kun bystaterne tillod de ledende at opnå tilstrækkelig nærhed til, at de kunne gennemskue de lokale forhold og sikre en ordentlig regulering af samfundsordenen. I praksis var det dog ofte svært at få det til at fungere. De små bystater var truet af ydre fjender og indre strid. *Politikken* rummer en lang og omfattende analyse af de mange ting som konstant underminerede bystaternes stabilitet.<sup>33</sup> Men med imperiets komme stabiliseres situationen. Den romerske hegemon understøttede og sikrede de lokale bystatsordninger og i modsætning til hvad man måske skulle tro, så blomstrede bystaterne på tværs af imperiet i århundreder.<sup>34</sup> Det er formodentligt en af de største overraskelser for tilhængerne af de europæiske foreningsbestrebelse, at Den Europæiske Union netop synes at have givet plads for, at de små og store (*de facto* republikanske) nationer kan trives indenfor rammerne af dens fred. Så langt fra at forsvinde og forvitte står de i fuldt flor og synes hele tiden at komme i karambolage med unionsprojektet. Her er det måske værd at erindre om, at imperiets succes og stabilitet var baseret på, at man netop overlod det meste til den tættere lokale magt og derfor ikke hele

32 For nu at spille på titlen i Koch 1952. Fowden 1993.

33 Aristoteles *Politikken* VII, iv, 5-8 (om nødvendigheden af begrænset størrelse, hvis staten skal være ordentligt reguleret). Hele Bog V er en diskussion af alle de ting som kan skabe omvæltninger, revolution, i bystaterne. De var, som det hed på græsk, plaget af *stasis* (en tilstand hvor den normale politik var kørt fast og staten splittet af indre strid).

34 Bang 2015 for en diskussion af den platonisk-aristoteliske politiske tænkning og det romerske imperium, i det perspektiv uventede, stabilisering af by-staterne.

tiden fremprovokerede konflikter i homogenitetens navn. I den daglige aktivitet var det meste overladt til den lokale autonomi, når blot en række minimale forudsætninger var opfyldt.

I sit essay om Erasmus af Rotterdam foregreb Stefan Zweig i mellemkrigstiden det nuværende Europa-projekts udfordringer og problemer.<sup>35</sup> Erasmus var for Zweig den første europæer og han så i ham en forpasset chance. Den store renæssanceskribent havde formuleret et fornuftens, humanismens og fredens program for Europas politiske mangfoldighed. Erasmus udtrykte sig på et formfuldendt, men krævende og studeret latin, et kunstfærdigt sprog der fordrede stor tillæring. Ikke en gang middelalderens gængse latin kunne matche standarden. Det var ellers krævende nok. Men Erasmus og de andre humanister hævdede barren betragteligt og dekreterede efterligning af antikkens årtusindgamle sprogudtryk. Humanistlatinens fordel var kosmopolitisk, at det appellerede til eliter og de højest uddannede på tværs af Europa. Det eksklusive og avancerede sprogudtryk, udviklet som det var til romernes imperium, leverede på en og samme tid en transregional norm for kommunikation og et redskab til at skille sig ud fra mængden. Men just da Erasmus syntes at stå med sejren i sine hænder, udløste Luther Reformationen. Begge ønskede de at reformere den gamle, romerske kristenhed. Luther valgte imidlertid at udtrykke sig på tysk og henvende sig umiddelbart til folkets følelser. Den kompromisløse reformator skrev direkte på passionen og nåede langt dybere ud i befolkningerne. Heroverfor var Erasmus' forstandige, nuancerede og afmålte argumentation magtesløs. Snart var hans program fejlet af banen og Europa splittet i religionsstridigheder. For Zweig pegede den Lutherske Reformation direkte frem mod nazisternes grasserende nationalisme i hans egen tid.

Det er ikke så underligt, at Erasmus i stedet er blevet et yndet symbol for den europæiske integrationsproces. Nu skulle der rettes op på fortidens fejltagelser. Men måske ville det være nyttigt, at huske den anden side af Zweigs analyse. Nationalismen måtte bestemte tøjles efter den 2. verdenskrig. Men ikke al nationalisme var trods alt af det onde. Den var fx også med til at sikre, at det danske samfund klarerede sig gennem besættelsestiden nogenlunde intakt eller at der var et Storbritannien, som blev ved at kæmpe, da en nazistisk sejr ellers syntes uundgåelig – "their finest hour", som Churchill proklamerede i sine berømmede radiotaler til afstivning af befolkningens kampmoral. Historisk set har nationalismens egalitære program om enheden af nation og stat været en afgørende forudsætning for udviklingen af demokrati, den politiske myndiggørelse af befolkningen.<sup>36</sup> Heroverfor står så det forhold, at Zweig jo ikke blot påpegede nationalismens fanatiske og morderiske potentiale, han så også klart begrænsningerne i det europæiske, kosmopolitiske program. Det savnede

35 Zweig 2014 [1938].

36 Lidegaard 2011, 2. del, kap.1 om den danske nationalisme som et værn mod fremmed besættelse.

folkelig appel og gennemslagskraft.<sup>37</sup> Det gælder stadig. Unionen er langt fra lykkedes i sine bestræbelser på at blive et folkeligt projekt. Tværtimod er der betydelig demokratisk skepsis overfor unionsprojektet, som ofte beskrives som elitært og teknokratisk. Tilhængerne af stadig dybere integration svarer så igen med at stemple kritikerne som populist og bekræfter dermed i virkelighed deres modstanderes kritik.<sup>38</sup> Populist, *popularis* var som bekendt det etablerede romerske republikanske aristokratis skældsord for de, der udfordrede deres greb om magten ved at appellere til befolkningsflertallet.<sup>39</sup> Svaret på den øjeblikkelige legitimitetskrise for Unionen var vel i stedet at acceptere begrænsningerne for det transnationale og kosmopolitiske som en forudsætning for formuleringen af den fremtidige politik, snarere end at vedblive i en tilstand af fornægtelse. Unionen vil fortsat være elite-båret<sup>40</sup> og det var måske slet ikke så dumt at tænke om den i termer som nationalismeteorikeren Ernest Gellner benyttede til at beskrive karakteren af før-moderne højkulturer og imperier. Han så dem som konstitueret af et tyndt bånd af overlappende netværk af transregionale elitegrupper. Den transregionale organisering gjorde det muligt for dem at dominere befolkningsflertallet, som var isoleret og opsplittet i lokalt forankrede samfund. De manglede overlokal organisation til at matche elitens og blev derfor som regel udmanøvreret.<sup>41</sup> EU-systemet nyder i dag nogle af de samme strategiske fordele. Modstand i medlemsstaterne kan fx let fremstilles som det enkelte lands individuelle problem. Men samtidig er systemet jo også langt svagere. Det er trods alt baseret på samarbejde, ikke militært hege-  
moni og voldelig tvang. Det gør det så meget desto mere relevant at minde om, at forudsætningerne for de førmoderne kosmopolitiske elitenetværks succes og stabilitet netop var, at man ikke søgte at mobilisere samfundet i dybden.

37 Zweig 2014, "Grösse", hedder et af kapitlerne og tilføjes det ikke mindre signifikant "und Grenzen des Humanismus".

38 Det er bemærkelsesværdigt, hvordan kritikere og modstandere af det europæiske projekt rutinemæssigt stemples som populist. Hos Münkler 2015: 165 finder man fx den kostelige glose "Populismusresistenz," kun en særlig ansvarlig befolkning er nu i stand til at tage hånd om Europa, dvs. den tyske. For den udenforstående, er det bemærkelsesværdige næppe analysens skarphed, men dens kombination af et paneuropæisk program med ufrivillig national selvgothed. Under alle omstændigheder behøver man ikke være modstander af Unionen for at kunne se ironien i, at man fra systemets side, på den ene side priser sig af Europa som hjemsted for demokrati og på den anden side udgrænser modstandere, der nyder stor demokratisk opbakning, som populist.

39 Ross Taylor 1949: 11-14 om brugen af "popularis", som den herskende aristokratiske konsensus benyttede til at stemple dens udfordrere som demagoger. Flaig 2006 om konsensus som det bærende princip i romersk republikansk politik og hvordan det i lange perioder *de facto* holdt den bredere befolkning væk fra indflydelse. Dens medvirken var alene ønsket som akklamation af eliten.

40 Som også Münkler (2015: 15-22) viser klart, har det ikke været muligt at omdanne Unionen fra et elitedrevet til et demokratisk projekt. Befolkningernes medvirken ønskes alene for at bekræfte den af eliten allerede bestemte politik og det er, som allerede bemærket i den foregående fodnote, netop kendetegnet ved den aristokratiske romerske republik.

41 Gellner 1983, chap. 2.

Deres dagsorden sigtede mod et mindste mål af regulering: ekstensiv snarere end intensiv kontrol.<sup>42</sup>

For tiden er EU projektet imidlertid fanget mellem to tendenser. I de gamle kernelande er man i gang med en stadig dybere, tættere og mere krævende integration bundet op på euroen. Men samtidig har man udvidet samarbejdet mod øst og optaget en lang række nye medlemslande, altså integration i bredden. Konsekvensen er imidlertid, at Unionen er blevet så sammensat, at det vil være næsten umuligt at bringe alle på samme formel.<sup>43</sup> Øger man presset for stadig tættere og dybere integration vil konsekvensen, som man allerede ser tydeligt, uvægerligt blive tendenser til fragmentering. Det kender vi allerede fra romersk historie. Da den imperiale stat kom i krise i det 3. århundrede, søgte man at styrke centralmagten og på mange måder øgedes integrationen. Men da den imperiale stat rakte stadig dybere ned i lokalsamfundene, blev resultatet det paradoksale, at imperiet brød op i regionale enheder.<sup>44</sup> Den spænding er i dag blot endnu stærkere og Brexit afstemningen i Storbritannien blot det seneste og mest dramatiske udtryk for den underliggende konflikt. EU står trods alt overfor store demokratisk mobiliserede nationale befolkninger på en måde som romerske kejsere overhovedet ikke gjorde. Det er man nødt til at acceptere som en forudsætning og begrænsning for EU på en måde man måske ikke hidtil har forstået. Men politik er som bekendt det muliges kunst. Spørgsmålet er derfor ikke om vi vil tillade et Europa i flere hastigheder. Det kommer vi til at få under alle omstændigheder og har det i og for sig allerede. Det virkelige spørgsmål er, om vi kan vende det til en styrke for EU, snarere end et problem – altså om vi kan lave en ny fortælling for Europa, sådan som den tidligere kommissionsformand Barroso efterlyste, der kan forene republikkens drøm om frihed og autonomi, med imperiets løfte om orden, stabilitet og fred.<sup>45</sup>

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42 Hall 1985 har i den kontekst talt om "cap-stone" government: Man var bedre i stand til at forhindre noget i at ske, end at generere nye kræfter. Det er en skarp måde at tematisere disse organisationsformers grundlæggende svaghed, men måske også lige stærk nok. Bedre er det nok simpelthen at fokusere på deres stabiliseringsevne.

43 Zielonka 2006.

44 Bang 2013: 447-460.

45 Barroso, den foregående formand for EU kommissionen, lancerede et projekt til at skabe en ny fortælling for Europa. Dets aktiviteter kan man orientere sig om på [http://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/new-narrative/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/policy/new-narrative/index_en.htm). Haldén 2011 er et løfterigt forsøg på at tænke EU som en komposit republik. Vi skal videre i den retning.

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# Statsvetenskapliga förbundet

Förbundsredaktör: Magnus Erlandsson

## En statsvetenskap i samhällets tjänst

av Magnus Erlandsson

Låt säga att vi för en stund vore överens om att svensk statsvetenskap kan beskrivas som någorlunda framgångsrik när det gäller metodologisk stringens, teoriutveckling och internationella publiceringar; att utbildningar där statsvetare står vid katedern är forskningsanknutna och uppskattade; att statsvetare icke utan beröm får godkänt på tredje uppgiften; och att vi utifrån vår forskning och våra snillen fördjupar medborgarnas förståelse för olika samhällsfenomen – vore allt väl i så fall?

Eller bör vår disciplins förmåga att lösa eller bidra till lösningar på angelägna samhällsrelaterade problem och utmaningar också vägas in?

### ATT BIDRA ELLER INTE BIDRA

Vi ska inte skriva ut recept, säger kanske de flesta. Visst, om vår grundforskning kan göra nytta utan vulgära tolkningar av våra resultat, så motsätter vi oss inte det, men det fria kunskapssökandet och disciplinens egna intressen och behov måste sättas främst.

Jo, säger kanske några – tillämpad, samhällsrelevant och ibland även politiskt beställd forskning fyller viktiga funktioner. Vi måste också aktivt medverka när stora samhällsproblem söker sin lösning, och som statsvetare är vi särskilt väl rustade.

## BEVILJADE PROJEKT SOM MÅTT

Om vi låter de tre senaste årens beviljade projektbidrag från Vetenskapsrådet<sup>1,2</sup> och Riksbankens Jubileumsfond<sup>3</sup>, och då projekt under statsvetenskaplig flagg, utgöra ett slags mått på balansen mellan grundforskning och tillämpad forskning är bilden relativt klar: det är grundforskning som premieras.

Det är i alla fall inte alldeles lätt att identifiera den omedelbara samhällsrelaterade nyttan i något av dessa projekt, inte om vi med ”nytta” kräver att projekten ska ”lösa eller bidra till lösningar på angelägna samhällsrelaterade problem och utmaningar”.

### EMPIRI, METOD OCH TEORI I FOKUS

Något redan identifierat samhällsproblem (relaterat till demografi, utbildning, migration, integration, klimat, hållbarhet, energi, folkhälsa etc.) fokuseras sällan. Forskningsfrågorna är generellt empiriska till sin karaktär och syftar framförallt till att fördjupa kunskapen om det som studeras och på vägen dit utveckla eller förfina metoder och teorier.

Utän att på något sätt göra några av de beviljade projekten rättvisa, inte heller med avsikt att raljera, är här ändå ett litet axplock av teman ur de senaste årens finansierade statsvetaridéer – och som väl inte visar på någon självklar koppling mellan förväntade forskningsresultat och lösningar på de stora samhällsproblemen.

1 Vetenskapsrådet, 2015. *Äldre bidragsbeslut*, <http://www.vr.se/forskningsfinansiering/bidragsbeslut/bidragsbeslut20112015.4.44482f6612355bb5ee780001697.html>.

2 Vetenskapsrådet, 2016. *Bidragsbeslut humaniora och samhällsvetenskap 2016*, [http://www.vr.se/download/18.6b078e51581835cea2139c9/1478104206857/Beviljade\\_bidrag\\_HS\\_2016.xlsx](http://www.vr.se/download/18.6b078e51581835cea2139c9/1478104206857/Beviljade_bidrag_HS_2016.xlsx).

3 Riksbankens jubileumsfond, 2017. *Beviljade anslag*, <http://anslag.rj.se/sv/ar/2014> (2015, 2016).

- I vilken utsträckning går det att urskilja ”maskulina” och ”feminina” förhandlingsstilar?
- Löper myndigheter större risk för nedskärningar när den politiska makten skiftar färg?
- Hur kan medborgerligt deltagande och deliberation försvaras utifrån normativt formulerade kriterier för politisk jämlikhet?
- Vilka faktorer förklarar medborgares stöd för internationella organisationer?
- Vilka ledarskapsförväntningar inom utrikespolitiken har representanterna för EU:s medlemsländer och EU:s institutioner?
- Hur politiserade är utnämningarna av domare till EU-domstolen?
- Vad är den juridiska statusen för det folk som slås fast i nationella och urfolks konstitutioner?

### RÖR INTE DEN FRIA FORSKNINGEN

Nu, när vindarna blåser åt ett annat håll, när många politiker och näringslivsföreträdare talar om ”utmaningsdriven forskning och innovation”, som i senaste forskningspropositionen<sup>4</sup>, liksom i EU:s ramprogram Horisont 2020 – där de förväntade resultaten av de 80 miljarder euro som portioneras ut ska ha en ”impact” på samhället – ja, då råder det heller ingen tvekan om vad åtminstone stora delar av forskarsamhället tycker om det, tydligt i bland annat Kungliga vetenskapsakademins inspel till den senaste forskningspropositionen:

Säkerställ ett stabilt stöd till den fria grundforskningen (...) genom att starkt begränsa politisk och annan utomvetenskaplig styrning av den grundläggande forskningen.<sup>5</sup>

### TEORIER FÖRE LÖSNINGAR

Man kan kanske ändå förstå den politiska och utomvetenskapliga efterfrågan på en mer lösningsorienterad samhällsvetenskap, särskilt i de fall man finansierar den. Som sociologen Duncan J. Watts skriver har samhällsvetenskapen under de senaste hundra åren levererat en imponerande mängd teorier (om än ofta inkompatibla) kring individuellt och kollektivt beteende.<sup>6</sup> Men enligt Watts bedömning har det för samhällsvetenskaperna varit viktigare att förädla och upprätthålla (de ofta inkompatibla) teorierna än att lösa samhälleliga, praktiska problem.

### AKADEMISK KULTUR FÖRKLARAR

En samhällsvetare drivs rimligen av en önskan att förstå, förklara och kanske också kunna påverka samhället vi lever i. Men dels, enligt Watts, fostras vi in i relativt snäva teoretiska och metodologiska ramar som vi sen använder i (nästan) alla våra kommande studier, och som kanske egentligen inte ökar vår förståelse, utan mer bekräftar det vi redan trodde att vi visste. Dels är incitamenten så utformade att en artikel i en redan stöpt form blir viktigare att pyssla länge med, än att ta tag i ett för omvärlden pockande problem.

### ENKELT FÖRSLAG UTAN FÖRSLAG

Watts har ett okonstlat förslag på paradigmskifte: börja istället med ett praktiskt, verkligt och angeläget samhällsproblem, försök att lösa det – och låt dina försök avgöra vilka teorier som bäst bidrar till lösningen. Då slår du två flugor i en smäll; du är ju då både utom- och inomvetenskapligt relevant.

Men vilket eller vilka problem ska man börja med?

Utmaningen för en ”lösningsorienterad samhällsvetenskap” är att inte välja ett

4 Prop. 2016/17:50. *Kunskap i samverkan – för samhällets utmaningar och stärkt konkurrenskraft.*

5 Yttrande från Kungl. Vetenskapsakademien inför den kommande forskningspolitiska propositionen 2016, Dnr: KVA/2015/93/76.

6 Watts, Duncan, J., 2017. ”Should social science be more solution-oriented?”, *Nature Human Behaviour*, nr 1.

så litet utsnitt av ett problem att man helt missar komplexiteten – eller att helt drunkna i detaljer och samband. Watts, i sin artikel underhållande och kreativ, ger dock inte många förslag. Inga alls, faktiskt – utöver den som har tydlig koppling till den verksamhet han nu själv befinner sig i, på Microsoft Research: han vill att samhällsvetenskapen ska engagera sig i hur människa och maskin kan samarbeta för att lösa komplexa uppgifter...

### REGERINGEN KOMBINERAR OCH MARKERAR

Regeringen presenterade i senaste forskningspropositionen ett halvhjärtat försök till kompromiss mellan akademisk frihet och samhällelig nytta – halvhjärtat, eftersom när regeringen skriver att utgångspunkten för forskningspolitiken är att ”värna den fria forskningen *samtidigt* som forskningspolitiken svarar mot globala och nationella samhällsutmaningar”<sup>7</sup>, får ju orden ”fria forskningen” en annan valör än de haft (särskilt om regeringen på egen hand bestämmer vad som är globala och nationella samhällsutmaningar).

Till elfenbenstornsförsvare riktas faktiskt en liten känga här och där i propositionen:

Utbildning, forskning och innovation ska stå i människornas tjänst för ett hållbart, solidariskt, jämlikt och jämställt samhälle. Regeringens politik drivs av synsättet att forskningen angår hela samhället, inte bara de som är direkt verksamma inom forskningen.<sup>8</sup>

Några av de litterära kvaliteterna försvinner möjligen när vi anpassar det där citatet – och propositionens nyckelmening – till oss i statsvetarskrået. Här i alla fall ännu en ruta att klippa ut och fästa på laptopskärmen (eller brodera).

Svensk statsvetenskap ska stå i människornas tjänst för ett hållbart, solidariskt, jämlikt och jämställt samhälle. Regeringens politik drivs av synsättet att svensk statsvetenskap angår hela samhället, inte bara de som är direkt verksamma inom svensk statsvetenskap.

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7 Prop. 2016/17:50, s. 1 (min kursivering).

8 aa: s. 20.



# Litteraturgranskningar

Litteraturredaktör: Björn Östbring

**Brännstedt, Lovisa, 2016. *Femina principes: Livia's position in the Roman state*. Lund: Institutionen för arkeologi och antikens historia.**

Anmälan av Martin Hall

Varför bör statsvetare läsa arkeologi och antikens historia? Det omedelbara svaret på den frågan är såklart att det är både bildande och roligt, och att det är anledning nog. Samtidigt är det nu så att vi statsvetare, och naturligtvis alla andra akademiker, har alltför lite tid för lustläsning, läsning utan mer konkreta och strategiska syften. Lovisa Brännstedts avhandling *Femina principes* erbjuder bildning, nöje och nytta på en och samma gång.

Avhandlingens syfte är att förstå och förklara Livia Drusillas - Augustus andra hustru och mor till Tiberius - politiska inflytande och position. Litteraturen om Livia och andra politiskt viktiga kvinnor i Roms historia är inte oansenlig, men från mitt statsvetenskapliga perspektiv och som lekman på området är Brännstedts avhandling ett viktigt och välkommet bidrag. Den typiska studien av romerska kvinnors politiska liv fokuserar idiosynkratiskt på deras respektive personligheter och har en "bakom varje framgångsrik man finns en kvinna"-ansats till ämnet. I *Femina principes* finner vi istället en teoretiserande ambition och en analys av Livias självständiga aktörskap, även om detta skall ses i ljuset av en dåtida, mycket strikt könshierarki.

Brännstedt vill alltså gå bortom Livias personlighet och vänder sig därför till sociologins - och då kanske närmast Robert Mertons - positions- och rollbegrepp. Till varje position i en samhällelig och kulturell struktur hör en

eller flera roller. Till Livias positioner som fru till den förste kejsaren, mor till den andra kejsaren, och matriark till den kejsarliga familjen hör de tre rollerna *uxor/mater* (fru/mor), *patrona* (patron) samt *diva* (gud), och det är Livias förmåga att kompetent utföra och utnyttja dessa olika roller som lägger grunden för hennes politiska inflytande. *Uxor/mater*-rollen faller in under bakom-kulisserna ansatsen, men i utförandet av de båda andra rollerna skapar Livia ett självmotiverat och oberoende politiskt aktörskap. Man kan mycket väl se, att Brännstedts ansats skulle kunna tillämpas i en studie av andra *principes*, såväl formella som informella, och ligga till grund för systematiska jämförelser av olika sorters ledarskap i antikens Rom.

Från ett samhällsvetenskapligt perspektiv skulle man naturligtvis kunna hävda att Brännstedts teoretiska apparat är väl tunn. Den grundläggande teatermetaforen är underutnyttjad, och det saknas en rad understödjande begrepp. Se bara på den rika begreppsflora som har utvecklats inom till exempel ämnesområdet utrikespolitisk analys sedan Kalevi Holsti började använda rollteori på 1970-talet. Men jag är inte övertygad om att jag skulle hålla med. Inte minst det "lätta" teoribruket gör avhandlingen elegant och läsbar och tillåter det breda och varierade empiriska materialet att tala tillräckligt tydligt till oss. Teoribruket tycks mig, inom ramen för vad Brännstedt vill åstadkomma med sin avhandling, helt enkelt lagom.

En andra förtjänst med avhandlingen, och det är kanske här vi statsvetare har mest att lära, men också ställs inför mer bekanta typer av forskningsproblem, är att den så tydligt visar hur perioden mellan mordet på Julius Caesar år 44 f.v.t. och tidpunkten för Tiberius

tillträde som det romerska imperiets andre kejsare är ett sk ”Machiavellian moment” i pococksk mening (Pocock 1975). När Augustus står som ensam politisk arvtagare till Caesar finns det ingen funktionsduglig institutionell struktur, som han kan placera sig i. Republikens institutionella struktur är intakt, om än enbart till formerna, samtidigt som all makt utgår från Augustus som person. Augustus bibehåller republikens politiska språk, men utvecklar och uppfinner efterhand, och för det mesta ad hoc, en rad nya institutioner (i vid mening) som gör det möjligt för honom att befästa och förankra sitt envælde. Intressant nog visar Brännstedt att Livia är en aktiv och delvis oberoende deltagare i denna institutionella skapelseprocess. Roms långsamma transformation från republik till imperium är något vi statsvetare inte studerat tillräckligt, men Brännstedts avhandling är en värdefull ingång till ämnet.

Så nog finns det goda skäl för oss statsvetare att ibland läsa arkeologi och antikens historia. Att just den här avhandlingen dessutom har ett osedvanligt vackert omslag gör inte saken sämre.

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**Fine, Sarah & Ypi, Lea (red.), 2016. *Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.**

Anmälan av Björn Östbring

Ett etablerat sätt att diskutera migrationsfrågor är att ställa nationalstatliga och medborgerliga föreställningar om gemenskap mot kosmopolitiska föreställningar. Så gjorde exempelvis redan Henry Sidgwick i *Elements of Politics*, där han beskrev det som en strid mellan två olika ”ideals of political organisation” (Sidgwick 1897: 308). Sidgwick anses vara den första som systematiskt avhandlade denna typ av frågor inom politisk filosofi. På sätt och vis kan man säga att det finns ett tomrum både före och efter Sidgwick. Få av de klassiska politiska verken behandlar frågor kring migration och inträde i en politisk gemenskap – snarare diskuterar de rättvisa, egendom, frihet och styrelseprinciper för sammanslutningar och befolkningar vars gränser och identiteter antas vara givna. Denna frånvaro av frågor kring migration och gemenskapens exkludering fortsatte i hög grad även efter Sidgwick. Som bekant utgår Rawls i *A Theory of Justice* från ett antagande om ett stängt och välordnat samhälle, och han är inte ensam om att på ett eller annat sätt ta nationalstaten för given.<sup>1</sup> Frågan om migration och gemenskapens gränser kan således betraktas som relativt ”nytt” inom politisk teori, eftersom den ända fram till 1970-talet överskuggades av frågor om hur en existerande gemenskap bör organiseras och kring det rätta förhållandet mellan individ och kollektiv makt (Bader 2005: 331).

En viktig bok inom det framväxande akademiska fältet ”migrationens politiska teori” utgjordes av antologin *Free Movement*, med Brian Barry och Robert Goodin som redaktörer (Barry och Goodin 1992). Där behandlades

1 Se exempelvis (Canovan 1998), för en diskussion om hur politiska teoretiker ofta tar för givet den typ av politiskt välorganiserat massamhälle som de västerländska nationalstaterna utgör.

frågan om fri rörlighet av pengar och människor utifrån olika tanketraditioner: liberal egalitarianism, libertarianism, marxism, naturrätt respektive realism. Många meningsutbyten i boken är fortfarande referenspunkter i den politisk-teoretiska diskussionen. Med detta i åtanke framstår den nya antologin *Migration in Political Theory* som ett intressant tillskott. Kommer denna volym bli en lika viktig bok? Boken, som har Sarah Fine och Lea Ypi som redaktörer, rymmer texter av flera framstående namn i fältet: David Miller, Anna Stilz, Joseph Carens, Christopher Wellman, Arash Abizadeh, Chandran Kukathas och David Owen.

I den första av bokens tre delar diskuteras frågan om migration som mänsklig rättighet. Är fri rörlighet en mänsklig rättighet? Och i så fall, på vilka grunder? Två välbekanta argument präglar diskussionerna. Det ena är ett argument som brukar förknippas med Joseph Carens, nämligen att de liberala principer som förfäktas inom stater måste leda till att de också bör upprätthållas internationellt. Mer konkret: om fri rörlighet är en giltig princip och värde inom ett land så är det en princip vars rättfärdigande borde ha samma kraft och implikationer i frågan om rörlighet mellan länder. Det andra argumentet handlar om en asymmetri: att det i de internationella konventionerna om mänskliga rättigheter existerar en rätt att lämna en stat, men ingen motsvarande skyldighet för stater att släppa in. För att rätten att lämna ska vara verkningsfull, menar många teoretiker, så måste den också åtföljas av en rätt att inträda i en annan stat.

Det första argumentet – ”the cantilever argument” – har framförallt förfäktats av Joseph Carens. Enligt Carens så borde reflektioner över de liberala principer vi upprätthåller och hyllar inom stater också leda till ett utvidgande av dess tillämpande till relationen mellan stater (Carens 2013: 237). Carens

konstaterar att det framstår som inkonsekvent att utmåla inre rörlighet som en självklarhet och samtidigt betrakta staters rätt att begränsa rörlighet mellan sig som precis lika självklar. En poäng med denna argumentstyp är enligt Carens att man inte befattar sig med frågan om vad som grundar den mänskliga rättigheten till inre rörlighet i första läget: ”I just claim that whatever the rationale is, the same rationale will apply to movement across border” (Carens 2013: 238–9).

Kritiker menar att detta är att göra det lite för enkelt för sig. Exempelvis om rätten till inre rörlighet motiveras, så som den ofta görs, genom att den hävdas vara nödvändig för uppfyllandet av basala mänskliga intressen som vi har som samhällsmedlemmar: att finna försörjning, en partner, en bostad, att utöva religion med likasinnade, att samarbeta politiskt med andra människor, med mera. För detta leder till frågan om hur stor *räckvidd* rätten till rörlighet måste ha för att dessa basala intressen ska kunna sägas vara realiserbara. Kieran Oberman, är likt Carens, en ”maximalist” i denna fråga: stängda gränser mellan stater omöjliggör vissa alternativ och möjligheter i avgörande livsval och innebär således att basala mänskliga intressen är påverkade av restriktionen (s 38–44). David Miller å sin sida menar att det faktum att vissa specifika önsksningar och möjligheter begränsas inte är tillräckligt: rättigheten bygger på en idé om vissa generella intressen, inte specifika preferenser för hur de ska tillgodose (s 19–22).<sup>2</sup> Själva det faktum att dessa olika positioner är möjliga i förhållande till basala intressen utgör ett problem för själva cantilever-logiken.

En annan strategi för att desarmera cantilever-argumentet är för Miller att påpeka att den inre rörligheten faktiskt är begränsad på många olika sätt: äganderätten, naturskydd, trafikregler, allmänna ordningsföreskrifter, och dylikt (s 23–24).<sup>3</sup> Detta avgör naturligtvis

2 Se även (Miller 2005) och (Miller 2016: 50–52).

3 Se även (Miller 2016: 53–54) och (Barry 1992: 284).

inte frågan huruvida begränsad rörlighet mellan stater är rättfärdigat eller ej, men det innebär att vi befinner oss på en skala där olika typer av begränsningar anses eller inte anses berättigade, snarare än en glasklar skillnad mellan principer för intern respektive internationell rörlighet. Det kan tilläggas att för de som i utgångsläget är benägna att motivera staters självbestämmande just utifrån idéer om kollektivt ägande och självbestämmande, så kommer analogin mellan intern och internationell rörlighet te sig helt annorlunda. Det framstår snarast som fullt koherent att individuell äganderätt begränsar den interna rörligheten, och den kollektiva äganderätten begränsar rörligheten mellan stater.<sup>4</sup>

Det andra huvudsakliga argumentet kring migration som mänsklig rättighet gäller den rättsliga asymmetrin mellan utträde och inträde. Deklarationen om mänskliga rättigheter innehåller rätten att lämna sitt land, men fastslår inte dess korrelat: att det finns en rätt att immigrera till en stat. Detta är rimligen en inkonsistens: rätten till utträde kan inte vara värt något om det inte finns något land som tar emot personen.<sup>5</sup>

Frågor om rätten till utträde och eventuell asymmetri behandlas i kapitlen av Anna Stilz och Christopher Wellman. Stilz tränger ner på djupet i olika tolkningar av rätten till utträde och nyanserar bilden av denna ”självklara” rättighet. I praktiken finns det många frågor där gränsen mellan positiv och negativ rättighet tycks suddig. Ska alla regler som i någon mån medför kostnader för ett utträde räknas som en inskränkning? Om inte, hur dras gränsen? Och vad menas för övrigt med utträde? Här skiljer Stilz mellan (1) resa utomlands, (2) flytta utomlands och (3) att avsäga sitt medborgarskap och dess skyldigheter. Hennes argumentation landar i att det finns rättfärdiga grunder för en policy som medför kostnader för personer som vill avsäga

sig skyldigheter gentemot sina medborgare. Stilz sätt att komma fram och motivera denna ståndpunkt är belysande och klagörande oavsett om man håller med eller inte.

Christopher Wellman adresserar mer direkt frågan om en asymmetri. Likt tidigare artiklar (exempelvis Wellman 2008) försvarar Wellman staters rätt att begränsa inträde. Både statens rätt att exkludera och individens rätt att lämna rättfärdigat Wellman utifrån människans rätt till associationsfrihet. Från individuell associationsfrihet – rätten att välja sitt sällskap, vare sig det gäller äktenskap, vänskap eller föreningsliv – överför Wellman till stater så som representanter för ett självbestämmande kollektiv. Detta kollektiv har också rätten att välja sitt sällskap, och det finns enligt Wellman inga goda skäl till att detta självbestämmande bara gäller i relation till andra stater och internationella organisationer, utan måste utsträckas även till medborgare i andra stater. Ett tankeexempel som Wellman diskuterar är ett scenario där vi i Sverige hade fått för oss att vilja återupprätta unionen med Norge (s 82–84). Det skulle vara svårt att förneka att Norge skulle ha rätt att motsätta sig alla försök till ensidig annektering från svensk sida. Men det är då konstigt, menar Wellman, att förneka att Norge inte samtidigt har rätten att neka samröre och inträde i relation till varje enskild svensk. Precis som en individ är fri att ha samröre, eller att avstå, så är detta också en kollektiv rättighet, som motsvaras av staters rätt att neka inträde och medlemskap. Wellmans text handlar om att försvara och utarbeta implikationerna av denna analogi mellan individers associationsfrihet och staters självbestämmande.

Den första delen av boken är tveklöst den bästa och mest sammanvävda i volymen, och den här recensionen nöjer sig med att redogöra för dessa texter. Likt *Free Movement*

4 Carens bemöter både dessa argument i (Carens 2013, kap. 11).

5 Se exempelvis (Cole 2000: kap. 3) för en utförlig argumentation av detta slag. Exempel på författare som anser att det är en uppenbar inkonsekvens inkluderar bland annat (Sassen 1998: 56)



uppnås i del ett något annat än vad helt separata tidskriftsartiklar gör. De övriga delarna spretar dock betänkligt: del två har den föga förpliktigande rubriken "Migration, Equality, and Justice", och del tre heter kort och gott "Migration and Membership", vilket inte innebär någon som helst precisering i relation till volymens övergripande tematik. Därmed inte sagt att bidragen är ointressanta eller av bristande kvalitet. Tvärtom finns goda chanser att vissa av bidragen kommer bli vedertagna referenspunkter i sitt sammanhang. Men som volym betraktat uppnår inte boken sin potential. Undertecknad hade önskat sig, möjligen lite naivt, en bok där dessa de främsta tänkarna på området gavs i uppdrag att utforska några olika tematiska men väl definierade frågor, och därigenom i dialog lyckats förmedla olika perspektiv och deras respektive styrkor och svagheter. Det har hänt mycket sedan volymen *Free Movement*, och det skulle vara givande med en bok som på ett sammanhållet sätt förmedlar de viktigaste skiljelinjerna i debatten.

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