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Licentiate Thesis

Local Values and e-Government

– Continuity and Change in Public Administration

Implementing Public e-Services in Two Swedish Municipalities

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Abstract

E-government, the use of information and communication technology in public administration, is often presented as a multifaceted reform with powerful transforming potential. E-government currently embodies both hopes of more efficient public administration and fears that an overemphasis on efficiency will neglect the democratic values of public administration.

This study sets out to increase the understanding of the relationship between local values in public administration and e-government. It does so by analyzing and comparing the significance of the introduction of public e-services for core values in two Swedish municipal organizations: Botkyrka and Nacka. To be more exact, what happens to local core values when public e-services are implemented? In doing so, the study contributes to research on reforms and their consequences for the function of public administration today and more specifically, to the discussion on “government” in e-government research.

A neo-institutional outlook with a special emphasis on core values in processes of continuity and change is used as an explanatory framework. The results of the study show the significance of the local institutional setting in defining the process and outcomes of public e-service implementation. Through a local framing of the policy, key actors within both municipalities perceive e-services as mutually supportive of existing core values, despite fundamental differences in values. Nevertheless, practices in the provision of e-services and the inherent characteristics of the technology reveal a higher level of conflict. These could have implications for local core values and, in the long run, for the view of the role of public organizations and citizens.

Keywords: E-government, public e-services, ICT, IT, public administration, public organization, municipality, reform, implementation, institutionalism, values.

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Abbreviations

ACF	Advocacy Coalition Framework
EU	European Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IT	Information Technology
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SALAR	Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions
SCB	<i>Statens Statistiska Centralbyrå</i> (Statistics Sweden)
STS	Science and Technology Studies
UN	United Nations
USK	<i>Stockholms Stads Utrednings- och Statistikkontor</i> (Office of Research and Statistics Stockholm)

Preface and Acknowledgements

In this world, there are things you can only do alone, and things you can only do with somebody else. It's important to combine the two in just the right amount. (Haruki Murakami)

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CHAPTER ONE

E-GOVERNMENT IN SWEDISH MUNICIPALITIES

Introduction

The role and function of public administration in society has been a much debated issue in recent decades as a result of changes in the way public administration¹ is organized.² The development of information and communication technology (ICT) has, in the form of e-government,³ added yet another aspect to this debate. In November 2009 the ministers of the European Union (EU) declared:

We aspire to a vision whereby European governments (...) use eGovernment to increase their efficiency and effectiveness and to constantly improve public services in a way that caters for users' different needs and maximises public value, thus supporting the transition of Europe to a leading knowledge-based economy.⁴

The EU declaration is illustrative of the great significance attached to e-government in defining the future structure of public administration.

¹ In this study I will refer to *public administration*, i.e. the administration of public assets (usually by non-elected officials), as the overarching field within which public organizations operate. I thus regard *public organizations* as the formal public entities which decide on and organize public administration of different sorts, e.g. state authorities, ministries, municipalities or regional authorities. Public organizations also encompass the activities of the popularly elected and therefore cover a broader spectrum of public activities than administration only, see for instance Christensen, Tom et al. (2005) *Organisationsteori för offentlig sektor*, p. 19; Gjelstrup, Gunnar & Sørensen, Eva, eds. (2007) *Public Administration in Transition: Theory, Practice, Methodology*.

² See for instance Jacobsson, Bengt, ed. (1997) *Organisationsexperiment i kommuner och landsting*; Blomqvist, Paula & Rothstein, Bo, eds. (2000) *Välfärdsstatens nya ansikte – demokrati och marknadsreformer inom den offentliga sektorn*; Rothstein, Bo (2006) *Vad bör staten göra?* 2nd ed.; Gjelstrup & Sørensen, eds. (2007).

³ The EU and the Swedish government define e-government as “organizational development in public administration, which takes advantage of ICT in combination with organizational changes and new competences”, Government Offices of Sweden (2008) “Handlingsplan för eFörvaltning – Nya grunder för IT-baserad utveckling i offentlig förvaltning”, p. 4.

⁴ Ministerial Declaration on eGovernment (2009) “An Open Europe with Accessible Public Administration”, p. 1.

Consequently, there is a growing awareness that “e-government is no longer the exception but is becoming the norm, the familiar, *the* way to ‘do’ modern government”.⁵

The increased centrality of e-government in the modernization of public administration has led to several predictions concerning the changes e-government will bring about, ranging from overly pessimistic to overly optimistic.⁶ Amongst these predictions, some observers claim that e-government, in its present form, has mainly been used as a tool to enforce the economic values of market-oriented reforms in public administration, associated with New Public Management (NPM).⁷ Private companies, such as those in the banking sector, have generally provided a blueprint for e-government strategies. In European Union (EU), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and national policy documents on e-government, cost efficiency and customer orientation are central policy aims. In return, critics argue that the overriding focus on efficiency will lead to a process in which the democratic values of public administration are neglected and subordinated to economic values.⁸

In the wake of NPM, e-government is thus seen by some observers to redefine the basic organization of public administration along principles governing the private sector. The premise for this debate is the belief that public organizations are democratic organizations, with a different role and responsibility than private organizations, that is, they ought to encompass a public ethos.⁹ Whereas private organizations are guided predominantly by economic values, such as cost efficiency and productivity, public

⁵ Nixon, Paul et al., eds. (2010) *Understanding e-government in Europe*, Issues and Challenges, p. xxiii.

⁶ See for instance Bekkers, Victor & Homburg, Vincent, eds. (2005) *The Information Ecology of E-government: E-government as Institutional and Technological Innovation in Public Administration*; Gidlund-Lindblad, Katarina et al., eds. (2010) *Förvaltning och medborgarskap i förändring*.

⁷ Homburg, Vincent & Bekkers, Victor (2005) – “E-government and NPM: A perfect Marriage?” in Bekkers & Homburg, eds., pp. 155-170; Cordella, Antonio (2007) “E-government: towards the e-bureaucratic form?” in *Journal of Information Technology* 22(3): 265-274; Giritli Nygren, Katarina (2009) “e” i retorik och praktik – elektronisk förvaltning i översättning.

⁸ Homburg & Bekkers (2005); Zouridis, Stavros & Thaens, Marcel (2005) “Reflections on the Anatomy of E-government” in Bekkers & Homburg, eds., pp. 21-36; Cordella (2007); Dutil, Patrice et al. (2007) “Rethinking Government-Public Relationships in a Digital World: Customers, Clients, or Citizens?” in *Journal of Information Technology & Politics* 4(1): 77-90; Taylor, John A. & Lips, A. Miriam B. (2008) “The Citizen in the Information Polity: Exposing the Limits of the E-government Paradigm” in *Information Polity* 13: 139-152; Giritli Nygren (2009).

⁹ See for instance March, James G. & Olsen, Johan P. (1995) *Democratic Governance*; Lundquist, Lennart (1998) - *Demokratis väktare*; Christensen et al. (2005).

organizations also have to take democratic values into account, such as the rule of law and public ethics. In order to create and maintain legitimacy, public organizations have to achieve a balance between these economic and democratic values. According to this logic, structures from the private sector cannot therefore, just like that, replace structures of public organizations without consequences.¹⁰

E-government has expanded most rapidly within the field of public services, so-called public e-services. Within the EU, public service provisions, such as school applications or filing tax returns, are increasingly being provided via the Internet, often with a cost efficiency rationale as a basis. In advanced welfare states, public services have a fundamental role in the relationship between public administration and citizens. To many citizens, the political system is embodied in the public services they encounter in their everyday life. The character of this meeting is decisive for how the citizen judges the political system. Hence, public services are central for the creation and maintenance of trust for the political system, as well as of democratic legitimacy.¹¹ This presupposes not only an efficient administration of public services but also an adherence to the rights of individuals as formulated in the constitution¹², e.g. equal treatment and equity, what are viewed as democratic values.

Sweden is one of the countries at the forefront of e-government developments and broadband accessibility per capita.¹³ Sweden is also one of the most developed welfare states in the world, where welfare services constitute an integral part of most people's lives. In 2008, the Swedish government issued an action plan for further development of e-government.¹⁴ E-government is here stressed as an important cornerstone in the creation of an effective welfare state. The action plan relies on the overall policy aims of the EU, in which a new e-government plan has been renegotiated in the aftermath of the 2010 Lisbon Agenda.¹⁵ General policy

¹⁰ Lundquist (1998); Lundquist, Lennart (2001) *Medborgardemokratin och eliterna*.

¹¹ See Lundquist (1998); Rothstein (2006); Rothstein, Bo, ed. (2010) *Politik som organisation*.

¹² See the Riksdag "Regeringsformen" 1:1.

¹³ United Nations (2008) "UN e-government Survey 2008: From e-Government to Connected Governance".

¹⁴ Government Offices of Sweden (2008).

¹⁵ European Commission (2005) "i2010 – A European Information Society for growth and employment" COM(2005)299 final; European Commission (2006) "i2010 eGovernment Action Plan"; eGovernment Subgroup (2009) "Visions and Priorities for eGovernment in Europe", Working Document 20.03.2009; European

aims for e-government are thus being formed on both EU and national levels. However, how this policy will be realized in the various public organizations in different settings remains less clear. In a Swedish context, this is the case for municipalities in particular – their constitutionally protected local autonomy means that they have been handed much flexibility in e-government implementation. They are at the same time central actors within public administration. Swedish municipalities fund and organize a large share of the overall public service provisions and are in several respects the public organization in closest proximity to the citizen.¹⁶

Two municipalities in the Stockholm region, *Nacka* and *Botkyrka*, have developed public e-services for almost ten years and can be regarded as forerunners within the field.¹⁷ They are two rather different municipalities in terms of local context, for instance, with regard to political rule and policy traditions in public service provisions. They thus illustrate the different local institutional settings within which public e-services are being implemented. Despite the fact that the formal institutional setting is similar – they are both Swedish municipalities subject to the same laws and regulations – the informal institutional setting, such as the local values embedded in the municipal organization, can differ to a greater extent. Research has shown that technology is disobedient in the sense that it can have different and unanticipated consequences in different contexts.¹⁸ Public e-services currently embody both hopes of more efficient public administration and fears that an overemphasis on efficiency will neglect the democratic values of public administration. This ambiguity calls for a deeper understanding of how public e-services are influencing the possibility of realizing different values in public administration.¹⁹ There is thus a need to study what happens in the local implementation of public e-services and what this means for existing values in different localities, as well as, more generally, for the prevailing function and role of public

Commission (2010) “The European eGovernment Action Plan 2011-2015: Harnessing ICT to Promote Smart, Sustainable & Innovative Government”, COM(2010)743.

¹⁶ Government Offices of Sweden (2008).

¹⁷ SALAR (2008a) “E-förvaltningsutveckling i Sveriges kommuner 2006-2007”.

¹⁸ See for instance Markus, M. Lynne & Robey, Daniel (1988) “Information Technology and Organizational Change: Causal Structure in Theory and Research” in *Management Science* 34(5): 583-598.

¹⁹ See Åström, Joachim & Olsson, Jan (2006a) “Bringing Inter-disciplinary Back in” in Olsson, Jan & Åström, Joachim, eds., *Democratic eGovernance: Approaches and Research Directions*, p. 212.

administration. To be more exact, what effect, if any, do public e-services have on existing values in a municipality's public administration?

Aim of Thesis

This study sets out to increase the understanding of the relationship between local values in public administration and e-government. The overarching aim is **to analyze the significance of the introduction of public e-services for core values in two Swedish municipal organizations**. In other words, does “business as usual” prevail after the introduction of this reform or do e-services change anything in local core values? A comparative case study of the municipalities of Botkyrka and Nacka in Sweden will provide the empirical basis for the analysis which aims to answer this question.

Three research questions will act as guidance for the analysis:

1. How are e-services implemented in the two municipalities?
2. Which core values can be distinguished before and during the implementation process?
3. How and why are existing core values affected in the implementation process?

The aim and research questions thus involve analyzing the introduction of a reform in two municipalities, which, crudely put, is hypothesized to either lead to some type of change in core values, or no change at all. In order to guide and systematize the analysis, a neo-institutionalist outlook, and a specific part of the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) – i.e. the structure of belief systems – of Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith²⁰ will be applied as a theoretical framework. In turn, it will be used to conceptually define values as well as to operationalize my study thereof. The comparative perspective will contrast and highlight the role of differences in the local institutional setting in general and core values in particular, in the process of implementing e-services. It is thus a way of visualizing and mirroring differences in public e-service implementation, as well as of assessing what effects – if any – different policy framings can produce.

²⁰ Sabatier, Paul A. & Jenkins-Smith, Hank C., eds. (1993) *Policy Change and Learning: An Advocacy Coalition Approach*.

The thesis mainly has an empirical emphasis. The purpose is first and foremost to explore a phenomenon in order to contribute to knowledge that can be built on in further research. My theoretical aim, albeit of secondary importance to the overarching one above, is to contribute to the academic debate on the role of reforms for the function of public administration and more specifically, the effect of e-government and public e-services on values in public organizations. In turn, I hope to add more to the discussion on “government” in e-government research.

In this first chapter I will present an overview of the issues that provide the rationale for my research problem. I will begin by presenting the field of e-government and adjoining fields in order to contextualize the research problem. The presentation will function as a background and positioning for my analysis but will not provide any tools for explanatory purposes. These will be presented in chapter 2. The following chapter places e-government within a broader discussion of general topics in research within public administration. It thus constitutes an attempt to bridge the often neglected area, at least by political scientists, of e-government and public e-services with issues generally discussed by political scientists. It should be mentioned that e-government spans a number of disciplines which in different ways handle the “large” issues of technology, society or the relationship between the two. Thus, within this limited space it is difficult to give an all-encompassing account of the field and the issues it touches upon. I will therefore limit the following section to issues which relate to my research problem and more specifically, e-government as a multifaceted reform in public administration.

E-government: A Multifaceted Reform in Public Administration

Perspectives on e-Government

In the first years of the 21st century, e-government has become a widely discussed concept globally. Nevertheless, it still lacks a single definition. E-government can generally be described as *the use of ICT to develop the activities of public administration*. In practice, this definition encompasses a great number of activities, such as filing tax returns via the Internet; internal systems for administrating documents or invoices; broadcasting of

political meetings; electronic handling of health care journals; various chat forums or simply the one-way information provided on the websites of public organizations. For both analytical and practical purposes, e-government is usually divided into three dimensions: *e-services*, *e-administration* and *e-democracy*. Although it is difficult in practice to make a clear division between these dimensions, figure 1 is frequently used to illustrate the distinction and relationship between them.

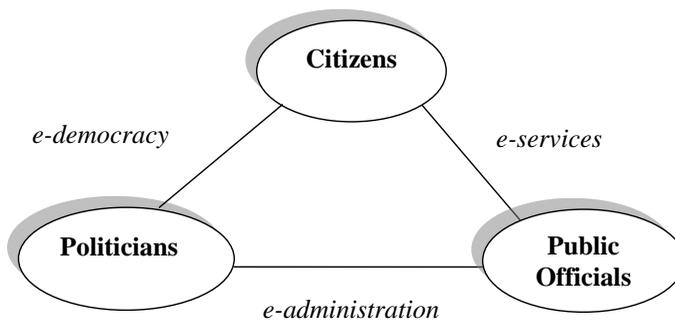


Figure 1. The Three Dimensions of e-Government.

Source: 24-timmarsdelegationen (2005) – “Offentliga e-tjänster i medborgarens tjänst”.

E-services concern the external delivery of information and services electronically; *e-administration* entails activities to develop internal efficiency and *e-democracy* involves the development of political influence and participation of citizens through electronic channels. E-government can thus be viewed as an umbrella concept which encompasses the use of ICT in public administration for both internal and external purposes.²¹

As a field of research, e-government is interdisciplinary and extends across disciplines such as public administration, information systems, media and communication studies and organizational management. Social scientists have generally paid less attention to the field of e-government while information systems perspectives have tended to dominate the field.²² As a

²¹ Grönlund, Åke & Ranerup, Agneta, eds. (2001) *Elektronisk förvaltning, elektronisk demokrati: visioner, verklighet, vidareutveckling*, pp. 9-10; Giritli Nygren (2009), pp. 5-8; Lindblad-Gidlund et al., eds. (2010), pp. 21-23.

²² Giritli Nygren (2009), p. 8; for a good categorization of the literature on e-democracy according to discipline, see Bock Seegard, Signe (2009) *Veje till lokalt e-demokrati – organisering, mål, virkemidler og resultater*, pp.72-85.

result, e-government has often been discussed mainly as an issue of technology and/or public management (in contrast to public *administration*). These perspectives have largely focused on how e-government can lead to best practices and efficiency gains. Evaluations of the success of e-government implementation according to certain criteria or models, e.g. the so-called “e-government ladder”, have for instance dominated the field.²³ These perspectives have often assumed rather deterministic views on technology and tended to downplay the influence of institutions and contextual factors. Technological determinism takes the context in which technology is implemented as given. According to this logic, ICT is an autonomous and exogenous power, the effects of which are built into the characteristics of the technology. In other words, no matter where ICT will be implemented, the effects will always be the same. In turn, the “government” in e-government, i.e. the specific setting of government or public administration, has largely been treated as a black box. Public organizations have often been viewed as no different from private organizations.²⁴ Despite their traditional preoccupation with governmental institutions, political scientists have also tended to regard e-government mainly as an issue of technology. Consequently, with a few exceptions, e-government has been a relatively unexplored field within political science.²⁵

Nevertheless, empirical research has over the years increasingly illustrated the various difficulties in implementing high-flying e-government plans. The decade has thus seen an increase in research which emphasizes the role of the specific institutional setting of public administration in e-government implementation.²⁶ The institutional perspective is in some respects the opposite of the deterministic view. The latter sees technology as a revolutionary force that will change everything whereas the former

²³ Goldkühl, Göran & Persson, Anders (2006) “From E-ladder to E-diamond – Re-conceptualising Models for Public E-services”, *14th European Conference on Information Systems (ECIS2006)*; Heeks, Richard (2006) “Analyzing e-government research: Perspectives, philosophies, theories, methods, and practice” in *Government Information Quarterly* 24(2): 243-265; Coursey, David & Norris, Donald F. (2008) “Models of E-government: Are They Correct? An Empirical Assessment” in *Public Administration Review* 60(3): 523-536.

²⁴ Taylor & Lips (2008), p. 140.

²⁵ See for instance Åström, Joachim & Olsson, Jan (2006b) “Political Science beyond Orthodoxy” in Olsson & Åström, eds., p. 61.

²⁶ See for instance Fountain, Jane (2001a) *Building the Virtual State: Information Technology and Institutional Change*; Bekkers & Homburg, eds. (2005); Tolbert, Caroline J. et al. (2008) “Institutions, Policy Innovation, and E-Government in the American States” in *Public Administration Review* 60(3): 549-663.

views technology mainly as a tool for reinforcing existing structures. In her influential book, *Building the Virtual State: Information Technology and Institutional Change*, Fountain unfolds an institutional outlook on e-government by developing a framework which recognizes the embeddedness of government actors in cognitive, cultural, social and institutional structures as well as their influence on design, perceptions and uses of ICT. According to Fountain, actors tend to enact technology in order to reproduce and strengthen existing structures, especially “deep institutions”, i.e. history and culture encoded in existing norms and values of organizations. She thus concludes that it is not surprising that similar organizations often use identical information systems in very different ways. Nevertheless, Fountain does not claim that technology is in a constant process of social construction and re-construction. Although ICT is subjectively perceived, she also recognizes that there is a hard core of technology which appears as pre-given, so-called “objective technology”.²⁷ This is a result of the fact that ICT, once “developed and deployed”, inhabits certain built-in properties which, as time progresses, become increasingly taken for granted.²⁸ The outcome of ICT implementation is therefore far from given but the processes of enactment can produce unanticipated consequences for institutional structures.²⁹ Thus, the dual and dynamic relationship between the institutional setting and ICT is here highlighted, much according to earlier research on technology’s role in society, such as Science and Technology Studies (STS)³⁰, Giddens’ structuration theory³¹ or Orlikowski’s development³² of the latter.

In line with dualistic views on the relationship between society and technology, researchers within the field of public administration have increasingly highlighted what implications the process of implementing e-government could have on specific aspects of public administration or

²⁷ In this definition, Fountain includes the Internet, other digital telecommunications, hardware and software.

²⁸ Orlikowski, Wanda (1992) “The Duality of Technology: Rethinking the Concept of Technology in Organizations” in *Organization Science* 3(3): 398-427.

²⁹ Fountain (2001a), p. 10; Yang, Kaifeng (2003) “Neo-institutionalism and E-government: Beyond Jane Fountain” in *Social Science Computer Review* 21: 432-442.

³⁰ See for instance Bijker, Wiebe et al., eds. (1987) *The Social Construction of Technological Systems: New Directions in the Sociology and History of Technology*.

³¹ Giddens, Anthony (1984) *The Constitution of Society*; Giddens, Anthony (1990) *The Construction of Modernity*.

³² Orlikowski (1992).

political life in general, such as democracy, accountability, legitimacy and public trust. There is recognition of a wider polity which affects as well as is affected by the implementation of e-government.³³ Bekkers and Homburg speak of a co-evolution between the institutional structures of public administration and ICT.³⁴

Thus, institutional perspectives have increasingly highlighted how the outcome of e-government implementation is bound by and contingent on the specific institutional features of governments and public administration. These are traditionally heavily formalized both in the shape of rules and regulations, but also in terms of more informal aspects, such as codes of conduct, norms and values.

In general, research on e-government has tended to highlight the influence of formal aspects, such as size, type of governmental structure or financial resources³⁵, rather than the informal aspects, such as social, cognitive and cultural factors. For instance, although Fountain recognizes the role of cognitive and cultural institutions, what she terms “deep institutions”, in shaping the use of ICT, she elaborates more on the changes facing formal bureaucratic structures than, for instance, the values embedded in public administration. This can partly be attributed to the fact that social and cultural factors are hard to measure and thus considered more difficult to study, hence, few studies exist with this particular focus.³⁶ Furthermore, in political science, there has traditionally been a pre-occupation with the formal institutions of government and representative democracy.³⁷ Yet, the increased emphasis on contextual factors in e-government research has also highlighted the “undeniable importance” of political culture, beliefs and mindsets embedded in a country, locality or public organization in determining the shape of e-government.³⁸ According to Åström and Olsson,

³³ See Bekkers & Homburg, eds. (2005); Tolbert, Caroline J. & Mossberger, Karen (2006) “The Effects of E-Government on Trust and Confidence in Government” in *Public Administration Review* 66(3): 354-369; Taylor & Lips (2008).

³⁴ Bekkers, Victor & Homburg, Vincent (2005a) “E-government as an Information Ecology: Backgrounds and Concepts” in Bekkers & Homburg, eds. (2005), p. 17.

³⁵ See for instance Moon, Jae M. (2002) “The Evolution of E-government among Municipalities; Rhetoric or Reality?” in *Public Administration Review* 62(4): 424-433; Tolbert et al. (2008).

³⁶ One example is Bolgherini, Silvia (2007) “The Technology Trap and the Role of Political and Cultural Variables: A Critical Analysis of the E-government Policies” in *Review of Policy Research* 24(3): 259-275.

³⁷ Åström & Olsson (2006a), pp. 203-204.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 266; see also Baldersheim, Harald & Øgård, Morten (2008) “Innovation in E-government: Analysis of

future e-government research should focus to a greater extent on “how new ICT techniques and forms of e-governance are influencing the possibility of realizing different values, but also to understand important values behind technical and social innovations”.³⁹ In order to understand the future shape and implications of e-government, there is thus a need for understanding the dominant values and perceptions embedded in the use of ICT.

In a Scandinavian context, political science perspectives on e-government have often focused on ICT’s role in revitalizing the traditional channels of democratic communication and representation, i.e. what is usually placed under the heading of e-democracy.⁴⁰ In line with the aforementioned perspectives, these studies have emphasized the role of existing institutional factors in determining the extent and shape of e-democracy initiatives.⁴¹ Although in the 1990s and 2000s there was great optimism concerning the democratic potentials of ICT, today it is clear that the number of e-democracy initiatives in public organizations cannot equal the number of e-services or e-administration initiatives.⁴² Innovations in e-democracy have been outrun by a focus on creating more efficient and accessible public services via the Internet. Despite this, the development of public e-services has, at least in the Scandinavian context, received little attention by political scientists and has tended to be mainly the occupation of researchers within information systems.

The lack of interest in the digitization of public administration is somewhat surprising considering the traditional interest of political scientists in other

Municipal Web Pages on the Nordic countries” in *Information Polity* 13: 125-137; Christensen, Tom & Lægriid, Per (2010) “Civil Servants’ Perception Regarding ICT Use in Norwegian Central Government” in *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 7: 3-21.

³⁹ Åström & Olsson (2006b), p. 212.

⁴⁰ See for instance Åström, Joachim (2004) *Mot en digital demokrati? Teknik, politik och institutionell förändring*; Baldersheim, Harald, Haug, Are Vegard & Øgård, Morten, eds. (2006) *Hva er den virtuelle kommunen? Mot den virtuelle kommunen. Studier i e-demokrati og e-forvaltning*; Bock Seegard (2009); Haug Vegard, Are (2009) *Lokaldemokratiet på nett og i nett*.

⁴¹ See for instance Åström (2004).

⁴² Ibid.; Torres, Lourdes et al. (2005) “E-government and the Transformation of Public Administrations in EU countries: Beyond NPM or just Second Wave Reforms?” in *Online Information Review*, 29(5), p. 532; Dawes, Sharon S. (2008) “The Evolution and Continuing Challenges of E-governance” in *Public Administration Review* 68(6): 86-102; Giritli Nygren & Wiklund, Hans G. (2010) – “En IT-styrd förvaltning – en fjärde förvaltningsdoktrin?” in Lindblad-Gidlund et al., eds., pp. 215-225.

types of reforms within public administration and services.⁴³ Furthermore, as Rothstein, Lundquist and other political scientists have emphasized, since public services are the channel through which citizens mainly experience the execution of public decisions, the quality of public service provisions have a central role in the creation and maintenance of trust and democratic legitimacy.⁴⁴ Rothstein puts it in the following way:

One can in fact say that public administration *is* the political system, as the citizen experiences it. The character of public administration is therefore decisive for how the citizen judges the political system.⁴⁵

The fact that public services are electronic should not make this aspect less important. Thus, according to this logic, public e-services are not only a tool for efficient service management but also a central component in the creation and maintenance of democratic legitimacy. In other words, even though e-democracy ambitions are low, there can still be democratic implications from the digitization of public administration and services.⁴⁶ The implementation of e-services should therefore indeed be an important issue for political scientists, not least in advanced welfare states such as the Scandinavian countries, where the existence of an effective, impartial and universalistic public administration has been claimed to be *the* most important factor explaining why these states display what has been dubbed a “high quality of government”.⁴⁷ In this respect, political scientists can contribute to the study of e-government and what it means for the function of public administration with a democratic and political outlook.⁴⁸

In sum, e-government has increasingly gone from being viewed mainly as an issue of technology to an issue of public administration. From this perspective, it is clear that e-government does not only concern the

⁴³ See for instance Rothstein & Blomqvist, eds. (2000); Johansson, Anders (2003) *Offentlig kultur i omvandling?*; Rothstein, ed. (2010).

⁴⁴ Lundquist (1998), p. 11; Rothstein, Bo (2010a) “Välfärdsstat, förvaltning och legitimitet” in Rothstein, ed., pp. 10-12.

⁴⁵ Rothstein, Bo (2010b) “Den svenska statsförvaltningens omvandling från försumpning till legitimitet” in Rothstein, ed., p. 106.

⁴⁶ Giritli Nygren & Wiklund (2010), p. 225.

⁴⁷ Rothstein (2006); see also Rothstein, Bo & Teorell, Jan (2008) “What is Quality of Government? A Theory of Impartial Government Institutions” in *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions* 21(2): 165–190.

⁴⁸ Lundquist (1998), p. 75; Christensen et al. (2005), p. 4.

implementation of a technology – it is also is a policy and administrative concept.⁴⁹ This means that formal *and* informal structures of politics need to be taken into account when studying the implementation e-government. In addition, rather than viewing the relationship between ICT and public administration as one-way, the co-development between the two is increasingly being highlighted. Giritli Nygren summarizes it as follows:

[I]t is not possible to separate technology from the social processes that surround it; nor is it possible to separate the social processes from the technology which they surround. Technology does not inhabit any values beyond the social context, it can however in interaction with the social processes that surround it be given values.⁵⁰

According to this view, during its implementation and use, e-government is continuously given a role and meaning in interaction with surrounding social processes and values. As a result, it has been acknowledged that the consequences of e-government are not always easy to predict, in other words: “the introduction of technology in organizations can hardly be understood in terms of rational and linear processes. Rather, it is the outcome of a complex and unpredictable process of interactions”.⁵¹ Thus, e-government can have unanticipated and unintended effects. This highlights the need to understand the processes which are currently giving e-government aims and practices their specific shape and values. These processes will be discussed more below. First, an overview of e-government developments in a Swedish context in general and in municipalities in particular will be provided in order to set the stage for subsequent discussions.

e-Government in a Swedish Context

Sweden is one of the most advanced countries in terms of ICT and e-government developments. Broadband diffusion and access to ICT is high: in 2009, 86 percent of the population had access to a computer at home; 83 percent had access to Internet at home; 78 percent had access to broadband

⁴⁹ Bekkers, Victor & Homburg, Vincent (2008) “The Myths of E-government: Looking beyond the Assumptions of a New and Better Government” in *the Information Society* 23, p. 374.

⁵⁰ Giritli Nygren (2009), p. 2.

⁵¹ Bekkers, Victor & Homburg, Vincent (2005c) “The Information Ecology of E-government Revisited” in Bekkers & Homburg, eds., pp. 184-185.

at home and 62 percent made use of the Internet on a daily basis, which illustrates the centrality of the Internet for the daily routines of Swedes.⁵² In turn, Sweden was ranked highest in terms of e-government readiness in the United Nations (UN) e-government survey 2008.⁵³ In addition, Sweden is one of the most developed welfare states in the world, with an extensive provision of services which affects citizens directly in their everyday lives. Public administration and services are thus central to the functioning of the lives of most Swedes. In turn, the Swedish model is built on an extensive welfare state founded on the principle of “high-quality standard solution”. This involves high-quality public services with universalist aims.⁵⁴ Generally, Swedish public institutions and welfare programs also enjoy high political legitimacy and trust.⁵⁵

In 2008 the Swedish government issued an action plan for e-government aimed at making public administration “as simple as possible, for as many as possible”.⁵⁶ E-government developments in Sweden had since the beginning of the 21st century been handled according to a decentralized public administration model, the so-called “24/7 agency”, initiated by the Swedish Agency for Public Management (*Statskontoret*). The goal was to coordinate developments towards more accessible public administration, with a delivery of public services and information 24 hours a day, seven days a week.⁵⁷ However, the centre-right government, elected in 2006, proved to be increasingly dissatisfied with the progress of the 24/7 agency model. The action plan is the first policy document on e-government issued by the Swedish government and indicates a will to steer more centrally and co-ordinate e-government developments. It is evident that the Swedish action plan relies on EU rhetoric as formulated in the EU’s *i2010 eGovernment Action Plan*. Both the European and Swedish action plans clearly emphasize ICT’s central role in improving access to public services and for creating more coordinated collaboration between different

⁵² Olle Findahl (2009) “Svenskarna och Internet 2009, World Internet Institute 2009”, p. 9, 15.

⁵³ UN (2008), p. 20.

⁵⁴ Universalism is here referred to as “the principle that laws and regulations should not directly address individual citizens but should be shaped in a way that is generally applicable, so that equality for the law can be followed”, Rothstein (2010b), p. 105.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁵⁶ Government Offices of Sweden (2008).

⁵⁷ See the Swedish Agency for Public Management (2000) “The 24/7 Agency, Criteria for 24/7 Agencies in the Networked Public Administration”, 2000:41.

governmental levels. Since the beginning of 2009, the ministry of finance has taken over the responsibility for e-government co-ordination through the eGovernment Delegation.⁵⁸ They have in turn issued a strategy for the coordination of e-government activities amongst state authorities in order to “increase their productivity and effectiveness as well as increase the development and innovation of society through e-government”.⁵⁹

Although the action plan as well as the work of the eGovernment Delegation mainly concerns state authorities, the central role of municipalities in public administration and their closeness to the citizen means that municipalities are often mentioned as important actors in e-government developments. The action plan states:

The municipal administration represents approximately 70 percent of the public administration. The municipalities therefore have an important role in the relationship with citizens in the area of services as well as with private companies, e.g. in the area of e-commerce. The e-government activities of the municipalities are therefore of great importance for the overall development of e-government.⁶⁰

Despite aims of more central coordination, Swedish municipalities retain a large degree of independence in terms of how to develop e-government. Considering the autonomy of Swedish municipalities, this is perhaps not surprising. The relationship between the state and municipalities can today be described as more on the lines of informal means of coordination and decision making, i.e. through advice and information.⁶¹ This has also characterized e-government matters: the government stipulates that municipalities have to develop e-government but they are free to decide the extent, shape and speed.

The Swedish form of government is sometimes referred to as “Swedish dualism”, which entails both a centrally controlled unitary state and

⁵⁸ e-Government Delegation website: <http://www.edelegationen.se/>, accessed: 11.11.2010.

⁵⁹ SOU 2009:86 - “Strategi för myndigheternas arbete med e-förvaltning”, p. 11.

⁶⁰ The Government Offices of Sweden (2008), p. 8.

⁶¹ Baldersheim, Harald & Ståhlberg, Krister (2002) “From Guided Democracy to Multi-Level Governance: Trends in Central-Local Relations in the Nordic Countries” in *Local Government Studies* 28(3), p. 77.

relatively strong local governments.⁶² Strong local autonomy is an important component of the Swedish constitution and involves local entities being responsible for publicly financed governmental tasks, with their own tax bases. Municipalities are also democratically elected organizations. They are thus politically run organizations with local council members commissioning tasks to the public officials, as well as deciding on them. Swedish municipalities are today responsible for a large amount of the public sector that affects the individual directly in terms of social care and education. In comparison with other public organizations, such as state authorities, municipalities are very multifaceted and handle a wide and complex set of issues.⁶³ Recent decades have also seen an increase in areas for which the municipalities are responsible, the most prominent example being when municipalities took over the responsibility for schools from the state in 1991. Some observers thus speak of the existence of “welfare municipalities”⁶⁴ rather than a welfare state.

The large degree of autonomy granted to municipalities in e-government developments has however led to huge variations between Swedish municipalities, both concerning what has been done and how far in the process they have come. Strategies have varied from municipality to municipality. In evaluations made by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR) in 2008, there are certain correlations between the size of municipality and development level. Below 30,000 inhabitants, the average for e-government developments is rather constant. Above 30,000 inhabitants, the mean value increases in relation to municipality size and reaches its peak in municipalities with over 100,000 inhabitants.⁶⁵ It thus indicates that the bigger municipalities usually have advantages in terms of for instance resources which facilitate e-government developments. Other studies have emphasized the need for leadership, single enthusiasts and/or political support⁶⁶, as well as an organizational

⁶² See for instance Premfors, Rune (1998) “Den komplexa staten” in Ahrne, Göran, ed., *Stater som organisationer*, pp. 17-60.

⁶³ This involves social services, social benefits, elderly care, addict care, care of disabled, education (compulsory school as well as parts of the gymnasium and adult education) rescue services, environmental protection issues, building issues, drainage and water supply, culture and leisure activities, etc., Gustafsson, Agne (1999) *Kommunal självstyrelse*, pp. 11-45.

⁶⁴ Sundin, Elisabeth et al. (2010) “Varför ska kvinnor starta företag inom vård och omsorg?”.

⁶⁵ SALAR (2008a), p. 2.

⁶⁶ Löfstedt, Ulrica (2007) “E-Government services in Local Governments – a Study of Development in Swedish Municipalities” in *Journal of Organisational Transformation and Social Change* 4(2): 157-176; Löfstedt, Ulrica

culture with a history of organizational change (a “change culture”).⁶⁷ In general, e-government policy aims in Swedish municipalities have gone from a technology oriented, to a government oriented and most recently, to a citizen-centric perspective.⁶⁸ This reflects the overall developments in e-government on an EU or OECD level.⁶⁹

Although aims of e-government implementation differ from municipality to municipality, higher quality of public services for a lower cost is generally stressed as a central aim. As major actors in the provision of public services, most municipalities thus see e-government as an opportunity to rationalize the costs of public administration and services and simultaneously improve availability for citizens and businesses. E-government in Swedish municipalities is generally portrayed as the solution for meeting the demands of an increasingly digitized and connected public as well as for managing the large responsibilities within welfare services.⁷⁰

This section has touched upon some of the central arguments behind e-government implementation in a Swedish context. Next I will turn to a more in-depth discussion of what has often been perceived as the dominant logic behind the e-government policy, namely the economic logic usually associated with NPM.

NPM and e-Government

As a reform in public administration, e-government has been related to a number of dominant values and discourses. On the one hand, e-government has been directly or indirectly linked to the marketization discourse usually associated with NPM. On the other hand, e-government has been associated with a new dawn of more deliberative forms of grass roots democracy according to a cyber or virtual view on democracy.⁷¹ In addition, e-government has also been regarded as something completely

(2010) “Kommunala e-tjänster – fokus, utveckling och medborgardeltagande” in Lindblad-Gidlund et al., eds., pp. 74-75.

⁶⁷ See for instance Baldersheim & Øgård (2008), pp. 125-127.

⁶⁸ Löfstedt (2010), pp. 67-82.

⁶⁹ See for instance OECD (2009) “Rethinking eGovernment Services – User-Centred Approaches”; EU (2010).

⁷⁰ Löfstedt (2010), pp. 67-82.

⁷¹ See for instance Buskqvist, Ulf (2006) “Cyberspace as Public Space” in Olsson & Åström, eds., pp. 119-134.

separate from previous developments, a new reform in itself.⁷² Considering my restricted research problem, I will focus in this section mainly on the first perspective and summarize observations of how the policy aims and practices of e-government have been grounded in values associated with NPM. According to these claims, it is the NPM-based rhetoric which is most evident in international and national policy documents on e-government.

International organizations such as the EU, OECD and UN have in several respects set the agenda for the current Swedish e-government policy, through policy documents, evaluations and reports on e-government.⁷³ Sweden and other countries have produced action plans and strategies which more or less reflect the rhetoric of these international organizations. This has led some observers to speak of an *e-government paradigm* or *e-government discourse* that countries and organizations share.⁷⁴ Present in this discourse is the belief that e-government “will bring a better government which is more open, more accessible, more responsive, more collaborative and more demand-oriented than government in the pre-Internet era”.⁷⁵ E-government is in this respect seen as a revolutionary force which will solve many of the challenges facing public administration today – it is *the* central reform for the modernization of public administration.

NPM is a much debated concept which lacks a single definition – it seems like most reforms in public administration during the last decades have been placed under this heading. On the one hand, NPM can be seen as a neoliberal, global administrative philosophy that applies market logic to public administration. On the other hand, it can be seen as a type of steering which involves a different way of running public administration according to a decentralized network structure and output logic, in contrast to the traditional, hierarchical bureaucracy along Weberian ideals. According to this structure, organizations should be as flat as possible on a vertical level, which entails a decentralization of tasks and responsibilities.

⁷² Dunleavy, Patrick et al. (2005) “New Public Management is Dead – Long Live Digital-Era Governance” in *Journal of Public Administration and Theory* 16: 467-494.

⁷³ See EU (2006); UN (2008); OECD (2009).

⁷⁴ See Zouridis & Thaens (2005), pp. 29-30; Taylor & Lips (2008), p. 140; Giritli Nygren (2009), pp. 37-38.

⁷⁵ Bekkers & Homburg (2005a), p. 7.

At the top, only core activities should be concentrated.⁷⁶ Central to NPM-based reforms are nevertheless ideals and solutions borrowed from the private sector. Gjelstrup and Sørensen define NPM as follows:

how market-based forms of organization that enhance competition between producers of public services can contribute to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of public governance, and the search for ways of organizing and performing public administration in a competitive public sector.⁷⁷

In practice this has often meant a so-called de-bureaucratization of public administration in which managerialism, market orientation, decentralization of responsibilities, contracted cooperation through public-private partnerships, quality measurements and a service orientation have become central imperatives.⁷⁸ Although links between e-government and NPM are not always made explicit, e-government is often considered to build on similar principles of de-bureaucratization, decentralization and marketization. Thus, by providing a solution to what has been regarded as the inefficient, bureaucratic structures of public administration, e-government is regarded to follow in the footsteps of NPM:

NPM and e-government are based upon ideas that are in fact quite similar: perceived unresponsiveness and rigidity of the traditional bureaucratic structures (...) and the resulting public dissatisfaction with the government, encouraging reformers to embrace managerial ideas.⁷⁹

ICT is thus viewed as the central tool for practically realizing shifts from an internal, bureaucracy-oriented public administration to an external, customer-oriented public administration.⁸⁰ In contrast to bureaucratic ideals, which often stress the *processes* of public administration, e-government emphasizes *effective results* and *output*.⁸¹ In turn, a more

⁷⁶ Røvik, Kjell Arne (2008) *Managementsamhället*, pp. 113-120.

⁷⁷ Gjelstrup, Gunnar & Sørensen, Eva, eds. (2007), p. 22.

⁷⁸ See Christensen, Tom & Lægrid, Per, eds. (2002) - *New Public Management: The Transformation of Ideas and Practice*, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁹ Cordella (2007), p. 269.

⁸⁰ Van Duivenboden, Hein & Lips, Miriam (2005) "Responsive E-government Services: Towards 'New' Public Management" in Bekkers & Homburg, eds., p. 142.

⁸¹ See Cordella (2007).

efficient, flexible and responsive organization along the ideals of the private sector is meant to be realized.

In line with NPM, e-government implementation is often related to two overarching goals: *customer orientation* and *increased internal and external efficiency*⁸², which are usually seen as complementary. On the one hand, ICT can do what technology has done for a long period of time in public administration, i.e. automate slow and cumbersome internal working processes and deliver public services more efficiently. By letting citizens do a large proportion of the work, e.g. through self-service applications, further rationalization can be achieved.

On the other hand, ICT offers possibilities of providing services more according to individualized needs. One of the major goals of e-government is to create a more responsive government. It is a government *for* the people. Through e-government, the needs of the citizen, rather than the needs of the public administration, can be met. For instance, ICT can be used for creating a more linked administrative apparatus, which means that the citizen's life situation is the focal point rather than the public administration.⁸³ Around-the-clock access to government issues from almost anywhere improves availability. Administrative and democratic processes can furthermore be organized in a transparent and non-hierarchical way.

ICT can moreover be used to provide more customized services through single-entry points, i.e. Internet portals which are shaped according to the citizen's needs and preferences. ICT can also facilitate the provision of quality measurements of public services and tools for comparing different public service providers. Citizens are thus able to more closely monitor government performance and in turn, the increased two-way interaction can lead to enhanced service quality. The citizen becomes an "empowered consumer" and a government closer to the people is realized.⁸⁴

⁸² Efficiency in e-government discussions is related to *internal efficiency* which focuses on the use of ICT for producing services at the lowest possible cost in terms of internal resources. In contrast, *external efficiency* focuses on providing services that meet the demands of citizens.

⁸³ Bekkers & Homburg (2008), p.375.

⁸⁴ Homburg & Bekkers (2005), pp. 155-170; Bekkers & Homburg (2008); pp. 373-382.

In line with the argumentation of NPM, policy documents on e-government often view customer satisfaction as a major source of accountability and legitimacy. Effective service delivery is regarded as imperative for the creation of public trust and legitimacy.⁸⁵ All in all, the e-government discourse emphasizes a customer-based view of the citizen, in which individuals, just like customers in a market place, are able to make informed choices and place demands on the governments according to their own needs.⁸⁶ According to the logic presented here, ICT in combination with the values of NPM is what currently can be defined as e-government.

Over the years, NPM reforms have been heavily criticized for changing the role and function of public organizations. The critique has mainly evolved around the fact that public organizations are different from private organizations. Public organizations have to take into account and balance a larger set of goals and interests than private organizations, for instance democracy, rule of law and respect for the common interest. Public organizations are also accountable to the citizen and the electorate which presupposes a need for transparency, public control, equal treatment and predictability. Furthermore, they are multifunctional: they have several and sometimes conflicting objectives, in contrast to the primary goal of profit and cost efficiency of the private sector.⁸⁷

Consequently, the discussion of e-government as a policy grounded in the values of NPM needs to be linked to views on the special role and responsibility of public organizations, in particular to views on what are regarded as typical public values.

The Specific Role and Responsibility of Public Organizations

Discussions of the specific role and responsibility of public organizations have evolved around the concept of *the public ethos*. The concept basically entails that the overarching aim of public organizations is to serve the public in ways that ensures the public interest. Public organizations should thus embody a shared sense of responsibility for serving social justice and the common good, whereby both *economic* and *democratic values* are

⁸⁵ See Homburg & Bekkers (2005); Cordella (2007).

⁸⁶ See Dutil et al. (2007).

⁸⁷ Christensen et al. (2005), pp. 9-31.

taken into account. Economic values are mainly founded on balancing the use of resources according to a set of economic targets and revenues, whereas democratic values are founded on the public rights and rule of law enshrined in the constitution, such as equality, freedom, equity and solidarity. Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of democratic and economic values:

Democratic Values	Economic Values
Power of the people	Rationality
Constitutionalism	Cost efficiency
Public ethics	Productivity

Table 1. The Values of the Public Ethos.

Source: Lundquist in Gjelstrup & Sørensen (2007).

Both types of values presuppose each other and have to be constantly balanced in order to fulfil the public ethos. In their day-to-day work, public officials are thus in a position where they have to decide how to meet economic targets as well as constitutional requirements. In short, in order to be legitimate, public organizations have to be both democratic *and* efficient.⁸⁸ In this sense, democratic values are regarded as specific to public organizations whereas economic values exist in both public and private organizations. Lundquist observes an increased focus on economic values in the public reforms of the last decades – he calls this the advance of *economism*, which in several respects corresponds to the basic propositions of NPM. According to Lundquist, economic and democratic values do not always exist as mutually supportive or independent of each other – they can also be in competition with each other. He warns that an increased focus on economic values could undermine the role of democratic values and thus the public ethos. In turn, a neglect of democratic values could undermine democratic legitimacy overall.⁸⁹

The critics of NPM and defenders of the public ethos tend to base their arguments on a democratic ideal along the lines of *representative*

⁸⁸ Lundquist (1998).

⁸⁹ See *ibid.*; Lundquist (2001); Lundquist, Lennart (2007) “Public Administration Theory and Public Administration Change” in Gjelstrup & Sørensen, eds., pp. 168-169.

democracy. Although an in-depth account of representative democracy will not be made here, it is important for my purposes to note that the democratic values emphasized here are parts of the institutions and mechanisms created for the functioning of a representative democracy. From this perspective, democracy is largely realized through elections of decision makers who represent the will of the people and who in turn are accountable to the people. In order to ensure accountability, a number of mechanisms, such as laws and regulations, have been put in place. These are partly ensured through a bureaucratic structure of public administration, which can be described as a hierarchical structure of authority with a detailed and rationalized division of labour.⁹⁰ These mechanisms should also protect political and individual rights. In turn, democratic legitimacy rests on the quality of these mechanisms. From this perspective, the individual is foremost a *citizen*, with certain political, social and civil rights as well as obligations. The role of a public organization is thus not only to ensure individual rights or efficient services but also social justice and the common good.⁹¹ Thus, this outlook also corresponds to a communitarian view of democracy.⁹²

However, within the framework of representative democracy, e.g. in combination with more deliberative democratic processes, individuals can also inhabit the role of *clients*. This assumes a more active role for individuals in influencing or participating in decision-making processes, albeit within the framework of the representative channels. The individual as client is thus still involved in a process of *collective* decision making.⁹³

NPM, and the general e-government discourse, highlight a different view on democracy. It can be described as a *consumer democracy* or a “democracy without politics”.⁹⁴ From this point of view, collective decision making should be complemented or replaced by individual choice, much along the lines of consumer power. Public services are here granted a central role. By introducing freedom of choice in public services,

⁹⁰ Aberbach, Joel D. & Christensen, Tom (2005) “Citizens and Consumers: An NPM Dilemma” in *Public Management Review* 7(2): 225-245; Cordella (2007), p. 270; Montin, Stig (2007) *Moderna kommuner*.

⁹¹ Montin (2007), pp. 140-151.

⁹² See Lundquist (2001), pp. 132-134.

⁹³ Montin (2007), pp. 173-182.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 182

individuals are handed market power in the sense that they can either voice their opinion or choose another supplier or institution. In turn, democratic accountability is mainly acquired through customer responses, democratic legitimacy through customer satisfaction. The role of public organizations is to ensure that services are efficiently delivered, with high quality. According to this logic, the individual is mainly seen as a *customer*. Collective decision making is thus replaced by the actions of rational and independent individuals.⁹⁵ Furthermore, public organizations do not inhabit a special role and responsibility in terms of fairly distributing social resources – this distribution becomes of secondary importance when everyone has the right to freely choose.

Although one dimension of e-government, namely e-democracy, also highlights the role of democratic channels according to ideals of representative or deliberative democracy, it is becoming increasingly apparent that these democratic processes have often become subordinated to a focus on efficiency and services in e-government implementation. This is evident in how the development of e-services has undergone larger changes than those within e-democracy.⁹⁶

As described, the consumer and output-oriented perspective of e-government tend to emphasize an outlook which favours economic values in the assessment of public policy processes and outcomes. Thus, a number of observers regard e-government, at least as it is currently generally defined and implemented, to largely neglect the enforcement of democratic values.⁹⁷ From this point of view, the balance of values in the public ethos could, in the wake of NPM, be shifting even further towards economic values, on behalf of democratic values. This critique of e-government is often held in discussions related to how bureaucratic structures and processes sometimes are a precondition for democratic values, e.g. the enforcement of rule of law and public ethics. This was already debated in relation to NPM⁹⁸ and is continuing with the increased importance of e-government:

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 182-190.

⁹⁶ See Åström (2004); Torres et al. (2005), p. 532; Montin (2007), pp. 162-163; Giritli Nygren & Wiklund (2010), pp. 215-225.

⁹⁷ See for instance Zouridis & Thaens (2005); Cordella (2007); Taylor & Lips (2008); Giritli Nygren & Wiklund (2010).

⁹⁸ See for instance Olsen, Johan P. (2006) "Maybe it is time to rediscover bureaucracy" in *Journal of Public*

It is our contention that fundamental public services can only be provided through the bureaucratic form itself, with its procedural-based structure that provides a large part of the values expressed in those services (...) when e-government is conceived as a policy to enforce NPM ideology (...) it also changes the nature of the services provided by the PA [*public administration*].⁹⁹

Furthermore, the customer-oriented perspective is seen as problematic in relation to the traditional policy norm of “universal service” since customer orientation could open the door for particularism. “Customized services” is often highlighted as one of the main benefits of e-government. According to this logic, e-government equalizes the relationship between citizens and governments since public services are adjusted to the particular needs of citizens. Thus, by removing information asymmetries, citizens can become increasingly empowered.¹⁰⁰ However, considering that the users of public services often are very heterogeneous, the question is for whom these public services will be customized for. The Internet portals usually reflect a customer segmentation mentality which neglects the situation of the individual in favour of broadly classified functions. Similarly, the self-service logic of e-services could marginalize the needs of those clients who require personalized support.¹⁰¹ These are some of the aspects which could complicate the aims of public services based on universalism and social inclusion.

Fountain describes a legitimacy paradox in current public service delivery. The improvement of the quality of public service delivery does not necessary have to lead to increased legitimacy of government. In contrast, viewing citizens as consumers and government as a “production company” neglects the public and political character of service delivery and thus narrows the multidimensionality of citizenship and public administration.¹⁰² This implies that the implementation of e-government and public e-services services may have more far-reaching consequences than current policy aims and ambitions have anticipated.

Administration and Theory 16(1): 1-24.

⁹⁹ Cordella (2007), pp. 271-273.

¹⁰⁰ Taylor & Lips (2008), p. 196.

¹⁰¹ Dutil et al. (2007).

¹⁰² Fountain, Jane (2001b) “Paradoxes of Public Sector Customer Service” in *Governance* 14(1): 55-73.

Summary and Definitions

The discussion in this chapter has provided a background overview of aspects relevant for the aim of this thesis: to analyze the significance of the introduction of public e-services for core values in two Swedish municipal organizations. For these analytical purposes, a number of fundamental presumptions and definitions need to be clarified in order to conclude where I position myself in the analysis.

E-government, Public e-Services and ICT

E-government is in several respects a central reform for the modernization of public administration today. This has highlighted the need to study e-government in the context of public administration and not only as a matter of technology or management. Accordingly, I regard e-government, or its sub-category e-services, as a *policy* which is implemented in public organizations. This means that e-government or e-services not only involves implementing a technology, but also certain values which in the present global context have largely been built on an economic logic. This assumption will be returned to and related more to my neo-institutional perspective and specific outlook on policy in the theoretical framework (chapter 2). The e-government policy of interest to this thesis is the general aims made with the 24/7 agency model in the beginning of the 21st century and the 2008 Swedish action plan on e-government, which in many respects is founded on the current e-government paradigm evident on EU and OECD levels. Despite the fact that these intentions present rather ambiguous policy aims for municipalities it indicates a clear direction: municipalities should implement e-government in order to increase productivity and availability.

Furthermore, although the terms implementation and policy are used in this study, it is not a traditional implementation study.¹⁰³ The aim is not to evaluate the implementation process according to certain clearly defined policy aims and assess its success or failure, but rather to understand the possible effects of policy in a local implementation process, i.e. to be more specific, effects from the introduction of e-services on the municipal

¹⁰³ See for instance Pressman, Jeffrey L. & Wildavsky, Aaron (1973) *Implementation*; for an overview of traditional top-down and bottom-up perspectives within implementation research, see Hill, Michael & Hupe, Peter (2009) - *Implementing Public Policy: An Introduction to the Study of Operational Governance*, 2nd ed. pp. 42-56.

organizations' core values. The pace of change or the success of e-government implementation has for several years been a predominant focus amongst researchers. I regard it just as vital to study the *process* of change in a non-evaluative manner, i.e. to understand the implementation of e-government, the potential dynamic or tensions this creates and its anticipated or unanticipated effects, without benchmarking progress. In turn, policy implementation is a way of framing the analysis but will not be used as an analytical concept.

Although I regard the implementation and use of ICT to be a socially constructed process, I believe that there are certain features of ICT which are perceived as preset, what Fountain refers to as "objective technology". This means that certain characteristics of ICT and hence the e-government policy are built in, or fixed, and thus not open for a complete reconstruction by the social surrounding in which it is implemented. The interaction between social processes and objective technology nevertheless means that the effects of e-government are difficult to anticipate. I argue that it is important to study the local implementation of public e-services in order to gain a deeper understanding of this dynamic and some of its unanticipated effects.

In this thesis, the focus will be on the sub-category of e-government called public e-services. My definition of public e-services is wide – it includes both the electronic provision of information services and self-services.¹⁰⁴ These definitions imply both one-way information sources, such as websites, or advanced, interactive services, such as application for schools and filing tax returns. Furthermore, in reality it is often difficult to separate e-services for citizens (external) from e-services for public employees (internal), i.e. the use of ICT for internal, administrative purposes (what is usually placed under the heading of e-administration) since these are usually integrated into one ICT system. In my analysis, I focus on external e-services for citizens but the internal parts will inevitably also be touched upon. Although an academic discussion sometimes has a more narrow definition of e-services, policy documents and public officials as well as

¹⁰⁴ Löfstedt (2010), p. 74; for a more detailed definition of what public e-services entail, see Bekkers & Homburg (2005a), p. 6.

local council members tend to apply the wider definition. This makes a wider definition necessary so that misconceptions are avoided.¹⁰⁵

With the above in mind, a clarification of concepts needs to be made: *public e-services* will be used when referring both to the policy as well as, more concretely, to the particular service and information deliveries¹⁰⁶ this includes, e.g. child care applications via the Internet. I will speak of *ICT* when I specifically refer to the actual computer technology in a more objective sense, e.g. the software and hardware providing public e-services. I am aware that the definition of ICT, or information technology (IT)¹⁰⁷, usually also encompasses other types of technology than the computer technology focused on here, e.g. telecommunications. Nevertheless, since the main activities of municipalities concern e-services via the Internet (also referred to as web-based services), e-services via telecommunications, e.g. SMS, will not be dealt with here.

Values in Public Organizations

The last decade has seen an increase in e-government research which stipulates that “institutions matter” in e-government implementation.¹⁰⁸ The main focus has however been on formal institutional structures and less on the significance of or effect on informal institutions. There is an acknowledgement that these matter in e-government implementation but not how and why. Furthermore, e-government needs to be addressed from a democratic and political perspective, which focuses the specific preconditions of public organizations, for instance with regard to values. Previous research in public administration has emphasized the importance of certain values, in specific democratic values, in creating democratic legitimacy. From this point of view, the current economic logic of e-

¹⁰⁵ Löfstedt speaks of the difficulties in studying public e-services in Swedish municipalities since there is a lack of common definitions of the concept of e-services. Most municipalities however tend to include all services which can be offered electronically, see Löfstedt (2007), p. 171.

¹⁰⁶ The term “public services” is here generally referred to as services provided by governments to its citizens, either directly (through the public sector) or indirectly (through private providers). In this term I include both what can be viewed as *actual delivery of welfare*, i.e. school and child care, as well as, more generally, *the provision and communication of information and services* either for administrating the above (i.e. applications for schools) or concerning public or democratic activities in general. It is however the provision and communication of information and services which public e-services mainly concern.

¹⁰⁷ ICT and IT are often used synonymously. In this thesis I will consistently use the term “ICT”, except when interviewees specifically use the term “IT”.

¹⁰⁸ See for instance Fountain (2001a); Åström (2004); see also Orlikowski, Wanda J. & Barley, Stephen R. (2001) “Technology and Institutions: What Can Research on Information Technology and Research on Organizations Learn from Each Other?” in *Technology & Institutions* 25(2): 145-165.

government neglects the specific role and responsibility of public organization. Consequently, the relationship between values in public administration and e-government deserves, I argue, more attention. In this study, I will therefore position myself within the institutional approach, but with a special focus on the role of values in order to increase the understanding of informal institutions in e-government implementation. Furthermore, my analysis is based on the assumption that the long-term legitimacy of public organizations requires a certain balance between democratic and economic values. Whether e-government contributes to a shifting of this balance is, in fact, the underlying problem guiding this study.

Outline of Thesis

This thesis is divided into four chapters. After this introductory chapter (chapter 1), in which the aim of the thesis and contextualization of relevant issues have been presented, I will continue in chapter 2 with a presentation of the research design. This includes both my theoretical and methodological approaches, which are closely integrated. In this second chapter I will provide the tool kit for my analysis. In chapter 3, I will make use of these tools through, firstly, process tracing of the development of public (e)-services in each municipality and secondly, a comparative analysis of the two processes. The first part of chapter 3 will describe how public e-services have been implemented in Nacka and Botkyrka respectively, that is, provide an answer to my first research question. This is a precondition for the second part of chapter 3, the comparative analysis, where I will discuss which core values can be distinguished before and during the implementation process, that is, give answers to the second research question. Consequently, this will build up to the concluding chapter (chapter 4), in which I will answer the third research question, how and why existing core values are affected in the implementation process. It is thus in the last chapter that the significance of the introduction of public e-services for core values in the two municipal organizations will be assessed. In this last chapter, preliminary remarks at possible implications of my findings and suggestions for future research will wrap up the study and simultaneously point forward.

Guide for the Reader

Certain chapters in this thesis might be more of interest to certain groups than others. Although I, as the writer, obviously prefer everyone to read the whole thesis, not least because the thesis does not do itself enough justice when read in parts, I nevertheless recognize that readers usually have very different aims (and time frames) when reading an academic thesis. I will therefore provide a short guide below.

Practitioners within public administration might be most interested in **chapter 3 and 4**, since these give in-depth insights into how the implementation of e-services have been conducted in two municipalities and provide the main conclusions on what some of the effects have been. These chapters could thus give insights and generate learning experiences for practitioners involved in similar implementation processes.

Students and researchers within the fields of political science or information systems or with a general interest in e-government might be especially interested in **chapter 1, 2 and 3**. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the field of e-government and, for the purposes of this thesis, related issues such as NPM and the specific role and responsibility of public organizations. It thus gives a contextualization for researchers who view e-government as more than an issue of technology, namely as a policy or reform within public administration. Chapter 2 could also be of interest to students and researchers who are interested in finding out what specific methodological choices and theoretical framework have been applied in order to address the aim of the study. Furthermore, the exploratory aim of this study calls for continued research of the findings made in chapter 4. For those interested in similar issues, the conclusions made in this chapter could provide insights and be a point of departure for continued research within the field.

CHAPTER TWO

AN INSTITUTIONAL AND TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVE ON POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The following chapter presents the research design of this thesis. The theoretical and methodological frameworks are closely connected in several respects and are therefore integrated when discussing how the research problem will be approached and analyzed. This chapter begins with a presentation of the theoretical framework, a *neo-institutionalist perspective*, and continues with a discussion of the methodological approach, *case study research and analysis*. At the end of this chapter, the theoretical and methodological approaches will be integrated in an analytical framework which describes in more detail the tools with which I will approach the aim of the thesis: to analyze the significance of the introduction of public e-services for core values in two Swedish municipal organizations.

The basic point of departure is thus to understand the process of implementing a policy in a municipal organization, which, simply put, may lead to some type of change in core values or no change at all. Neo-institutionalism, in particular Pierson's *temporal perspective* and parts of the *advocacy coalition framework* (ACF) will provide the framework for how the analysis will view the role of institutions and processes of change. In this respect, the analytical framework will be used more generally to identify elements and the relationships among elements but also, in more detail, to explain the phenomenon and processes under study.¹ In specific the ACF will operationalize my institutional outlook with a specific emphasis on the significance of values in policy change.

¹ See Ostrom's categorization of frameworks, theories and models in Ostrom, Elinor (2005) *Understanding Institutional Diversity*, pp. 27-28.

Institutions as an Explanatory Basis

Putting institutions at the centre of explanation is one way of framing an implementation process in order to understand the process as well as its outcome.² Institutions are in several respects at the heart of politics in general and the study of public organizations in particular. Public organizations operate within institutional structures which in different ways affect implementation processes and thus produce consequences for how public administration is handled. Although institutions tend to be persistent, reality shows that there is always a possibility that implementation processes will, to varying degrees, affect institutions. In turn, the institutional context is, I argue, difficult to ignore when studying e-service implementation with the aim of understanding its outcomes.

Institutions can be seen to exhibit many forms – Scott sees them as “multifaceted, durable social structures made up of symbolic elements, social activities and material resources”.³ Institutions are thus, on the one hand, composed of formal elements, what we view as laws, rules and regulations. On the other hand, institutions consist of informal elements, such as certain routines, values, norms and cognitive templates. Whereas formal institutions are more tangible and easy to detect, informal institutions are more difficult to pin-point, they are in the minds of actors or as tacit knowledge in organizations. In my analysis I will view institutions as multifaceted – the formal and informal features interact and are, in my opinion, difficult to disentangle. Consequently, even though I will mainly focus on core values, i.e. the informal and deeply embedded aspects of institutions, the formal aspects will also be touched upon.

Neo-institutionalism is a rather broad theoretical perspective which can be described as an umbrella framework for a number of theoretical perspectives with differing ontological and epistemological starting points.⁴ The relationship between institutions, organizations and actors – how and

² Parsons, Wayne (1995) *Public Policy: An Introduction to the Theory and Methods in Political Science*, pp. 323-335.

³ Scott, Richard W. (2008) *Institutions and Organizations: Ideas and Interests*, 3rd ed., p. 48.

⁴ Three main strands of institutionalism are usually distinguished: rational choice institutionalism, historical institutionalism and sociological institutionalism. All institutionalisms recognize the importance of institutions in structuring the behaviour of actors but they put a different emphasis on how the relationship between institutions and actors is structured as well as how to explain processes of institutional origin and change.

to what extent institutions influence the behaviour of actors – is the main preoccupation of neo-institutionalism. Through legal, moral and cultural boundaries, institutions are considered not only to restrict but also to enable actors. Institutions have no intrinsic value but arise in interaction with and through actors.⁵

The different strands of neo-institutionalism have different explanations for what structures the behaviours of actors. This thesis places itself within the neo-institutional tradition which considers actors as forming and upholding institutional structures according to the *logic of appropriateness*. This means that actors turn to socially established conventions, norms or familiar patterns when making decisions, i.e. what is seen as appropriate and legitimate in a given situation.⁶ The deeply embedded structures of an institution provide the very basis for how actors act. From this perspective, institutions are central in shaping identities and self-images of actors. In turn, institutions are not always effective partly because, the original intentions aside, the process of creating symbolic meaning and legitimacy become ends in themselves. Thus, instead of rational utility maximization, the process of *symbolic politics* and the enhancement of *social legitimacy* in the broader institutional environment and within the institutional setting, are regarded as the main driving force of actors.⁷

The drive for social legitimacy is often assumed within neo-institutionalism to result in a detachment of rhetoric from praxis, meaning that reforms tend to stay at a superficial and symbolic level – in the *rhetoric of actors* – and are not implemented in-depth – in actual behaviour, i.e. the *praxis of actors*.⁸ This illustrates the strong persistence of already established institutions. The organizational theorist Røvik, however, has challenged this notion in his research on the diffusion of reforms in public organizations. He has claimed that reality shows that there is seldom such a strict detachment between rhetoric and praxis but

⁵ See Hall, Peter A. & Taylor, Rosemary C. R. (1996) "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms" in *Political Studies* 44(5): 936-957; Scott (2008), pp. 47-50.

⁶ March, James G. & Olsen, Johan P. (1983) "The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life", *American Political Science Review* 78: 734-749

⁷ Ibid.; Røvik, Kjell Arne (2000) *Moderna organisasjoner*, pp. 30-41; Christensen et al. (2005), pp. 51-73; Scott (2008), pp. 59-62.

⁸ See for instance DiMaggio, Paul J. & Powell, Walter W. (1983) "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields" in *American Sociological Review* 48(2): 147-160.

rather a constant interplay, which means that changes in rhetoric can also lead to in-depth change in practises. He develops this in the *virus theory*, which, briefly put, illustrates how ideas can affect organizations.⁹ When the rhetoric of a reform is adopted, it becomes the standard by which practice slowly is measured and thus a gradual accommodation of praxis takes place. In other words, the rhetoric of a reform can spread like a virus to practices and gradually accommodate them to the intent of the reform. Changes therefore often take time and have long-term consequences.¹⁰

By using an analytical distinction between rhetoric and praxis, I can separate between stated incentives of changing something (i.e. rhetoric) and what actually is done (i.e. praxis).¹¹ The analytical distinction does not necessarily mean that rhetoric and praxis are detached from each other but the distinction is useful for the purposes at hand, i.e. for considering the different effects of e-service implementation on core values. Actors can always state that they represent certain core values in interviews and documents but these core values may not always be congruent with what is done in practice. Thus, differences in rhetoric and praxis, as well as the degree of interaction and congruence between the two, can produce different effects and illustrate different processes of change.

In other words, the policy process is in this analysis considered to be more of a political activity than a rational process. Here, actual implementation is therefore viewed as problematic and constrained and should therefore not be taken for granted simply because some policy, for example, has rhetorically been adopted by an organization.¹²

Next I will turn to explain in more detail how and why institutions matter by firstly discussing Pierson's temporal perspective on change and secondly, Sabatier's and Jenkins-Smith's advocacy coalition framework. The structuralist emphasis of neo-institutional perspectives has been given most acclaim for explaining stability rather than change. The main logic of

⁹ This is in contrast to Røvik's translation theory which focuses on what organizations do with new practises and ideas, i.e. how reforms are translated into existing structures.

¹⁰ Røvik (2000), p. 148; Røvik (2008), pp. 291-311.

¹¹ Christensen et al. (2005), p. 152.

¹² Gordon, Ian et al. (1993) "Perspectives on Policy Analysis" in Hill, Michael, ed., *The Policy Process: A Reader*.

institutions is to preserve and uphold existing institutional structures but at the same time it is clear that change does happen – how and why can this be? The ACF and Pierson’s temporal perspective are perspectives which have focused more specifically on explaining institutional change.

A Temporal Perspective on Policy Implementation

A critical question has been posed to neo-institutionalist explanations of change: Why and when do institutions lose their influence over actors enough for them to initiate change? At one point the whole explanatory logic of neo-institutionalism is based on the fact that institutions structure behaviour and maintain stability over time, but when change happens, these structures are suddenly unimportant.

Within neo-institutionalism, path-dependent processes are often used for explaining the behaviour of actors: choices taken at one point earlier in time “lock in” actors on certain institutional paths which then are difficult to depart from. Path dependency means that “history is remembered”¹³, i.e. history is used as a point of references in terms of what is perceived as legitimate. Periods of continuity can however be disrupted by so-called *punctuated equilibriums*, in which a long period of stability is punctuated by large-scale institutional change. In turn, this creates a new path and new stretches of institutional stability. These junctures are usually seen as causes of major external changes, such as economic crisis or military conflicts, which make actors re-evaluate institutional elements and thus initiate a reconstruction of these elements.¹⁴

A similar view on processes of change is captured in the concept of *critical junctures*. From this perspective, institutional stability reaches a point during which a conjuncture of various internal political forces come together and provides an opening or “window of opportunity” for actors to initiate change. Individually these forces would not have much leverage but by joining together at a specific time and place, change is possible.¹⁵

¹³ Pierson, Paul (2004) *Politics in Time: Historical Institutions and Social Analysis*, p. 45.

¹⁴ See Hall & Taylor (1996).

¹⁵ Peters, Guy B. (1999) *Institutional Theory in Political Science*, pp. 33-34.

My analysis will try to nuance the somewhat black and white picture of institutional stability and change provided by several neo-institutionalist perspectives by highlighting a number of issues brought up by Pierson. Pierson develops the concept of path dependency by speaking of *positive feedback* as the main process generating path dependency: each step along a certain path produces consequences that increase the attractiveness of following that path and thus strengthens self-reinforcing processes. The longer an institution embarks on a certain path, the less open to new influence it gets. When path-dependent processes have been settled, it will lead to an *equilibrium* which makes institutions resistant to change.¹⁶ These processes are both conscious – e.g. an awareness of that a change would mean a loss of investment costs in an institution – as well as intuitive – e.g. that a change does not fit what is socially interpreted as the appropriate way to handle things. Material and social investments as well as social interpretations are thus part of the glue which contributes to the stickiness of institutions.¹⁷ Christensen et al. highlight how the legacy of past decisions, embodied in central norms and values, determines how and which reforms are introduced. Reforms that can be matched with past institutional features are more easily accepted by actors. The institution is a filter for how new ideas are interpreted and internally legitimized. The legacy of the past thus both constrains and facilitates change.¹⁸

Consequently, Pierson is reluctant to speak of institutional change only as a major punctuated equilibrium which suddenly appears and changes everything: he regards institutional change more as *development*. Change can occur through several types of slow-moving causal processes, such as cumulative causes and threshold effects. Consequently, these processes can in the longer run produce enough institutional build-up to facilitate a punctuated equilibrium.¹⁹ Furthermore, change in outcomes can also be slow-moving. In fact, most causes and outcomes in political life are slow-moving – it is often difficult to see immediate effects of political decisions. The high start-up costs that typically are associated with the introduction of new or huge changes in political institutions mean that the positive

¹⁶ Pierson (2004), p. 44.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 17-40.

¹⁸ Christensen et al. (2005), pp. 51-73; see also Røvik (2000), pp. 34-38; Bergström, Tomas (2002) *Organisationskultur och kommunal förnyelse*.

¹⁹ Pierson (2004), pp. 82-90.

feedback mechanisms are particularly strong in politics. According to this logic, the mechanisms and processes which produce institutions and in turn their breakdown become the key to understand change. Since these processes are often slow-moving, a longer time perspective is required; otherwise, slow-moving change can often be mistaken for periods of stability. Hence, understanding change also means understanding the character and extent of resistance to change.²⁰ Path dependency is not a description of what is inevitably to come, in which the “past predicts the future”. Change does indeed come about, but it is bounded change.²¹

Timing is essential to development processes, i.e. *when* an event takes place is just as central in shaping outcomes as any institutional setting. As the literature on social revolutions and their potential in overturning society has illustrated, the timing of an event can to different degrees facilitate or hinder change.²² Schmidt runs a similar argument in his comparison of how innovations are created and diffused amongst Swedish municipalities. He divides the municipalities into groups of *pioneers*, *imitators* and *hesitators* and argues that pioneer municipalities, as the first municipalities in implementing innovations, have the most freedom in shaping innovations according to their own ideas. Imitators, who start later, tend to mainly imitate pioneers but also develop a few methods of their own. Nevertheless, since they arrive later, their options have been more limited by what has already been done. Finally, hesitators usually wait and see what other solutions municipalities have come up with and thus have the least liberty in determining the shape of innovations.²³ Accordingly, the timing of the implementation of a policy can provide more or less leeway for actors in influencing the process.

The ACF, which will be dealt with in the next section, provides an institutional framework which is more specifically tied to what role deeper institutional structures – what ACF terms core values – have in processes of stability or change. How can the study of values as institutional features and the change thereof be put in a more concrete form?

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 133-166.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 49-52.

²² See for instance Scopcol, Theda (1979) *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*.

²³ See Schmidt, Stefan (1986) *Pionjärer, efterföljare och avvaktare*.

Values as Institutional Grounds

The ACF provides an outline for understanding policy change and learning amongst so-called advocacy coalitions, that is, “different people from various governmental and private organizations who share a set of normative and causal beliefs and who often act in concert”.²⁴ Within a policy area or subsystem, these different coalitions advocate and compete for the preferential right of interpretation so that their specific beliefs can be translated into governmental programs and policies.

That said, in studying the Swedish e-government and e-services policies, I have not noticed visible coalitions of actors which advocate their beliefs to the same extent as, for instance, in the environmental or transport policies in the United States (U.S.), the political context from and for which the ACF was originally developed. The authors themselves have also acknowledged certain difficulties in transferring the developed framework to a different political system than the U.S., i.e. non-federal systems which do not involve the same extent of coalitions across different governmental levels.²⁵ This is not to say that different actors with different interests do not exist within the policy area of e-government in Sweden, but their conflicts do not correspond to that of the more formalized interests of advocacy coalitions in the original U.S case studies Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith refer to. The role of different advocacy coalitions in policy change will therefore be downplayed in my analysis. Instead, I will focus on one specific aspect of the ACF, namely *the structure of belief systems*, which provides a conceptualization of policy and policy change. The ACF places belief systems at the centre of analysis for explaining change. Accordingly, “public policies can be conceptualized in the same manner as belief systems, that is, as sets of value priorities and causal assumptions about how to realize them”.²⁶ In other words, policy consists of a number of central beliefs and in turn, strategies for how to realize them in practice. Thus, this analysis will regard policy as a course of action rather than simply one clearly defined decision, in accordance with Easton’s definition: “a policy... consists of a web of decisions and actions that

²⁴ Sabatier, Paul A. (1993) “Policy Change over a Decade or More” in Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, eds., p. 18.

²⁵ See Sabatier, Paul A. & Jenkins-Smith, Hank C. (1999) “The Advocacy Coalition Framework: An Assessment”, in Sabatier, Paul A., ed., *Theories of the Policy Process*, pp. 117-166.

²⁶ Sabatier (1993), p. 16.

allocate... values [my emphasis]”.²⁷ I thus regard the e-government policy as a number of decisions and actions that reflect different values. In turn, the technology that e-government policy aims entail is to a certain extent value laden when it is to be implemented. The policy thus contains an artefact²⁸, which carries both technical and symbolic meaning. In practise this means that the e-government or e-services policy involves both objective (what appears to be pre-determined) and subjective (more noticeably modifiable) features. Scott mentions artefacts as an institutional carrier, i.e. vehicles through which a particular constellation of ideas and values are conveyed, and emphasizes their fundamental role in institutional change.²⁹ Thus, by viewing policy implementation as an allocation of values, the implementation of e-services can be understood as the process of joining different values and the outcome thereof.

Instead of viewing policy change between different and competing advocacy coalitions, the change (or non-change) of different beliefs – and values in particular – shared by a specific group of actors during the process of implementing e-services will be analyzed in this study. Although I acknowledge that there are different actors with sometimes conflicting belief systems within a municipal organization, this analysis only considers *the belief system as expressed in official documents and interviews with key actors involved in the development of public services and e-services* within the two municipalities. These key actors consist of certain local council members and officials on top levels, who have been central for the realization of the studied policy field. Since these actors often have had the preferential right of interpretation for developments of public services in general and e-services in particular and thus often set the agenda for overarching strategies of the municipality, their views were considered important as an analytical starting point. The conceptualization of the actor is thus here an influential group of individuals who are organized around common beliefs and more or less share the same fundamental aims within the policy field of public service provisions. Although these beliefs also can be seen to relate to the basic goals of the whole municipal organization – and not only to the public policy field

²⁷ Easton, David in Hill, Michael (1997) *The Policy Process in the Modern State*, p. 7.

²⁸ According to Suchman: "An artifact is a discrete material object, consciously produced or transformed by human activity, under the influence of the physical and/or cultural environment" in Scott (2008), p. 83.

²⁹ Scott (2008), pp. 79-85.

studied here – it is not within the limited scope of this study to investigate how all-encompassing these beliefs are. Nevertheless, for practical reasons, I will in this study generally refer to the studied policy belief system and core values as “local” or “municipal” even though I am aware of that it denotes a wider application than is within the range of this study.

The ACF considers actors to be bound by cognitive limits in the shape of certain more or less central beliefs – rationality is thus viewed as limited rather than perfect. Fundamental beliefs of how to achieve policy objectives are here the focal point, for instance, assumptions of the scope of the problem as well as what policy instruments and means are most efficient in achieving these objectives.³⁰ These fundamental beliefs are, according to Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, the main glue of politics.³¹ Institutions are thus viewed as belief systems – a type of common cognitive map – which constrain or enable the behaviour of actors.

The structure of a belief system uses a hierarchical categorization of beliefs for conceptualizing attempted policy change and changes in beliefs over time. The framework takes off from the proposition that some beliefs are more fundamental than others in resisting change, especially abstract political beliefs are more resistant to change than specific ones.³² These beliefs are categorized according to a deep (normative) core, near (policy) core and secondary aspects:

The **deep normative core** consists of underlying personal and ontological beliefs. It is considered to constrain actors the most and is thus most stable over time. These beliefs concern common political values according to the left-right scale, such as equal distribution vs. individual freedom or the role of the state in society. They are described as *core values*.

The **near policy core** relates to the preferences for achieving deep core beliefs and concerns basic strategies and positions for the policy area in question. What are the aims of the policy area? What are the problems that should be addressed? These are also difficult to change but less so than the near core. They are summarized as *policy strategies*.

³⁰ Sabatier (1993), p. 17.

³¹ Ibid., p. 27.

³² Ibid., p. 30.

The **secondary aspects** consist of instrumental and technical issues for realizing policy cores, e.g. administrative rules and budgetary allocations. These are more open to changes over the course of a few years than are the inner core elements which can take decades to alter.³³ They are named *implementing activities*.

Hence, core values are, in my view, the more underlying and deeply embedded features of institutions. They involve the cognitive templates through which decisions are filtered. Core values are expressed through policy strategies, which are the pronounced beliefs or aims connected to a certain policy. They in turn include more observable and graspable features of institutions. Implementing activities entail the instrumental ways of realizing the beliefs connected to policy strategies, i.e. how to carry out the implementation of a policy in practice. These are often more formalized in the shape of administrative rules and the distribution of roles and responsibilities. Söderberg describes in her application of the ACF, how policy strategies refer to the preferences through which actors want to realize their policy aims, whereas the implementing activities refer to the means through which these are realized.³⁴ Within a coalition, the secondary aspects are what actors within a coalition tend to disagree on. The policy aims are thus the overarching driving forces of actors, whereby implementing activities, as instrumental means, are more replaceable.

In sum, I regard the structure of belief systems as a scale which expresses different degrees of abstraction³⁵ with regards to institutional features. Core values are most abstract whereas implementing activities are most concrete; policy strategies are somewhere in-between. The structure of a belief system is also based on scope – core values apply to all aspects of the policy field, whereas implementing activities refer to a narrower range.³⁶ Nevertheless, policy strategies and implementing activities are ultimately, more or less, the expression of core values – the former more so

³³ Jenkins-Smith, Hank C. & Sabatier, Paul A. (1993) “The Dynamics of Policy-Oriented Learning” in Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, eds., pp. 29-38; see also Santesson-Wilson, Peter (2009) “Politiska paradigm och institutionell förändring” in Santesson-Wilson, Peter & Erlingsson, Gissur, eds., *Reform*, pp. 65-68.

³⁴ Söderberg, Henriette (1999) *Kommunerna och kretsloppet – avloppssektorns förändring från rening till resurshantering*, p. 46.

³⁵ Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith discuss in their later assessment of the ACF whether the structure of belief system can be determined by degree of abstraction or not, see Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith (1999), p. 131.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

than the latter. Accordingly, core values are expressed both through overarching aims as expressed in the *rhetoric* in policy documents and instrumental means expressed through *practices*.

Belief systems are relatively stable over time but can incrementally be altered through gradual learning processes. One basic premise of the framework is therefore that in order to understand policy change, we need a time perspective of a decade or more. Policy learning is a central component of policy change and can lead to the altering of secondary aspects. The policy core is however resistant to cognitive factors and can only be changed by large-scale changes in the socio-economic environment. Policy change thus partly takes place through the exchange of experience-based knowledge between coalitions and partly through an adjustment to external conditions. Since this thesis does not focus on different advocacy coalitions, the former aspect of policy change will here be downplayed, in favour of the latter. Furthermore, since the aim is to analyze a possible change of core values, the adjustment to external conditions is of more immediate interest.

Accordingly, the change of secondary aspects can be seen as a way for actors to adjust to and make sense of changes in the world in order to achieve policy objectives, i.e. the beliefs of the inner policy core. Changes in the secondary aspects are thus mainly made to buttress and keep the policy core intact. In fact, it can be seen as a way to restrict change.³⁷ Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith summarize it as follows:

An actor or coalition will give up secondary aspects of a belief system before acknowledging weaknesses in the policy core.³⁸

The level of conflict reflects the degree of incompatibility of different core values. The more certain claims threaten core values, the greater are the incentives of actors to commit resources and use analysis to defend the core, in order to make their “best case”. In contrast, if the level of conflict is lower, there is a higher probability of actors to amend secondary aspects and certain core elements. Policy-oriented learning and change is thus most

³⁷ Sabatier (1993) p. 19.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

possible if the level of conflict is intermediate and core values are not directly threatened.³⁹

In short, policy change is viewed as an “ongoing process of search and adaptation motivated by the desire to realize core policy beliefs. Confronted with constraints and opportunities, actors attempt to respond in a manner consistent with their policy core”.⁴⁰ By concurring to this view, the importance of studying informal aspects of institutions – such as beliefs and values – is just as relevant for understanding stability and change as the study of formal institutional features.

The view on change amongst groups of actors corresponds to Pierson’s temporal perspective: in order to understand policy change, development processes over at least a number of decades should be analyzed. From this perspective, implementation is seen as a process rather than as a static event with a distinct end and beginning. The stages heuristic model in which the policy process is divided into functionally distinct and hierarchically ordered sub-processes (input, throughput, output and feedback) is thus somewhat misleading in the sense that it creates strict divisions in time and processes. I regard policy implementation as a continuous development process, in which the different stages of the policy cycle constantly interact.⁴¹ The above means that policy processes in this analysis are seen as continuous processes of evolution in which the starting point may be far back in history.⁴²

Summary

What has been said so far provides a framework for how the implementation of e-services and its implications for core values can be understood and explained. Institutions are here described and analyzed as multifaceted and path-dependent structures which both restrict and enable actors. Institutions provide actors with information about what is appropriate and legitimate in a given situation and are thus the basis for

³⁹ Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier (1993), pp. 49-50.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴¹ See for instance Barrett, Susan & Fudge, Colin (1981) *Policy and Action: Essays on the Implementation of Public Policy*.

⁴² Hill (1997), pp. 6-27.

how actors act. The ACF puts a particular emphasis on belief systems and core values in particular as central institutional features in defining the activities of actors and in turn processes of change and stability. Change is here viewed not only as major punctuated equilibriums but also as slow-moving, incremental process. To understand change, the processes and junctures behind development, and their role in causing institutional change, have to be studied. The underlying assumption of the ACF – that the fundament of policies can be understood as a hierarchy of different beliefs, amongst which certain beliefs are more resistant to change than others – provides a framework for conceptualizing some of these development processes and their outcomes.

Next I will turn to a discussion of methodological considerations in order to see how the theoretically based conceptualization has been practically realized. In this respect, the methods have been used both as a complement to and a reinforcement of the theoretical approach. The analytical framework at the end of this chapter will illustrate this, and more concretely spell out how the analysis will be operationalized.

Case Study Research and Analysis

The following section presents the methodological design for my study: *a qualitative case study with comparative elements*. The fact that e-government and public e-services are relatively new policy areas implies that there is a need for finding out more about the field, in particular where the policy is being realized, i.e. in the local implementation process. The unexplored character of the issue opens up for asking “how?” and “why?” questions and thus for exploring the problem in-depth. In this respect, qualitative methods through empirically driven case studies allow for approaching the phenomenon in an explorative manner.⁴³

In this study, I have conducted a within-case analysis through process tracing, in combination with a comparative perspective.⁴⁴ It has been

⁴³ The study serves as part of the research project *SAFe – Safe Public e-Services: An Issue of Trust and Organization?*, financed by MSB, The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency. The main aim of the research project is to analyze how public e-services are interpreted and developed by different actors, both within and outside of public organizations.

⁴⁴ See George, Alexander L. & Bennett, Andrew (2005) *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*.

guided by an abductive approach, in which the logic of discovery has been leading. My methodological considerations are in turn based on three basic questions which will structure this section:

- *Why?* (choice of method)
- *Where?* (case selection)
- *How?* (collection of empirical material and data analysis)

Case study methodology should be seen as the umbrella that spans over the methods for collecting the empirical material (*document studies, semi-structured interviews* and *direct observations*), as well as my framework for analyzing the material (*abduction, process tracing* and *a comparative perspective*). The purpose has been to keep every step of the research as traceable and transparent as possible in order to enhance reliability and replication. I will begin by addressing my ontological stance in order to substantiate my methodological choices.

A Qualitative Research Approach

My basic presumption is that the researcher – to varying extents – constructs the object of research. Regarding the nature of qualitative research, in which researchers study changing and reflective social subjects, as well as “try to understand or interpret phenomenon from the meaning which people give to them”⁴⁵, I consider it problematic to view research as a direct reflection of empirical facts, and therefore I adhere to an interpretative perspective.⁴⁶

With this in mind, one has to differentiate between research objectives. In qualitative research these are seldom to provide an objective replication of social reality but rather to provide different interpretations and understandings of what can be viewed as reality, according to the hermeneutic tradition. However, I do believe that reality in some respects can be viewed as objective and real, since we collectively believe in it and it consequently has real effects beyond simply being an idea.⁴⁷ In turn, I

⁴⁵ Alvesson, Mats & Sköldbberg, Kaj (2008) *Tolkning och reflektion: Vetenskapsfilosofi och kvalitativ metod*, 2nd. ed., p. 17.

⁴⁶ George & Bennett (2005), pp. 127-150.

⁴⁷ See Schmidt, Vivien A. (2008) “Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse”, *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, p. 322.

regard research as a search for understanding what we perceive as real. The study of parts of our reality can contribute to knowledge accumulation, which “provides possibilities for understanding rather than establishes ‘truths’”.⁴⁸ In sum, my ontological stance can be seen as social constructivist and interpretative. Consequently, I regard critical reflection and awareness, i.e. a thought-through and systematic logic as well as the weighing of different interpretations, as central for knowledge accumulation.⁴⁹

Why Case Studies?

Case study researchers tend to look at under which conditions and mechanisms something occurs (“how?”), rather than the frequency of conditions and outcomes (“how much?”). The fact that greater explanatory richness within a type of case often leads to less explanatory power across other types of cases has been claimed as a classical trade-off for case studies.⁵⁰ Clearly, the nature of social phenomena means that all cases are unique and propositions from one case study should not be taken as proving generalizability for other cases. However, case studies represent a different type of generalization which can be seen as more contingent. Case study research and selection does not aim at representativeness of cases but at offering findings to be built on for future research and knowledge accumulation. It thus illustrates broader tendencies rather than proves them and aims at uncovering or refining theory cumulatively.⁵¹

The empirical situation has through an abductive approach been the focal point of this thesis.⁵² Whereas deduction involves testing of a specific theory or hypothesis on a new problem, meaning that the empirical study has theory as its point of departure, induction starts in the empirical material and ends with theory development. Obviously, deduction can also lead to theory development. However, both induction and deduction in different ways make theory the end-point. In contrast, the abductive approach, in my view, also regards theory as a *tool* for clarifying and

⁴⁸ Esaiasson, Peter et al. (2007) *Metodpraktikan: Konsten att studera samhälle, individ och marknad*, pp. 15-27
Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2008), p. 20.

⁴⁹ Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2008), pp. 19-23.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵¹ Yin, Robert K. (1995) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 2nd ed., pp. 1-17.

⁵² Denk, Thomas (2002) *Komparativ metod – förståelse genom jämförelse*, p. 19.

abstracting a research problem. Considering that the new policy field of public e-services is followed by a lack of political science perspectives in this area, e.g. the impact on values in public administration, a combination of empirically driven research seen through a neo-institutionalist lens was deemed most suitable for the aims of this thesis. This means implicitly contributing to generic knowledge and in some respects theory development through new theory application to a new problem (or which through that specific theoretical lens is regarded as a new problem), since these findings can be built on in further research with more specific theory developing aims.

Case study research thus corresponds to my problem-driven, exploratory research purposes, as well as the relatively new and under-researched nature of public e-services. In particular the possibility of studying contextual and historical processes of contemporary events suited my aims of a more longitudinal and contextual perspective, i.e. putting public e-services into the context of public services, public organizations and their locality.

Where? Case Selection

How do we know that the chosen case(s) is/are scientifically relevant for our research objectives and simply not cases of selection bias? Although the former is important to strive for, the latter might, in my view, be difficult to avoid. Even though within any research area there can be an abundance of possible cases to study and the researcher does a careful overview of suitable cases, a certain personal bias for what the researcher finds an “interesting case”, as well as cases of convenience, is difficult to avoid. Ultimately, researchers conduct research about issues that interest them and, furthermore, do not possess an unlimited source of time or resources. However, once again, awareness of the problem, close scrutiny of the research objectives and transparency in the research design can reduce selection bias. The research objective is central here: a case should strive for being an instance of a phenomenon or a class or subclass of events.⁵³

⁵³ George & Bennett (2005), p. 69.

The chosen cases are here instances of the class of event *reforms in public administration* and more specifically, the sub-class *implications of public e-service implementation for public services*. My case study approach corresponds to the “building block” procedure, in which the study of a particular subtype of a phenomenon leads to an identification of a common pattern which can be used as part of a larger contingent generalization. In line with George and Bennett, I find that even though the generalization of building block studies is more narrow and contingent, they can also be seen as more precise and involve relations with higher probabilities.⁵⁴

Cases: Nacka and Botkyrka Municipalities, Sweden

As mentioned in the first chapter, Sweden is one of the most advanced countries with regards to e-government and broadband access and is furthermore one of the most developed welfare states in the world, with an extensive provision of public services, from the cradle to the grave.⁵⁵ As a forerunner in e-government, an advanced welfare state and with high Internet use per capita, Sweden is thus an interesting and important forerunner case for illustrating the significance and possible implications of e-service implementation for public administration and services.⁵⁶

The choice of Swedish municipalities as case units has been driven by a number of factors that highlight the importance of studying the local level in public e-service developments, for reasons relevant both to policy and citizens. In a Swedish e-government context, municipalities are key actors for several reasons. Firstly, they provide a large proportion of the general services closest to the citizen. Municipal services are in several respects what citizens most regularly perceive as public services, e.g. schools, childcare, social services, elderly care, building issues and water and drainage affairs. In turn, municipal administration accounts for 70 percent of the total public administration in Sweden.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 74-79.

⁵⁵ UN (2008), p. 20.

⁵⁶ For more information on Scandinavian countries as forerunners in e-government see Andersen Viborg, Kim et al. (2005) “Introduction to the Special Issue: E-government in Scandinavia” in *Scandinavian Journal of Information Systems* 17(2): 3-10.

⁵⁷ Government Offices of Sweden (2008), p. 8.

Secondly, the strong local autonomy of Swedish municipalities has resulted in a largely decentralized implementation of e-government. Municipalities have carried and still carry most of the responsibility for the implementation. The fact that there are 290 municipalities in Sweden, each with more or less their own way of handling e-government developments, calls for more studies of the variations amongst municipalities according to local circumstances and the implications thereof.⁵⁸

Thirdly, municipalities are generally known as testing grounds for a number of innovations within public organizations in Sweden.⁵⁹ Although e-government developments amongst Swedish municipalities have varied mostly depending on size and financial situation⁶⁰, they are also important testing grounds for e-government and e-service implementation. Studying municipalities could thus illuminate new and interesting developments within public e-services.

Since my general aim is to assess the significance of the introduction of e-services for core values in two Swedish municipal organizations, I was looking for municipalities with documented experience of 1) a relatively long and specific tradition of organizing and providing public services and 2) high e-government maturity. The former would make the institutional features more visible prior to e-services. E-government maturity would also entail longer experience of public e-service developments, which facilitates studying possible effects thereof (in contrast to a municipality which recently has begun offering e-services). Both factors would thus facilitate an in-depth, longitudinal perspective. In short, I was looking for forerunners in terms of innovations in public service provisions and as e-government implementation.

Botkyrka and Nacka municipalities, both situated in the Stockholm region in Sweden (see figure 2 on next page), are regarded as forerunners amongst municipalities not just when it comes to e-government. Both municipalities have a long tradition of innovations in public services and have in several instances been highlighted by SALAR as model municipalities in terms of

⁵⁸ See Löfstedt (2007).

⁵⁹ See Baldersheim & Ståhlberg (2002); Montin (2007).

⁶⁰ SALAR (2008a).

the development of public service provisions and citizen orientation.⁶¹ Furthermore, both municipalities early on developed e-government and e-services initiatives, which also in this respect have led to them being portrayed as innovators by SALAR.⁶²



Figure 2. Location of Botkyrka and Nacka Municipalities in Sweden.

Source: Stockholm County Council [picture is partly modified by author].

The comparative purpose of the case analysis will be further developed below – here, I will only mention a number of related issues which were central for the case selection. The aim with the comparative perspective has been to contrast two different municipalities and the impact of e-government implementation in these two different localities. The municipalities were thus chosen according to different local contexts, a

⁶¹ See for instance, SALAR (2003) “Fem intressanta kommuner”; SALAR (2008b) “Att utveckla valfriheten: En studie av styrning och organisation i fem kommuner med valfrihetssystem”; Frankelius, Per & Ubult, Mats (2009) “Den innovativa kommunen”.

⁶² See SALAR (2008a).

different tradition of organizing and providing public services and different political rule, which boiled down to rather different views on the role of public organizations and the citizen. Furthermore, a longer period of continual political rule was also deemed important since an alteration of the ruling political parties could lead to disruptions and fragmentations in policy traditions. The purpose was thus to build on previous research on e-government and the proclamation that “context matters” (see chapter 1). This would be done by breaking down the rather wide concept of “context” through process tracing and thus illustrate the significance of different factors in different local contexts.

Botkyrka and Nacka differ in several respects. Apart from sharing the same size as well as being urban municipalities within the Stockholm region, Botkyrka is a municipality with socio-economic conditions below average; a multi-cultural population and long period of continual rule by a left-wing coalition.⁶³ In contrast, Nacka is a municipality with socio-economic conditions above the Swedish average; it also has relatively few inhabitants with an immigrant background and a long period of continual rule by a centre-right coalition.⁶⁴ Since size (and thereby resources) has been proven to be important for e-government maturity in Swedish municipalities⁶⁵, it would have been difficult to compare municipalities of different sizes or smaller municipalities with less resources and lower e-government maturity since size could have proven to be too overshadowing a factor in terms of outcomes.

How? Method for Collecting Empirical Material

The empirical material was collected through field studies in both municipalities and is based on *document studies*, *semi-structured interviews* and *direct observations*. These qualitative methods provided for a triangulation of methods⁶⁶ whereas official municipality records, third party records and interviews provided for the triangulation of material (sources). By using multiple sources and methods, multiple measures of

⁶³ Botkyrka Municipality website: <http://www.botkyrka.se/kommunochpolitik/ombotkyrka/kommunfakta>, accessed: 01.10.2010.

⁶⁴ SCB (2009) “Nacka kommunfakta 2009”.

⁶⁵ SALAR (2008a).

⁶⁶ Triangulation of methods does not necessarily have to involve a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, but can also consist of a triangulation of different qualitative methods, Yin (1995), pp. 92-93.

the same phenomenon could be corroborated and in turn balance subjective interpretations and improve internal validity.⁶⁷ I have made own translations to English of all sources, both primary and secondary sources, which were originally in Sweden.

My research approach starts from the perspective of the local actors involved in the policy field. It means that the researcher is in the local context of implementation and focuses the policy problem according to the involved local actors, i.e. their experiences, intentions, processes of organizing and constructions of meaning.⁶⁸ This also allows for seeing processes and relations which perhaps would not have been as visible in letting the researcher conceptualize the policy problem alone.

Document Studies

The studied documents in the cases of Botkyrka and Nacka consisted of official records such as minutes of meetings, policy proposals, strategies, reports, project plans and decisions.⁶⁹ Interviewees were also asked to share documents which they thought might be of interest to me, which gave access to more unofficial working documents. In conjunction with the municipality records, third party records were also used, such as consultancy reports, reports conducted by SALAR or other academic studies of the municipalities in question.

The municipal websites, in particular the available e-services, of Botkyrka and Nacka were studied in order to get an overview of the e-services and the provided information as well as to give the policy documents on e-government and e-services more substance. However, since the focus was not on technology, but rather on *how* it was implemented, i.e. the process and the meaning attached to the technology, there was no thorough evaluation of the e-services and they were mainly studied for informational purposes.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Bogason, Peter (2000) *Public Policy and Local Governance: Institutions in Postmodern Society*, p. 151.

⁶⁹ The search focused on key-words such as one-stop government offices (in the Botkyrka case), customer choice system (in the Nacka case), public services, IT, ICT, communication, channel strategy, e-government and e-services.

The analyzed texts in this study (documents and interviews) have been viewed from the perspective that texts mirror both conscious and unconscious conceptions and ideas as well as power.⁷⁰ I have regarded narratives as constructed and influenced by the context of the social surroundings. This means recognizing in what context something is said, by considering “*who is speaking to whom, for what purposes and under what circumstances*” [original emphasis].⁷¹ In order to avoid the trap of attaching particular significance to issues that support pre-existing or favoured interpretations, the documents and transcribed interviews were re-read in different intervals during a longer period of time. This proved useful, since varying and sometimes competing perspectives gradually were illuminated. The theoretical framework contributed in providing categories, which the material was coded according to.

Semi-structured Interviews

Interviews are a central source if, as in my case, the point is to analyze what people think and how they interpret and perceive events.⁷² The empirical material gathered through interviews has thus been the focal point of this research. In Botkyrka, semi-structured interviews with seven municipal officials and three political groupings⁷³ were conducted during winter-summer 2009. In Nacka, five interviews with municipal officials and one interview with a local council member from the ruling coalition were conducted during spring and summer 2010.

More interviews were held in Botkyrka than in Nacka partly as a result of the fact that a colleague who studied e-democracy developments within the municipality conducted interviews during the same time period.⁷⁴ I thus had the opportunity to take part in those interviews. Furthermore, considering

⁷⁰ Bergström, Göran & Boréus, Kristina (2005) *Textens mening och makt: metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*, p.13.

⁷¹ George & Bennett (2005), p. 102.

⁷² Aberbach, Joel D. & Rockman, Bert A. (2002) “Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews” in *Political Science and Politics*, 35(4), p. 673.

⁷³ One group interview with nine of the ruling left-wing coalition (representatives from the Swedish Social Democratic Party, the Green Party and the Left Party) was held as well as two smaller group interviews with two representatives from the centre-right coalition (representatives from the Swedish Moderate Party, the Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats).

⁷⁴ See Mikaelsson, Rickard & Wihlborg, Elin (2011) “Challenges to local e-democracy: A conceptual analysis of a bottom-up study of e-democracy practices in a multicultural Swedish municipality”, paper for *CeDEM11, Conference for E-Democracy and Open Government 2011*, Krems, Austria.

that Botkyrka was the first case and that the study had an exploratory purpose, in which previous knowledge was limited, more interviews were deemed necessary in order to be able to “soak and poke”⁷⁵ and consequently find stronger corroboration between findings. In turn, the selection of interview candidates in Nacka was easier and more confined. Snowball sampling was used both in Nacka and Botkyrka in order to get suitable interview candidates. Key officials and local council members who were and are active in the implementation of e-services and/or the overarching development of public services in general – what I term key actors – were interviewed both in Botkyrka and Nacka in order to acquire a longitudinal and wider perspective of how public services are handled in the municipalities. “Regular” officials or street-level bureaucrats were not interviewed with one exception: in Botkyrka and the case of the one-stop government offices. Here, officials working at the offices were interviewed in order to get a fuller picture of the development and activities of the offices.

Since depth, context and historical processes are fundamental to the purpose of this study, open-ended questions but with a certain structure were considered most relevant.⁷⁶ Semi-structured interviews meant keeping the interviews rather open but with a certain set of questions and themes derived from my research problem and theory.⁷⁷ This allowed for personal perspectives at the same time as excessive information was avoided. The beliefs and perceptions of the interview candidates were the main objective of the interviews.⁷⁸ In order to balance differing interpretations, information from different interviewees as well as sources were corroborated.

⁷⁵ Leech, Beth L. (2002) “Asking Questions: Techniques for Semi-structured Interviews” in *Political Science and Politics*, 35(4), p. 665.

⁷⁶ Berry, Jeffrey M. (2002) “Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing”, in *Political Science and Politics* 35(4), p. 682.

⁷⁷ Interview questions depended on who I interviewed, but there was a general standard format for questions. Certain flexibility was thus left in terms of sequencing and follow-up questions, depending on the position as well as personality of the interviewee. These mainly concerned issues such as the developments processes, motives and driving forces, perceived risks and opportunities, the relationship and communication with citizens, inclusion and exclusion, what is specific about Botkyrka and Nacka, with a particular focus on own perceptions and values (see Annexes 1 and 2 for a more detailed specification of the interview questions).

⁷⁸ Berry (2002), p. 680.

Direct Observations

Direct observations can be useful in providing additional information about the topic studied. By observing events directly, the researcher does not merely have to rely on verbal second-hand accounts but can draw her or his own conclusions about the event in its natural setting. It covers the context of the event. Consequently, it is one way of determining if there is great discrepancy between what people say they do and what they actually do.⁷⁹

In the case of Botkyrka, observations of the one-stop government offices were considered an important additional source, since the offices occupy such a central role in the municipality. It was deemed useful to see what role the one-stop government offices occupy in public service provisions, e.g. what kind of questions citizens come to the offices for and how they are taken care of by the public officials. In turn, this says something about how the municipality perceives the citizens and needs of citizens, as well as how they view and handle the role of public organizations, in short, central components of the municipality's core values. I therefore visited one of the one-stop government offices in Alby in Botkyrka municipality. Alby is a city district which experiences a high number of newly-arrived immigrants and was therefore regarded as illustrative for some of the local needs and questions which the officials at the offices say they experience. In agreement with the officials at the office, I spent approximately one hour observing the visitors, officials and general environment.⁸⁰

Since Nacka does not have any one-stop government offices or, to the same extent, the personal face-to-face meeting as a central way of communicating with citizens, no direct observation was conducted in Nacka.

⁷⁹ Esaiasson et al. (2007), pp. 343-359.

⁸⁰ For ethical reasons and because some of the questions asked by citizens could be perceived as sensitive, I left a note at the desk of each official which told who I was and for what purposes I was there, in case some visitor would ask or seem uncomfortable. It turned out that none of the visitors appeared bothered and several of the conversations were held in languages other than Swedish, which also could have made the issue less sensitive.

How? Data Analysis

The following section will spell out the approach for analyzing the empirical material. Three methodological approaches were applied: *abduction*, *process tracing* and *a comparative perspective*.

Abduction

As highlighted, the ever-present earlier presuppositions of the researcher make a strict application of inductive methods difficult – facts are always theory or perspective laden. In my view, this makes abduction a rather realistic approach.⁸¹ Using theory as an explanatory tool makes some of the hidden presuppositions more apparent and thus the analysis more transparent.

I see the purpose of theorizing to clarify issues, “to make the complex and seemingly obscure clear and understandable”.⁸² However, in line with Allison in his famous study of the Cuban missile crisis, I believe that theory does not only influence how one analyzes a problem but also what type of questions one asks, thus affecting the analytical process from early on.⁸³ In this thesis, a neo-institutionalist approach, in particular the ACF, provided a framework for casting light on values in processes of stability and change and in turn, possible effects of public e-service implementation on values. Theory has thus been used mainly as a framework for defining the research questions as well as for reducing, categorizing and analyzing the empirical material.

Process Tracing

Pierson’s temporal perspective and process tracing are in several respects overlapping and complementary. Both approaches focus on the process rather than the outcome and thus turn to historical explanations⁸⁴, i.e. temporal aspects and formative elements in a longer chain of events. The temporal perspective and its emphasis on path-dependent mechanisms assert that the analysis needs to be focused on tracing certain key decisions

⁸¹ Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2005), p. 55.

⁸² Hedström, Peter (2005) *Dissecting the Social: On the Principles of Analytical Sociology*, p. 4.

⁸³ Allison, Graham T. & Zelikow, Philip (1999) *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed., pp. 385-389.

⁸⁴ Bennett, Andrew (2010) “Process Tracing: A Bayesian Approach” in Box-Steffensmeier, Janet M. et al., eds. *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*.

and branching points and in turn the processes and mechanisms in-between. Process tracing is a method for mapping a course of events, highlighting causes of effects rather than effects of causes. It involves illuminating not so much the correlations between variables but rather the question: what has happened to bring this about?⁸⁵ In turn, I have focused both on important branching points in the development process and on the role of path-dependent processes in restricting or enabling certain outcomes.⁸⁶ Causes and processes have been traced by mapping and summarizing the development processes chronologically and by dividing them into different phases.

In other words, the development of public e-services has been regarded as longitudinal: it does not appear in a vacuum but is placed during implementation into existing policy traditions. E-service implementation has thus been placed in the analysis into the longer process of developing public service provisions in general and core values of key actors in this field in particular. The difficulty here has been to determine how far back to trace the process. Obviously, the process of developing public services in a municipality goes back to the development of the modern Swedish welfare state or even further. Considering the limited scale of the research project, I chose to focus on what can be seen as the last punctuated equilibrium or critical juncture in the two municipalities, i.e. when they last came across a significant change in terms of public services practices, which was decisive for how they have organized and provided public services prior to e-services. This means that the point of departure for the process tracing does not correspond over the two cases. Furthermore, the implementation of public e-services in Nacka and Botkyrka municipality is viewed as a process which at the time of writing is highly ongoing. There is thus no “after” in my analysis but only “before” and “during”.

Process tracing involves abstracting mechanisms from a complex totality. Although this can be seen as very matter of fact, it is essential in case study approaches, in which the heuristic approach often generates a rich and complex picture. However, a central methodological problem with process tracing is that it can create a strong confirmation bias – the researcher sees what she or he wants to see. In turn, it is difficult to know if you have had

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 226.

⁸⁶ George & Bennett (2005), p. 212.

access to all the vital material. I have tried to combat this problem by corroborating material (e.g. policy documents, interviews and secondary sources) as well as interviewing several candidates with different views on events. Similarly, the specific theoretical lens I employ means that this is *one way* of viewing the problem – different theoretical perspectives can provide other pieces of the puzzle.

A Comparative Perspective

The general aim of the comparative approach has been exploratory – my aim is not to prove causality between different factors but to illustrate a certain situation or issues that have been neglected in other studies. The comparative approach has thus been used in order to increase the understanding of the studied phenomenon. The case studies are in turn contextual, with the aim of providing material for future research. As indicated above, I nevertheless had certain selection criteria with regards to finding two municipalities which in several respects contrasted each other in terms of policy traditions in public service provisions and local context. My comparative approach highlights what role these differences in the institutional setting have for e-service implementation and in turn for the effect on core values. To be more specific, do different policy framings create different effects? The aim has thus not been to analyze variables across cases but to trace causal paths in a single case, compare the significance of these, and in turn, to identify the role of differing and/or similar factors for the outcome. In turn, the contrasting approach has enabled a clarification of belief systems of the two municipalities. By mirroring the two cases against each other, certain aspects, relationships and patterns could be made more explicit.⁸⁷

Obviously, to conduct case studies in a chronological order means that the presumptions and patterns found in the first case study to a certain degree influence the research in the second case. In the second case study (Nacka), the research focus and interview questions had also become more refined. Nevertheless, the theoretical framework has ensured that the same questions were asked of the empirical material in both cases.

⁸⁷ Denk (2002), pp. 7-29.

Summary

As a result of the relatively unexplored field of local practices in e-services, this is an exploratory study which, through theory application, aims to increase the understanding of particular aspects of the phenomenon in question. Case study research and analysis has allowed for an in-depth and holistic study of the process of implementing public e-services, which combined with process tracing, has provided a tool for analyzing mechanisms behind certain developments and thus causes of effects. The abductive approach has through a neo-institutional outlook guided the research questions, field studies and the analysis. In turn, the comparative perspective has contributed to illuminating as well as problematizing the role of different policy traditions and local contexts in e-service implementation. By building on process tracing, the comparison of Botkyrka and Nacka will consequently focus on the implications of the implementation process for values, as well as explain why.

Analytical Framework: A Temporal Perspective on Belief Systems

What has been said up until now has set out the parameters for how we can view the phenomenon in question through specific methodological and theoretical lenses. How can these perspectives be used for assessing the significance of e-service implementation for core values in the public administration of the two Swedish municipalities?

The structure of belief systems provides a categorization for understanding the interplay between the e-services policy and the existing local core values, including to what degree core values are threatened by the e-services policy. Simply put, it means assessing the level of conflict in the implementation process, i.e. whether these values are conflicting, mutually supporting or independent of each other, as well as to what extent.⁸⁸ This provides a picture of key actors' interpretation of the reform and their willingness to change.

⁸⁸ See Lundquist (2007), p. 168.

However, it is not enough to look at the level of conflict between the implemented policy and existing core values. Since all the elements of the belief system are interconnected – i.e. policy strategies and implementing activities are, more or less, ways of realizing and expressing core values – change in one element is, in my view, not always without consequences for the other elements. In other words, even though merely implementing activities are changed, it is important to consider whether this will have consequences for the core values, and if yes, what consequences. It is therefore vital to look at the relationship between the different elements of the belief system and ultimately, what changes in different elements mean for core values. In addition, core values, policy strategies and implementing activities are expressed both through rhetoric and practice. Consequently, it is significant for my purposes to consider changes both in what is stated and in what is actually done, as well as what possible detachments between the two signify.

The elements of the belief system represent the institutional features which will be analyzed in the following chapters. Table 2 summarizes the different characteristics of a belief system and their susceptibility to change.

	Deep Core <i>(core values)</i>	Policy Core <i>(policy strategies)</i>	Secondary Aspects <i>(implementing activities)</i>
Defining Characteristics	Fundamental normative and ontological axioms	Fundamental policy positions concerning the basic strategies for achieving core values within the subsystem	Instrumental decisions and information necessary to implement policy core
Susceptibility to Change	Very difficult; akin to a religious conversion	Difficult, but can occur if experiment reveals serious anomalies	Moderately easy; this is the topic of most administrative and even legislative policymaking

Table 2. The Structure of Belief Systems [partly modified by author].

Source: Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, eds. (1993).

One of the fundamental propositions of ACF is the need for a longer time perspective in order to capture changes in policy. The framework however does not elaborate much on how this perspective can be applied. Hence, in this analysis, Pierson's assumptions on developments over time will, combined with process tracing, be used for bringing out the temporal perspective in ACF.

An application of Pierson's framework for institutional change entails a more nuanced view on what change entails than traditional neo-institutional perspectives – change can for instance involve punctuated equilibriums, critical junctures, less drastic but nonetheless formative moments as well as slower and incremental development processes. The ACF also highlights the role of policy learning in change, which in this study will be highlighted by analyzing the adjustment to changing external conditions. I will therefore speak more in terms of policy adjustment and accommodation rather than learning.

Consequently, it is important to study not only large-scale triggers of institutional change but also slow-moving processes. A longer time-horizon can capture these processes which build up to change. From this perspective, the question is what type of change – if any – the implementation of e-services represents for core values in the two municipalities. Is it a critical juncture or are there indications of a critical juncture? Or does it reinforce the established path, adding to the existing equilibrium?

In order to understand the level of conflict between the new policy and existing belief systems, not only the development of institutions but also institutional resilience, i.e. the glue of institutions will be studied. Understanding the factors behind the glue of institutions can help in identifying likely trajectories of institutional change. In turn, studying these path-dependent processes means specifying the mechanisms that reinforce a particular trajectory.

Thus, e-services as a policy will be viewed from a longitudinal process perspective, i.e. the “e” will here be placed into the process of developing public service provisions in the municipality. The analysis will thus regard the specific policy belief system in question as the institutional context

which e-services enter into. In order to analyze implementation over time and in turn assess possible effects on core values, a disposition of phases will be created. In the beginning of each new phase, certain central events are regarded to cause a re-negotiation of what characterized the previous phase and is thus meant to illustrate branching points which to different degrees are decisive in the implementation of e-services. The main process to be traced is how decisive these developments are for core values. Thus, the implementation of e-services will be ordered chronologically through these phases and in turn linked to changes in the belief system, with a special focus on core values:

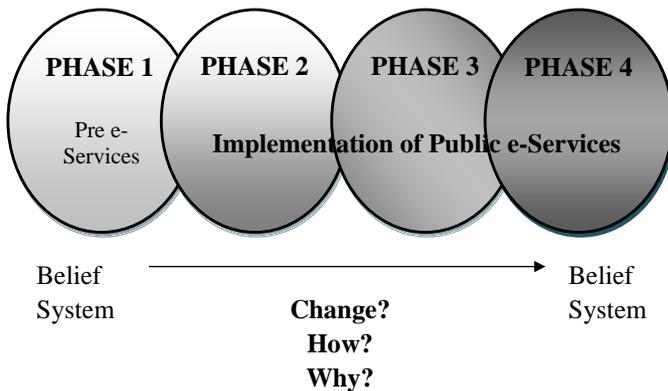


Figure 3. The Implementation of e-Services over Time.

By combining Pierson’s view on change with the ACF, a conceptualization of differences between developments and in-depth institutional change can be made. Since the inner policy core, the core values, are very difficult to alter, a change of these would indicate in-depth change of institutional features, i.e. punctuated equilibrium. In contrast, change in policy strategies would illustrate critical junctures or formative moments which could have long-term consequences for core values. Lastly, change of implementing activities would indicate more incremental and slow-moving developments.

In the following chapters, this framework will be applied in an analysis of the two cases. I will begin by analyzing the process of developing public (e)-services in Nacka and Botkyrka through process tracing of each case. I

will then continue with the analysis of which core values can be distinguished before and during e-service implementation. Here, I will compare the two cases in order to distinguish what characterizes each belief system and the developments over time respectively. This will prepare for the concluding discussion of my main findings in chapter 4, where the implications of e-service implementation for core values will be assessed.

CHAPTER THREE

TWO PATHS TOWARDS PUBLIC E-SERVICES

This chapter consists of three main sections. The first two sections present empirical narratives of the process of developing public (e)-services in the municipalities of Botkyrka and Nacka respectively. These sections will address my first research question: *how are public e-services implemented in the two municipalities?* The third section is a comparative analysis which addresses the second research question: *which core values can be distinguished before and during the implementation of public e-services?*

The Process of Developing Public (e-)Services in Botkyrka

The following section will be structured according to a longitudinal and process perspective, in which the implementation of public e-services is placed into the greater context of developing a policy belief system for organizing and providing public services, hence the “e” in brackets. In order to capture fundamental developments over time, the process tracing has been divided into four phases. The time frame of the phases should not be taken strictly however as they are often overlapping and parallel. I will begin with a short illustration of demographic and socio-economic conditions of the two municipalities in order to locally contextualize my findings.

Botkyrka Municipality – “Far from *lagom*”

In 1994, the Botkyrka-based hip hop group Latin Kings released their debut album *Välkommen till förorten* (“Welcome to the suburb”), which became an immediate success. The lyrics of Latin Kings told stories of

growing up in a Stockholm suburb dominated by immigrants, amongst multi-storey block buildings. Their autobiographical lyrics in Swedish seemed to hit a nerve amongst the Swedes. Suddenly everyone knew about northern Botkyrka and life in the suburbs.

The lyrics of Latin Kings have in several respects influenced the image of Botkyrka: an immigrant area and typical concrete suburb largely built and populated during the so-called “Million Programme” period, a social housing project developed by the Swedish government from 1964-1975, with the goal of building one million dwelling units in Stockholm within ten years. Its architecture has since been criticized as inhumane, contributing to isolation and exclusion rather than a spirit of community.¹ Although this is open to discussion, travelling on the subway through Botkyrka or visiting the northern parts of Alby (the home of Latin Kings) or Fittja, the landscape is clearly characterized by the large blocks of flats of the Million Programme.

Botkyrka has approximately 81,000 inhabitants, which makes it a rather large municipality by Swedish standards: of Sweden’s 290 municipalities, the 120 smallest have fewer than 20,000 inhabitants.² It is situated in the southern parts of the Stockholm region and is one of the most international municipalities in Sweden. Over 100 nationalities are represented within the municipality: 51.4 percent of the inhabitants have an immigrant background.³ This is to be compared to inhabitants with an immigrant background in Sweden at large: 17.8 percent. Botkyrka has in some respects been regarded as a transit municipality for newly arrived immigrants, who after a while move on to other municipalities in Sweden.

Approximately 60 percent of the housing in Botkyrka consists of blocks of flats, 35 percent of single-family houses.⁴ However, there is a clear divide between the northern and southern parts of Botkyrka. The southern parts, such as Tullinge or Tumba, are largely composed of nature reserves as well

¹ The Million Programme website: <http://www.miljonprogrammet.info/>, accessed: 19.11.10.

² Botkyrka is the 23rd largest municipality in Sweden in terms of inhabitants, SCB website, http://www.scb.se/Pages/TableAndChart_304755.aspx, accessed: 28.02.2011.

³ Born abroad or with both parents born abroad.

⁴ Botkyrka Municipality website: <http://www.botkyrka.se/kommunochpolitik/ombotkyrka/kommunfakta>, accessed: 01.10.2010.

as some residential areas of single-family houses. In the southern part of Tullinge, inhabitants with an immigrant background constitute 16.8 percent and the unemployment rate is only 2.2 percent.⁵ In contrast, in the northern part of Alby, inhabitants with an immigrant background add up to 59.8 percent and an open unemployment rate of 6.6 percent.⁶ In 2010, the average unemployment level in Botkyrka was 4.9 percent (Sweden at large: 9.8 percent).⁷

	Sweden	Botkyrka	Tullinge (Southern Botkyrka)	Alby (Northern Botkyrka)
Inhabitants with Immigrant Background	17.8%	51.4%	16.8%	59.8%
Unemployment Levels	9.8%	4.9%	2.2%	6.6%

Table 3. Statistics Botkyrka Municipality

Source: Botkyrka Municipality, SCB, USK.

Another defining characteristic of the municipality is its young population. The average age is 36.9 years (compared to 41 years in Sweden at large).⁸ The multicultural and youthful context of the municipality can be seen as two main factors behind the municipal slogan “Botkyrka – far from *lagom*”, indicating that Botkyrka in several respects differs from the average Swedish municipality and “the land of *lagom*” by which Sweden is often characterized by Swedes (the Swedish word “*lagom*” means roughly “good enough” or “just right.”). The slogan also indicates that this is something that Botkyrka wants to portray as a comparative advantage in its

⁵ Office of Research and Statistics Stockholm (USK) website: <http://www.usk.stockholm.se/internet/omrfakta/tabellappl.asp?omrade=BOKD5&appl=Omradesjmf&resultat=Andel&Kommun=B>, accessed: 01.11.2010.

⁶ USK website: <http://www.usk.stockholm.se/internet/omrfakta/tabellappl.asp?omrade=BOKD1&appl=Omradesjmf&resultat=Andel&Kommun=B>, accessed: 01.11.2010

⁷ Botkyrka Municipality website: <http://www.botkyrka.se/kommunochpolitik/ombotkyrka/kommunfakta/botkyrkaisiffrorstatistik>, accessed: 01.11.2010.

⁸ Ibid.

marketing strategy. It illustrates a wish to move away from the image of the socio-economically deprived suburb and be viewed as a municipality which takes advantage of its international and youthful population in creating innovations in culture as well as in trade and industry.⁹ As will be illustrated below, the will to change the negative image of Botkyrka has also influenced how the municipality has approached public services and democracy.

Botkyrka has been ruled by a centre-left coalition¹⁰ during the last 30 years. After the election in 2010 it is one of only two municipalities in the Stockholm region with a centre-left government; the other 24 municipalities in the region are governed by centre-right coalitions.¹¹

Phase 1 (1987-2000): Institutionalizing One-Stop Government Offices

In the mid-1980s it became increasingly apparent that Botkyrka was struggling with a number of socio-economic problems. High unemployment rates and low turnout in public elections characterized the municipality, which contributed to a negative image in national media. According to a leading local council member, the socio-economic situation was a potential “time bomb”.¹² Interaction with citizens was low at the time and it was concluded that communication with citizens had to be improved. In order to counteract alienation and reduce the gap between citizens and the municipal administration, the municipality needed to become more available to its citizens. As a first measure, a one-stop government office¹³ – also the first in Sweden – was opened in 1987. A one-stop government office is a common public service unit where personnel with general competencies provide services across administration, authority and sector divisions (see figure 4).¹⁴ Officials in Botkyrka had studied the development of one-stop government offices in Denmark and reached the conclusion that it could be an instrument to address the problems Botkyrka faced at the time.¹⁵

⁹ Botkyrka Municipality website: <http://www.botkyrka.se>, accessed: 01.11.2010.

¹⁰ A coalition of members from the Swedish Social Democratic Party, the Green Party and the Left Party.

¹¹ Statistics Sweden (SCB) website: <http://www.scb.se> and the Election Authority website: <http://www.val.se>.

¹² Interview with group of local council members, centre-left coalition.

¹³ The one-stop government office was then called *servicestuga*, i.e. roughly “service cottage”.

¹⁴ SALAR (1997) “Samtjänst vid medborgarkontor”, 1997:133, 26.08.1997.

¹⁵ Botkyrka Municipality (1994) - “Servicestugornas utveckling”, 20.09.1994.

What is a One-Stop Government Office?

One-stop government offices (*medborgarkontor*) are offices, usually located in a public place such as libraries or shopping malls, where citizens can go to get personalized and coordinated public services from public officials with general competences. The main aim of the offices is to provide an accessible meeting point where citizens can get help and information with issues which usually concern more than one public authority or sector, hence the term “one-stop”.

Through the personal meeting and conversation the public official provides information, guides and makes decisions concerning a number of issues. Although municipalities usually host the offices, services from state authorities, civic information in general and legal or economical counseling can sometimes also be offered.

Source: SALAR (1997), Björk & Bostedt (2002).

Figure 4. What is a One-Stop Government Office?

level bureaucracy in which public officials are given much discretion and flexibility, the one-stop government offices started to provide customized information and services more in tune with local needs. A notion of an open and physically available municipal organization in close proximity to citizens was emphasized. In turn, the municipal leadership reasoned that improved communication with citizens, and thus an increased service orientation, would create more trust in the municipality and in public institutions in general, as stated in policy documents:

Democracy presupposes trust for public institutions. Poor public services lead to frustrated citizens and undermine the preconditions for a democratic society. The strength of the one-stop government offices lays in the view of the inhabitants of the municipality as both citizens and clients. The offices creates preconditions for citizen engagement, for instance by accommodating service supplies to the needs of the clients and by making them more available, cost-efficient and simpler.¹⁶

¹⁶ Botkyrka Municipality (2002a) “Medborgarkontoren som kommunens demokratocentrum”, p. 3.

The opening of the first one-stop government office marks the beginning of the first phase of the specific public service tradition in Botkyrka. Because of the municipality’s high share of inhabitants with an immigrant background, a wide range of needs for public services had become increasingly apparent, in particular for inhabitants with no or little knowledge about Sweden. There was thus a need for flexible public services which could be attentive to the varying needs of the population. Based on the logic of street-

Trust and increased dialogue between the municipality and the citizen was expected to have important long-term effects, such as increased social stability and an improved municipal budget. The one-stop government offices were also regarded as a central tool for building a municipal identity in an otherwise heterogeneous municipality.¹⁷

Over the years, the municipal organization has consistently developed the offices in relation to the results in regular citizen evaluations. The tasks have increasingly been accommodated to the local needs of the citizens. For instance, interpreters have been made available at certain office hours and several of the officials working at the offices speak one or more of the larger immigrant languages such as Spanish or Arabic. A growing number of municipal activities have been moved from expert officials within the municipal administration to officials with general competencies at the one-stop government offices – they have provided a “short-cut” to municipal information and services.¹⁸ The offices have also offered help with issues which are not directly related to municipal affairs but to other public authorities, e.g. health care, social insurance, student loans or consumer counselling.¹⁹ In a report from 2000, the municipality states:

45% of the population in northern Botkyrka was born abroad. Approximately 35% of those who live in the northern parts of the municipality have only completed nine-year compulsory school. All of this together with little knowledge of the Swedish language or Swedish society demands external information which is shaped and customized to local needs.²⁰

The above quotation illustrates how the municipality recognized that the responsibilities of different public organizations are not always clear to all citizens, in particular not to newly-arrived immigrants. As the level closest to the citizen, the municipality then has to function as the gateway to Swedish society in general and public institutions in particular. An official

¹⁷ Botkyrka Municipality (1989) “Kommunal information på biblioteken i Botkyrka”; Botkyrka Municipality (1997) “Inbjudan till samverkan i integrerade medborgarkontor (servicestugor)”, 09.10.1997; Botkyrka Municipality (2000a) “Projektet Medborgarkontoren som kommunens demokratocentrum”; Björk, Peder & Bostedt, Göran (2002) *Avsektoriserad lokal offentlig service*; interview with Botkyrka official D.

¹⁸ Öhring PriceWaterHouseCoopers (2002) “Granskning av medborgarkontoren i Botkyrka kommun”, p. 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁰ Botkyrka Municipality (2000a), p. 5.

at one of the offices claims that several citizens, especially newly-arrived immigrants, have regarded them as the link to Swedish society.²¹ As a result, some citizens have preferred to contact certain public authorities, e.g. the immigration authorities, through the offices rather than the authorities directly. The municipality is in these cases viewed as the “neutral link” between citizens and public authorities in general.²² Consequently, Botkyrka has been very active in pushing for increased collaboration between municipalities and state authorities – the municipality has special agreements with several public authorities.²³

In addition to public service provisions, the one-stop government offices have increasingly become a forum for political dialogue and democratic processes. This concerns both actual meetings between the citizens and local councillors as well as the spread of public information to raise knowledge and interest in public issues. Officials are also meant to give local council members feedback about what issues are discussed at the offices. *Öhrling PriceWaterHouseCoopers* highlights in an evaluation made on request by Botkyrka, the central role of the one-stop government offices for the democratic process in Botkyrka:

We estimate that one-stop government offices have an important role in the democratic process. A well-developed democracy presupposes knowledgeable citizens as well as an active dialogue between citizens, elected representatives and public authorities. Public information has a decisive role for participation and influence in developments in society.²⁴

The offices are thus regarded as an important tool for creating well-informed and politically active citizens. In this context they have been seen as especially important for groups which are normally difficult to reach, e.g. certain groups of immigrant women.²⁵ In sum, the development of the one-stop government offices in Botkyrka illustrates the conviction of

²¹ Interview with Botkyrka official B.

²² Interviews with Botkyrka officials B & D.

²³ Öhrling PriceWaterHouseCoopers (2002); Botkyrka Municipality (2009b) “Yttrande över betänkandet Styr Samverkan – för bättre service till medborgarna (SOU 2008:97), samt beskrivning av pågående arbete”, 18.02.2009; interviews with Botkyrka officials B & D.

²⁴ Öhrling PriceWaterHouseCoopers (2002), p. 4.

²⁵ Ibid.

having public services which are trusted and adapted to local needs, both for service and democracy purposes.

Notwithstanding the above, the continued expansion of the one-stop government offices has also been ensured thanks to the considerable efficiency gains made in the municipal organization. Over the years, the municipal administrations have increasingly transferred more non-specialist tasks to the offices. Although this was not an easy process to begin with, the one-stop approach of the offices has created increased collaboration across administrative divisions. The offices can be seen as the hub around which the municipal organization is built. One high-level official describes it in the following way: “More and more it [*the one-stop approach*] has become a giant system we have for creating engagement, participation and involvement”.²⁶ Thus, even though the one-stop government offices were initially one way of solving a problem, the municipal organization has over the years incrementally developed around the offices. Consequently, a consensus that “this is the way we work in Botkyrka” has been established in the organization amongst key actors. This has been termed the “Botkyrka spirit”.²⁷ It can generally be summarized as a municipality which works in close proximity to the citizen, with an overarching aim of improving openness, availability and dialogue. In turn, the work in Botkyrka has acquired both a national and international reputation. Although one-stop government offices exist in other Swedish municipalities as well, few are considered to do such extensive work as the offices in Botkyrka.²⁸ SALAR writes about Botkyrka:

The municipality’s interplay with the citizens and the local community through the Botkyrka dialogue also strengthens the picture of Botkyrka as a modern Swedish municipality, characterized by curiosity, accessibility, dialogue and a spirit of co-creating.²⁹

This first phase is characterized by the process of institutionalizing one-stop government offices and a public service tradition accordingly. The

²⁶ Interview with Botkyrka official E.

²⁷ Dalarna’s Research Institute (2008) “Kommunen som möjliggörare: Steg 2 – Botkyrka kommun”, June 2008; interview with Botkyrka official D.

²⁸ Interview with Botkyrka official F.

²⁹ SALAR (2005) “Kommunkompassen – Analys av Botkyrka kommun”, Rapport 08.11.2005, p. 3.

time before the development of the offices led up to what I view as a critical juncture, in which local socio-economic conditions created strong pressures for a fundamental change of organizational rhetoric and praxis. With the development of one-stop government offices, the institutionalization of a belief system began to take place both in rhetoric and in praxis. Dialogue with citizens, availability and flexibility (i.e. adjusting to nuances in local needs) were emphasized as important beliefs in this context. The idea of building trust and democratic legitimacy in order to facilitate the work of the municipality internally and externally seems to have been decisive in developing a tradition of one-stop offices. However, at the end of phase 1, the Botkyrka spirit is still realized mainly through personal encounters. ICT does not yet have a central role in public service delivery.

Phase 2 (2000-2005): Towards a 24/7 Municipality

The development of one-stop government offices seems to have paved the way for innovative perspectives on public services. Botkyrka was initially regarded as one of the pioneer municipalities in e-services developments in Sweden.³⁰ As in several public organizations, ICT was gradually introduced into the Botkyrka organization during the 1980s and '90s.³¹ However, e-services as a policy became most evident after 2000. During this period, ICT was increasingly discussed in a service application context, indicating a new view of ICT as useful not only for internal administration or for one-way information but also for two-way interaction between citizens and the municipality in the form of self-services. The success of e-services amongst banks and certain state authorities triggered ideas for how e-services could be transferred to a municipal context.³² In conjunction with this, Botkyrka became involved in activities aimed at becoming a so-called 24/7 agency³³, coordinated by the Swedish Agency for Public Management. Terms like the “digital municipality”; “24/7 municipality” and “digital services” started to appear. The potential of ICT for improving public services was discussed more and more amongst top officials in Botkyrka.

³⁰ SALAR (2008a), p. 22.

³¹ Botkyrka Municipality (1997a) "Policy för informationshantering i Botkyrka kommun", 22.08.1997; Botkyrka Municipality (1997b) "Remittering av förslag till IT-policy och därtill knutna handlingsplaner", 05.09.1997.

³² Interview with Botkyrka official D.

³³ The Swedish Agency for Public Management (2000) "The 24/7 Agency: Criteria for 24/7 Agencies in the Networked Public Administration".

ICT was associated with an increased service supply, availability and citizen orientation. Simultaneously, ICT was related to existing policy beliefs such as an “active citizen dialogue” as well as “personalized services”.³⁴ Certain external events thus crystallized and acted as incentives for introducing ICT into public service provision in Botkyrka.

These developments coincided with internal needs for reviewing whether more activities could be transferred to the one-stop government offices. As a result, an inventory of municipal services was made in 2003, with the aim of evaluating what services could become e-services. The “electronic services” project was now initiated. This marked the beginning of concrete activities for making e-services an integral part of service provisions. A leading official summarizes it as follows: “We had to start thinking e-services”.³⁵ The inventory drew clear parallels between one-stop government offices and e-services. E-services, just like one-stop government offices, should involve services that are regular, simple and based on routine procedures.³⁶ There was no point in turning services into e-services unless they were numerous or frequent since the investment costs would be too high. Simultaneously, e-services and one-stop government offices should develop in parallel as a way of complementing each other. Both e-services and one-stop government offices were regarded as important components in the creation of a 24/7 municipality since both are means for improving availability. E-services were highlighted as a way to further improve the quality of service provisions and contribute to greater transparency and availability.³⁷ Experiences from the one-stop offices thus guided e-services developments. One-stop offices and e-services have in certain respects been regarded as “the same thing”, as a high-level official puts it.³⁸ Nevertheless, during this phase, the municipality focused mainly on developing less advanced e-services, i.e. services in which citizens did not have to prove their authority or sign applications via the Internet.³⁹

³⁴ Botkyrka Municipality (2002) “Bilaga protokoll kommunstyrelsen §98 IT-strategi”, 26.06.2002.

³⁵ Interview with Botkyrka official D.

³⁶ Botkyrka Municipality (2003) “Elektroniska servicetjänster – Etapp 1 Inventering och kartläggning”, 16.06.2003.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Interview with Botkyrka official D.

³⁹ Botkyrka Municipality (2003).

This second phase marks the beginning of e-service implementation, in which the potential of ICT for public service delivery was introduced into the municipality's belief system, mainly through the 24/7 agency rhetoric. The rhetoric and praxis of one-stop government offices governed how the municipality viewed and managed public service delivery. An external context which increasingly regarded ICT as a central tool in public administration started to pave the way for new ways of handling public services. Nevertheless, beliefs similar to those for the one-stop offices, e.g. availability, dialogue with citizens and flexibility, continued to be stressed within the organization. With e-services, the municipality could become even more accessible and reach a wider spectrum of different groups of citizens. Simultaneously, an efficiency rationale is also apparent – by automating frequent and voluminous public service provisions, savings in time and costs could be made.

This second phase illustrates how strongly institutionalized the one-stop offices had become at the beginning of the 21st century. They provided the foundation for the policy strategies of the municipality and in turn shaped the rhetoric and praxis of the implementation of e-services. During this phase one-stop government offices were still a dominant channel for communicating public services and information – in 2002 the offices handled approximately 75,000 cases.⁴⁰ E-services were not advanced enough at the time to gain a stronger foothold. Thus, during this period, e-services were mainly complementary. The fact that the municipality started to consider what activities could be transferred to e-services however indicates the increased significance of ICT in the interface towards the citizen.

Phase 3 (2005-2008): Towards Three Service Channels

The initial steps of integrating ICT into information and service channels were rapidly followed by more in-depth and long-term ambitions. In 2005 the process took a significant leap forward: a special group for coordinating e-services developments, *Botkyrka24*, was formed. At the same time, the process of developing an overarching policy document for activities related to ICT, an e-strategy, was launched. The strategy

⁴⁰ Öhrling PriceWaterHouseCoopers (2002), p. 2.

illustrated an important step towards a more intensive use of ICT in public service delivery.

Before the local council approved the e-strategy, it had to be anchored within the municipal organization. The anchoring process was regarded by several officials as lengthy and slow. A lack of political leadership and resources, as well as some administrations feeling excluded from the process, were a few of the reasons put forward.⁴¹ According to some of the interviewed key actors, the e-strategy had been run mainly as a technology project rather than as a project driven by organizational needs, although the officials in charge had emphasized the latter.⁴² However, all involved actors generally appeared to agree on the great potential of ICT, for instance in terms of providing a more visible and accessible municipality for citizens.⁴³ Thus, it is clear that the municipal organization generally agreed on the *purpose* of e-services and its role in furthering municipal core values but disagreed on the actual *way* e-services were implemented. This indicates a mismatch between how e-service implementation was justified in rhetoric and how the actual implementation process was handled in practice. Nevertheless, there was a general consensus on the advantages ICT in general and e-services in particular would bring – it was never a question of e-services or no e-services.

In the beginning of 2007 the municipal e-strategy was formally adopted by the local council:

The municipality needs to take advantage of the possibilities of information technology in order to strengthen and deepen democracy, improve municipal services and contribute to citizens, the business community and others who see Botkyrka as an attractive municipality. Information technology and e-services should simultaneously make the organization more effective.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Interviews with Botkyrka officials C, D & E.

⁴² Interviews with Botkyrka officials E & G.

⁴³ Botkyrka Municipality (2007a) "Sammanfattning av remissvar på förslaget till ny e-strategi", 19.01.2007.

⁴⁴ Botkyrka Municipality (2007c) "Protokoll kommunfullmäktige §28 E-strategi för Botkyrka kommun", 22.02.2007, p. 1.

The above quotation indicates the great possibilities seen in ICT. Improved efficiency, availability and also democracy are put forward as central driving forces. The e-strategy furthermore pointed at the importance of being “modern” and keeping up with popular demand in order to appear as an “attractive” municipality. One key official stresses how “as a citizen today, you do everything on the Internet... we have to adjust to a world that is changing”.⁴⁵

Significant for the e-strategy is how e-services now were integrated with the other service channels of the municipality in what has generally been labelled a “channel strategy”.⁴⁶ The purpose of the channel strategy was to refine the various channels which citizens can use to contact and communicate with the municipality. Three service channels were provided: *the municipal website* (contact via e-services), *the contact centre* (contact via telephone, e-mail, letters and fax) and *the one-stop government offices* (contact via personal meetings).⁴⁷ However, as the name of the e-strategy indicates, the main emphasis was placed on the web:

The web is the most cost-efficient channel with highest accessibility while the personal meeting costs most in terms of resources. Municipality inhabitants and other interested parties should be able to choose the channel which suits them best in the individual case, but we should steer them towards the most cost-efficient channel.⁴⁸

The above quotation illustrates the intent to make the Internet the main channel for contacting the municipality, and cost efficiency as a salient reason behind this emphasis. Nevertheless, there was also a general consensus on the importance of retaining other contact channels.⁴⁹ The one-stop government offices and the contact centre were therefore emphasized as complementary channels for citizens who for different reasons cannot or

⁴⁵ Interview with Botkyrka official G.

⁴⁶ The e-Delegation defines a channel strategy in the following way: “A channel is the way through which a public authority or municipality offer their services, i.e. how the service is delivered. The channels involve personal meetings, social media, e-services, etc. A channel strategy describes which channels a public authority should prioritize for reaching its long-term goals and fulfilling its assignment”, <http://www.edelegationen.se/sida/vagledning-for-kanalstrategi>, accessed: 19.11.10.

⁴⁷ Botkyrka Municipality (2007b) “E-strategi för Botkyrka kommun”, 19.01.2007.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁹ Botkyrka Municipality (2007b).

choose not to use the Internet. In particular the personal face-to-face meeting was highlighted: “There have to be ways for those who need a personal meeting and it doesn’t have to concern old people only... but it can concern complex questions too”.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the offices would provide computers and offer support for the use of e-services by citizens for both municipal and other public issues. Emphasis was however placed on that the offices would “help citizens to help themselves”, i.e. contribute to an independent use of e-services. The offices were thus in this respect meant as a channel for enforcing the use of e-services. Several of the interviewed officials point out that one-stop government offices will most likely always exist in Botkyrka because of the specific needs of many citizens and “because it is the way we work in this municipality”.⁵¹ There is thus an awareness that e-services might not be for everyone or for every type of service and that the offices have a central role in accommodating these varying needs.

At the end of this third phase, there were several e-services available on the Botkyrka website, e.g. library services, school and building permit applications or availability functions for disabled. Most of the e-services during this phase were however still driven mainly by simple solutions that did not require extensive changes in the existing organization. Statements by a high-ranking official, like “the e-services we have reflect what was possible to do” and “to water where there is fertile soil”, i.e. implement e-services where it is possible, illustrate the clash between ambitious talk and practical reality.⁵² One of the key actors claims that this period was characterized by few real developments in e-service implementation. Ambitions were high but in-depth developments slow.⁵³

Parallel with e-service implementation, the development of the one-stop government offices went on. They continued to be popular instances for contact and communication with the municipality. The offices also continued to be a source of action and inspiration. The consistency in the rhetoric is noticeable in the e-strategy, where e-services are said to be guided by the same principles as one-stop government offices: *increased*

⁵⁰ Interview with Botkyrka official D.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Interview with Botkyrka official C.

⁵³ Interview Botkyrka official G.

*citizen advantages, customer focus, increased availability, increased effectiveness, increased dialogue, greater openness and transparency.*⁵⁴ This is reinforced by a high-ranking official, who highlights the parallels between the one-stop offices and e-service implementation: “the goals and aims are the same that we almost always have, citizen focus... that we should favour our citizens... move closer to the citizen”.⁵⁵

In this third phase, e-services are becoming an integral part of the belief system in Botkyrka. E-services are increasingly becoming essential for handling the delivery of public services and information. Through e-services, the municipality can become more available and reach more citizens in a cheaper, more efficient way. Simultaneously, transparency in decision-making processes and dialogues with citizens is thought to increase. Other channels remain important, but are increasingly seen as complementary. The dominant implementing activity, i.e. one-stop government offices, thus now inhabits a less prominent role, at least in the rhetoric of key actors. In line with the e-government discourse on national and EU levels, ICT’s role as an enabler is strongly highlighted. In turn, e-service implementation is motivated through rhetoric which builds on, and is actively connected to, beliefs such as an extended role of the municipality, availability and flexibility. This is illustrated not least in the rhetoric of the e-strategy. E-services thus fit, at least rhetorically, the Botkyrka spirit. Instead, difficulties in the implementation process concern more practical issues. E-services are complex and extend over a number of administrations and responsibilities. The implementation process involves not only technological development but also organizational development. This requires resources and strategic leadership.⁵⁶ It is a fact that e-service implementation in Botkyrka has mainly been driven by officials, with little involvement from members of the local council. As a political organization, a lack of political leadership appears to have slowed down the implementation process. One high-ranking official describes a general lack of interest in issues related to ICT amongst local council members, because “this [ICT] doesn’t win you elections”.⁵⁷ In sum, the idea of change is present in rhetoric, but actual praxis is slower.

⁵⁴ Botkyrka Municipality (2007b).

⁵⁵ Interview with Botkyrka official A.

⁵⁶ See for instance Dawes (2008); Löfstedt (2010).

⁵⁷ Interview with Botkyrka official C.

Phase 4 (2008-2010): Towards a Web-Based Municipal Portal

After a period of slower practical developments, the pace of e-service implementation picked up in 2008. This characterizes the beginning of the fourth and so far final phase. During this period, Botkyrka started to develop more advanced e-services, for instance, an Internet portal for school and child care information and services. It also borrowed a number of solutions for e-services, e.g. serving permits for restaurants, from another municipality in the Stockholm region. Most importantly, the municipality started the implementation of a web-based municipal portal, developed in collaboration with a number of private companies. When logging into the portal, one's role as a citizen or municipal employee will determine the kind of information one reaches. It is thus meant to be customized according to one's specific situation and needs, in contrast to the divisions within the municipality. In turn, the portal provides the infrastructure for e-services. The portal also encompasses a new municipal website (www.botkyrka.se) and a new intranet for employees, the latter to be implemented during the spring of 2011. The long-term ambitions are however to erase the differences between the external website and the internal intranet. Instead, the portal will be based only on different divisions of roles, either according to tasks (e.g. applications for social services or schools), area of residence, the general division of municipality activities (e.g. "Building and Living" or "Businesses") or more overarching roles such as "parent", "business", "visitor" or "youth".⁵⁸ This practice lies in line with the rhetoric of a municipal strategy from 2008: "The portal of tomorrow will offer the citizen's personal municipality office, the pupil's digital school desk or the boss's or the employee's personal desk".⁵⁹

The implementation of the portal points at a focus on tailored services: "the services that the municipality offers should as much as possible be determined by the demand of citizens and other stakeholders".⁶⁰ Flexible access to public information and services no matter the time or place, adjustment to personal needs, directed information, the possibility for citizens to become more self-propelled were aspects generally stressed in

⁵⁸ See Botkyrka Municipality website, <http://www.botkyrka.se>; interview with Botkyrka official C.

⁵⁹ Botkyrka Municipality (2008b) "Förslag till e-handlingsplan 2009", 27.10.2008.

⁶⁰ Botkyrka Municipality (2008a) "Förstudie rollbaserad portal, rapport", 26.01.2008, p. 7.

relation to the portal, as highlighted in a study from 2008: “The personal productivity is a recurring element in all discussions concerning the portal (...) The portal is generally seen as a possible way for facilitating the user’s everyday life”.⁶¹ The portal is here emphasized as a way of “offering more” of the municipality, next to the personal meeting.⁶² The latter illustrates a continuation of previous policy strategies of de-centralization, that is, a prominent municipality that works in proximity and is available to the citizen.⁶³ However, although the portal will enable the provision of directed information and flexible access, it is rather flexibility *in availability* which is highlighted, i.e. easier access to the municipality how- and whenever. Flexibility and availability are thus reduced mainly to issues of easy access.

In terms of technological development in the field of e-services, Botkyrka has relied both on solutions developed by other municipalities and solutions developed in cooperation with private distributors. A high-ranking official describes how, on the one hand, most of their demands usually fit the standardized solutions developed by the bigger private distributors. On the other hand, the same official also highlights how it makes the municipality reliant on the pre-determined organizational processes set out by the private distributor. It is furthermore not unproblematic to fit the solutions of other municipalities into the municipality’s own systems and structures.⁶⁴ In this respect, it has been easier to shape the development of the municipal portal, since Botkyrka is amongst the first municipalities to develop one and thus cannot rely on existing solutions to the same extent.⁶⁵

During this last phase, the internal organizational structure of Botkyrka was also changing. The unit for dialogue and services which, amongst other things, was responsible for the one-stop government offices was now integrated with the unit for services, handling all services to the citizen.⁶⁶ These changes reflect the general approach of the channel strategy and the

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 12.

⁶² Ibid, pp. 15-16.

⁶³ Öhrling PriceWaterHouseCoopers (2002).

⁶⁴ Interview with Botkyrka official C.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

refinement of service channels. The *Botkyrka24* group was now also replaced by a special group for the municipal portal. This illustrates the central role of the municipal portal in the future development of e-services.

With the implementation of the portal, Botkyrka once again places itself at the forefront of e-services developments. The change of pace in the implementation process can be explained by several factors. Botkyrka appears to have learnt from other municipalities in various formal and informal networks. Officials often highlight what they have learnt from e-services in other pioneer municipalities.⁶⁷ The influence from the national and EU level is more indirect and is mainly evident in the wording of the rhetoric. Simultaneously, ICT in the form of social media is starting to inhabit a more central position in many citizens' daily lives. From a citizen perspective, conducting certain public services on the Internet is appreciated: 64 percent of Botkyrka inhabitants prefer to get municipal information and services via the municipal website. In comparison, 42 percent prefer to get information and services via the one-stop government offices.⁶⁸ Thus, an increasingly ICT-positive context has exerted pressure and impetus for deepening the implementation process, despite practical constraints. This is evident not least in the rhetoric concerning the municipal portal. One of the aims of the portal is to "increase perceptions of Botkyrka as a modern municipality".⁶⁹ There is, however, an awareness of the incremental implementation process and the need to develop an all-embracing, long-term vision and development for the portal and e-services. This is meant to be one of the main tasks for 2011.⁷⁰

As the above numbers indicate, the one-stop government offices have continued to develop and inhabit an important role in the municipality's services. The number of errands has not decreased (85,000 cases in 2008). The cases continue to concern mainly municipal issues, but also state services, as well as non-public issues, such as postal issues and debt advice.⁷¹ One official at the offices describes them as "a place where you can get help with exactly everything... Anyone should be able to turn to us

⁶⁷ In this context, Nacka is for instance often mentioned.

⁶⁸ SKOP (2010) "Rapport till Botkyrka kommun", November-December 2010.

⁶⁹ Botkyrka Municipality (2008b), pp. 15-16.

⁷⁰ Interview with Botkyrka official C.

⁷¹ Botkyrka Municipality (2009a) "Statistik rörande antal ärenden på medborgarkontoren 2007 och 2008".

if they need help”.⁷² The municipality has thus continued to provide services outside the mandatory responsibility of municipalities. This indicates how the offices continue to adapt to the life situations of the citizens. Nevertheless, several of the interviewed key actors emphasize that the main role of the one-stop government offices is and will increasingly be to accommodate the citizens “really in need of support”.⁷³ According to a high-ranking official, there will always be a need for face-to-face meetings in a municipality like Botkyrka, because of the relatively significant group of citizens in need of special guidance. This also concerns citizens with little or no knowledge of how to use the Internet. There is thus recognition of the specific flexibility in the face-to-face interaction, which the offices can accommodate. In turn, citizens seem to continue experiencing trust in the offices.⁷⁴

The development and continuation of the one-stop government offices have partly been possible through the continued rule of a centre-left coalition in Botkyrka. The local oppositional parties have been more critical of the extensive help given through the offices. One opposition local council member claims that the municipality pampers the citizens too much and should regard them more as independent and capable human beings.⁷⁵ In the political goals for 2011-2015, one of the key areas is “the citizen as the focal point”. It emphasizes values which have been evident through the development of one-stop government offices: the Botkyrka citizens should participate and be able to influence the municipality; they should get good treatment and good service from the employees of the municipality and citizens should have equal rights and opportunities.⁷⁶

This fourth phase shows how the rhetoric of the e-strategy is being implemented, not least through the municipal portal. Simultaneously, the portal continues to build on the beliefs created through the one-stop government offices, e.g. the one-stop approach. Botkyrka now takes availability and personalized e-services to a new level. However, it is

⁷² Interview with Botkyrka official B.

⁷³ Öhrling PriceWaterHouseCoopers (2002); interviews with Botkyrka officials A & C.

⁷⁴ Öhrling PriceWaterHouseCoopers (2002); SKOP (2010).

⁷⁵ Interview with group of local council members B, centre-right coalition; focus group with Botkyrka officials and local council members..

⁷⁶ Botkyrka Municipality website: <http://www.botkyrka.se/kommunochpolitik/politikochnamnder/politiskamal>, accessed: 02.11.2010.

interesting to note that with “personalized”, very simplified and broad as well as pre-determined roles are meant. In contrast, the offices, through the personal face-to-face meeting, are able to capture more of the nuances in varying citizen needs. Thus, whereas the offices are flexible in the sense of adjustment to personal needs and situations there and then, the portal and e-services are flexible in terms of easy access. As a complementary channel to e-services, the offices still serve as an integral part of public service provision and experience trust and popularity amongst many inhabitants.⁷⁷ During this phase, the practical realization of e-services as the main service and information channel nonetheless takes place.

Summary

The above described process tracing illustrates the development of public services in general and public e-services in particular in Botkyrka municipality from 1987-2010. During phase 1, the one-stop government offices became institutionalized in the activities of the municipality; during phase 2, the organization of *Botkyrka24* illustrated the first steps towards incorporating e-services into the organization; this was taken one step further during phase 3 in the shape of the e-strategy and the channel strategy; finally, during phase 4, the municipal portal (including e-services) was emphasized as the central way to organize public information and services. The identified phases illustrate a combination of continuity and gradual change in the municipality’s implementing activities. The beginning of phase 2 marked the beginning of e-service implementation. E-services were here implemented into a tradition of one-stop government offices which has shaped both organizational structures and strategies in service delivery. *Botkyrka24* and e-services were in turn largely built on experiences from the one-stop government offices. However, during phase 3, e-services were, at least in the municipal rhetoric, increasingly emphasized as the main channel and one-stop government offices as complementary within the framework of *Botkyrka24* and the e-strategy. One-stop government offices were thus now integrated into a framework which places the main emphasis on e-services. In line with this, during phase 4, the municipal portal was increasingly highlighted. Simultaneously, the rhetoric associated with the one-stop government offices is consistent during all phases of e-service implementation,

⁷⁷ Öhrling PriceWaterHouseCoopers (2002).

although a certain shift in meaning also is noticeable. Thus, path-dependent processes are apparent during all phases, although they become less distinct during phase 3 and 4.

The Process of Developing Public (e)-Services in Nacka

Nacka Municipality – “Openness and Plurality”

In 1984, the Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme made a verbal attack on the private kindergarten *Pysslingen*, which had recently been established in Nacka. “There is a big difference between children and garbage bags”, Palme agitated. This illustrated the ideological reluctance of the time to challenging the public monopoly through privatization. It eventually led to *lex Pysslingen*, a law that prohibited state financing of for-profit kindergartens.⁷⁸

Although much has happened since then – *lex Pysslingen* was repealed in the early 1990s – *Pysslingen* placed Nacka on the map as a municipality open to new ways of running municipal activities. Its slogan “Openness and Plurality” is meant to illustrate the belief in an open and tolerant attitude in order to foster plurality both in individual and municipal activities.

Nacka, like Botkyrka, is another suburb municipality to Stockholm. It is only slightly bigger than Botkyrka, with approximately 89,000 inhabitants. Yet it differs in several respects. Nacka is situated by Saltsjön, the beginning of the Baltic Sea, and has been described as “the place where the inner city meets the archipelago”.⁷⁹ Travelling through Nacka by bus, there are many single-family houses situated idyllically by the sea, although blocks of flats also can be spotted. The water is never far away. The new shopping mall in Sickla draws urban families from the inner city to go shopping on weekends. The old industrial buildings from the early 1900s have been turned into cultural meeting points. Nacka is thus not the typical concrete suburb and has not been characterized to the same extent by the landscape of “the Million Programme”.

⁷⁸ *Dagens Nyheter* (2009) “Ekon från 1984”, 18.10.2009, <http://www.dn.se/ledare/signerat/ekon-fran-1984-1.976948>

⁷⁹ Nacka Municipality website, <http://www.nacka.se/underwebbar/Turist/Sidor/default.aspx>, accessed: 09.09.2010.

In comparison to Botkyrka, Nacka is a more homogenous municipality in demographic and socio-economic terms. Socio-economic conditions are above average, with, for instance, open unemployment constituting only 2.8 percent.⁸⁰ Nacka is also ethnically more homogenous than Botkyrka: 22.4 percent of the population has an immigrant background. There is however some degree of internal segregation within Nacka, where the area of for instance Fisksätra-Saltsjöbaden has higher unemployment (4 percent) and inhabitants with an immigrant background constitute 34 percent. In contrast, the area of Boo has 2.5 percent unemployment and 16.6 percent with an immigrant background.⁸¹

	Sweden	Nacka	Fisksätra- Saltsjöbaden	Boo
Inhabitants with Immigrant Background	17.8%	22.4%	34%	16.6%
Unemployment Levels	9.8%	2.8%	4%	2.5%

Table 4. Statistics Nacka Municipality

Source: Nacka Municipality, USK.

A coalition of centre-right⁸² parties has ruled Nacka since the 1970s. In the 2010 election, the Swedish Moderate party was very close to getting a majority on its own, i.e. over 50 percent of the votes.⁸³

⁸⁰ SCB (2009) "Nacka kommunfakta 2009".

⁸¹ USK website:

<http://www.usk.stockholm.se/internet/omrfakta/tabellappl.asp?omrade=01823&appl=Omradesjmf&resultat=Andel&Kommun=N>, accessed: 03.11.2010.

⁸² The coalition consists of members from the Swedish Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party of Sweden.

⁸³ The Swedish political system is based on a proportional system in which a party has to get at least 4 percent of the votes in order to get a seat in parliament, or on the local level, the local council. The local council runs the municipality and chooses the municipal executive board. The political party that gets the most votes also gets the most seats on the municipal executive board. If a political party acquires a majority of seats in the local council, it is also able to control the voting of decisions since half of the votes have to be in favour of a decision for it to go through.

Phase 1 (1984-2000): Institutionalizing a Customer Choice System

At the end of the 1970s, officials and local council members in Nacka started to experience increased pressure from parents in the municipality. Several parents wanted to be able to offer child care in parental cooperatives financed by the municipality. At the time, private involvement in public monopolized issues such as child care was not a matter of course in Sweden. However, in Nacka the demands from groups of parents triggered a discussion on a political level concerning issues such as, what is the role of the municipality and what should it pay for?⁸⁴ It eventually led to publicly financed parental cooperatives and, as we have seen, the first privately owned, publicly financed kindergarten *Pyslingen* opened in 1984.

These developments marked the beginning of a specific public service tradition in Nacka and thus the beginning of phase 1. By opening up for non-public actors in the provision of public services, Nacka took the first step towards a re-evaluation of the role of the municipality. This role increasingly involved a view of the municipality as a financier and enabler rather than a producer. The centre-right rule in Nacka had fewer ideological difficulties in loosening up the public monopoly than its social-democratic counterparts. Other conservative governments, such as in Thatcher's England, illustrated similar trends of private involvement. However, in Sweden, with its strong social-democratic tradition, Nacka was ahead of its time.

The loosening up of the public monopoly continued in the 1980s. In 1985, the first customer choice system for foot care was introduced. The customer choice system basically entails that the municipality provides vouchers for certain services, which citizens can use to pay for public services at any place (public or private) that produces the service in question (see figure 5). The municipal funding thus follows the choice of the citizen. In turn, it opens up for variation and competition in public services.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Interview with local council member, centre-right coalition.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

What is a Customer Choice System?

Customer choice solutions within the public sector are based on the principle that citizens, just like customers, should have the right to choose between various providers of public services. In order to enable freedom of choice, public and private service producers have to be able to conduct their activities on as equal terms as possible. This means opening up the public sector for a plurality of actors, which nevertheless have to be approved by the municipality according to certain criteria. Competition between service providers is meant to enhance the quality of services, an effective use of resources and citizen influence.

Schools and child care have been the most common area for customer choice solutions, but it is in some municipalities being extended to areas such as elderly and social care.

Source: Montin (2007) SALAR (2005, 2008).

Figure 5. What is a Customer Choice System?

In 1992, vouchers for home-help service were introduced, followed by vouchers for child care, education and elderly care.⁸⁶ One of the last areas to be included in the customer choice system was family guidance in 2007.⁸⁷ This means that today, all public activities are in principle open for competition between different actors. However, the customer choice system exists mainly within individual services such as social services, health care and education. For more collectively targeted services, e.g. street maintenance, public procurement is used.⁸⁸

Competition between service providers was thus early on considered to be central for creating quality and efficiency. As a result, emphasis was also placed on recurrent evaluations of the service providers so that citizens could compare alternatives.⁸⁹ This was meant to make service providers more aware of citizen needs. In order to be able to make informed choices, the citizens need to have full access to information about the service providers. For this purpose, a specific “customer choice group” was created within the municipal organization. It dealt directly with questions from citizens concerning the various service providers.⁹⁰ An important principle in this respect was open and fair competition: public providers should not be favoured by the municipal organization on behalf of private

⁸⁶ Nacka Municipality (2003b) “Nacka24 – en mötesplats i etern”, p. 5.

⁸⁷ Montin (2007), p. 185.

⁸⁸ SALAR (2008b), p. 4.

⁸⁹ Montin (2007), pp. 185-186.

⁹⁰ SALAR (2003), p. 77.

producers. Competition neutrality was thus early on established as a central prerequisite for the customer choice system to be effective.⁹¹

The specific view of the role of public organizations was also reflected in the structure of the municipal organization. A clear division of tasks between the local council members and the officials became important early on. The local council members formulate the central visions, goals and strategies of the municipality, as well as budgetary distributions, while the officials execute and shape the details of the decisions. Furthermore, the practical execution of activities, e.g. schools, social services and water and street maintenance, called *production*, is separated from the other two sections of the organization, *politics* and *public authority*. The activities of “production” are open for competition. In addition, there was an emphasis on decisions being made as close to the citizen as possible; “to place the task where it belongs”.⁹² By involving the citizen as much as possible in choosing public services, decentralization at its lowest level could be accomplished. One Nacka official speaks of the traditional structure of Swedish municipalities as “old-fashioned”, indicating that the Nacka organization represents something new and different.⁹³

The customer choice system can partly be seen as a result of active Nacka citizens. A local council member describes citizens in Nacka as very active and informed.⁹⁴ Furthermore, according to a Nacka official, the more influence citizens get, the more they want to get involved and participate.⁹⁵ The latter view generally corresponds to the view of citizens in Nacka. The municipality’s political vision has emphasized and still emphasizes “trust and respect for the knowledge and capacities of human beings, as well as their wish for taking responsibility”.⁹⁶ According to this logic, the more responsibility citizens are given, the more they will be able, and wish, to handle themselves. Two leading officials summarize these beliefs in the following way:

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 72.

⁹² Interviews with Nacka officials A, B & C.

⁹³ Interview with Nacka official B.

⁹⁴ Interview with local council member, centre-right coalition.

⁹⁵ Frankelius & Utbult (2009), p. 42.

⁹⁶ Nacka Municipality website:
http://www.nacka.se/web/politik_organisation/sa_styrs_nacka/sa_styrs/Sidor/Majoritetsprogrammet.aspx,
accessed: 04.09.2010.

I somehow feel that somewhere you have to believe in the citizen's own ability. To explain to the citizen if she doesn't understand, that's how you help. You don't help by doing it [*for the citizen*].⁹⁷

We have to learn to trust more in the ability of the user to be able to express his or her needs and wishes. That they can determine and assess what kind of help they need.⁹⁸

The above quotations illustrate an authorization of the citizen: the citizen is expected to take individual responsibility in choosing services. In turn, he or she is granted influence and participation in municipal issues.⁹⁹ Freedom of choice in public services is thus portrayed as a necessary condition for democratic input:

Our democratic view is based on the idea that citizens themselves should have much influence and greater possibilities in directly affecting issues. The customer choice system has clearly moved power from the political system to the citizen.¹⁰⁰

In other words, the citizen is not only the (passive) receiver of standardized public services but an (active) consumer of a variety of services. From this point of view, the citizen is regarded more as a customer. The role of the municipality is to finance, enable and supervise the various service providers among which the citizen then actively chooses.¹⁰¹ This has, according to a local council member, forced the municipality to be more attentive to the service needs of the citizens:

If you look historically, it is not the public production which has had to tip-toe around the citizen but rather the citizens who have had to stand with their hats in their hands and be grateful for getting parts of the services. We want to reverse that: production [*service providers*] should tip-toe around the citizen who can freely choose between competing

⁹⁷ Interview with Nacka official B.

⁹⁸ Interview with Nacka official C.

⁹⁹ SALAR (2003), p. 72; Montin (2007), pp. 181-182.

¹⁰⁰ Nacka Municipality (2006a).

¹⁰¹ Interviews with local council member, centre-right coalition & Nacka official A.

alternatives. It is the best way for accommodating a need which is different amongst the citizens anyway.¹⁰²

The customer-oriented view of citizens means that Nacka early on worked actively with service management and how to place the citizen at the centre of municipal activities. Several officials highlight citizen orientation as a central guiding principle behind the customer choice system and the organization of the municipality in general:¹⁰³

The basic starting point in Nacka municipality is that freedom of choice puts the user in focus and that customer choice contributes to development and a distinctive image for the service providers.¹⁰⁴

In turn, an output-focused perspective on public administration has been emphasized in the municipality. A leading local council member describes it as follows: “it is not money that is needed by the citizens: it is services, the reality, services that are differentiated according to their terms, their wishes”.¹⁰⁵

This first phase is dominated by the institutionalization of a customer choice system. This development was closely driven by ideological considerations and was ensured by a long period of centre-right rule. The first involvement of non-public actors in public service provisions did not represent something as drastic as a punctuated equilibrium. Rather, it was, I argue, the starting point in the build-up towards a new local belief system, and thus a juncture which only in hindsight can be seen as critical. The demands from the population provided a catalyst for a re-evaluation of the role of the municipality. This, in combination with a political rule open to liberalization of public services, as well as the increased popularity of neo-liberal ideals in public administration during the 1980s, propelled developments further. The increased development of the customer choice system and the municipal organization has in turn shaped a belief system, whose central tenets are freedom of choice, competition among service

¹⁰² Interview with local council member, centre-right coalition.

¹⁰³ Interviews with Nacka officials A, B & C.

¹⁰⁴ Nacka Municipality (2009a) “Införande av kundval för boendestöd och sysselsättning enligt lagen om valfrihetssystem”, 13.05.2009.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with local council member, centre-right coalition.

providers, public-private cooperation and an authorization of the citizen. The customer choice system is the dominant implementing activity for realizing these beliefs. During this period, a customer-oriented view of citizens and a reduced role for the municipality has increasingly been enforced. The relatively active and informed population of Nacka has both pushed for and enabled these beliefs.

During the 1990s, ICT increasingly became integrated into the activities of Nacka. Nacka was one of the first municipalities to develop a municipal website. A local council member describes an early interest and curiosity in the municipality concerning how ICT can be used for efficiency gains.¹⁰⁶ However, the new technology was mainly used during this period for internal, administrative procedures. The idea of using ICT as a tool for public service provisions in the form of e-services was not yet strongly pronounced in the late 1990s.

Phase 2 (2000-2004): Towards *Nacka24*

As a municipality at the forefront of developments within both public services and ICT, Nacka soon caught on to the advantages e-services could offer in the contact with citizens. After 2000, the vision of the 24/7 municipality started entering the rhetoric in central policy documents of Nacka. The importance of keeping up with the increased pace of ICT developments in the world was becoming more and more evident, in particular in a forerunner municipality such as Nacka:

Our intention is of course that Nacka should be at the forefront when it comes to modern IT solutions and contacts with citizens.¹⁰⁷

To move from paper to Internet feels natural in a modern municipality.¹⁰⁸

Simultaneously, the local administration was struggling with old and inefficient ICT systems. At the end of the 1990s, it was becoming increasingly clear that the school and education division of Nacka – which

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Nacka Municipality (2002a) "Enklare, billigare och bättre – nytt stöd till Barnomsorgs- och utbildningsnämnden", 24.02.2002, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Nacka Municipality (2003b), p. 2.

handles one of the main activities of a Swedish municipality – needed a new administrative system. The old system involved heavy, manual routines and the application process for schools and child care was long and complicated for all involved stakeholders. Furthermore, only public service providers had access to the old ICT system. It was thus based on a situation of public monopoly, which was precisely what Nacka for years had wanted to change. One former high-ranking official describes how the old system allowed for manipulation of the competition neutrality. Officials sometimes bypassed certain providers, which in practice tended to result in fewer advantages for private providers.¹⁰⁹ The old ICT system thus indirectly led to private service providers being discriminated against. In addition, the old system did not reflect the division of responsibilities in the municipal organization. Boundaries were unclear and duplication of work occurred. This illustrates how the politically driven agenda of freedom of choice was sometimes difficult to realize in practice. The local belief system appeared to clash with practical reality. If competition neutrality and other policy strategies were to be fully realized, a new ICT system was needed, and even regarded as a “necessity”.¹¹⁰

However, the kind of technical solution needed was not available on the market at the time. In the early 2000s, Nacka municipality was still rather alone in its pronounced focus on freedom of choice in Sweden, with the social democratic government still partly opposing public financing of private activities. The local council therefore reached the decision, to develop its own system, in cooperation with a private distributor, for the division of child care and education – *Nacka24*. The system has been described as inspired by the Internet solutions of the banks: a communication system for schools and child care in which providers, citizens and the municipal organization can communicate and share information on equal terms and in a coordinated fashion.¹¹¹ By improving availability 24/7 and by allowing the parent or guardian to follow the application process, the whole process would become easier and more transparent. In turn, the rationalization of administrative and manual work would speed up the application process. Several languages could also be

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Nacka official D.

¹¹⁰ Nacka Municipality (2004b) “Nacka24 – en rapport om utveckling, genomförande, resultat och finansiering”, 17.02.2004; interview with Nacka official E.

¹¹¹ Nacka Municipality (2004b).

chosen for the services, indicating a will to accommodate citizens with immigrant background. According to a municipal official, the aim was to involve more actors in the “value creation”¹¹² of public services. Thus, *Nacka24* built on earlier beliefs: out-put emphasis, stakeholder involvement and the role of the municipality as a supervisor rather than producer.¹¹³

Before the implementation of *Nacka24*, a mapping of what could be achieved in terms of efficiency gains was made. The political assignment of the division was stressed as important in the process, that is, to “return” to what each actor is actually meant to do. In turn, every process should reflect an effect or a need of the citizen.¹¹⁴ The characteristics of *Nacka24* were described as follows:

[A] development with the citizen perspective in focus and an IT system which with modern technology can realize the ideas of the customer choice system and contribute to a clearer delegation between production and the financing committees.¹¹⁵

The implementation process of *Nacka24* has been portrayed by the key officials involved as very “ambitious and intense”.¹¹⁶ The formal decision was made in October 2002¹¹⁷ and the actual implementation of the system and the first school services took place in January 2003, followed by child care services during the spring. The speedy process involved both pros and cons. For instance, the learning process within the municipality had to be rapid and run parallel with the implementation process. There was also not enough time for anchorage of the project within the organization or amongst providers.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, the development project was criticized for costing too much, since the system was regarded as a budget expense

¹¹² Value creation entails focusing on the output, e.g. what in the end creates values. It puts less emphasis on the process, but rather what can be cut in terms of the process (e.g. administration), in order to enhance output and the value of the process.

¹¹³ Interview with Nacka official A.

¹¹⁴ Nacka Municipality (2002b) “Konsultrapport: Projekt ”Uppdrag BUN”, 07.04.2002; Nacka Municipality (2002c) “BUN 24 – ett nytt kommunikationssystem mellan medborgare, användare och nämnd”, 13.10.2002.

¹¹⁵ Nacka Municipality (2004b).

¹¹⁶ Interviews with Nacka officials B & D.

¹¹⁷ Nacka Municipality (2002c).

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*; interviews with Nacka officials B & D.

and not an investment expense.¹¹⁹ The fact that *Nacka24* was more transparent than the old system was also not welcomed by some officials. The old system had allowed for shortcuts that had created advantages for certain actors. One key actor of the time describes especially the headmasters of the municipal schools as very sceptical. According to the same actor, some of the internal resistance to *Nacka24* could be explained by its disruption of old power structures.¹²⁰

However, there were also advantages with the rapid implementation process. A patchwork of systems, with old and new systems running parallel, could be avoided. In hindsight, one leading official involved in the development of *Nacka24* describes the rapid implementation as something good since it forced the whole municipality to think and work in one direction and prevented old ways of thinking from lingering.¹²¹ Furthermore, the vision and support of the local council and the management was clear: “everyone had the same view”.¹²² The local council members have in this respect been very influential in pushing the realization of *Nacka24*. The implementation amongst the providers has been described as more cumbersome, since there was a general unfamiliarity with computers and with handling organizational and administrative tasks, and thus required a number of education efforts.¹²³

In evaluations conducted after implementation of *Nacka24*, the reaction amongst citizens was very positive. A clear majority of citizen users thought that application for child care and schools had improved and some requested e-services in more areas. Nonetheless, several respondents also pointed out the need for personal face-to-face meetings to remain.¹²⁴ Already in 2003, a large proportion of the Nacka citizens had access to ICT (83 percent).¹²⁵ This obviously facilitated for the high number of citizens using and appreciating e-services. According to Nacka reports, the areas

¹¹⁹ Interview with Nacka official D.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Interview with Nacka official B.

¹²² Nacka Municipality (2003a), p. 7; interview with Nacka official B.

¹²³ AGURA IT (2003) “Utvärdering av lansering av barnomsorg i Nacka24”, 01.07.03; interviews with Nacka officials B & D.

¹²⁴ AGURA IT (2003).

¹²⁵ Nacka Municipality (2004b), p. 9.

with a higher rate of citizens born abroad did not diverge from the high usage. One official claims that several of these citizens thought that it was easier to use *Nacka24* than to apply through paper forms.¹²⁶

With the implementation of *Nacka24*, it was decided that after the launch of the new system, application for schools and child care would only be possible via the Internet. Paper applications would be eliminated. According to a high-ranking official, this was not considered problematic. If citizens do not have a computer or lack ICT skills, “then we help them, they are welcome at the libraries, welcome at the contact centre or to contact the schools”.¹²⁷ Not keeping any complementary channels even during a transitional period can be seen as rather daring, in particular in 2003. On the one hand, it illustrates the belief in citizens’ own capabilities, while on the other hand, it illustrates the strong belief in ICT and that it will provide a better service channel for everyone.

In conjunction with the implementation of *Nacka24*, Nacka also developed an e-strategy for the whole organization. It generally laid down the guidelines for ICT usage in the municipality. Close parallels are once again drawn to the banking sector:

The customer today individually handles several of the services which the bank earlier offered. The advantage for the banks is lower costs for personnel and premises, at the same time as the customer experiences that he/she can handle his/her errands during hours which suit individual needs (...) In the same way as one has used ICT within banks and finance, public organizations can use similar solutions with the aim of offering citizens and other stakeholders good service.¹²⁸

Private solutions for e-services developments have thus been influential. The e-strategy also touches upon how ICT developments in public organizations are driven by several external pressures: a future shortage of labour, pressures for improving internal and external efficiency, service improvements, as well as the “Internet revolution” in general. The Internet is in this context regarded as an enabler for “easier, cheaper and faster

¹²⁶ Interview with Nacka official A.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Nacka Municipality (2003a) “E-strategi för Nacka kommun”, p. 3.

services”.¹²⁹ As described, important prerequisites for the customer choice system are evaluations of service providers and that these are made public and easily comparable.¹³⁰ Here the tools offered by the Internet and websites of public organizations are important facilitators for this type of information. Nacka has in this respect early on used the potential offered by ICT and scores high in evaluations made of their website today.¹³¹

Nacka24 was a unique solution for public information and services at the time and Nacka has consequently received a great deal of public attention for it. Since the system is based on the customer choice system, *Nacka24* has been described as rather Nacka specific. This means that although several municipalities have been inspired by the organizational developments in Nacka, it has been problematic to sell the system to other municipalities.¹³² Today, *Nacka24* includes not only services related to child care and schools but also municipal adult education.¹³³ The registration of the customer vouchers and payments were also early on integrated into the system, thus incorporating internal administrative processes.

To summarize, this second phase is characterized by the rapid implementation of *Nacka24*. It was a concrete effort to realize the 24/7 municipality and illustrates how the implementation of e-services in Nacka took a giant leap in a short period of time. Besides improving internal and external efficiency, e-services were seen as a tool for furthering policy strategies, such as freedom of choice, competition neutrality and empowerment of the individual citizen. With *Nacka24*, availability and transparency were also increasingly stressed as central prerequisites for citizen involvement in the delivery of public policy. The local belief system, embodied in the customer choice system, was thus in combination with an increased use of Internet in society (e.g. amongst banks), a central driving force behind implementation of e-services. E-services were even regarded as a necessity for preventing core values from being undermined.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 3.

¹³⁰ Swedish legislation on freedom of choice (LOV) highlights the responsibility of public service providers to provide objective, relevant, comparable, available and easily understood information for citizens and suppliers.

¹³¹ SALAR (2010) “Valfrihet på webben: Utvärdering av information om valfrihetssystem på kommuner och landstings hemsidor”.

¹³² Interview with Nacka official E.

¹³³ See website of *Nacka24*: <http://www.nacka24.nacka.se>, accessed at: 04.11.2010.

The implementation of *Nacka24* was thus another important event in which the local belief system was further institutionalized. The strong modernization rationale of Nacka should also not be underestimated. Several of the interviewed officials describe Nacka as a municipality which aims at being a forerunner.¹³⁴ In turn, e-services were rapidly becoming the main channel for public service provisions and a precondition for the customer choice system.

Phase 3 (2004-2006): Towards “One Way” into Nacka

The intention not to provide applications via paper forms, but only via the Internet, for school and child care services indicated a will to simplify and thus rationalize service channels into the municipality.¹³⁵ The rationalization of contact channels became more apparent in 2005 when Nacka established its contact centre. In a report from 2004, one municipal official states: “as an important step in creating a more efficient municipality and simultaneously improving and developing citizen access to information and simple services, a contact centre is proposed to be established in the municipality”.¹³⁶ The basic reasoning is “one way into the municipality”. Whatever way one chooses to communicate with Nacka municipality as a citizen – phone, e-mail or fax – one will reach the contact centre, unless one of course chooses to contact an employee directly. In turn, contacting the municipality would be simpler and more coordinated. The contact centre would simultaneously guide citizens so that next time, they know who to call or how to get the information on the Internet. In turn, many of the basic questions would be dealt with at once, leaving more complex issues to specialist officials.¹³⁷

Simultaneously, the 2004 report on the contact centre highlights the centrality of the Internet:

The availability and packaging of services via the web should be so attractive that citizens are steered towards foremost using this channel. It

¹³⁴ Interviews with Nacka officials B, C & D.

¹³⁵ Nacka Municipality (2003c) “Projektplan – Nacka24”, 12.09.2003.

¹³⁶ Nacka Municipality (2004a) “Kontaktcenter i Nacka kommun”, 08.02.2004, p. 1.

¹³⁷ Nacka Municipality (2006) “Den fortsatta driften av kontaktcenter”, 06.02.2006.

is however always the citizen who chooses which way he or she wants to get in touch with the municipality.¹³⁸

This quotation indicates the intent to steer citizens towards mainly using the Internet for municipal information and services. Thus, it can be seen as somewhat contradictory to speak of “one way into the municipality” via the contact centre and simultaneously emphasize the centrality of the Internet. According to my interpretation, one way into the municipality means, first and foremost, the Internet, and if that is not possible or desirable, the contact centre. According to a high-level official: “We are trying as much as possible to channel our communication and information via the Internet. It is cost-efficient, it is fast, it is up all the time and it is available”.¹³⁹ Availability and efficiency were thus highlighted as motives behind the increased emphasis on Internet as the main channel. However, other channels (e.g. phone, letter, personal meeting) are in most cases still available for the citizen: having one way into the municipality is not meant to exclude citizens who want to use other channels.¹⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the municipality has an explicit ambition to help citizens to increasingly use the Internet. This once again indicates a belief in the citizen’s own capabilities: everyone should be able to use public e-services. Receiving information or services via the web was considered to be the easiest information and service channel for citizens, because “they can do it on their own terms”. Furthermore, according to a local council member, there are very few errands which require personal meetings, at least not a meeting with the municipal bureaucracy. Instead, it is in the actual delivery of the service, in schools and child care, that the meetings take place.¹⁴¹

In sum, this third phase illustrates the increased centrality of the Internet and e-services in dealings with the municipality. The vision of “one way into the municipality” involves making contact with the municipality as easy and clear as possible, while at the same time making municipal activities more efficient. Improved availability, as in round the clock and flexible access, was brought to the foreground as a central motive behind this strategy. Availability is in turn increasingly stressed as a central belief

¹³⁸ Nacka Municipality (2004a), p. 2.

¹³⁹ Interview with Nacka official A.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Interview with local council member, centre-right coalition.

to enable citizens to handle municipal issues, including the responsibilities granted to them through the customer choice system.

Phase 4 (2006-2010): Towards e-Services as a Matter of Course

As main activities of a municipality, school and child care services were self-evident areas for Nacka to develop electronically. Over the years, other e-services have incrementally been developed on the municipal website, such as building permits and library services – e-services which today can be found on many municipal websites in Sweden. However, *Nacka24* has during this period remained the most integrated and advanced system for service provisions in Nacka.

In order to expand the 24/7 municipality to other areas, Nacka has since 2006 collaborated with other municipalities in the Stockholm region, as well as private distributors, for developing e-services for social services. Just like *Nacka24*, it will be an integrated communication system, connecting users, municipal officials and service providers. One official involved in the implementation describes the motives behind the project in the following way:

We want to get more open, another way into social services which is not restricted by for instance our opening hours (...) We are a 24/7 municipality when it comes to the school and then I guess we can be that for social services as well (...) We become a more open municipality. And I guess that is what Nacka aspires to in general, so I guess the social services just came along. I guess it is just a continuation.¹⁴²

There is thus an ambition for furthering availability to areas other than school and child care. The customer choice system has in practice already been transferred to social services, e.g. citizens can choose between several public and private providers for elderly care. The implementation of a new ICT system for social services is regarded to facilitate this even further. Citizens will be able to make an “active choice” by seeing what service providers are available. In turn, the system is linked to the municipal website which contains detailed information about the providers. The implementation process indicates reasoning similar to the case of *Nacka24*,

¹⁴² Interview with Nacka official C.

in which ICT had an important role in reinforcing freedom of choice and competition neutrality. The authorization of the citizen is furthermore once again stressed:

Another advantage about this [*e-services*] is that we have to learn to trust more in the ability of the user to express his/her own needs and wishes and that they can decide and judge what kind of help they need. We as professionals can interfere and determine if there are users who cannot do it, then we should interfere.¹⁴³

This illustrates how ICT is not meant to exclude the possibility of a personal meeting. On the contrary, e-services are meant to handle routine errands in order to create more time for the difficult cases.¹⁴⁴ Contact with specialist officials are thus for citizens who cannot handle the customer choice system and/or e-services.

In contrast to school and child care services, which involve citizens who are relatively young, social services concern citizens who are older (e.g. elderly care) and often more socio-economically exposed (e.g. social allowances). A couple of interest organizations have criticized Nacka for introducing freedom of choice in areas which concern citizens who have limited abilities to choose.¹⁴⁵ According to interviewed Nacka officials, this is not considered to be a problem – people with disabilities are usually aided by their relatives or a trustee. They will be able to choose and use e-services for the applicant in question. Citizens are also still allowed to actively make a non-choice and get help from the municipal officials with the web-based application.¹⁴⁶ Since the activities are registered within the web-based system, relatives or trustees are more clearly able to see what kind of services have been performed, e.g. if home-help services have aided their parent. In contrast to *Nacka24*, it will still be possible to apply via paper forms. However, according to the project leader, the aim in the

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Nacka Municipality (2009a).

¹⁴⁶ Ernst&Young (2009) “Granskning av biståndsbedömning inom äldreomsorgen” Revisionsrapport 1/2009; Interview with Nacka official C.

long run is to steer as many service applications as possible towards the Internet.¹⁴⁷

The rationale behind the e-services for social services is generally very similar to the one behind *Nacka24*. It points at path dependency in the reasoning of the municipality. In addition, the implementation of e-services for social services illustrates the presence of e-services in the organization as a matter of course. E-services are the self-evident choice when internal processes need to be made more efficient or the relationship with producers and citizens needs to become more transparent or available. E-services are thus partly used as a pretext for changing old routines and communication channels. However, several of the interviewees claim that it is not the technology in itself which is interesting. As one high-ranking official expresses it: “ICT is a pen”, which basically means that it is a tool for the purposes of the municipality.¹⁴⁸ Thus, the main focus is how ICT can be used to further beliefs of the municipality. In turn, ICT should be regarded as an integrated part of the municipal vision, values and activities. This illustrates the significance of politics in e-service implementation in Nacka¹⁴⁹

The increased naturalness of ICT in the organization as well as local values as a driving force is illustrated by a decision made in 2009:

IT is today a central and important part of all activities. The computer increasingly becomes the central working tool and information is essentially IT-based (...) The direction of this development is in the central policy documents of the municipality – the vision, the basic values and the general goals. The explicit political direction for how the municipality should develop, even within IT, exists in these.¹⁵⁰

In other words, in order to highlight the importance of political goals and values in ICT developments, policies related to ICT have to be minimized. Once again, it illustrates how ICT is not an end in itself but the means for a specific end. E-service implementation would not have looked the same or

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Nacka official C.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Nacka official A.

¹⁴⁹ Interviews with Nacka officials B & E.

¹⁵⁰ Nacka Municipality (2009b) “Översyn av styrdokument inom IT-området”, 23.11.09.

been as extensive, if Nacka had not had the values and policy strategies it has:

What I think is unique for Nacka, when you look at Nacka, we have pushed the ideas of the citizen's right to choose and have linked economic compensation to these choices. And then we have built e-services, which relate to making choices in a simplified way. (...) Citizen influence, freedom of choice, the right to choose.¹⁵¹

Had we not had these interests, to change distribution and the whole interplay surrounding the public sector, I don't think we would have been as keen to use these kinds of facilities [ICT].¹⁵²

The lack of an e-strategy can thus be seen as a way to downplay ICT as something new or external:

Why should we have central policies for that? There isn't anyone who says we should have a policy for how to use a paper or pen. (...) Everyone understands that we have to use it, IT is a natural part [of activities].¹⁵³

We do not have a phone strategy or a letter strategy; it [ICT] is such a natural facility.¹⁵⁴

Instead, the municipality has a service policy¹⁵⁵, which maps out the approach of the municipality towards citizens, as well as guidelines for ICT¹⁵⁶, which addresses infrastructure rather than e-services and e-government. ICT or e-services can thus be considered yet another channel for service, information and communication which the municipality uses for furthering policy strategies such as decentralization, competition neutrality and empowerment of citizens. This could on the one hand be a consequence of the advanced level of e-service implementation in the

¹⁵¹ Interview with Nacka official A.

¹⁵² Interview with local council member, centre-right coalition.

¹⁵³ Interview with Nacka official A.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with local council member, centre-right coalition.

¹⁵⁵ Nacka Municipality (2009c) "Servicepolicy", 03.04.2009.

¹⁵⁶ Nacka Municipality (2009d) "Riktlinjer för IT", 30.09.2009.

municipal organization, i.e. the longer ICT is used in public service provisions, the less it might be seen as something external. However, on the other hand it could indicate precisely what the municipality wants to point at: that ICT is an integrated tool for political means and not an external reform. SALAR comes to a similar conclusion about Nacka: “freedom of choice permeates the whole inner culture and is the supporting pillar for municipal development”.¹⁵⁷

In sum, this fourth phase illustrates a consistency in the rationale and praxis behind e-services developments, from *Nacka24* to e-services for social services. Despite different types of services and different target groups, the belief system established with the customer choice system continues to guide the implementation process. The political vision of Nacka keeps being highlighted as essential for this process. In turn, ICT is increasingly regarded as a natural component of the central vision and values of the municipality. Furthermore, e-services are seen as the self-evident approach for increasing internal and external efficiency.

Summary

The above described process tracing has illustrated the development of public services in general and public e-services in particular in Nacka municipality from 1984 until 2010. Phase 1 was characterized by the institutionalization of the customer choice system; phase 2 by the implementation of *Nacka24* and thus signified a big leap in e-services developments; phase 3 was characterized by the introduction of “one way into the municipality” and phase 4 by the implementation of e-services for social services as well as the decision of no separate policies for e-government, hence e-services as a matter of course. Each phase illustrates how the customer choice system incrementally is developing through ICT and the implementation of e-services. The customer choice system in phase 1 is not the same as in phase 3 or 4. E-services are in this sense integrated into the customer choice system and in several respects are reinforcing it. The fact that the customer choice system continuously is emphasized as a basis for further developments illustrates path-dependent processes during all phases. Nevertheless, the customer choice system is here an enabling force which facilitates the implementation of reforms, not only in the

¹⁵⁷ SALAR (2003), p. 77.

municipal rhetoric but also in practice. ICT in general and e-services in particular have in several respects become a precondition for a smooth functioning of the customer choice system.

In sum, the process tracing shows path-dependent processes in both municipalities, but to different degrees. Nevertheless, it is also clear that changes in implementing activities have taken place. Most markedly is how the implementing activities of both municipalities have increasingly developed towards regarding e-services as the main channel for public information and services. What these developments mean for the specific policy belief system of both municipalities and core values in particular, will be assessed below.

Comparison: Everything Everywhere but Everywhere Different?

In the following section I will, by comparing the two cases, distinguish and contrast which core values have been decisive for each municipality before and during the process of implementing e-services. In line with the ACF I will identify *core values*, *policy strategies* and *implementing activities*, and their possible development or change.

The above analysis showed that the municipalities have had rather different traditions of organizing and providing public services but also that the implementation of e-services, to varying degrees, have changed existing policy traditions. The following section will build on the narratives above and through the ACF's structure of belief system and Pierson's temporal perspective depict whether these changes also result in changes for core values. It addresses the second research question: *which core values can be distinguished before and during the implementation process?* I will do this firstly, by identifying which local belief systems had been institutionalized before e-service implementation. Secondly, I will analyze the outer core of the structure of belief system (implementing activities), then move to the near core (policy strategies), in order to finally conclude with the inner core and thus the core values.

The Local Belief Systems before e-Services

At the end of Phase 1, before e-services, both municipalities had institutionalized two distinct policy belief systems with regards to how public services were organized and provided. Since the organization and activities of both municipalities to a high degree and for a long period of time have been structured around these belief systems, both cases indicate, I argue, equilibrium. New decisions keep being built on a solution which once was initiated as a response to more or less pressing conditions at one point in time. In turn, by building on past policy decisions, a distinct policy tradition becomes increasingly cemented as time passes.

In Botkyrka, low trust for the municipality pushed for significant changes in the way the municipality viewed and handled its relations with citizens. This change was manifested in the operations of the one-stop government offices. Through the practices of the offices, which in several respects have been built on a street-level bureaucratic ideal of handling a heterogeneous population with different needs and life situations, certain beliefs have been developed and realized both in rhetoric and practice. The specific local context has thus contributed to the initiation and institutionalization of the local belief system.

In Nacka, changes were more incremental. It started with active citizens demanding change in how public services were provided. This triggered a process on a political level which gradually resulted in an increased involvement of non-public actors and the possibility for citizens to exercise freedom of choice amongst service providers. These policy beliefs and practices have become increasingly institutionalized over time and have largely been embodied in the customer choice system. As in the Botkyrka case, the specific local context of Nacka, which includes an active and informed population, has contributed to the specific institutional setting.

Table 5 presents a description of the institutional features, i.e. the local belief system, of Botkyrka and Nacka at the end of Phase 1, that is, before there was a pronounced implementation of public e-services in the municipalities. The temporal dimension is not included here but will be presented in figures 6 and 7 at the end of this section. In order to depict what I view as core values, I have categorized them according to ontological beliefs which adhere to some of the fundamental components

assigned to core values by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith¹⁵⁸ and which in turn are fundamental in how the municipalities have chosen to organize the policy area of public service provisions: *the view of the role of public organizations* and *the view of the citizen*. I will illustrate that these differ quite markedly between the municipalities.

Belief System	Botkyrka	Nacka
<p>Core Values (<i>Deep Core Beliefs</i>)</p> <p>I. View of the Role of Public Organizations</p> <p>II. View of the Citizen</p>	<p>Community Values</p> <p>Prominent (the special responsibility of public organizations)</p> <p>- Entitled to help (supports the citizen)</p> <p>- Citizen as client</p>	<p>Individual Choice Values</p> <p>Retracted (the inclusion of non-public actors)</p> <p>- Manages alone (enables the citizen)</p> <p>- Citizen as customer</p>
<p>Policy Strategies (<i>Near Core Beliefs</i>)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Availability - Dialogue with citizen - Flexibility in service provisions (street-level bureaucracy) - Internal and external efficiency - Proximity to the citizen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Competition neutrality & plurality in service provisions - De-centralization of responsibility - Freedom of choice - Internal and external efficiency
<p>Implementing Activities (<i>Secondary Beliefs</i>)</p>	<p>One-stop government offices</p>	<p>Customer choice system</p>

Table 5. The Belief Systems of Botkyrka and Nacka before e-Service Implementation.

¹⁵⁸ Beliefs associated with a left-right scale, e.g. equal distribution vs. individual freedom or the role of the state in society.

Community Values as Core Values in Botkyrka

The core values of Botkyrka are what I term *community values* – they emphasize a prominent role for public organizations and regard the citizen as entitled to rather extensive support from public organizations. The one-stop government offices in several ways illustrate this. The practices of the offices embody a view which recognizes that not all citizens have the same preconditions but that some require extra support in public and everyday life issues. For instance, officials at the offices often handle issues which are not within the mandatory responsibility of municipalities. This is regarded as important not only for a smooth functioning of public services, but also for the creation of trust in public institutions. In addition, the offices fulfil the task of creating a continuous dialogue with citizens concerning local issues, which further develops trust and a sense of community. As the reasoning preceding the establishment of the first one-stop government office shows, there is a general belief that public trust contributes to a societal integration of citizens. Acquiring public services and information are thus not solely the responsibility of the individual citizen but, first and foremost, the responsibility of public organizations. It is a *collective matter*, hence the special role and responsibility of public organizations is emphasized.

Although the emphasis on dialogue with citizens and the democratic mission of the offices also illustrate a deliberative democratic ideal with regard to the role of the citizen, local council members nevertheless point out that individual interests should not rule over the collective interest nor replace the representative channels.¹⁵⁹ The citizen is from this perspective viewed more as a *client*.¹⁶⁰ The core values are thus mainly based on a representative democracy ideal-type in which deliberative forms of participation should complement the representative channels. There are also clear elements of a communitarian view of democracy, in which the significance of the community's role in shaping the possibilities of citizens is recognized. In turn, the common good is weighed as heavily as individual rights.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Interview with group of local council members, centre-left coalition.

¹⁶⁰ Montin (2007), pp. 174-190.

¹⁶¹ Lundquist (2001), pp. 132-134.

The core values have been realized through a number of more or less prominent policy strategies in both municipalities. I view policy strategies both as abstract *beliefs* and concrete *strategies* which spell out these beliefs.

For Botkyrka these policy strategies entail the following beliefs:

- *A municipality in close proximity to the citizen* – a decentralization of the handling of public issues to one-stop government offices.
- *An available municipality* – a physically present and easily contactable municipality with one-stop government offices in public places such as libraries and shopping centres.
- *A municipality which upholds a dialogue with the citizen* – a focus on communicating what happens in the municipality to citizens and listening and responding to issues which citizens raise.
- *A flexible municipality* – a focus on local needs rather than merely what lies within the responsibilities of the municipality; a high degree of discretion according to street-level bureaucratic ideals.

Individual Choice Values as Core Values in Nacka

The core values of Nacka embody what I term *individual choice values*. They can be seen to represent liberal values, in which the role of public organizations is more retracted. In turn, non-public actors have a self-evident role in the provision of public services. The citizen is viewed as an able and independent individual who is engaged in public issues and aspires to take own responsibility. Furthermore, in principle everyone has the capacity to make informed and active choice or, over time, to learn to do this. The customer choice system of Nacka largely embodies the above aspects. According to this logic, the possibility to make individual choices within public services contributes to the fostering of service quality and democracy. By moving influence and power in public services to the citizen, participation in public issues is considered to increase. Consequently, the role of the municipality is to enable and support the citizen to make active choices. This view embodies a wider perspective on democracy, in which the individual's influence can be increased through something which resembles market power.¹⁶² The citizen is thus viewed more as a *customer*. Montin makes a similar observation of Nacka:

¹⁶² Montin (2007), pp. 182-185.

The democracy view of Nacka thus resembles consumer democracy, in which citizens can “vote with their feet”, meaning they have a choice of exit if something does not suit them. Through this, citizens are considered to become more empowered.¹⁶³

Furthermore, the rhetoric in Nacka follows a liberal view of democracy, in which public intervention in individual rights and freedoms is criticized for making citizens into passive followers and benefit receivers. Public authorities thus have to respect individual autonomy.¹⁶⁴

Consequently, the policy strategies of Nacka are based on the following beliefs:

- *A municipality for freedom of choice for citizens* – a focus on citizens’ right to choose whatever service provider suits their needs; the municipality finances choices via a voucher system.
- *A municipality which enables competition neutrality and plurality in service provisions* – an opening-up of public areas for competition; the municipality is the financer and enabler of public services, not the producer.
- *A municipality which decentralizes responsibility* – a decentralization of tasks to the lowest level possible, i.e. service providers or citizens (via vouchers and freedom of choice)

However, as in all public organizations, economic values have also had a fundamental role in the realization of the local belief systems. A central belief behind strategies in both organizations is therefore *increased efficiency gains* – both in terms of internal (within the organization) and external efficiency (vis-à-vis the citizen). In both cases, efficiency gains have facilitated the institutionalization of the other beliefs and are thus important prerequisites for policy strategies in both municipalities. However, increased internal and external efficiency is at the end of phase 1 not an end in itself – it has, I argue, no intrinsic value without the other beliefs.

The core values of both municipalities largely have their basis in the political mission of the municipalities. A long period of continual political

¹⁶³ SALAR (2003), p. 72.

¹⁶⁴ Lundquist (2001), pp. 132-134.

leadership has enabled and formed a belief system, which at the end of phase 1 is very stable and hence displays certain salient characteristics. However, the division of core values made above should not be taken as dichotomous. The municipalities are not complete opposites, reality is seldom so clear-cut and obviously they also share several characteristics with each other. For instance, both municipalities often refer – as do most Swedish municipalities – to citizens as customers. Clearly, the consumer democratic view in Nacka exists in parallel with traditional representative channels. Nevertheless, when looking at what characterizes their local belief systems, the above are features which, I argue, are more significant than others.

Finally, although implementing activities has been regarded as everything from budget to administrative rules and thus can encompass a wide spectrum of activities¹⁶⁵, my interpretation of implementing activities here is that they embody the instrumental realization of policy strategies, i.e. the tangible means which are used for a certain end. At the end of phase 1, these implementing activities are embodied in the organization of *the one-stop government offices* in Botkyrka and in *the customer choice system* of Nacka.

To summarize, the described belief systems provide the institutional setting at the time of the first implementation of e-services. In the next section, I will discuss what characterizes the local belief systems during the implementation process by comparing and discussing the developments in the belief systems of the two municipalities. Based on the case studies above, I will examine how e-service implementation has been related to firstly, the implementing activities of the two municipalities, secondly, policy strategies and thirdly, core values. This discussion will be concluded in two figures (see figures 6 and 7 below) which summarize the development of each component according to each phase in the implementation process.

¹⁶⁵ See Sabatier (1993), pp. 29-34; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith (1999), pp. 130-135.

Local Implementing Activities and e-Services

Since e-services have been implemented, it is evident that practical change in the provision of public information and services has taken place in both municipalities. The introduction of e-services has resulted in a new tool for providing public information and services. E-services have increased in importance ever since the initial implementation and at the end of phase 4 are regarded as the main channel for public information and services in both Botkyrka and Nacka. Both processes also reveal far-reaching plans to develop e-services further in order to make them an even more integrated part of daily practices of public administration. Public e-services are evidently here to stay and will most likely increase in importance. A change in implementing activities is thus evident in both cases. However, I argue that they have changed in different ways.

Both the customer choice system and one-stop government offices respectively, have been sources of action for the implementation of e-services. In Botkyrka, the one-stop government offices have given practical guidance. The organization has used experiences from the development of the offices for implementing e-services: both have been regarded as tools for making service provision more efficient and for bringing the municipality closer to the citizen. For instance, volume and frequency of services decided, as in the case of one-stop government offices, which services should become e-services. As in the example of the municipal portal, the one-stop approach of the offices has been transferred to the implementation of e-services.

In Nacka, the customer choice system has not provided the same practical guidance. Instead, it has to a greater extent been the driving force behind e-service implementation: e-services presented a solution to several of the inefficiencies in the practical realization of the system. E-services have in turn proven to facilitate a more efficient application of the customer choice system. Consequently, e-services have been integrated into and thus reinforced the customer choice system.

In Botkyrka in contrast, the implementation of e-services has not been driven to the same extent by a locally defined problem in need of a solution. One-stop government offices have guided how e-services have been implemented but has only moderately reinforced the one-stop

government offices. The offices offer access to and help with e-services but with the main purpose of facilitating an independent use of e-services. The result of the increased centrality of e-services in Botkyrka is that at the end of phase 4 the one-stop government offices are regarded as a complement to e-services.

Local Policy Strategies and e-Services

The development of one-stop government offices and the customer choice system has in several respects co-evolved with the institutionalization of fundamental policy beliefs and strategies. Consequently, the policy strategies institutionalized before the introduction of e-services have, just like the implementing activities, acted as a driving force for e-services.

In Botkyrka, the belief that the municipality ought to work in close proximity to the citizen has through e-services become even more feasible. With the one-stop offices, citizens could easily get in touch with the municipality while shopping in a shopping centre; with e-services citizens can easily reach the municipality via the Internet in their own home. Flexibility in service provisions and accessibility is thus taken to another level through e-services. Citizens do not have to adjust to the opening hours of the municipality but can get public information and services 24/7. An open and available municipality, which was an important original aim of the one-stop government offices, can thus be furthered. In line with this, e-services can also contribute to an improved dialogue with citizens – they can now easily comment and leave suggestions via the municipal website, and in return, the municipality can reach many of its citizens with information through the website.

In Nacka, key actors viewed e-services as necessary tool for improving competition neutrality, in many ways a prerequisite for the customer choice system and beliefs such as competition and plurality amongst service providers. The technology does not favour certain providers over others and thus facilitates free and equal competition. In hindsight it is also clear that e-services have become an important tool for the realization of freedom of choice for citizens. The web is a central channel for providing an overview of different service providers and for comparing these. Nacka thus sees e-services as an important means for abandoning what they call the “standardized” model for municipal services, i.e. public service

providers only, since e-services enable variation in the provision of public services. Furthermore, as illustrated by *Nacka24*, the integrating and coordinating characteristics of ICT facilitate a decentralization of administrative responsibilities, meaning that both service providers and citizens are involved in the administration of public services.

In addition to reinforcing institutionalized policy strategies, the implementation of e-services has increasingly also highlighted the importance of being an available municipality. In Botkyrka, an available municipality has, with the development of the one-stop government offices, been the focal point for a long period of time. In Nacka, the increased digitalization of society and the advance of public e-services have increasingly revealed the possibilities for furthering availability. For instance, several key actors consider e-services to be a more user-friendly channel for vulnerable groups with regard to access and use of public services. The fact that citizens in areas with a high percentage of immigrants prefer e-services over paper applications is often used as an example. According to this logic, the increased availability of e-services creates more equal conditions than traditional service channels since citizens can use the services whenever and however they want.

In contrast, Botkyrka does not couple the use of e-services to vulnerable groups. For these groups, the one-stop government offices are viewed as the main channel. E-services are thus not to the same extent considered to be for everyone or for everything – Botkyrka recognizes, in line with the street-level bureaucratic ideal, that some citizens and issues require the flexibility of the personal face-to-face meeting. Although this awareness also exists in Nacka, key actors in Botkyrka emphasize it to a greater extent. Considering the different local contexts and policy traditions, this difference in emphasis is not surprising. Several of the key actors in Botkyrka stress that the one-stop government offices and the personal face-to-face meeting will always be of central importance in Botkyrka, because of the local needs amongst the citizens. However, there are certain contradictions in the rhetoric regarding *who* will experience increased advantages of e-services. On the one hand, e-services are emphasized as the service channel which will reach more citizens and provide more equal terms for citizens in terms of availability. On the other hand, there is a realization that an effective use of e-services is not possible for everyone.

Thus, at the end of phase 4, the rhetoric in Botkyrka seems torn between emphasizing e-services as a tool for increasing advantages for everyone, despite personal prerequisites, and simultaneously admitting that differing prerequisites result in a less effective use of e-services for some.

Consequently, the meaning of flexibility in service provisions is given a different content when officials discuss it in the context of one-stop government offices versus in the context of e-services. Flexible service in the case of the offices refers to flexibility in the meeting between official and citizen, i.e. an adjustment to the prerequisites and needs of the citizens with regard to the specific issue at hand. Flexibility in the case of e-services is referred to mainly as flexibility in availability, i.e. services are easy to get access to.

Increased efficiency gains have contributed significantly to the institutionalization both of one-stop government offices and the customer choice system. As a leading official in Botkyrka points out: the one-stop government offices would not have been as long-lasting if they had not improved efficiency both internally and vis-à-vis the citizen.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, Nacka emphasizes how freedom of choice and a de-centralization of tasks increase efficiency for all stakeholders. Internal and external efficiency gains are also important policy aims of the e-government discourse (see chapter 1). Policy documents of Nacka and Botkyrka clearly reflect this rhetoric. Both municipalities highlight how e-services are the most cost-efficient channel for public services and simultaneously how it is meant to be the main channel for public services and information. Obviously, most reforms in public administration are more or less driven by efficiency gains. A future question is nevertheless how much room the emphasis on efficiency and rationalization will be given in the implementation of e-services and more specifically, on behalf of what other values this will take place.

In sum, the developments described above show how key actors relate the implementation of e-services to institutionalized policy strategies, thus illustrating continuity in both belief systems. However, although the same beliefs are emphasized, one should also be aware of how their meanings

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Botkyrka official A.

shift over time. This is perhaps most noticeable in Botkyrka in the rhetoric concerning flexible and available services.

Local Core Values and e-Services

As argued in chapter 1, this analysis takes off from the assumption that the e-services policy involves not only the intention to implement a technology but also the allocation of a number of values. These are in international and national policy aims largely based on a logic borrowed from NPM. By comparing Botkyrka and Nacka, it is clear that the individual choice values of Nacka are most in line with what is typically associated with NPM. However, I will argue in the following section that, despite differences in core values, both organizations have used e-service implementation as a way to strengthen core values.

View on the Role of Public Organizations – Minimal or Broad

One of the fundamental core values of Nacka is a minimalist view of the role of public organizations. The analysis of the implementation of e-services shows that e-services have facilitated the realization of these values, mainly by enabling the involvement of non-public service providers and citizens. In fact, competition neutrality has been described by several key actors as one of the main driving forces behind the initiation of *Nacka24*. Discrimination against non-service providers could through the new system be avoided and it was also easier to provide information about the various service providers for the citizen. Furthermore, the implementation of *Nacka24* forced a clarification of roles and responsibilities, which meant that more activities were placed on both service providers and citizens. All these measures have contributed to a leaner role for the municipality.

Botkyrka has had a broader view of the role of public organizations. Although private actors are involved in the service delivery of Botkyrka as well, as they are in most Swedish municipalities of today, the emphasis on involving non-public actors is far less explicit than in Nacka. Furthermore, the activities of one-stop government offices reflect a belief that public organizations carry the main responsibility for support of citizens in societal issues. The process of implementing e-services shows that they are generally regarded as a tool for reinforcing these beliefs. Through e-services, the municipality can provide more of itself to groups which

require more availability than what one-stop offices can provide. E-services are thus another channel for expanding the services of the municipality in order to reach more citizens.

View of Citizen – Customer or Client

NPM, as well as e-government and e-services, has often been associated with an approach which treats citizens as customers. Furthermore, e-services have generally been implemented in a way which presupposes that all citizens have similar prerequisites as users. The customer choice system in Nacka reflects a comparable view of the citizen. The citizen is regarded as a customer who makes conscious choices between various competing alternatives. The citizen is – despite background and prerequisites – able to make these informed choices about service providers. This view has generally been reinforced by e-service implementation. The decision not to keep paper applications for schools when *Nacka24* was implemented is an example of this. The general view is that all citizens, with enough support from the municipal organization, will eventually be able to use e-services. In turn, since citizens perform more individually, *Nacka24* has placed even more responsibility on the individual citizen with regard to service applications. For instance, citizens have to keep themselves informed about application processes and different service providers. E-services are thus an important tool for enabling the citizen to do more individually. Furthermore, with more available information on the Internet, influence in the form of consumer power can also increase. Nacka thus views the increased own responsibility of citizens in handling public services as citizen empowerment.

Botkyrka's view of citizens is closely connected to their view of the role of public organizations. Since public organizations should carry the main responsibility for service provision, citizens are also entitled to rather extensive support from public organizations. In comparison with Nacka, not as much responsibility is placed on the individual citizen in Botkyrka. This perspective is based on a general view that citizens have different prerequisites – not everyone manages equally with regard to public issues. This view is partly a response to a population with different and sometimes extensive needs. Nevertheless, through e-services, the municipality can reach out to more citizens, more according to their needs and preferences. The non-stop availability of e-services thus extends the public support for

citizens. In likeness with Nacka, Botkyrka also sees e-services as a way to increase citizen influence. However, it puts the emphasis on citizen *dialogue* rather than influence. This corresponds to the view of individuals as clients, which entails that individual influence is important but that it should not challenge the collective interest or the channels of representative democracy. Participation rather than influence in public issues is thus emphasized.

Summary: e-Services and Belief Systems over Time

Figures 6 and 7 (next page) summarize the process of developing public (e)-services in Botkyrka and Nacka, by illustrating the relationship between e-service implementation and the local belief systems. In line with the argumentation above, the figures show how community values and individual choice values have been consistent during the implementation processes in Botkyrka and Nacka respectively.

In the case of Nacka (figure 7), the implications for existing policy strategies have been few. The customer choice system and the beliefs related to it still inhabit a central role. E-service implementation has instead added policy beliefs such as the importance of being an available municipality (phase 2) as well as reinforced the beliefs and strategies established during phase 1. In terms of implementing activities, certain changes have clearly been undertaken with the introduction of e-services. E-services have become the main channel for public information and services (phases 2-4). As the figure illustrates, *Nacka24* and e-services for social services have been integrated into the customer choice system and are today vital components and even prerequisites for it. As for core values and policy strategies, e-services have reinforced implementing activities. In fact, e-services have been so integrated into the municipal activities that no specific policy documents are needed, e.g. an e-strategy.

E-services can also be seen as one of the factors behind the strategy of “one way into the municipality” (phase 3). In both Nacka and Botkyrka, Internet and/or e-services appear to have motivated a rationalization and clarification of contact channels. This is evident both in the policy for the contact centre of Nacka and in the e-strategy of Botkyrka (phase 3). It is however difficult to say if it is a direct cause of e-service implementation

or if it simply is another organizational reform which often is related to e-service implementation.

Botkyrka's policy strategies appear unchanged at first glance (figure 6). The policy strategies which have been associated with one-stop government offices are still important in the organization. In turn, it is, as in Nacka, mainly the implementing activities which have been altered with the introduction of e-services. In comparison with Nacka, there is however a more noticeable shift of previous implementing activities in Botkyrka. During phase 3 and 4, e-services are increasingly stressed as the central service channel, whereas one-stop government offices are emphasized as complementary. Thus, the *praxis* has changed, i.e. the personal face-to-face meeting is downplayed in favour of e-services. However, the *rhetoric* behind implementing activities remains more or less the same, although shifts in meaning of certain beliefs are evident. This rhetoric nevertheless continues to be used for pushing and legitimizing e-service implementation. Conversely, Nacka has to a greater extent managed to use e-services to strengthen both previous policy strategies and implementing activities, in rhetoric *and* in practise.

The comparison between the two cases shows how core values have remained intact in both cases, at least according to the rhetoric of interviewed key actors and policy documents. Policy strategies have also remained more or less the same with the same beliefs motivating e-services developments. E-services have reinforced or added value to both core values and policy strategies. However, in Botkyrka, a shift in the meaning of certain beliefs can be noticed. It is in the implementing activities of both municipalities that the greatest change can be observed, in particular in Botkyrka where e-services are getting a more central role than one-stop government offices. In contrast, e-services appear to have strengthened the customer choice system in Nacka. The differences in implementation processes can be summarized as follows: Botkyrka tends to use *existing values for strengthening the implementation of e-services* whereas Nacka tends to use *e-services for strengthening existing values*.

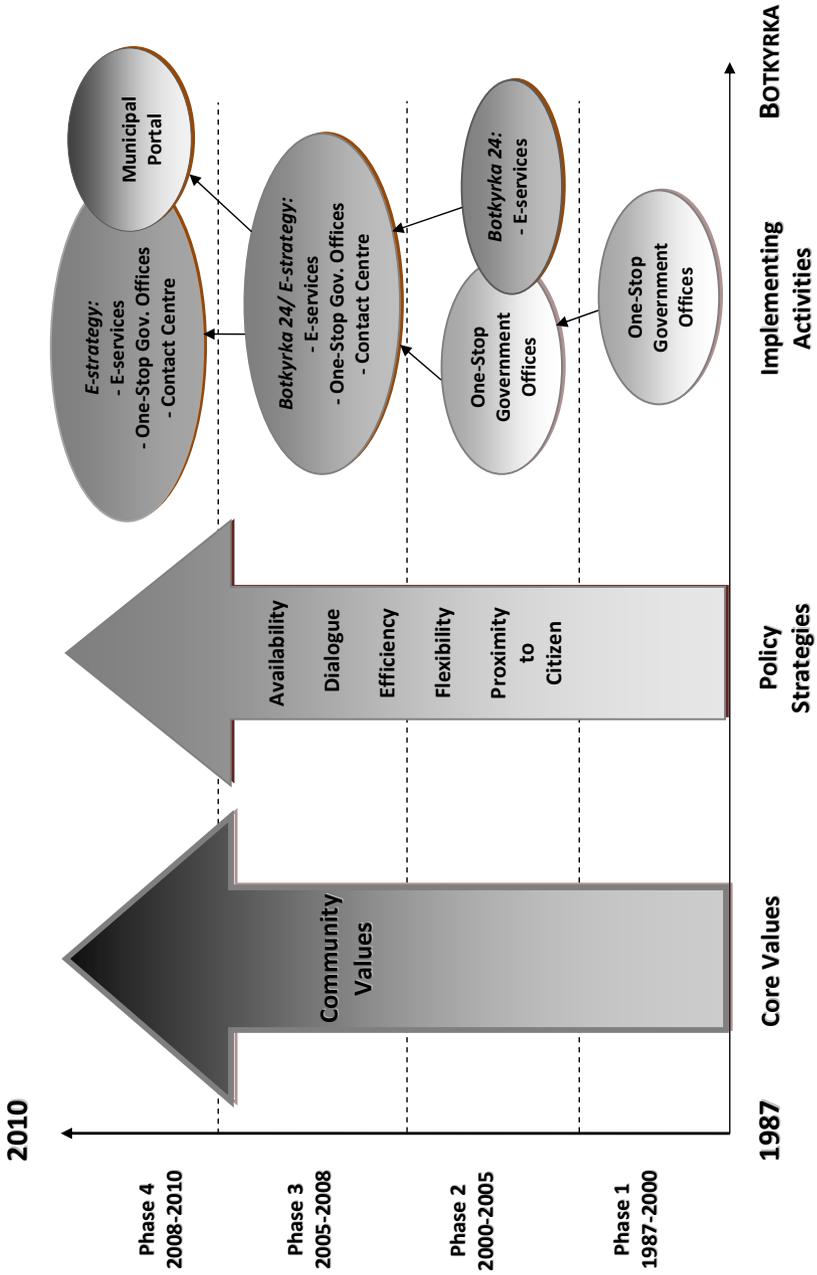


Figure 6. The Local Belief System over Time in Botkyrka.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHANGE WITHIN TRAJECTORIES?

This study has set out to increase the understanding of the relationship between local values and e-government. E-government and in turn public e-services are often presented as influential reforms in public administration today: they have been described as the solution to almost every imaginable problem facing modern public administration. Public e-services currently embodies both hopes of more efficient public administration and fears that an overemphasis on efficiency will neglect and potentially threaten the democratic values of public administration. This calls for a deeper understanding of the dominant values and perceptions embedded in the use of e-government and in turn, how e-government is influencing the possibility of realizing different values in public organizations. Thus, what happens to local core values when public e-services are implemented? This last chapter will draw on my analysis in chapter 3 in order to elaborate on the study's aim, that is, to analyze the significance of e-service implementation for the core values of two Swedish municipal organizations. In turn, the third research question will be answered in preparation for a number of general conclusions. In other words, have the core values that were in place before the introduction of e-services been affected in the implementation process, and if so, how and why?

In the previous chapter, I traced the process of developing public (e)-services in the municipalities of Nacka and Botkyrka. I identified their core values before and during the implementation process in order to depict whether and how there has been any change. Values are here regarded as deeply embedded personal and ontological beliefs of actors, what Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith term core values. This analysis has focused the core values as expressed in official documents and interviews by certain key actors in the policy field of public services in general and public e-services in particular, within the two municipal organizations. I asserted that, despite differences in core values, the core values which existed before e-

service implementation – what I term community values in Botkyrka and individual choice values in Nacka – have remained more or less the same during the implementation process in both municipalities. Nevertheless, despite this, the analysis also showed that the introduction of e-services has led to substantial changes with regards to how public services are organized and provided in both municipalities. The consequences of these changes for core values will be discussed in more depth in the following chapter. Thus, although core values have remained intact, the central point of departure in this analysis is that change involves slower development processes which need to be brought to the foreground in order for us to understand where policy developments are heading. It is these nuances in change that this chapter aims to capture.

Conclusions Based on Case Studies

The Reinforcement of Core Values

Despite the often revolutionary potential assigned to e-government and public e-services by actors on international and national levels, the two studied processes in Nacka and Botkyrka illustrate that the reforms have not been strong enough to prompt a drastic change in local core values, i.e. what is here viewed as in-depth institutional change. Instead, changes have been made with regards to how public services are practically being administered and provided. This is particularly the case in Botkyrka, where the one-stop government offices have been sidestepped by e-services in the municipal rhetoric. Nacka has also adapted its customer choice system in order to accommodate e-services, for instance in the case of the web-based system *Nacka24*, where applications for school and child care can only be made via the Internet. In both cases, it is clear that e-service implementation has moved beyond symbolic politics – real changes have been implemented and thus transformed practices of both municipalities.

Nevertheless, the above processes illustrate how changes in implementing activities have not only been made to accommodate a new policy or changes in the external context, but have simultaneously been used by key actors to reinforce or add value to core values in both municipalities. In Botkyrka, key actors have regarded e-services as a natural continuation of existing core values, such as an available and present municipality. Several

types of communication channels are considered to add value to public service provision, since it benefits different groups and individuals. Through e-services, more citizens can get easy access to public services and even more special needs catered to. Public services can through non-stop accessibility and customized Internet portals become even more flexible and available. Consequently, the citizen is further supported. According to this logic, public e-services are the natural continuation of previous policy beliefs and thus in line with existing ontological beliefs concerning the role of public organizations and the citizen.

In Nacka, e-services have been an essential tool for realizing the core values of freedom of choice for citizens and a more retracted role for the municipality. The fact that the old ICT-system for school and child care applications – two central municipal activities – was not considered to be completely in tune with the core values of the municipality and even threatened to undermine these values, called for new solutions. The old, manual system tended to benefit municipal service providers more than private providers, thus threatening competition neutrality. E-services were in this respect regarded as a suitable solution, since the technology “locks” tasks and responsibilities and does not allow short-cuts. Furthermore, e-services generally tend to lay the responsibility of finding and processing public information and services on the individual citizen. This largely suited Nacka’s core values which involve a belief in the individual’s own will and ability to take responsibility in public issues. Key actors in Nacka thus saw e-services as another opportunity for citizens to become further enabled in the relationship with the municipality. Moreover, the standardized nature of ICT enabled the structuring of responsibilities amongst the different actors involved in the provision of public services. A de-centralization of tasks and responsibilities was facilitated and in turn, the municipality could further limit its activities to the core of administration and provision of public services.

In sum, key actors in Nacka and Botkyrka have in different ways used the implementation of e-services to preserve what is perceived as legitimate and familiar. A change of core values would mean a questioning of the very ontological basis for how public service provisions have been perceived and disturb the foundation for what has been regarded as socially legitimate in recent decades. Changes in implementing activities can be

used to buffer these in-depth changes and thus contribute to a preservation of core values. Yet, the implementation of e-services illustrate more than that: not only are e-services not perceived as a threat to core values, but predominantly as an opportunity. The differences in core values have in this respect not made a difference: the e-services policy is used for supporting two different value grounds. E-services are in both cases viewed as part of the means which add value or reinforce existing core values.

The Legitimization of e-Services

However, reverse processes are also present in the implementation of e-services: local core values and policy strategies, i.e. what is perceived as legitimate and familiar, are used to facilitate the implementation of e-services. These processes illustrate how the implementation of e-services and its effect on values cannot be regarded as a simple one-way relationship. Instead, my analysis shows an interdependent and alternate relationship between local core values and e-service implementation. The Botkyrka case illustrates how the beliefs associated with one-stop government offices have become the source of strategy and action before and during e-service implementation. Through the one-stop government offices, the municipality has via one contact point provided services for citizens across administrative and sector divisions for over 20 years. E-services in the municipal rhetoric are considered to build on this one-stop approach of available and fast services which focuses the perspective of the citizen. Botkyrka states in their e-strategy how the development of e-services builds on the same principles as that of the one-stop government offices: increased customer focus, availability, effectiveness, dialogue, openness and transparency.¹ Since the experiences from the one-stop offices embody both the tested and legitimate way of handling issues, drawing parallels between the offices and e-services is partly a way to learn from previous experiences, partly a way to legitimize and facilitate the implementation of e-services.

The Nacka case illustrates a similar influential role for existing core values and policy strategies in e-service implementation. This is most visible in the claimed necessity of *Nacka24*. By enforcing transparency and

¹ Botkyrka Municipality (2007b).

standardized practices, e-services were in several respects suitable for solving the threat to core values which the old ICT system entailed. Thus, the preservation of core values was a central driving force for e-service implementation. This is also visible in the Nacka-specific form of *Nacka24*, which is developed according to several of the core values and policy strategies of Nacka, e.g. catering to a plurality of actors and competition neutrality. Municipal core values were thus decisive in influencing both the aims and shape of e-services.

To conclude, both municipalities have used their policy belief systems to build on previous experiences and to legitimize e-service implementation. The reforms have been related to previous policy traditions, as in Botkyrka, or to an actual problem or need, as in Nacka. By contextualizing the introduction of e-services in the municipal historical-cultural tradition, the reforms are not regarded as something new or alien, and consequently as not threatening.

Both cases indicate processes of policy adjustment in which a new reform has been readily accepted. Although whether to have or not to have e-services no longer is an issue for mid-sized municipalities in Sweden in 2010 – most Swedish municipalities the size of Nacka and Botkyrka or bigger have a number of e-services – the very fact that it is increasingly regarded as an unavoidable reform makes a study of its implementation so interesting. It means focusing on *how* e-services are implemented (i.e. content and process) and potential conflicts in these processes, rather than merely *if* they are implemented (i.e. progress). The great belief in and extensive resources devoted to e-services show that in the studied cases, the level of conflict between the e-services policy and local core values is perceived by the involved key actors as low. The local setting has, I argue, been decisive in this respect: it provides e-services with meaning for municipal employees and citizens. Once again, the shape of existing core values does not appear to make a difference. Both municipalities use a rather different reasoning for implementing e-services – in Botkyrka, more of the municipality can be provided; in Nacka, less.

Nonetheless, just because the e-services policy and core values are perceived as complementary by involved key actors does not mean that it cannot have unanticipated consequences. Policy implementation – not to

mention technology implementation – is known for “dashing great expectations” and not turning out as planned.² Furthermore, I will argue below that the two implementation processes also indicate that it is not always as clear-cut as values being either mutually supportive or in competition. The effects of e-services on core values are more complex and nuanced than that – I will continue by discussing these nuances in order to provide a deeper understanding of the changes brought about by public e-services.

The Stretching of Rhetoric

Although a similar rhetoric with regards to core values is used when discussing both previous policy strategies and e-services, certain terms nonetheless change meaning when discussed in different contexts. This is especially the case in Botkyrka. Increased *flexibility* in service provision is an important policy belief of both e-services and one-stop government offices. However, in the case of one-stop government offices, flexibility is referred to more in the sense of adaptation to the personal needs of the individual citizen along street-level bureaucratic ideals. In the case of e-services, flexibility is mainly discussed in terms of flexibility in access, i.e. that services can be reached around the clock, regardless of time and place. Although e-services are also seen to contribute to more personalized services, i.e. through the collection of personal errands under the so-called “My page” in an Internet portal, it once again refers more to a facilitation of access rather than a flexible adaptation to a certain situation or individual need. *Availability* is another term which changes meaning when used in different contexts. Whereas availability in the case of the one-stop government offices refers to an accessible municipality, it also refers to a more physically present municipality that is available for all types of questions, not only municipal issues. This corresponds to core values such as a strong presence of public organizations in public service delivery. The meaning of availability when referring to e-services once again focuses more on ease of access for the individual. Thus, in order to fit the e-services policy, certain terms appear to lose their original meaning when discussed in relation to e-services.

² See for instance Pressman & Wildavsky (1973); Linder, Stephen H. & Peter, Guy B. (1987) “A Design Perspective on Policy Implementation: The Fallacies of Misplaced Prescription” in *Policy Studies Review* 6(3): 459-475; Rothstein, Bo (2006), pp. 71-85; for more on the unpredictability and complexity of technology implementation see for instance Lynne & Robey (1988); Orlikowski (1992).

This, I argue, indicates a stretching of rhetoric in order to relate e-services to an existing and familiar rhetoric. It illustrates how the propagation of similar beliefs for different implementing activities does not necessarily mean a preservation of status quo but that certain changes, intentionally or non-intentionally, nonetheless take place. In turn, my analysis shows that it is difficult to discuss the effect of e-services on core values without making a distinction between rhetoric and praxis and thus without analyzing the congruence between the two. As Røvik brings to the fore in his analysis of organizations, it is important to look at what organizations actually do in the wake of reforms – the praxis – in order to get real indications of the depth of change.³ E-service implementation in Botkyrka and Nacka has clearly moved beyond symbolic politics. Real changes have been implemented: *Nacka24* in Nacka and the Internet portal in Botkyrka are just two concrete examples of this. As discussed above, there is no conflict between e-services and municipal core values in the rhetoric of either municipality. Core values are however not only in the rhetoric of local council members and officials but are also expressed through the practices of a municipality. Implementing activities are here expressions of how core values are practiced. It is when looking at this praxis that it becomes most apparent how smoothly the values of e-services are paired with existing core values. I will continue by looking at what the changes in practices entail for core values.

The Responsive Bureaucrat

The change of praxis is perhaps most illustrative in how e-services have during the last ten years been emphasized as the central channel for public services in both municipalities. In Nacka, the increasingly important role of e-services has in practice not resulted in large-scale changes for how core values are realized. E-services have proven to reinforce the customer choice system both in rhetoric and in praxis. Several aspects of the customer choice system today depend on e-services, such as the possibility to compare information about service providers. Conversely, in Botkyrka, the centrality of e-services has resulted in more significant changes as a result of one-stop government offices traditionally being the central way of practicing core values. The one-stop offices are today regarded as a complementary service channel and not, as previously, a dominant channel

³ See Røvik (2008).

for service delivery and continuous dialogue with citizens. There is a belief amongst several key actors in Botkyrka that the one-stop government offices will lose in importance with the expansion of e-services and thus that the number of offices will be reduced.

However, these changes in the prioritization of service channels have more to do with the characteristics of the one-stop offices than different core values as such, namely that the activities of the offices are largely based on the *personal face-to-face meeting*. The personal meeting and thus one-stop government offices represent a specific channel for contact with citizens, which the customer choice system of Nacka does not. This means that one-stop government offices *per se* are in more competition with e-services than the customer choice system. Although e-services and one-stop government offices are seen as complementary by key actors, the e-strategy of Botkyrka states that citizens should be “steered” towards using the Internet as the main channel, thus illustrating that the personal meeting is losing in importance on behalf of e-services, at least among the interviewed key actors in this process. Hence, the question to be asked is: how important is the personal face-to-face meeting for the local core values? The personal meeting has long been an important institution for accommodating several of the core values and policy strategies of the municipality, that is, to meet heterogeneous citizen needs through responsive and flexible public services. This has largely been based on the discretion of the street-level bureaucrats at the offices. As Lipsky and others have asserted in research concerning the role of street-level bureaucrats, public services sometimes require discretion and the human dimension (e.g. compassion and flexibility). Situations are often too complicated for a strict adherence to rules and thus cannot completely be reduced to a standardized format according to the rational-legal Weberian bureaucrat. The “responsive bureaucrat” is thus an important foundation for maintaining legitimacy of authority.⁴

Stivers applies a similar reasoning when she speaks of the “listening bureaucrat” – according to her reasoning, responsiveness begins with listening: “through speaking and listening, we make room for the voices of others and responsively reshape the dialogue and its context”.⁵ Listening

⁴ See Lipsky, Michael (1980) *Street Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service*.

⁵ Stivers, Camilla (1994) “The Listening Bureaucrat: Responsiveness in Public Administration” in *Public*

responsively and engaging in dialogue makes public officials see citizens as inhabitants of the same public square they occupy. In turn, situations can be more carefully defined and neglected aspects and interests can be heard.⁶ This has in several respects also been the reasoning of Botkyrka in the case of the offices – their flexibility and proximity to the citizen have assured them a central role in the creation of a municipality in tune with local needs. Botkyrka has not only aimed at strengthening core values and the legitimacy of the municipality by being responsive to citizen needs, but the offices have also functioned as early warning systems, i.e. as channels for identifying general needs which have then been communicated back to the municipal organization, officials as well as members of the local council.⁷ This does not have to be explicitly expressed needs but also tendencies which the officials at the offices pick up in the meeting with citizens. Listening to and communicating with citizens has been an important foundation in the relationship between the municipality and citizens. The officials at the offices have thus in several respects embodied the responsive or listening bureaucrat.

Consequently, the offices have had an important role in building a sustainable relationship between the municipality and citizens and in creating public trust, hence contributing to the creation of social capital. There is disagreement on the role of the Internet in creating social capital – some experts consider the Internet to increase social capital, e.g. through social media, while others regard face-to-face interaction as necessary to do this. It is clear that the Internet produces information capital with more, open and easily accessible information, but, as Fountain notes, information capital is not a replacement for social capital.⁸ The one-stop offices and the face-to-face meeting have in this respect been central for several democratic processes, which alongside the representative channels have been important for strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the municipality.

Although e-government and public e-services often are regarded as important cornerstones in building a more responsive government (see

Administration Review, 54(4), p. 366.

⁶ Ibid, pp. 364-369.

⁷ Öhrling PriceWaterHouseCoopers (2002), p. 14.

⁸ Fountain (2001a), p. 76.

chapter 1), it is clear that the amount of discretion and flexibility or the human dimension of the responsive bureaucrat are aspects which are difficult to transfer to e-services – at least with the present technology. E-services generally involve a self-service logic, which does not suit all individuals or errands. Activities that previously were handled by public officials are now increasingly handled by the individual citizen, hence the increased individual responsibility in handling public service information and applications. The present characteristic of e-services thus partly presupposes a more retracted role for public organizations, something which does not pair as well with Botkyrka's view of the role of public organizations. In turn, e-services have the potential of marginalizing citizens in need of more personalized support.⁹

Language is an important aspect in this respect. The one-stop government offices involve the possibility of scheduling interpreters for the most common immigrant languages. In contrast, the language policy in the provision of e-services on the municipal website in Botkyrka is Swedish¹⁰ only.¹¹ Furthermore, it is easier during a face-to-face meeting for officials to adjust to someone who does not know Swedish or English that well, through body and sign language, and thus despite language difficulties create adequate communication. E-services are not able to capture these nuances in communication. Thus, even though e-services are based on the same core values and policy strategies as one-stop government offices, the change of praxis could result in an altering of the responsiveness of the municipality. Since several of the core values of Botkyrka have been realized through the workings of the responsive bureaucrat, the personal meeting could in this sense be more central for the expression of core values than what is currently acknowledged. In turn, e-services could in the long run have consequences for a municipality like Botkyrka which for a long time has based its core values and policy strategies on the personal meeting.

Thus, the process of implementing e-services in Botkyrka currently points at an increased gap between the rhetoric and praxis of core values. It is

⁹ See Dutil, et al. (2007), p. 87.

¹⁰ Some sections of the municipal website are however available in Finnish as well – this nevertheless mainly concerns general information and not the actual self-services.

¹¹ Interview with Botkyrka official C.

here – in the detachment of rhetoric from praxis – that a conflict between e-service implementation and core values could take place. However, as indicated in the above discussion and as will be developed below, this has more to do with the preset qualities of the technology than the inherent values of the e-services policy as such.

The Nacka case shows a stronger congruence between the rhetoric and praxis of core values. As illustrated, the self-service logic of e-services largely suits Nacka's view of the citizen as an individual, capable of managing her or his own affairs. In fact, e-services have enabled this in a way which was not possible beforehand. Although both Nacka and Botkyrka are aware of that not all citizens in the municipality are able to use e-services effectively – which is what the complementary channels are for – e-services in a sense presuppose more equal users, something which, as will be discussed below, could have more long-term consequences for the view of the citizen.

The fact that e-services thus have a certain effect on practices in Botkyrka and another in Nacka illustrate that in these two cases, the effects of e-services are contingent on what *type* of practices existed in the public organization before e-service implementation. By tracing the implementation of e-services backwards, this analysis has illustrated that the implementation process has been driven and facilitated by previous core values and policy strategies. This is something that varies from case to case, in particular in municipalities with their relatively strong local autonomy. This shows how the implementation of e-services and its effects are indeed contextual. Different trajectories and outcomes are possible, depending on the institutional setting of implementation. Both cases thus show a partial implementation of the e-services policy – those parts which suit existing core values are used in order to strengthen these values. Røvik refers to this process as local translation.¹² Nevertheless, in my view it is not enough to establish that the local matters but also what aspects in the specific locality matter and why.

In this respect, the inherent differing characteristics of the personal meeting and e-services mean that in Botkyrka, praxis and rhetoric have become more detached than in the case of Nacka, where e-services have been more

¹² See Røvik (2000); Røvik (2008).

integrated both into the rhetoric and praxis of core values. It illustrates how e-services rhetorically can fit local core values, but that the expression of core values in practice gives greater indications of what effects e-services might have. To put it briefly, even though a policy suits the value ground of an organization, it does not have to suit the practical outcome of the policy. It points at the possible unintended side effects of implementation.

Thus, in order to understand possible effects of policy change in general and e-services in particular, situational and historical factors should be taken into consideration. Furthermore, in order to understand the extent of change, discrepancies between rhetoric and practices during the implementation process need to be scrutinized.

The Local Definition of e-Services

The above analysis implies an overarching conclusion of this thesis – local traditions in public service provision and locally defined values have a fundamental role in *how* e-services are implemented and *why* the implementation process looks the way it does. The local autonomy of Swedish municipalities is indeed influential in this respect. Municipalities are able to interpret e-services according to local core values because the formal institutional context of local autonomy allows them to.

In my two cases I have shown that what is viewed, from a national perspective, as the same e-services policy, is interpreted by two municipalities in different ways. Both formal institutions (e.g. local autonomy) and informal institutions (local values) matter in this respect. In my analysis, the main focus has been on core values, i.e. what is viewed as the deeper informal institutions. In turn, the analysis illustrates how e-services on the one hand are used to preserve existing core values and on the other, existing policy core values are used to facilitate e-service implementation. Consequently, Botkyrka and Nacka are examples of two processes where local values rather than globally or nationally defined values frame and give meaning to the implementation of e-services. Hence, even though e-government in a global discourse is given meaning through what can be seen as NPM-based values, these values do not necessarily have to prevail when e-government is implemented on a local level. Consequently, the two municipalities interpret the e-services policy more as an objective technology than as a value-laden policy.

The two cases illustrate that the policy of e-services is – to a certain extent – regarded as value neutral. The local implementation process boils down to the implementation of a technology which is given meaning largely through the historic-cultural tradition of the municipality. Accordingly, e-services are not necessarily the revolutionary tool that threatens to overturn democratic values of public organizations. In fact, this presumes a rather deterministic perspective in which the role of the existing local institutional setting is discarded, for instance, with regard to the democratic ideal the municipality adheres to. It presumes that all public organizations have a similar view on the function of public organizations and as illustrated in the two cases, this can differ. In Nacka, democracy is defined much according to a consumer democracy in which the citizen, through choice of services, exercises his or her individual rights. Since e-services enable individual service choices, the Nacka case indicates that from a consumer democracy perspective, e-services contribute to a strengthening of democratic processes. Obviously, this democratic ideal does not correspond to what Lundquist, March and Olsen and others define as democratic values of public organizations. However, once again this illustrates the impact of the local institutional setting in defining a policy, including the already existing democratic ideals. Furthermore, in Botkyrka, which has a view of democracy that corresponds more to the ideal type according to Lundquist et al., e-services are not perceived to be in conflict with democratic ideals. The implementation of e-services and its effect on values should thus be seen less in the light of how e-services are defined as a policy on a global or national level and more in the light of how local institutional factors in general and core values in particular shape and reshape e-services as a policy. In Botkyrka and Nacka, the definition of the e-services policy thus largely takes place in the local implementation process.

By viewing the interplay between e-services and the historic-cultural tradition, I have illustrated the significance of viewing the implementation of e-services as part of a *process*. This on the one hand means that e-government and e-service implementation needs to be viewed in light of past policy choices of public organizations. These are significant in determining the shape of e-services and the effects they might have. On the other hand, it also means viewing change as a process. The two cases show that the implementation of e-services does not lead to abrupt changes but is

incrementally joined and developed in conjunction with past policy processes. Process tracing is in this respect one way of placing e-services into a context in order to be able to view the role of previous decisions and time in the implementation process.

Although these conclusions do confirm results from previous studies which view ICT as an instrument for preserving the status quo¹³, the path-dependent tendencies which I have argued for in the implementation of e-services in Botkyrka and Nacka are made with a certain reservation. Rhetorically, differences in core values between the two municipalities have not mattered – e-services have in two different institutional settings been fitted to a local reasoning of key actors. Nonetheless, with regards to practices, the different institutional settings can have an impact. Botkyrka is with the implementation of e-services making a greater break with the past practices of one-stop government offices. Similarly, the stretching of the existing rhetoric, like the terms availability and flexibility, in order to fit the new policy, also indicates a reformulation of past policy strategies. In this case, discrepancies between past and new practices and a detachment of rhetoric from praxis could in the long run have an effect on local core values, through a potential hollowing-out of these values.

So far, the impact of e-services as a policy and thus as an allocation of values have been discussed. The following section will more closely discuss my conclusions on the role of the objective technology in e-services and in turn touch upon possible implications of my findings. E-government or e-services as reforms differ from other reforms in public organizations – they do not only involve the implementation of an idea, an “organizational recipe”¹⁴ as Røvik terms it, but also the implementation of an artefact, i.e. a technology. Since the implementation of e-services is an ongoing process, the consequences of which are still difficult to fully apprehend, these findings should be regarded as preliminary.

¹³ See for instance Fountain (2001a), pp. 84-88.

¹⁴ Røvik (2000).

Implications of e-Service Implementation

An Inflexible Technology

As established in chapter 1 and 2, I regard the e-services policy to involve the implementation of an artefact to which in turn has been attributed a number of values, manifested in policy aims. This means that e-services as a policy involve both objective (what appears to be pre-determined) and subjective (more noticeably modifiable) components. The implementation of an artefact means that e-service implementation often involves rather large investments in terms of resources. Many municipalities, in particular smaller ones, do not have the financial resources or technical knowledge to develop their own innovations or technical specifications of requirements with regards to hardware or software for e-services. Consequently, they become more reliant on general, standardized solutions provided by private companies; to buy already existing solutions from other municipalities or to collaborate with other municipalities¹⁵ in the development process.¹⁶ These solutions are often based on structures which borrow from either the business logic of the private sector or the organizational premises of other municipalities. For instance, Internet portals usually reflect a customer segmentation mentality, with their integrated service streams based on usage patterns such as life events.¹⁷

Considering that e-services solutions in a Swedish context are often developed by private companies which have re-used much of the structures of Internet banking, the customer segmentation structure is perhaps not surprising. However, this means that certain rules, processes and standards are built into the technology.¹⁸ It also means that the technology follows a general preset structure which often has been determined in a different setting than the local public organization, for instance in a different municipality or on a national or even global level, as well as in a private

¹⁵ One platform for municipal collaboration with regard to e-government is *Sambruk*, which includes collaboration on both selection and purchase of e-services as well as the knowledge and technology needed for developing and maintaining public e-services, see Löfstedt (2007), pp. 168-169.

¹⁶ Interviews with Botkyrka officials C & G; Löfstedt (2010), p. 76.

¹⁷ Dutil et al. (2007), p. 81; Taylor & Lips (2008), pp. 148-149.

¹⁸ See for instance Fountain (2001a), pp. 61-63; Orlikowski, Wanda J. & Iacono, Suzanne C. (2001) "Research Commentary: Desperately seeking the 'IT' in IT Research – A Call to Theorizing the IT Artifact" in *Information Systems Research* 12(2), p. 131.

setting rather than in a public one. In turn, the preset technical solution is not as flexible as other organizational recipes.

Consequently, even though the values attached to e-services can be adapted to local core values, the technical solution in itself is not always considered to be as adaptable. In this respect, certain values have already been built into the preset technology. Although it can be debated whether these values are based on an NPM logic, they do nevertheless correspond to a customer orientation evident from the private sector.¹⁹ The inflexibility of the technology means that effects of e-services as a policy are not entirely up to the local institutional setting. In turn, e-services, as partly a seemingly objective and preset technology, can in the shape of the inherent qualities of the technology have unintended and unanticipated effects on the institutional setting.

This is particularly the case in Botkyrka. In contrast to the one-stop government offices, e-services have so far not been initiated and shaped by the local context to the same extent. As a slightly later developer of e-services than Nacka, Botkyrka has the characteristics of an imitator. This can be described by how the municipality's vision is more limited and steered by existing solutions. As a consequence, it mainly follows already staked out paths rather than creating own innovations. It is in general easier and more reliable to implement already developed and tested technical solutions for e-services, either by other municipalities or in cooperation with private distributors.²⁰ Unlike *Nacka24*, the technical solutions in Botkyrka have not been shaped to the same extent by the need to enforce local core values. E-services have not been initiated as a solution to a problem, but rather as a way to add value to existing core values or even as an end in itself.

The lack of anchorage in the specific locality could have external consequences for citizens. The one-stop offices have proved to be flexible and adjust to the nuanced needs of public services amongst the Botkyrka inhabitants. In turn, the core values of Botkyrka have largely been built on the one-stop offices' ability to adapt. As argued, e-services are in some respects not as flexible – in particular not once in use – but follow

¹⁹ See Dutil et al. (2000).

²⁰ Interviews with Botkyrka officials C & G.

standardized ways of structuring the delivery of public services. This is reflected in the Internet portal or websites of both Botkyrka and Nacka, where the division of public services illustrate a customer segmentation structure. Services are here divided according to a number of pre-determined roles or issues. Taylor and Lips call this “social sorting”.²¹ This implies a different way of approaching citizens and citizenship, which reinforces the role of citizens as customers. Obviously, the reality is more complex than that. Within the group of parents, there are various needs and interests. Nonetheless, e-services in its present form involve an underlying assumption that users have more or less the same starting point in terms of knowledge and information.

Røvik speaks of how rhetoric can influence practice by serving as the yardstick to which activities slowly are adjusted.²² Reforms may thus, just like a virus, have a period of incubation, in which structures and activities slowly are accommodated to new ways of reasoning.²³ In other words, regarding citizens as more equal users might in the end lead to the municipal officials increasingly treating them as such. In a socio-economically heterogeneous municipality like Botkyrka, where many citizens as newcomers to the Swedish public system also require extra support, treating all users the same may increase the risk of exclusion. This exclusion might not only be created because of e-services or ICT as such – i.e. as a lack of sufficient technical knowledge – but also as a knowledge gap with regards to the Swedish public system, a language problem or a lack of trust in technology, e-government or government in general. More responsibility is thus put on the single individual in effectively receiving public services. It should be stressed that both Nacka and Botkyrka emphasize complementary channels, such as the personal face-to-face meeting and the contact centre, for citizens who have difficulties in using e-services. Nevertheless, the alternation of how services are carried out and the view of citizens as more equal users could in the long run accommodate a different outlook. Above all, it might change the view of citizens as once in a while requiring personalized services according to differing needs, thus undermining public services based on equity, equality and the common good.

²¹ Taylor & Lips (2008), pp. 148-149.

²² Røvik (2000), p. 147.

²³ Røvik (2008), p. 301.

Obviously, e-service implementation is still in its infancy – at this point it is still difficult to predict consequences thereof. On the one hand, a similar development as that of the one-stop government offices could occur: a reform is implemented and then gradually accommodated to the local context. The one-stop government offices in Botkyrka initially followed a general model but have over the years developed into something Botkyrka specific. Today, the offices of Botkyrka have a rather distinctive role which not many offices in Sweden or abroad have.²⁴ On the other hand, a significant difference is once again that the technical solution for e-services is less flexible than an organizational structure such as the one-stop government offices. It is expensive to change technical infrastructure, which often produces long-term lock-in effects.²⁵ An outcome of the weak local anchorage of e-services could therefore be an emerging conflict between rhetoric and practices, in which a change of core values occur.

Pioneers and Imitators

All in all, the Nacka case shows a different development than Botkyrka since *Nacka24* ultimately is a rather Nacka-specific system, based on the logic of the customer choice system. This has facilitated e-services becoming a reinforcement of local core values and policy strategies simply because this is what they were designed to do. Being a pioneer in e-government developments has provided Nacka with both advantages and disadvantages. Developing *Nacka24* was an expensive process, which also created internal conflicts within the municipality. Although the system was developed in cooperation with a private distributor, the lack of other technical solutions at the time meant that Nacka had more leeway in shaping the system according to local preferences. The implied urgency of a new ICT system, and as a municipality at the forefront of developments, also meant that collaboration with other municipalities was not on the agenda. However, precisely the local development of *Nacka24* has given Nacka the advantage of defining e-services according to its own core values. This could have facilitated the view of ICT and e-services as an integrated part of municipal activities.

²⁴ SALAR (2003).

²⁵ See for instance Summerton, Jane (1998) "Stora tekniska system: en introduktion till forskningsfältet" in Blomkvist, Pär & Kaijser, Arne, eds. *Den konstruerade världen: tekniska system i historiskt perspektiv*, p. 26; Fountain (2001a), pp. 84-88.

The implementation of e-services is to different degrees facilitated by different institutions. Nacka has in this respect had fewer difficulties fitting e-services into its core values and policy strategies, not only because of the character of its past practices but also because early on it integrated these values and practices into the development of e-services. Although both Botkyrka and Nacka were early developers of e-services, my analysis has shown that Nacka began the implementation process slightly earlier than Botkyrka, in particular of more advanced e-services (*Nacka24*). The fact that Nacka was slightly earlier indicates the importance of time in the development process. By the time Botkyrka decided on more advanced developments of e-services, certain choices with regards to the shape of the technical solution had already been made. It is also interesting to note how Botkyrka with regards to the Internet portal experiences more flexibility in shaping the technical solution: with the Internet portal Botkyrka is more at the forefront of developments again. Obviously, it is also a matter of resources – as key actors in Botkyrka have pointed out, the municipality has not had the necessary financial resources for full liberty of action in e-services developments.²⁶ The developments in Botkyrka and Nacka nevertheless illustrate that different timing in the implementation process matters in terms of what leverage municipalities have in shaping e-services according to local preconditions. As a pioneer, Nacka was granted certain possibilities in shaping developments. As an imitator, Botkyrka options have been more restricted. Although in Botkyrka generally it is not perceived as a problem to have less leverage, there is still an awareness that it is not entirely unproblematic to be reliant on the processes and solutions of a few private distributors.²⁷

In light of the above discussion, the developments in Botkyrka could be more illustrative of e-service implementation in other Swedish municipalities. In contrast, Nacka is more exceptional. Few municipalities have had the possibility to shape their development of e-services to the same extent as Nacka but have, in likeness with Botkyrka, either collaborated with others or used already partly pre-determined solutions.

The conclusions made in this chapter have illustrated the possible side-effects of e-service implementation. It is evident that e-services can bring a

²⁶ Interview Botkyrka official C.

²⁷ Interviews with Botkyrka officials C & G.

number of advantages to public administration, not only in terms of efficiency gains, but also in terms of increased transparency, adherence to rule of law and interaction with citizens. However, in line with previous studies²⁸, my findings in the two cases have emphasized that the effects of e-services should neither be taken for granted nor assumed as general. The interaction between the institutional setting and e-services can result in locally specific outcomes, which, as the two cases of Botkyrka and Nacka illustrate, could have different consequences in different localities.

Summary

This study has set out to analyze the significance of the introduction of public e-services for core values in two Swedish municipal organizations. A comparative case study of the municipalities of Botkyrka and Nacka has provided the empirical basis for the analysis. In turn, a neo-institutional outlook has been used for approaching and analyzing the research problem, in particular parts of the ACF which emphasize core values as an important component in processes of stability and change. Whereas policy documents on e-government and early research have had a very optimistic view of the changes e-government will bring about, later research has had a more pragmatic view of the depth and effects of e-government implementation: e-government has so far not proven to be the revolutionary force initially predicted. As forerunners in the development of public e-services, it is clear that a number of changes with regards to e-services have taken place in both Botkyrka and Nacka – both municipalities today have integrated e-services in several policy areas and regard them as a central channel for public service provisions. Implementation can thus in a sense be considered “successful”. Notwithstanding this, the effects of implementation remain more ambiguous. What have these changes meant for existing local core values? Has it led to a transformation of local core values and how is this transformation manifested?

²⁸ See for instance Orlikowski (1992); Wihlborg, Elin (2000) *En lösning som söker problem*; Fountain (2001a); Giritli Nygren (2009).

The Local Reinterpretation of the e-Services Policy

Firstly, I have argued for *the significance of the specific local institutional setting* in shaping the implementation of e-services. Consequently, in these cases, e-services are not viewed by key actors as the value-laden technology which some observers claim. Although an NPM-based rhetoric is evident in global and national articulations of an e-services policy, the local rhetoric and praxis reveal mainly other driving forces of e-services. Both Nacka and Botkyrka have implemented the e-services policy with a different rationale and reasoning. The municipalities were chosen as contrasting cases, that is, as two rather different municipalities in terms of demography, political rule and policy traditions within public service provisions. E-services have in this respect been used to reinforce or add value to local core values in the policy area of public service provisions – but these local core values have also been used to legitimize and facilitate e-service implementation. The case studies show a combination of preserving core values and previous policy experiences and responding to a changing external context. In turn, the core values that existed before e-service implementation have remained stable during e-service implementation.

Thus, key actors within the both municipalities perceive the e-services policy as *mutually supportive* of existing core values, despite fundamental differences in values. The local belief system of Botkyrka is based on what I have termed community values. It entails a general view of the role of public organizations as extensive and citizens as entitled to broad support from public organizations. Compared to Nacka, these core values correspond less to the economic logic of e-government policy documents on a global and national level. Key actors in Botkyrka nevertheless regard e-services to be in line with previous measures to reinforce core values: the municipality can now provide even more information and service channels for different groups of citizens along the lines of “the Botkyrka spirit”. E-service developments are thus considered to add value to the community-based core values. Consequently, a policy that at first glance appears to cause a conflict in values is reinterpreted according to a local reasoning.

Nacka has based its belief system on what I have termed individual choice values. It involves a view of the role of public organizations as retracted and citizens as rational individuals capable of shouldering their own

responsibilities and making their own choices. Although the core values correspond largely to the basic propositions of NPM and the e-services policy, these values existed in Nacka several years before NPM gained a foothold in Swedish public organizations and are therefore, in a Swedish context, often considered to be Nacka-specific. Consequently, e-services are regarded as a tool for developing these Nacka specific values, i.e. to reduce the role of public organizations even further and thus to involve other actors, including the citizen, to a greater extent. The self-service logic and the non-discriminatory characteristic of e-services are regarded as suitable for the reinforcement of existing core values.

The described implementation processes point at path dependency but not necessarily as a constraining force but rather as an enabling force. The introduction of e-services has been an important reinforcement mechanism for core values, which have enabled both municipalities to continue on past paths. Rather than renegotiate core values, implementing activities of *how* to carry out services have been renegotiated with e-services developments. Thus, in both cases, a local implementation process has been related to contemporary national policies and to former local policies without renouncing core values.

Discrepancies between Rhetoric and Praxis Matter

Thirdly, notwithstanding the above, I have also argued that it is important to *differentiate between rhetoric and praxis* when analyzing the effects of e-services on local values. The above proposition thus needs to be made more exact: e-services and core values are mutually supportive in both municipalities – *in the rhetoric of actors*. The level of conflict between policy and core values is low here. In praxis, the reality is more complex. With e-services, the implementing activities of Botkyrka and Nacka have clearly changed. In both cases, e-services are now considered to be a central channel for services and information. In this respect, e-services have had an effect on the long-term centrality of the personal face-to-face meeting in Botkyrka. The one-stop government offices are nowadays not viewed as being as central as they were ten years ago: rather, they are now a complementary channel which citizens should use mainly if they cannot use the Internet. In Nacka, the central way of expressing core values has been its customer choice system, where citizens through freedom of choice amongst various service providers have exercised a voice. However, in

contrast to the one-stop government offices, the customer choice system of Nacka is reinforced by e-services. E-services ease several aspects of how the customer choice system is carried out and hence are congruent with e-services both in rhetoric and praxis.

Moreover, the analysis has also shown some discrepancies *within* rhetoric. Certain terms change meaning when applied in different contexts, which indicate that a stretching of rhetoric sometimes happens in order to maintain consistency in rhetoric. It is in these discrepancies between rhetoric and praxis, as well as within rhetoric, that the level of conflict between the e-services policy and local core values could increase and thus produce unintended consequences.

Specific Context – Specific Trajectory

Fourthly, the effect of e-services on values is thus contingent *on what type of policy traditions* and especially *what type of practices* existed in the municipalities before e-service implementation. Certain practices are more in conflict with e-services than others. In the case of Botkyrka, e-services are not able to capture to the same extent as many nuances in individual needs as the personal face-to-face meeting. Botkyrka has through the one-stop government offices, in the form of “the responsive bureaucrat”, realized several of the core values of the municipality. The gradually decreasing role of the face-to-face meeting could thus produce consequences for core values in Botkyrka. This could in the longer run have implications for how the citizen is viewed, i.e. as more homogenous and with more equal needs. The rhetoric could thus eventually lead to a gradual accommodation of municipal structures and activities. For a heterogeneous municipality like Botkyrka, this could have implications for public trust and the legitimacy of the municipality.

This shows how a change of implementing activities, over time, can have the opposite effects on core values than initially intended, i.e. a possible weakening instead of a strengthening. Furthermore, it shows how changes in implementing activities also can produce consequences for core values, but more in terms of gradual and slow-moving developments than sudden in-depth change.

Objective Technology Matters

Fifthly, as this thesis has touched upon in the last discussion concerning the implications of my findings, the possible consequences of e-services have more to do with certain *built-in qualities of the objective technology* which is currently being used for e-services, than *the contemporary values attached to the policy* as such. This technology often follows a pre-set, standardized and rather inflexible format which is not developed in the local context and which usually adheres to a customer-oriented structure of private companies. Thus, even though in my two cases, the local institutional setting is important in framing how e-services are perceived and implemented, the objective aspects of technology could in itself have an effect on core values, for instance by influencing how the citizen is viewed and what the role of public organizations ought to be. This is an issue which deserves more attention if we want to understand the consequences of e-government and public e-services for the role and function of public organizations.

Same Technology – Everywhere Different

To summarize, in the cases of Botkyrka and Nacka, e-services are so far not the revolutionary force predicted in central policy documents. Effects of e-services are incremental and illustrate development processes rather than large-scale institutional change. Existing local core values of policy areas have a more central role in determining e-service implementation than globally formulated values. Consequently, e-services are shaped by and gain legitimacy through the local context in which they are implemented and are thus contingent on a number of formal and informal structures. In turn, e-government is in this analysis not the impending threat to democratic values some observers claim: both cases illustrate how public e-services are used to reinforce the status quo.

However, this thesis has also argued that the incremental development process could have long-term, more in-depth effects. Although e-services until now may not have been the large-scale force which essentially challenges core values, it has led to certain changes in the practices of both municipalities which could lead to more in-depth change in core values, particularly in a municipality like Botkyrka. The question is thus if these developments indicate institutionalization processes, i.e. if they are on their way to being integrated into the institutional setting. The view of citizens

as more equal in terms of capacities could have implications for a heterogeneous municipality like Botkyrka which requires flexibility and support in public service provisions.

Consequently, *there is a potential conflict in using similar technical solutions for different contexts*. The specific local preconditions of public e-service implementation therefore need to be taken into consideration in the implementation process if the democratic values in public organizations are to be realized. This means that the differing needs and capabilities of citizens in different contexts need to be accounted for, if not through e-services then through other contact channels. Today's Swedish, and Western, societies have become more culturally and ethnically heterogeneous.²⁹ This places greater demands on public organizations to handle this increased heterogeneity in order to adhere to the constitutional rights of equality and equity. There is a multidimensionality of citizenship, which is not yet accounted for in public e-services provision. Thus, e-government and public e-services may to a greater extent have to target issues such as citizenship, equality and competences in order to create a legitimate public administration and a truly “responsive” and “citizen-oriented” government.

Further Research

The exploratory nature of this thesis and the conclusions it has generated suggest a number of prospects for future research. Considering the fast pace of e-government developments and the underexplored nature of many aspects of the field, it is tempting to elaborate on a wide prospect of exciting research outlines. I will limit myself in the following section to briefly outlining four of these possible research perspectives.

European e-Government Policy Translation

Both the comparative perspective and the analysis of the role of different local institutional settings could be given a new dimension by conducting a comparative study of e-government implementation in different EU member states. Studying e-government, in contrast to e-services, would

²⁹ Rothstein (2010a), p. 8.

involve having a broader view of the role of ICT in public administration. In several policy documents the EU has spelled out visions and strategies for e-government implementation in an EU-wide context. However, there are conclusive differences in the implementation of e-government among the EU states. The study of Nacka and Botkyrka municipality has highlighted how e-government is both shaped by and gains legitimacy through the local context in which it is implemented and is thus contingent on a number of formal and informal structures. Thus, from an EU-wide perspective, it appears even more urgent to understand the different settings and local praxis of government implementation, e.g. the role of political and organizational culture, welfare state settings and political systems. The interplay between global and local processes could here be focused. In this respect, the relationship between the informal aspects of institutions and e-government could be further elaborated on, for instance, by applying a cultural theory perspective.³⁰

Røvik's interpretation of the concept of *translation*³¹ has in this thesis only been touched upon and could in a comparative study of EU states also be interesting to apply more in-depth, with the aim of theory development. Røvik's research of the concept of translation has been conducted on various NPM-based reforms in the public sector but has not specifically analyzed the implementation of e-government. In this context, a more in-depth analysis of the translation of the e-government policy in a number of EU states could contribute to research on the role of technology in processes of translation in public organizations. Furthermore, whereas the main focus of this thesis has been on what a policy (e-government) does to organizations when the policy is adopted and implemented, a future study could focus more on what organizations do with practises and ideas when they are transferred and implemented, thus highlighting the process more than the effects.

Citizens and Public e-Services

Obviously, the effects of e-government implementation could also be investigated more in-depth, in particular the effect on the creation and upholding of democratic legitimacy. Whereas this thesis has had a strictly

³⁰ See for instance Bergström (2002); Johansson (2003).

³¹ Røvik (2000); Røvik (2008).

organizational perspective, a second prospect for future research could therefore be a citizen perspective in which the perception of e-services amongst different groups of citizens could be developed through both quantitative surveys and in-depth interviews. From this perspective, the role of public e-services in processes of sustaining and building trust and legitimacy could be further investigated. There is generally a need to conduct more research on how citizens perceive public e-services and in particular, the role of e-services in building a democratic government.³²

One aspect of the above concerns the implications of inflexible technology for citizens with different competencies and knowledge regarding e-services, also termed the digital divide. Although the digital divide has been a much debated issue ever since the introduction of ICT, it has been less discussed in an e-government context³³ and then mainly as an issue of access to ICT. Aspects highlighted in this thesis, such as tensions between the responsive street-level bureaucrat and the responsiveness of e-government as well as between information capital and social capital could be further elaborated on. In this respect, the increased individual responsibility in managing public services embodied in the provision of public e-services brings up a number of issues related to social inclusion and exclusion. How this affects different groups of citizens as well as how public organizations choose to define and combat this problem are thus aspects which could be developed more in-depth. In this respect, the specific role of technology and the ICT artefact in these processes could also be further theorized according to theoretical perspectives which problematize technology to a greater extent, such as STS or structuration theory.³⁴ These aspects have, within the limited scope of this thesis, only been touched upon here.

Finally, the above discussion could also be developed in a more in-depth investigation of the definition of “the citizen” vs. “the customer” in e-government policies. This could more specifically be linked to an issue which has not been developed very much in this study, namely the role of private organizations in defining the technology used for public e-services along, for instance, customer segmentation ideals and in turn, their

³² See for instance Taylor & Lips (2008).

³³ See Helbig, Natalie et al. (2009) “Understanding the Complexity of Electronic Government: Implications from the Digital Divide Literature” in *Government Information Quarterly* 26:89-97.

³⁴ See for instance Giddens (1984); Bijker et al., eds. (1987); Orlikowski (1992); Orlikowski (2001).

influence in processes which define the relationship between citizens and public organizations in public service provisions.

Political Actors in e-Government Implementation

This thesis has had a largely structural perspective, in which the role of single actors has been downplayed. This is not to say that individual actors have not been important. Considering the great amount of actor-centred research and in particular the influence of political and social entrepreneurs in public policy³⁵, this could be an alternative perspective for shedding light on how organizations handle the implementation of e-services. In this respect, the tension between local council members and public officials in e-government implementation is an issue that deserves more attention.³⁶ The implementation of technology has traditionally been considered to be within the domain of public officials, i.e. the execution of political decisions. It is a political decision *if* a public organization chooses to implement e-government, not *how* – this belongs to the expert knowledge of public officials. However, with e-government becoming increasingly integrated into the structures and practices of public administration and with the number of ICT-related projects growing, the absent role of local council members in e-government implementation is bringing up questions concerning democratic legitimacy and accountability. Furthermore, political leadership and involvement have been highlighted as important variables in studies of organizations with an effective and in-depth implementation of e-government.³⁷ A possible research perspective would thus be to analyze the role and significance of local council members in the implementation of e-government and, secondly, the implications thereof for a sustainable integration of e-government into the existing structures and practices of public organizations. Ultimately, the aim would be to increase the understanding of the distribution of power between local council members and public officials during reforms in public administration and the implications of this for democratic government.

³⁵ See for instance Dahl, Robert (1961) *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*; Kingdon, John W. (2003) *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, 2nd ed.

³⁶ See Jæger, Birgit (2005) “Digital Visions – The Role of Politicians in Transition” in Bekkers & Homburg, eds., pp. 107-125.

³⁷ Ibid.

Annexes

The following standard formats were used for interview questions in Botkyrka and Nacka respectively. Since the interviews were semi-structured, the format or sequencing of questions was not followed strictly but adapted to the person interviewed.¹

Annex 1: Interview Questions Botkyrka

- Tell me about your role in Botkyrka municipality, what is your title and assignment here?
- How come you started to work here? What is your background? For how long have you been working here?
- What is your role in the development of the e-strategy/e-services? Can you describe the development process (important decisions, etc.)?
- Why did this process start? Which ideas and reasoning were behind it?
- How would you describe the e-strategy of the municipality? For instance, how would you describe it to a citizen?
- What is your relation to the local council? How do you cooperate in issues related to e-services?
- How is your e-strategy related to the national action plan for e-government? Other policies within the field, e.g. the 24/7 agency?
- Can you describe the future development of the e-strategy/e-services?
- We have seen that Botkyrka has been a forerunner within the development of dialogue and services. What does that mean for the development of e-services?
- Why do you think there has been such a big focus on improving services to and dialogue with citizen in Botkyrka?
- What makes the development of e-services special in Botkyrka?
- Can you describe the process of developing the web-based municipal portal?
- How is the new technology used for services to citizens? Pros and cons?
- What advantages are there with e-services/the municipal portal? What difficulties or problems are there?
- How would you describe the e-services of Botkyrka?

¹ All interview questions were originally in Swedish and have been translated to English by the author.

- What has been positive/negative in the development of the e-strategy?
- What is your impression of the general view of the e-strategy/e-services amongst officials and local council members in the municipality?
- What is your impression of the general view of e-services amongst citizens? Are e-services trusted?
- If you could decide, what would the future development of Botkyrka's e-strategy and e-services look like?

Interview questions for officials working at the one-stop government offices:

- How come one-stop government offices were developed in Botkyrka?
- What were/are visions and aims with the one-stop government offices in Botkyrka? Have they been fulfilled?
- If we compare the one-stop government offices of Botkyrka with other offices, what is different?
- How would you describe the one-stop government offices? What is their foremost task?
- What pros/cons are there with the offices? What can be made different?
- What typical questions do you get at the offices? Who is visiting you?
- How can the offices be developed?
- What is your impression of the general view of the one-stop government offices amongst officials and local council members in Botkyrka?
- What is your impression of the general view of the one-stop government offices amongst citizens?
- What experiences from the offices do you think can be transferred to the development of e-services? What is difficult to transfer? Why?
- What do you think the future development of the offices will look like (e.g. in relation to the development of public services in general)?

Annex 2: Interview Questions Nacka

- Tell me about your role in Nacka municipality, what is your title and assignment here?
- How come you started to work here? What is your background? For how long have you been working here?
- What is your role in the development of Nacka24/e-services? Can you describe the development process (important decisions, etc.)?

- Why did this process start? Which ideas and reasoning were behind it?
- We have seen that Nacka has been a forerunner within the development of public services. What does that mean for the development of e-services?
- Why do you think there has been such a dominant focus on freedom of choice and the development of public services in Nacka?
- How does the development of e-services relate to your view of freedom of choice for citizens?
- What is your relation to the local council? How do you cooperate in issues related to e-services?
- What is your strategy for informing and providing services to citizens? What is your vision? Is there a channel strategy?
- How do you perceive the needs for contacting the municipality amongst citizens?
- What does the future development of public services look like? Visions and goals?
- How is the new technology used for services to citizens? Pros and cons?
- What makes the development of e-services special in Nacka?
- What differentiates Nacka from other municipalities?
- What has been positive/negative in the development of the e-strategy?
- What is your impression of the general view of the e-strategy/e-services amongst officials and local council members in the municipality?
- What is your impression of the general view of e-services amongst citizens? Are e-services trusted?
- Can you describe the future development of e-services in Nacka?
- If you could decide, what would the future development of Nacka's e-services look like?

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