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Lines of Reasoning When Designing Education for Municipal Councillors in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Although elected representatives play an imperative role for the functioning of a formal democracy, educational research has so far not given much attention to the education and training offered to this group of people. A democratic dilemma may arise in the design and organisation of this education that relate to local governance and policy processes. This paper investigates introductory education that Swedish municipalities offer to municipal councillors and explore the reasons behind its design. The study draws on a comprehensive set of empirical material, consisting of educational programmes from 261 Swedish municipalities and interviews with municipal representatives. The results suggest three different lines of reasoning, denoted system-oriented, relationship-oriented, and market-oriented lines, behind the design of this education. The importance of these results can be considered in relation to previous findings that a strained relation exist between elected representatives and local administrations in Sweden.

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Educational design; lines of reasoning; municipal councillors; Dichotomy-Duality Model

Introduction

This article focusses on the education organised for persons that have been entrusted with representing other citizens in democratic assemblies. More precisely, we focus on the introductory courses that Swedish municipalities organise for municipal council members. Although the relationship between education and democracy is a well-explored theme in Scandinavian educational research, education targeting key functions such as elected representatives in a democratic system has not been given much attention. More literature has explored the role of the educational system in educating children and young people to become democratic citizens (e.g., Lieberkind, 2015; Piepenburg & Arensmeier, 2020). Another recurring theme in research concerns how learning in civil society and participatory popular education contribute to the development of citizens' democratic skills (e.g., Andersson & Laginder, 2013; Harding, 2011; Larsson, 2001; Pastuhov & Rusk, 2017).

International literature on education for elected representatives is found primarily in research within the field of public administration (Battaglio, 2008; Grenier & Mevellec, 2016; Leete & Maser, 2007; Lewis & Coghill, 2016; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). This literature indicates that a democratic dilemma can arise in the design and organisation of this education where certain relations, roles and responsibilities may be constructed. On the one hand, elected representatives are expected by voters, the media, and experts of various kinds to be able to handle the complexity of political matters in a resourceful manner. The need for education to improve the governance capacity of elected representatives has been described as great (Battaglio, 2008; Leete & Maser, 2007;

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Lewis, 2016; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999). On the other hand, a basic element of the representative democratic system is that any eligible citizen can be elected to a formal political position, assuming that they received sufficient popular support in an election. Requiring elected officials to undergo education to conduct their duties can be seen as undermining their democratic mandate, which can appear as more obvious if courses are mandatory (Grenier & Mevellec, 2016). We argue that this democratic dilemma has a clear relevance also for educational researchers.

With reference to the Swedish context, municipalities decide independently and at the local level if municipal councillors are to be given an introductory education, and if so, how the training or introductory course should be designed and implemented. Normally, this education takes place over one or two days in connection with the start of a new term in office (Nordvall et al., 2020). From the perspective of a potential democratic dilemma, we find it important to study and critically examine how these educational activities are designed and what ideas they are based on.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the introductory education provided to municipal councillors by municipalities in Sweden and investigate the reasons behind the design of this education. The research questions were the following: What are the main reasons for the kinds of introductory education that are being provided? How do local administrators in the municipalities justify the choices they make when designing the courses? How can we understand the justifications given? Based on an approach that is common in Nordic didactic research, we focused on the reasons given for the educational courses being conducted in the way they are, in short, how choices behind the education are justified (cf. Bengtsson, 1997; Larsson, 2006).

In order to embed our main findings, we will present some prevalent features of the municipal education that is offered to municipal councillors. To answer the research questions, we conducted a thematic analysis of interviews with administrative officials in Swedish municipalities who were responsible for introductory education in order to distinguish qualitatively different ways of motivating these courses. When analyzing the rationality behind the ideas for the education, we draw on research on public administration influenced in particular by the so-called Dichotomy-Duality Model (Hansen & Ejersbo, 2002; Svara, 1985).

The article is organised as follows. Previous research in the field is presented in the next section. Then our theoretical perspective is presented, followed by a presentation of method and material. Before we present our findings regarding the didactic considerations of those responsible of the municipal education for local politicians, the educational context in which the considerations have been made is presented. Finally, the study's contribution and possible avenues for further research are discussed.

Previous Research

Research has so far not extensively studied the education and training provided to municipal councillors or Local Elected Officials (LEOs). However, the subject has been given some attention in international literature. Grenier and Mévellec (2016, p. 37) point out that “Due to tensions between the democratic and expert approaches to governance, training programs raise significant issues regarding the current and future roles of LEOs”. This observation steers focus to the design of education and how, why, and by whom it is operationalised.

An imperative aspect of designing education is the selection of content as well as the discursive element of the education being provided. This issue has been scrutinised by scholars who have examined education organised for female politicians in India and Canada (Clover et al., 2011; Clover & McGregor, 2011, 2012). These studies found that education providing knowledge of governance structures is important but may prove insufficient when contrasted with informal tactical knowledge of policy making. Clover et al. (2011, p. 29) state that “Politics, as the women in this study noted, is a discursive game of who knows what. Power lies in and is exercised through this knowing but more importantly, through the uses of political capital”.

Another aspect is related to the practical operationalisation of education and training. With inspiration from the private sector, Gilbert (2020) makes a case for what is referred to as onboarding for newly elected councillors. She states that “Onboarding is, therefore, an effective programme for instilling practical and cultural knowledge, reducing learning curves to productivity, and ensuring successful integration into a new organisation” (p. 14). Onboarding is construed as a programme that can enhance the capacity of councillors to better meet the needs of their communities. Other local governments are recommended to study this model. Another model has been proposed by Jacobson and Warner (2008) who argue for the integration of governance, leadership, and public service into education to better meet the growing complexity of governing.

However, at times, education and training can be outsourced to other organisations by the local government and municipal administration. Scholars have examined universities as a provider of education to elected officials. These studies discuss the role universities can play for enhancing the knowledge of skills of individuals which on a collective level could also improve the effectiveness of the political assembly (see Leete & Maser, 2007; Thomson, 2010).

In reference to the Swedish context, there are no studies that explicitly cover education for municipal councillors or LEOs. However, there are several studies addressing the dynamics of the relationship between the administrative and political leadership that are of relevance for understanding the context in which the introductory courses are being organised. The growing power of municipal administrations has been noted and discussed (Bäck, 2000; Montin & Granberg, 2013). Bergström et al. (2008) draw attention to a closeness between administrative and political leadership, and write that the “borderline between politics and administration is highly porous” (p. 208). This porous borderline can be understood as a line that is permeable, thus, enabling a grey area in which overlapping roles and responsibilities are adapted, redefined, and re-negotiated.

Högberg (2007) has investigated how municipal public managers interact to enable real political power. In this process, they use three power resources described as centrality, control over critical resources, and nearness to power. These resources give the managers more influence than their formal position would imply. The observations made by Högberg are additionally elaborated by Lennquist Lindén (2010), who has examined the strategies local public managers use to increase their professional status, in other words, to work without interference from politicians. One strategy is to talk about politicians as being incompetent. Lennquist Lindén has summed up her observations of this discourse with the metaphor “Politicians are like children” (p. 223). Construed as children, they are also perceived as in need of upbringing from the municipal administration.

From a formal educational perspective, however, it would appear unfair to describe politicians as generally incompetent. Elected representatives at all political levels in Sweden (local, regional, and national) have higher educational merits than the voters they represent (Statistics Sweden, 2020). In spite of their formal position and educational attainments, surveys show that municipal councillors perceive that they have less influence and power than other stakeholders in the local municipal system, including local administrators and managers (Erlingsson & Öhrvall, 2017; Giljam et al., 2010).

With their formal role comes formal responsibilities, as specified in the Basic Laws of Sweden and current legislation. The work of municipal councillors has been described as both complicated and demanding, which has led to calls for education and training to improve their governance capacity (Vogelsang-Coombs, 1997; Vogelsang-Coombs & Miller, 1999).

To conclude this overview, there is limited international research on the education and training provided to municipal councillors or LEOs. Most previous studies are related to the field of public administration, and none of them focus specifically on the reasons behind the design of this education. Although some Swedish studies address the dynamics between the administration and LEOs, none discuss the design and organisation of education specifically. We argue that there is a gap in the literature that is relevant to fill. The present study intends to make a contribution to such an endeavour.

Data Collection and Empirical Material

The data that was collected and processed in this study has two central components. Firstly, we gathered educational programmes or plans from 261 Swedish municipalities. This was done by sending a request to all 290 municipalities during the spring of 2019. In the email, we requested information on education designed for elected representatives following the most recent elections in Sweden, in 2018. Following the initial email, we also sent two reminders to municipalities that did not reply to our first email. In the end, we received responses from 265 municipalities, of which 4 informed us that they did not organise any education for their municipal councillors.

However, 261 municipalities sent us information in the form of written replies, programmes, plans, or educational materials for the education they had already organised or were about to organise in the near future. The sample was composed of municipalities of various sizes located in all parts of the country. This enabled us to gain a broad, yet detailed, overview of education organised for municipal councillors in Swedish municipalities.

Similarities and differences started to emerge when we browsed and more systematically processed all the programmes and plans we had collected. To gain a deeper understanding of the material, we employed thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 79) as a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail”. For us, this meant recognising certain patterns more fully in relation to educational content, the selection of educational activities, and the choice of education providers. This was a way to sort the variations that we had initially observed. This procedure allowed us to find clear divergences in some areas although many aspects overlapped.

The second component of data collection was achieved through interviews. In October 2018, we conducted an interview with an official working on planning and organising education in the *Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions* (SKR).¹ This initial interview was conducted to gain a national overview of the situation in local municipalities and to more closely understand the role played by SKR. Five interviews were conducted with local administrators and one former municipal commissioner in five different municipalities between December 2018 and May 2019. The selection of these municipalities was based on our initial processing of programmes and plans, which led to the observation that those municipalities had reached different educational designs and solutions.

Most interviews were conducted in an office in the City Hall where the local administrator was based, and one took place online through Microsoft Teams. The interviews were conducted in order to enhance our understanding of the prior deliberation and the range of factors that influenced the planning and implementation of educational programmes. The interviews lasted 30–90 min and were all recorded and transcribed verbatim.

All transcripts were coded using the NVivo programme which, according to Hoover and Koerber (2011, p. 78), offers “benefits in the areas of efficiency, multiplicity, and transparency [which] have added a depth and a rigor to our projects that we would have been hard-pressed to achieve with a more traditional method”. Using NVivo thus constituted an efficient means of gaining both an overview of the empirical material and also easy access to various details.

When analysing the transcripts and the different codes that we had developed, we observed recurring patterns in the ways in which the local administrators reasoned or legitimised certain decisions or choices regarding the educational designs or solutions they used. As these kept recurring, we decided to use the concept of lines of reasoning to describe them. These lines of reasoning are analytical tools that can help us to understand why municipalities may design education in differing ways.

¹The Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions changed its name in Swedish in November 2019, resulting in its abbreviation changing from SKL to SKR.

Theoretical Perspective

To deepen our understanding of the reasoning behind the lines of reasoning distilled through the thematic analyse, we drew on theoretical insights developed in the field of public administration research. These theoretical insights will be further developed in this section.

The relationship between politicians and public administration has been extensively discussed (cf. e.g., Doig, 1983; Georgiou, 2014; Yang & Holzer, 2005). The classical view on the relationship between elected officials and administrative officials makes a clear distinction: elected politicians formulate policies and the administration impartially implements (Wilson, 1887). This notion, which has also gained a strong foothold as a normative ideal, has long been questioned in empirical studies, which instead assert that the relationship is much more complex and that these limits are often exceeded. Officials are involved in various ways in the development of policy, and elected representatives are involved in issues that are handled by the administration. The Dichotomy-Duality Model (Svara, 1985), which incorporates the four dimensions of mission, policy, administration, and management, sheds light on the variability and complexities related to the roles and responsibilities in governing and policy processes. The model specifies these four dimensions as part of the governmental process and illuminates that the spheres of activity between council and administrators may vary between contexts. According to Hansen and Ejersbo (2002, p. 737), “the boundaries within and among the four dimensions are fluid and overlap, varying over time and among cases”, which is construed as one of the advantages of the model.

In later work, Svara (1999, 2001) came to put more emphasis on a complementarity view. This view is “based on the premise that elected officials and administrators join together in the common pursuit of sound governance. Complementarity entails separate parts, but parts that come together in a mutually supportive way” (2001, p. 179). The complementarity view has been empirically tested by e.g., Demir (2009) who finds support for the view and argues for a continuum of policy and administration activities. Although a certain momentum has been noted for the complementarity perspective, this does not exclude the possibility of dichotomous relations being embodied to some degree or quality (Georgiou, 2014).

Jacobsen also (2006, p. 304) points out the importance of “studying the relationship between politics and administration in dynamic turns, as something that may change over time”. Hansen and Ejersbo (2002) introduce a logic of disharmony to characterise complex interactions. They state that politicians follow an inductive logic of action and administrators a deductive logic of action. The conclusion they draw is that the “logic of disharmony emphasizes the dynamic, conflict-oriented and dialectical interaction between politicians and administrators” (p. 749). This relationship is described as dynamic and dialectical, which implies the emergence of contextual configurations that can vary.

Introductory Education for Municipal Councillors in Sweden

Sweden currently has 12,712 municipal councillor seats in 290 municipalities. The people that are elected shoulder a substantial individual and collective responsibility. The decisions that they take affect 20–25% of Swedish GDP and the over 750,000 persons employed by the 290 municipalities (Erlingsson 2017, p. 91). Ninety-seven per cent of all elected municipal councillors conduct their political work in their spare time (SKL, 2019). The introductory education is normally offered at the beginning of each term and, according to the municipalities, aims to provide necessary knowledge and skills to meet the responsibilities that follow with the position.

The design and organisation of the introductory education for municipal councillors are characterised by a degree of decentralisation. In most cases, the responsibility is delegated to one or a few local administrators in the municipal administration. Although these administrators must respect financial constraints and anchor their proposal with the political or administrative leadership, in

practice, they enjoy a substantial degree of discretionary power. In the following section we will provide a brief overview of content, educational providers as well as activities.

Educational Content

A high degree of similarity was found in the content of the educational programmes. This was not surprising because municipalities are formally constructed in a uniform way. Their formal organisation is to be in accordance with the constitutional laws, and they are bound by the same national or international legislation.

The theme that appeared most frequently in the programmes was the authority, competence, and organisation of the municipality. This means clarifying the formal aspects of the local democratic system and its responsibilities towards citizens or the state. Different pieces of legislation govern the competence of the municipalities and what municipal councillors are allowed or not allowed to do. This implies specific national or EU legislation that conditions and affects the actual exercise of local self-governance in a municipality.

Another common element in the programmes is the role of an elected representative and the responsibilities, rights and obligations that follow from the role. This can be practical knowledge, such as how meeting sessions are organised, or how, where, and when different matters are handled, as well as municipal crisis management. Issues regarding the interplay between elected representatives and citizens and the public administration are also often discussed. In particular, the distribution of roles between municipal councillors and the public administration, appeared to constitute a substantial issue.

The programmes also provided education on more practical skills or competencies considered to be important know-how. This included education in ICT, how to handle social media, and personal availability to the general public. Other items that have been integrated into the programmes relate to threats and violence to elected representatives, ecological and social sustainability, digitisation, economic growth, and trends for the future.

Educational Providers

We identified three main categories of education providers: external experts, local administrators, and politicians. External experts comprised two sub-groups. The first sub-group was private consultants, legal firms, or public relations agencies. They offered pre-designed and standardised programmes throughout the country and their services were procured by certain municipalities. The other sub-group comprised academic staff from universities or research centres, in other words, professionals from the academic world or people working in the public sphere.

Local administrators constitute another category of people who provide education. They normally represent and present the bailiwick in which they work in the public administration. This might encompass, for example, professionals in educational or environmental areas, or staff in strategic positions.

The final sub-group of education providers that we identified comprised current or former politicians. In many cases, their involvement was limited to giving a brief speech welcoming new councillors to the introductory programme or summarising at the end of the day. However, in some programmes, politicians were also invited to give lectures about communication, how to uphold decent inter-party relations, or how to conduct a suitable political discussion.

The most prevalent constellations and combinations of different categories of educational providers, are either local administrators or external experts as the sole educational provider, or a combination of both. Politicians were integrated into a comparatively small number of programmes.

Educational Activities

Lectures given in a rather one-directional way were the most common and prevalent feature of the educational activities. These lectures were given by different categories of providers. This corresponds to a significant degree of the traditionally dominant mode of delivery in academia. It was much less common to include participatory or group-based approaches, or to incorporate explicitly social activities into the programme.

Different Lines of Reasoning When Designing Education

Based on our interviews with the local administrators in the municipalities who were responsible for designing, deciding, and organising the introductory education for elected representatives, we were able to distinguish three different ways of explaining and justifying a particular educational design. We have chosen to label these as different lines of reasoning encompassing system-oriented, relationship-oriented, and market-oriented lines. These are three analytically distinct lines of reasoning that represent different ways of legitimising the design of education.

According to Larsson (2006), the justification for the various choices that underlie an educational design and teaching situation is a central part of what characterises a specific pedagogy. It can help us to understand why education is organised as it is and reasons for the choices that have been made. Thus, by focusing on lines of reasoning, it was possible to clarify the ways in which local administrators in the municipalities reasoned and legitimised their decisions when deciding upon specific solutions to the content, form, and implementation of education for municipal councillors.

It should be noted, however, that these were not mutually exclusive ways of reasoning and justifying education but can occur to varying degrees within the same design. At the same time, certain lines of reasoning were more accentuated in relation to certain forms of educational design. For example, the justification we call market-oriented, where education is described as a service that is purchased on the basis of economic considerations on the market, was more prevalent in situations where education was outsourced and solely organised by external experts.

System-Oriented Line of Reasoning

The most important point in this line of reasoning is that education is to provide the recently elected councillors with knowledge and understanding of how the municipality is organised and their role in the local democratic system. The line of reasoning is based on the formal system of laws, rules and established procedures that govern formal work in the municipalities. Education was, consequently, justified on the grounds that there is a formal system that politicians must know about and that their role within this system provides them with responsibilities, obligations, and rights. This was said to be important for the formal democratic and administrative system to function properly.

For example, in the following quote, a local administrator deliberates on why this is seen as important:

Help them to understand their role and what mandate they have and don't have and who it is that governs and so on. Decisions ought to be as correct as possible and they should feel comfortable in their roles, and we should be able to cooperate as well as possible.

This example illustrates that the education is to provide elected members with facts and understanding so that they will be able to make decisions in a correct way in accordance with the rule of law. The education was thus primarily about clarifying the formal framework in which their work would take place during their term. This applies both to national legislation applicable to the municipal situation and in relation to local organisational structures and established practices.

In the interviews, local administrators expressed different ideas about the actual relation between the formal framework and the role of elected representatives within the municipality. However, one recurring point was related to elucidating the relationship or division of roles between the local administration and elected representatives. Education was designed to introduce politicians to their responsibilities and to clarify the boundaries of who is supposed to do what in the local governance and policy processes.

One way to illustrate this boundary was what local administrators referred to as “detail issues”. These kinds of issues, regardless how they are defined, are construed as the responsibility of the local administration. Instead of getting involved in details, politicians are to learn to focus on broad visions and long-term goals. The fact that politicians are supposed to learn not to exceed their powers and to follow an established order of decision-making is articulated in the quote below:

So, you don't think like that: “Yes, but as a politician, yes but then I can certainly decide that a community youth centre should be built in this [residential area]”, that's not how things work. That they know about their frames above all, what rights you have to initiate something [...] Put simply, what the frames, ((35:31)) obligations, and rights are; those are also extremely important, and something we inform them about as well.

In this example, relating to building a new community youth centre, the perceived need for education on a division of roles and maintaining a formal order is expressed.

Relationship-Oriented Line of Reasoning

A recurring, albeit less frequent, reason why the programmes were designed as they were, was to integrate the more personal and relational aspects of the role of elected representative in the education. Themes such as “Conversational tone” recurred in several educational programmes. In one programme, we found the heading “Social forms of politics”. The interviewees referred to perceived problems that occurred during previous terms relating to how people in the municipal arena interacted with each other. This concerns relationships among politicians from different parties but also relations between politicians and the local administration. These problems were construed as a reason for integrating social and relational components in the design of these programmes.

One local administrator described the development of trust and an appropriate conversational climate as reasons for organising the education in the way they did. A significant portion of the education was built around a model in which participants were divided into small groups where politicians from different parties were mixed. In these groups, politicians were allowed to move around the municipal hall according to a rotating schedule and to meet different administrative departments within the local administration;

We probably wanted mixed groups to ... so that they talk to each other in a, in a, in a tone and get an understanding of each other in a way that [...] No, but simply that they should be able to relate to the work in a common way, even if they have different ideological stances. And to gain respect for each other. And hopefully this will affect their tone and willingness to interact in a, in a dignified and positive way. So being able to distinguish between issue and person, really, was the purpose.

The fact that the participants were expected to go around in the municipality in mixed groups was intended to allow them to become familiar with the building and to enable informal conversations within the interparty groups. Integrating this kind of educational activity was thus legitimised as an intention to foster and develop relationships among politicians. Facilitating conversations in smaller groups was also described as intended to foster positive relations between staff working in the public administration and individual politicians.

And we've had problems [in the municipality] previously that this hasn't worked, there's been a lack of trust on some occasions. And then we saw this education as our opportunity to create a platform for enabling this trust [between local administration and politicians], which is so important for the machinery to function over time.

The purpose of creating good relationships and trust is emphasised as central in this quotation. However, this was not explicitly stated in the programme for the current introductory education in the municipality where this local administrator worked. It is through the form, thus the educational arrangement as designed in the programme, that fertile relations are supposed to be facilitated.

The relationship-building components of the programme in some other municipalities were explicitly integrated. One programme had the item “Social forms of politics”. Several municipalities addressed the theme “Conversation climate in politics” in their introductory education programmes. Social interaction also appeared to be an important aspect of programmes that included more participatory and group-based activities. A very small number of municipalities had also planned social activities, such as guided tours or visits within the region, as part of their educational programme. We interpreted this as relationship-building and social interaction, which were the prominent reasons behind the legitimisation of this educational design.

Market-Oriented Line of Reasoning

The standardised education for elected representatives that is available in the form of services that can be procured from private consultants or companies was addressed by the majority of the interviewees. The decision to employ a pre-designed educational package was justified in terms of financial considerations, and that it constituted an efficient solution considering, for example, time constraints. In some cases, this approach also became the starting point for explaining and justifying why an individual municipality chose this solution.

Then it may happen that we hire someone if an offer pops up. SKL had some kind of offer on education about hatred and threats against elected representatives, so maybe we'll go for that if it's something that doesn't cost much. But it depends a little on ... what's actually being offered.

These economic considerations are commonly combined with the more formal or relationship-oriented lines of reasoning discussed above. However, as this was also used as a way to justify the use of external providers, this can be understood as a market-oriented form of reasoning. The municipality restricts its role to that of the purchaser of a commodity that is available through the market at a certain price.

It was also possible to detect this line of reasoning in our interview with a local administrator in the *Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions*, an organisation that regularly provides education to municipalities around the country. The person in the quote below deliberates over how education ought to be packaged in order to better meet the demand that is conceived to exist in the municipalities:

I think we may need to package it in a different way. And then you might be able to coordinate more, for example, if you buy this package, then this will be included, and then you may get a better total price, but it will be more expensive if you only choose one of the tracks, for example.

The reasoning concerns the supply of education where composition and marketing value are important attributes that reflect an understanding of an established education market where consumers make decisions on the basis of economic rationality.

Concluding Discussion

Although elected representatives play a central role in democratic systems, education that is organised to introduce these persons to their mandates has not been extensively addressed in research so far. We tried to respond to this gap with this study. Our main interest was trying to understand why education is designed as it is by Swedish municipalities and which justifications are presented to legitimize decisions taken for different solutions. Our results show three different lines of reasoning that help to explain and justify different educational designs. The findings of this study reconnect to

the potentiality of a democratic dilemma in the organisation of introductory education for elected representatives.

The line of reasoning that we call system-oriented is a prevalent way to justify education being designed. This line is also reflected in educational content in which a substantial part deals with the formal aspects of the local democratic system: rules, responsibilities, and role distributions. Knowledge about these formal elements is delivered by local administrators or external experts mainly through lectures. Thus, the interpretation of how the formal system is supposed to work or how roles are defined is mainly presented from the side of the local administration. There is limited scope for questions or joint deliberations. The system-oriented line of reasoning can be addressed from the perspective of the Dichotomy-Dual Model (Svara, 1985). Based on this line of reasoning, elected representatives are supposed to learn their obligations and the limitations of their mandate in the formal system. Their focus is to be on broad missions and visions, and they must learn not to micro-manage or get involved with details related to the other dimensions of the model. The design of education may thus generate opportunities for the local administration to push the delicate borderline between politics and administration in a certain direction. The design of the education can also be related to the deductive logic of action proposed by Hansen and Ejersbo (2002). They state (p. 738) that “The basis for administrative actions is general statements of laws, rules, objective and values”. This is contrasted by the inductive logic of politicians who develop a general attitude and understanding based on experiences from specific cases and work in progress. Education that is designed based on the system-oriented line of reasoning reflects a deductive logic with an interpretation of the formal system and its limitations from the perspective of the local administration. However, in reference to the proposed inductive logic of politicians, the educational needs of municipal councillors could be conceptualised in a different manner. Instead of designing education based on the idea of pointing out general rules and limitations of the formal system, it is possible to imagine a design focusing on how the system could be used to solve specific problems or to realise certain policy goals set by local politicians. Such an inductive approach could, for example, be stimulated with case work discussions or allowing for joint deliberations in which different interpretations are contrasted. The learning outcome may be different if one contrasts listening to an expert about the meaning of a specific piece of legislation with a discussion with colleagues about how the legislation is to be interpreted when handling a concrete case in a local situation. As was demonstrated in this paper, education that reflects an inductive logic of action is not common in the education that the Swedish municipalities design and offer to their municipal councillors. This logic of disharmony, which is reflected in the design of the education that is provided, reconnects to the potential tensions between politicians and the local administration that have noted in relation to the Swedish context (Högberg, 2007; Bergström et al., 2008; Lennquist-Lindén, 2010). However, the relevance of these observations extends beyond this context as Nicholson-Crotty (2009, p. 611) has stated that “Modern theories of administration and management have continued to suggest that public managers are not only shaped by, but also have an important role in shaping, both the institutional and policy context in which their organisations exist”. Constructing or transforming roles and relations through introductory education may be one way to shape or form institutional and policy contexts.

Another way municipalities justify the design of education is the relationship-oriented way of reasoning. Fruitful relations should be fostered not only among politicians but also with the local administration. From the perspective of the local administration, it could be argued that there is an underlying strategic interest in fostering these kinds of relationships. Given that politicians accept their designated roles within a local formal system, fostering positive relationships among representatives from other parties will increase stability and the sustainability of long-term goals and missions. This could be contrasted with a situation where political parties are on a less friendly basis and where the political goals of the municipality may change following the most recent election. Thus, enabling a positive climate and suitable conversational tone among local parties will also create more favourable work conditions for the local administration.

Part of this process is fostering good relationships between the local administration and politicians, assuming that the latter group has accepted its role within the local democratic system as it was designed. Efforts to foster positive relations may also be a way to counteract the “shock” to the formal system that elections can imply, according to Jacobsen (2006). Seen in this light, introductory education may be a way to accommodate newcomers into a formal system which has been established.

The market-oriented line of reasoning may be understood in relation to the deductive logic of the administration, in the sense that it reflects an aim to “smooth” the functioning of the municipal system. It would thus allow for the administrators work to work in a more predictable manner. The market-oriented line of reasoning is construed as an efficient way to solve the task of organising education by outsourcing, thus giving local administrators time to focus on other duties.

The observations made in this paper raise some new questions that may be of interest to future research. One potential question concerns the discursive element of the education being provided. Which ideas or preferences define when roles are defined and boundaries drawn between politicians and a local administration? The power of interpretation that this entails may have an impact on how a local democracy works and how elected representatives come to perceive what is possible to do through political work in the municipal arena. More detailed analyses of the actual content of the municipal introductory education programmes could generate insights into the discursive dimension and scope and limitations for agency in the local democratic system. Our study indicates that differences do exist between municipalities in this respect. Some questions that may be explored and problematised in future research are to investigate how substantial these differences are, and how these differences can be justified within the same national democratic system.

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