

## CHAPTER 12

# The difference that makes a difference?

Exploring the purple zone of political and administrative leadership in Danish and Norwegian local government

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter is based on a study of political and administrative leadership in Danish and Norwegian local governments. While the two neighbouring countries share a similar governance tradition, making them suitable for a most similar comparative design, there is one important difference regarding the interaction between political and administrative leadership: while Danish mayors are formal leaders of the municipal administrations, Norwegian mayors are only leaders of the council. In this chapter, we explore to what extent such formal differences have an impact upon the perceptions political and administrative leaders have about the everyday relation between politics and administration. Empirically, the analysis draws on data from in-depth qualitative interviews with a set of Danish and Norwegian top political and administrative leaders in municipalities, all of which have recently implemented institutional changes to their leadership that actualise the relation between political and administrative leadership.*

*Keywords: local government, politics and administration, leadership, mayor, Nordic countries.*

## INTRODUCTION

Across the countries of Europe, the institutional environments surrounding political and administrative leadership in local government vary and are developing in both divergent and convergent ways (Jacobsen 2012; Heinelt et al., 2018; Vetter and Kersting, 2003). This chapter reports results from a recent study of political and administrative leadership in Danish and Norwegian municipalities. Although being neighbouring countries with an almost similar governance tradition, there is *one* important difference regarding the interaction between politics and administration: While Danish mayors are formal leaders of the municipal administration, Norwegian mayors are only leaders of the council. In the Norwegian system, a hired Chief Municipal Executive (CME) holds the formal leadership over the administration and the mayor can only instruct the municipal administration through formal decisions taken in the council. The two countries are, therefore, ideally suited for a comparative study exploring the impact of this particular institutional variation.

Intra-national Danish and Norwegian studies point to a plurality in how political and administrative leaders perceive and practice their roles within the two countries (Berg & Kjær, 2007; Jacobsen, 1996; Klausen, 2010; Mikalsen & Bjørnå, 2015). Yet, while the difference in the formal role of the mayor has been

highlighted in comparative studies of legal frameworks (Sletnes 2015), scholars have to a lesser extent explored the practical implications of the formal difference in terms of power, influence, and daily leadership following a comparative design. Our main objective here is to address this apparent gap by providing new knowledge on how this difference in the formal roles of the mayor impacts on the interaction between political and administrative leadership. However, rather than constructing a randomised causal test of the practical implications of such institutional differences, we take a more open approach. Well aware of the many contextual, institutional and individual factors that may influence daily life practices, our main research question can be stated as: *How is the interaction between political and administrative leadership perceived by local political and administrative leaders in Denmark and Norway, and to what extent do these perceptions express institutional differences in formal roles?*

In our study, we conducted qualitative interviews with the mayors and highest-appointed administrative leaders in four Norwegian and four Danish municipalities. Accordingly, we addressed the above research question from the viewpoint of the leaders forming the critical “apex” of political and administrative leadership (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002). By analysing similarities and differences in how these leaders understand their roles and interaction, we provide interesting insight to both cross-national and intranational variations in how the relationship between politics and administration is understood by these central actors in the two countries.

The chapter proceeds as follows. In the next section, we introduce both classical and novel theoretical perspectives on the interaction between politics and administration that we have found relevant to our analysis. After a note on methods and case selection, the analysis section will discuss the eight cases in cross-national pairs organised by recent institutional changes implemented in these municipalities that have actuated discussions on the relation between politics and administration. In the concluding section, we sum up the empirical analysis and point out some questions for further research.

## ON POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP

The interaction between political and administrative leadership is perhaps one of the most classical topics of political science (see Pierre et al., 2013; Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman, 1981). While Woodrow Wilson (1887) and Max Weber’s (1919) convergent principles of a politics-administration dichotomy are frequently quoted interchangeably, it is worth noting the classical theorists’ differing emphases on the two main functions of this division. While Wilson argued that *politics should stay out of administrative tasks*, thus allowing

the development of an autonomous bureaucracy relieved of the spoils system corrupting his contemporary American context, Weber stressed the need for political control that could strain the advancing European bureaucracies' inexorable quest for autonomous power by keeping *administration out of politics* (Sager and Rosser, 2009).

These differences reflect an inherent tension between the multiple roles that the modern bureaucracy is expected to fulfil. While political leaders' role in a society is to represent the citizens and to solve any emerging challenge, administration – or bureaucracy – has a more mixed set of partly conflicting roles (Jacobsen 1996; Aberbach, Putnam et al., 1981; Pierre et al., 2015). First, the public bureaucracy is expected to be *politically loyal* to the governing political coalition. At the same time, we also expect bureaucrats to be *politically neutral*, not to take any political decisions, or to reveal any political sympathies during their service in bureaucracy. Finally, we expect bureaucrats to be *professionally independent*, taking their decisions based on professional knowhow and technology, and to raise the alarm whenever political leaders make decisions or suggestions that collide with professional standards. The three different roles will often conflict. For example, it is hard to believe that a bureaucrat can be both professional, independent and loyal in any situation; neither is it possible to combine loyalty and neutrality in one single situation. However, even if these bureaucratic roles are in conflict, it is argued that the conflict cannot and should not be resolved. Rather, we need to see these roles as expressions of the different and conflicting values related to the public sector with which the everyday operations of the public sector will have to deal (Jørgensen and Bozeman, 2007).

Turning to the political side, newer contributions on political leadership have argued that power based on coercion needs to be supplemented by more discursive forms of power (Sørensen and Torfing, 2016). Significantly, Robert C. Tucker (1995) argued that political leadership consists in the construction of a political community with a collective political identity and destiny, and a willingness to be led. This type of leadership therefore involves three main functions: The *formulation of a problem diagnosis* that calls for political action, the *proposition of a political strategy* for solving this problem, and the *mobilisation of support* for the political leader among the members of the political community. In short, this means that we cannot delimit political leadership to decision making alone but should also include problem definition and implementation.

Following classic institutional theory, the literature on administrative and political leadership commonly, yet often implicitly, argues that these roles and how they interact can be designed (Bentzen, Lo & Winsvold, 2020; Peters, 1999). Based on the degree of separation between politics and administration and the

ranking of politics versus administration, three different ideal models for organising the relationship between political leaders and administrative actors often inform the discussion on the organisation of these tensions in local government (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002; Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman, 1981). The first is *the separate roles model*, implying that politics and administration are two different and separate spheres, with administration formally subordinate to politics (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002, p. 31). This model emphasises the *neutrality* of administration in the context of political parties and political preferences and interpreted through the lenses of Tucker's (1995) aforementioned functions, the *formulation of problem diagnosis* as well as the *proposal of political strategy* will take place within the administrative sphere, while elected leaders will have their main role related to the mobilisation of political support. In other words, political leadership will be restricted to formal decision-making.

In a similar vein, *the autonomous administrator model* understands administration as an activity separated from politics, but administration is subordinate to politics to a lesser extent (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002, p. 35). Political leaders make the overall decisions based on problems defined by the bureaucrats, and the alternative solutions among which political leaders will choose have all been developed by the administration. This model emphasises the professional *expertise* held by administrative actors. Hence, both the *formulation of problems* and the *searching for political strategies* will be tasks for administrative leaders based on their professional expertise. Since the emphasis put on professional expertise will often involve devolution from political bodies to administrative agencies, administrative leaders will also be involved in the process of *mobilising political support*, and in *making decisions*.

Finally, in *the responsive administrator model* the bureaucrats have a clearer subordinate role compared to political leaders, and the separation between the two functions is less clear (Mouritzen and Svara, 2002, p. 36). This model implies that political norms and values will pervade administration, partly as a result of elected politicians having a formal role as leaders of administrative staff and partly as a result of employed bureaucrats acting as a political secretariat for political leaders. In this model, the administration's political *loyalty* has been maximised. Contrary to the models mentioned previously, the latter model represents a less clear division between elected politicians and administrative leaders, and political and administrative leaders will act jointly to fill the three main functions of political leadership.

The three ideal models demonstrate how tensions built into the bureaucracy also have influence upon their counterparts – the elected political leaders. To some extent the division of power among elected political leaders and their administration is a zero-sum game. Ideas about bureaucracy that maximise

the independent-expert dimension of administration, as e.g., managerialism does (Pierre, 2011), will likely not allow political leadership to the same extent that ideas maximising bureaucrats as loyal servants do.

While such ideal models may provide a useful tool for institutional design of organisational structures and roles, reality will of course be characterised by a more provisional mix of traditions and beliefs that inform the enactment of both political and administrative leadership (Rhodes, 2017). While not denying that a clear-cut delineation may be an adequate goal and description in some cases, Alford et al. (2017) suggested that the notion of a “line” demarking the domains of politics and administration should be supplemented by the notion of a “purple zone”. The “purple zone” indicates a variable approach where the “red” activities of politics and “blue” activities of administration overlap. Accordingly, rather than searching for a one-size-fits-all delineation, the perspective proposed by Alford et al. advocates an approach focused on the interaction between political and administrative leadership which will vary according to circumstances.

The following analysis will explore how the interaction between political and administrative leadership is perceived by local political and administrative leaders in Denmark and Norway. In the theoretical terms outlined above, the position of Danish mayors as formal leaders over the administration can be argued to represent an example of the *responsive administration* model, while the Norwegian system of having a hired Chief Municipal Executive is closer to the *autonomous administration* model (Aberbach, Putnam et al., 1981; Mouritzen and Svava 2002, p. 43).

While the models mentioned above should be understood as ideal types (Ringer, 1997), empirical investigations would, however, be expected to find a significant amount of variation with elements of all three models characterising the two countries. In addition, while departing from these models, one could expect local top-leaders to express some relatively clear ideas about the line between politics and administration. However, following the conception of a purple zone, we would expect local top-leaders to express significant uncertainty about the line between politics and administration, while perhaps having clearer ideas about where the purple zone starts and ends.

## CASES, METHODS AND DATA

In the following empirical analysis, we compare Norway and Denmark. The two countries are usually treated as “most similar system” and until 1814 were parts of one kingdom. Through their historical interconnection, the two countries share many cultural characteristics including a very similar written language

(Knutson, 2017). Both countries also belong to a common governance tradition in which the municipalities are core welfare providers under a universal and national welfare state regime (Heinelt et al., 2018; Røiseland and Vabo, 2020). Local government functions are almost similar, while as mentioned, there is a significant difference related to the formal role of the mayor and the mayor's formal relation to the municipal administration. Thus, our overall design when choosing national contexts is a good example of "most similar systems design" which presupposes inter-system similarity between two or more cases and variation in a key intra-system variable (Przeworski, 1987).

As briefly explained in the introduction, the Norwegian mayors chair the council and can only instruct the municipal administration through formal decisions taken in the council, while a hired Chief Municipal Executive (CME) is the formal leader of the administration. The roles of the mayor and the CME are clearly defined in the Norwegian Local Government Act. In the case of Denmark, the mayor not only chairs the council, he/she is also the formal head of the administration. While the Norwegian legislation frames an hourglass-like relationship between politics and administration, where the two spheres meet in the roles of the mayor and the CME, the Danish framework allows a "thicker" relationship between the two spheres (see Mikalsen and Bjørnå, 2015; Berg and Kjær, 2007).

The data for the following analysis are qualitative interviews with the mayor and the CME in four Danish and four Norwegian municipalities. When choosing municipalities for this analysis, we have not followed the conventional strategy, which aims to construct a representative sample. Rather, we have chosen the cases among a set of municipalities that have recently initiated and introduced institutional changes that in some way have implications for the relation between politics and administration. These changes, which are made within the legal frames defined by national legislation, have either challenged the local relationship between politics and administration or at least, led to some discussions and reflections among the local actors involved. We consider this strategy to correspond to what Seawright and Gerring (2008) conceptualised as the "influential" cross-case method of case selection, where the selected cases contain some influential configurations of possible relevant variables, while not necessarily being representative as such.

The cases were identified based on a rigorous mapping of Norwegian and Danish local governments that had taken extraordinary actions to strengthen political leadership and democracy. Among 43 possible cases, four cases in each country were selected in order to display variation in design changes, where one in each country represented a similar type of effort. We will therefore discuss

the cases in pairs and will explain the type of effort during the analysis. The eight cases and their institutional change are listed in Table 12.1 below.

**TABLE 12.1:** Types of efforts and institutional changes in eight cases

Type of effort	Institutional change	Municipality	Population	Nationality
Emphasising the separation between political and administrative leadership	Mayor and Committee leaders make proposals	Fredrikstad	81,000	NO
	Committee for finances consists of leaders of standing committees	Esbjerg	115,700	DK
Develop holistic policy development	Facilitating councillors' active participation in budget processes	Hjartdal	1,600	NO
	Common pre-meeting for members of standing committees	Hedensted	46,500	DK
Co-creation strategies	Team of resource persons set up to deal with specific local issues	Steinkjer	30,000	NO
	Co-creation projects	Guldborgsund	61,200	DK
Politicians as hands-on policy developers	Ad hoc committees with councillors and citizens	Svelvik	6,400	NO
	Ad hoc committees with councillors and citizens	Gentofte	74,500	DK

Besides documents and information online about the effort made, data for this paper consist of 16 extensive interviews with the mayor and the CME in the eight municipalities conducted in 2017. The hour-long interviews followed a semi-structured guide focussing on the institutional change made and more general thoughts, attitudes and perspectives on political leadership and the political-administrative relationship.

## ANALYSIS

In this section, we will present the eight cases in four pairs. Each pair is presented by first explaining the institutional change made, followed by a section dealing with how the actors (Mayor and CME) conceptualise the political-administrative relationship. For each pair, we also try to point out how and to what extent the institutional change relates to actors' view on politics versus administration. This latter discussion takes its point of departure in (neo) institutional theory, emphasising the interrelationship between actors and formal organisation.



### PAIR ONE: EMPHASISING THE SEPARATION – FREDRIKSTAD AND ESBJERG

Both Norwegian Fredrikstad and Danish Esbjerg have introduced measures aimed at strengthening the role of top political leaders. In Fredrikstad, this was done by institutionalising the right of the mayor and committee leaders to propose decisions in the case documents distributed to the councillors or committee members prior to their respective meetings. Formerly, as is normal in most Norwegian municipalities, the case documents would only have a proposed decision formulated by the CME. By doing so, Fredrikstad has adapted an arrangement that is considered a standard procedure in Denmark.

In Esbjerg, the role of the Committee of Finance (Økonomiudvalget) has been strengthened by including all the leaders of the other standing committees as members. Thus, the Committee for Finance has become the central arena for coordination and policy development in the municipality. The arrangement is presumed to accentuate political leadership through more coherent and competent political processes.

In both Fredrikstad and Esbjerg, the institutional changes are explained as a means towards making political leadership more pronounced and distinct from administration, thus promoting the ideal of separate roles. In the Danish case, the mayor emphasised the need to maintain a distinct political role despite being formal head of the administration. In this effort, the mayor had also chosen to abstain from participating in the meetings held by top administrative leaders (Direktionsmøter). As the mayor explains:

It is an art, really, to avoid being sucked into the administrative part, and become part of the daily running (...). Before entering my present position, I was wisely advised to: Never forget you are a politician! (Mayor, Esbjerg, Denmark)

Similarly, the Danish CME also emphasised the importance of maintaining separate roles.

The mayor is, fortunately, conscious about not being an administrator. "(...) As an administrator – we have talked it through several times – it is my duty to keep the business running, while he must handle the political dimension, including the political parties" (CME, Esbjerg, Denmark).

While the Norwegian mayor in Fredrikstad also argued in favour of a distinction between political and administrative roles in principle, he also maintained that in practice the demarcation was less clear-cut:

In my day-to-day function as mayor, I do not give it too much thought. But my opinion is that it is not watertight and it's not always easy to claim one thing

as politics or administration. A solution is talking together [the CME and the mayor] (...). But I do not experience any sort of doubt about what is the CME's responsibility and what is the responsibility of politics (Mayor, Fredrikstad, Norway).

Emphasising this pragmatic interplay, the Norwegian mayor went on to suggest that the separation between politics and administration is mainly a procedural and internal matter. As the mayor explained, "People and public opinion do not see the difference between a proposal from a CME and a proposal from a mayor". In both cases, the mayor argued, most people would conceive case proposals as something that "the *municipality* was about to promote". Somewhat paradoxically, the mayor therefore also saw the new arrangement as a way of aligning politics and administration in the view of the general public that, in some cases, allowed the municipality to stay clear of unnecessary conflict and turmoil by allowing the mayor to alter controversial proposals made by the CME.

#### PAIR TWO: PROMOTING HOLISTIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT – HJARTDAL AND HEDENSTED

Hjartdal and Hedensted have introduced measures promoting holistic policy development by encouraging politicians to have a cross-sectorial outlook in all policy processes. While several of the institutional changes in the Danish cases included an ideal of promoting holistic political representativeness, the *dialogue meetings* introduced in Hedensted provide a particularly pronounced illustration of this ideal. The dialogue meetings are scheduled prior to the ordinary committee meetings and allow the committee members to have discussion about any issue brought forward by the politicians. The dialogue meetings were framed as a tool to ensure dialogue among the councillors and thereby coordinate issues across committees and political parties. Moreover, the mayor emphasised the dialogue meetings as an effort to avoid over-specialised committee members:

As a member of a committee, you usually tend to see yourself as part of the sector served by the committee. But in the end, you're not an expert, you're a politician. It's been important to me to get the politicians back on this political track again (Mayor, Hedensted, Denmark).

Since administrative leaders are invited and allowed to speak, the meeting is also seen as a means towards encouraging dialogue between politicians and the administrative leadership. The CME of Hedensted, in particular, emphasised the

dialog meetings as important in building trust between political and administrative leadership.

In Norwegian Hjartdal, the aim is more restricted to the Executive Committee and the role of the councillors participating in the annual budget discussion. Budget discussions tend to be complex and rather technical. In order to empower the committee members and to allow for a more holistic discussion over the annual budget, the municipality of Hjartdal has introduced an arrangement where it is the Executive Committee that formally proposes a budget to the council, and not the CME, which is the most common Norwegian model.

In both municipalities, the interviewed mayors and CMEs emphasised politics and administration as clearly separate spheres. In Hedensted, the mayor understands her leading role as that of a representative of the citizens in the large public bureaucracy:

I'm the upper leader of a large organisation, but I also realise that there is a line between my role and that of the CME (...). This line needs to be there. But I am the citizen's representative and voice in this large organisation (Mayor, Hedensted, Denmark).

The Norwegian mayor expressed similar ideas regarding representing the municipality's citizens, but also emphasised his own role in securing a unifying political climate. He criticised the tendency among some politicians to represent particular parts or interests in the municipality and emphasised the importance of appearing unified in important cases. In some cases, he argued, this made it necessary to vote against one's own conviction in the effort to ensure a public image of consensus. As he explains about one particular incident where he had done so:

In this case, we had a large group of people to which we had to demonstrate that we stand united in the decisions we make (...) I thought it would have been unfortunate to have seven or eight votes against. It finally became a 14 against 1 vote. And to state it clearly, I completely agreed with the councillor voting against. I did voice my opinion. But it would have been utterly meaningless, when you know that you have lost a case, to provoke it any further [by voting against it] (Mayor, Hjartdal, Norway).

The Norwegian CME also stressed the need to appear unified. However, he noted that there was a tendency among local politicians to have the administration publicly represent controversial issues, and thus saw the new arrangement

as instrumental towards having the politicians take leadership by forcing them to propose the (often controversial) budget:

Some [politicians] told me that “you are making us responsible”. So, in a way, part of it is that they have to take [responsibility], they can’t keep pushing the CME in front of themselves. (...). In a way, it is OK from my point of view, being in the role of the CME, it is OK for me to bring in unpopular proposals. My argument has been that it also creates an unnecessary turmoil among citizens and employees (CME, Hjartdal, Norway).

Similar to the mayor in Fredrikstad, the CME in Hjartdal saw the promotion of a more pronounced political leadership as a way of unifying political and administrative leadership in the effort to avoid the municipal leadership giving conflicting signals.

### PAIR THREE: CO-CREATION – STEINKJER AND GULDBORGSUND

The Norwegian municipality of Steinkjer and the Danish Guldborgsund have both adapted measures aimed at promoting processes of co-creation involving the municipal organisation and local communities.

Both municipalities see themselves as incorporating numerous and quite distinct local communities. In Steinkjer, the strategy is to activate and utilise existing networks and voluntary organisations at the local community level. When a local community raises an important challenge and demonstrates that there is a local network in place to deal with it, the municipal administration will set up a project team of administrative staff and other resources to support the local community in solving the challenge. The co-creation strategy chosen in Guldborgsund is quite similar, but rather than utilising existing networks, the municipality is promoting the establishment of new networks in the local communities to deal with challenges and decrease the financial burden of the local government organisation.

The mayor in Danish Guldborgsund seemed to separate politics and administration to a lesser extent than the previously mentioned Danish mayors. On the one hand, he explained, “There are two doors and a border between them. If it’s a question about our staff, it’s one door, if it’s a question about the 29 councillors, it’s another door”. However, he also argued that there is a need for “holes in the doors, so that if we are having a discussion about organisational issues, and a related political issue is brought up, I must be able to talk to the CME about it”. The mayor explained that he took the liberty to talk to anybody in the municipal administration and that he would only occasionally inform

the CME about such contact. The mayor did, however, explain that this was a controversial practice and that a previous CME had taken issue with the mayor's communication with administrative staff.

The CME in Guldborgsund, on the other hand, seemed to draw a clearer line between politics and administration. According to him, administration was related to "long-term strategies", while politicians "solve the political dilemmas". In his view, administrative expertise was a necessary supplement to political leadership:

On the one hand, I have an almost religious respect – local government politicians are the best there is (...). We should respect them, listen to them, and empower them as our absolute best. On the other hand – we have 29 councillors administering 4.5 billion, who, in principle, lack the necessary qualifications (CME, Guldborgsund, Denmark).

Meanwhile, in Norwegian Steinkjer, the mayor argued that the long-term strategies were largely set by political leaders through passing long-term plans. Still, he noted that the administration set large parts of the agenda in the day-to-day running of the municipality: "As mayor, I do set much of the agenda, obviously. But so does the administration. They throw cases at us all the time, cases that we have not asked for. That's how it is." Similar to the mayor in Fredrikstad, he emphasised the importance of a separation between political and administrative roles while also maintaining that a clear-cut definition was hard to give. Referring to a prior discussion in his own municipality regarding the municipal council's right to intervene in the CME's administrative organisation, he suggested that the autonomy of the CME depended on the goodwill of the municipal council:

We've agreed that we give a lot of orders and make demands on the CME, and we cannot micromanage the CME on how she solves her tasks. (...). We have tried to tend to the CME's autonomy, meaning, [her] way of doing things. But we have on some occasions [done the opposite]. If there are areas that we have been dissatisfied with over longer periods of time: that does lead to more micromanaging (Mayor, Steinkjer, Norway).

The CME of Steinkjer also indicated that clear-cut definitions of the demarcation between politics and administration were hard to give and suggested that explicit discussions of these roles occur mostly when the interplay has failed:

I've never been in a situation where it's been challenging. (...) If I and the mayor have a sit-down and tell each other that this is my responsibility and this is yours, then I believe we have already failed. This is about achieving something together. (CME, Steinkjer, Norway).

Akin to the CME in Hjartdal, the CME in Steinkjer noted a tendency among politicians to prefer having the administrative side of the organisation take the lead on proposing unpopular policy choices. However, the CME in Steinkjer sees this as an integral and fairly unproblematic part of the interplay between politics and administration:

That is a part of my role and I act on it. I think that's okay. It's a large part of what we do. I mean, when I tighten [the budget] some places, and also put some money into the reserves, it is in order to let the politicians do politics on something. So, we agree, that's how it has to be. And I'm happy to be the wolf (CME, Steinkjer, Norway).

#### PAIR FOUR: POLITICIANS AS HANDS-ON POLICY DEVELOPERS – SVELVIK AND GENTOFTE

Norwegian Svelvik and Danish Gentofte have introduced measures aimed at bringing politicians in on the early stages of some pre-selected policy processes. By introducing ad hoc committees, these two municipalities have partly set aside administrative actors in the early stages where policy alternatives are developed, assessed and proposed. In that respect, this is a radical change in the interaction between politics and administration.

Danish Gentofte developed ad hoc committees some years ago as a replacement for the standard standing committees in Danish municipalities. The main idea of ad hoc committees is to engage both politicians and citizens in policy development. Each of the committees consists of 10 selected citizens and five elected councillors, while administrative personnel serve as facilitators. Each committee is given a mandate explaining a challenge to discuss and a delivery to make. In Danish Gentofte, the report containing policy suggestions from each ad hoc committee is delivered to the council, which then defines the next step. The Norwegian municipality of Svelvik adopted the idea from Gentofte, albeit in a more modest form. Svelvik has also chosen to keep the standing committees, and the reports from the ad hoc committees are delivered to the administration, not to the council as in Gentofte.

According to the Danish mayor, the ad hoc committees of Gentofte were established “after years of searching for how to modernise the political leader-

ship". The mayor argued that this was a total "redefinition of our political work, with more engagement among citizens, more activity and more co-creation", and explained this redefinition as a necessary renewal of local party politics. Similarly, the CME explained how the new committees have altered the way policies are developed:

In the old days, the politicians asked the administration – "What do you think?" And the administration told them what the law said [...] and the administration made the real decision. Now we say: Come politicians and citizens and tell us what you think. Then, unless their suggestions are against the law, we have a look at it (CME, Gentofte, Denmark).

In Svelvik, the introduction of ad hoc committees was also seen as a means towards renewing political leadership. Similar to Gentofte, the ad hoc committees placed politicians alongside a selection of citizens at the development phase of certain policy processes chosen by the municipal council. As such, the mayor emphasises ad hoc committees as a means to provide politicians, who have been content in the traditional structures of local politics, with a new and more active role:

Some of what I find fun with ad hoc committees is that some politicians who have not found their place in this [traditional] decision-making machinery, have now suddenly found a new role. A more active role where they have to participate. It's not possible to have party meetings before attending the ad hoc committees. So, the ad hoc committees, in a way, [they] free more politicians from the power structures of the parties (Mayor, Svelvik, Norway).

In Svelvik as well, this arrangement means having the administrative leadership in a less intrusive role during the early stages of these policy processes. As the CME explains, the administration only participates as facilitators to the committees, "...providing facts, if that's requested. Then, eventually, when the mayor receives the proposals from the ad hoc committees, the cases are moved into the ordinary procedures." In general, the CME in Svelvik emphasised the superior role of politics and explained the separation between political and administrative leadership as a division of labour:

The way I like to understand it, I think we are in many ways a team of leaders who both have our different channels available. I have my channel into the organisation, and [the mayor] has the channel to the municipal council and to the citizens. That's the division of labour put simply. It is the municipal council

with the mayor who decides where we are heading. It's not all black and white, but it is the administration, my people, who decide how we should perform the task (CME, Svelvik, Norway).

### SUMMING UP THE FOUR PAIRS

In the first pair, Fredrikstad and Esbjerg, our analysis suggests that even if a clear-cut line between politics and administration is hard to draw, the separation between politics and administration seems to be the prevailing idea informing the institutional designs. Both these municipalities have made efforts to visualise the political and the politicians at the expense of administration and administrative leaders. However, while the institutional change in Fredrikstad (mayor proposes) seemingly represents an effort to withdraw the CME from politics; the change in Esbjerg (committee leaders in the Committee for Finance) seems more attuned to withdrawing the councillors from the administrative sphere. In both cases a clearer separation is a likely result.

In the second pair, including Hedensted (dialogue meeting) and Hjartdal (budget), the intention is to develop a more holistic type of political leadership. In Hedensted the aim is to promote comprehensive policy development across administrative silos, while the case of Hjartdal is seemingly to develop political leaders that to a greater extent adopt the perspective of the CME. In both cases, even if ideas about a separation of politics and administration certainly exist, the institutional change contributes to a broader and deeper relationship between politics and administration.

The third pair, Steinkjer and Guldborgsund, have made institutional changes (co-creation) that to a large extent create shortcuts between citizens/communities and administrative staff, with less direct involvement of political leaders. To the extent these efforts influence the political-administrative relationship, it is by reducing the number of political issues and relieving the financial burden of the municipal organisation. In both municipalities, leading actors express a typical pragmatic view of the political-administrative relationship, and they seem to understand this as an internal issue that should not be spelled out to the public. For these actors, this is not so much a question about politics versus administration, as it is about the municipal organisation as a whole and its relation to its citizens.

The fourth pair represents two rather radical attempts to empower elected politicians in the early stages of a policy process (ad hoc committees). The institutional change is almost similar in the two municipalities, but while Gentofte has gone further in replacing its former system with the new arrangement, Svelvik has kept a larger part of the old system. Moreover, the legal constraints



in the Norwegian case led to an administrative processing of the propositions from the ad hoc committees. In both municipalities we find prevailing ideas about political leadership that are clearly distinct from administrative leadership, and an intention to strengthen the role of elected leaders in the framing of policy problems. Especially in the case of Danish Gentofte, there is every reason to believe that such a change has taken place.

The eight cases discussed above clearly demonstrate the significant intra-national variation in Norway and Denmark. Formally, Danish mayors are heads of the administration, while their Norwegian counterparts chair the council. However, even if the two national sets of municipalities each act under a common legal framework, there is no clear script defining political-administrative interaction. Some Danish mayors, like in Danish Hedensted, seem to adhere to a role that is more typically “Norwegian” than Danish, while some Norwegian mayors seem to take a stronger role vis-à-vis administration compared to their legal role.

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The main aim of this chapter is to answer how the interaction between political administrative leadership is perceived by local political and administrative leaders in the two countries. Our analysis illustrates that despite a significant institutional difference related to the role of the mayor, top political and top administrative leaders in Danish and Norwegian local government have very similar perceptions about political and administrative leadership and the roles involved. Moreover, our findings suggest that the intra-national variations seem to outweigh the cross-national differences, indicating that factors related to context and the individual level strongly influence role perceptions and behaviour.

Following the suggestion by Alford et al. (2017) that the idea of a line between politics and administration should be supplemented by the notion of a “purple zone” reflecting the varying nature of the interface, our findings suggest that the interaction is characterised by ideas about a *line*, but in daily operations this takes the form of a *zone*. In other words, while there are expectations of a clear and principal line between politics and administration, the daily work is more characterised by pragmatism and ad hoc solutions.

Still, the above analysis illustrates that the idea of a separation is somewhat different in the two national contexts. In the Danish cases, the overarching objective is to create arenas where politicians are allowed to “do politics”. This perception resembles the classic idea of Wilson, where the separation most of all is about moving politics out of administration. In the Norwegian cases, where the CEO has a strong formal position, the objective is more in line with the

reasoning of Weber, emphasising that administration needs to remain within its own bureaucratic domain.

Despite these differences at the conceptional level, in operational terms the interactions between administrative and political leaders seem quite similar in the two countries, and much more similar than what would be expected based on the two different frameworks. A possible explanation would be that, regardless of overall institutional framework, in their everyday work top political and top administrative leaders find themselves in a blurred “purple zone” where abstract ideas about a separation do not match their daily activities.

To the extent that the latter explanation is valid, it would indicate that the theoretical typologies explored in the theoretical section mostly refer to the ideational level. In practice, the cross-national institutional variations are less pronounced. Exploring this in more depth would, however, require more prolonged and observation-based studies combining approaches and perspectives from different disciplines, and preferably in a comparative design. Through its focus on unpacking external variables as local beliefs and practices, ethnographic methodology and interpretive perspectives would seem to provide ideal tools for this task (see e.g., Rhodes, 2017; Lo, 2021).

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