FRAGMENTATION AND CONSOLIDATION IN THE BIG CITY:
NEIGHBOURHOOD DECENTRALISATION IN SIX SCANDINAVIAN CITIES

Henry Bäck
Fragmentation and consolidation in the big city: Neighbourhood decentralisation in six Scandinavian cities

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The big city is characterised by simultaneous centrifugal and centripetal forces. The centrifugal forces are formed by the differentiation that functional specialisation and social segregation creates between different parts of the city. Dwellings, places of work, shopping centres, cultural institutions and recreational areas will be located in different parts of the city. The poor and the rich will live in different parts of the city. But in order to make the functionally differentiated city work common and integrated systems of communication and provision are needed. Social segregation can imply that expensive facilities happen to be located in neighbourhoods that are unable to support them financially. Social segregation can lead to social unrest and demands for equalisation between the parts of the city. The demands for common systems of communication and provision and for economic equalisation make up the centripetal forces.

How the authorities to be entrusted with the tasks of resource equalisation, service provision and regulation in the city best are delimited and how tasks are to be allocated will for these reasons always be a contested issue in the urban landscape. In the USA there is a long ongoing political and academic debate between the adherents of the polycentric city (Tiebout 1956; Ostrom & al 1961; Ostrom 1972; Boyne 1997) and the adherents of metropolitan government. The polycentric city is characterised by a high degree of municipal fragmentation. The main argument of the Polycentrists is that competition for inhabitants between different local authorities will produce more efficient service provision. Further it could be assumed that small entities would be more homogenous with respect to citizens’ preferences than would one or few large ones. The minorities run over in majority decisions thereby will be minimised, and thereby also the loss of welfare, following from the fact that the minorities

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will not receive their preferred tax/service packages. In favour of a more consolidated system one could in the first place point at the need to internalise externalities – *i.e.* to guarantee that undertakings with a public goods character will materialise. Further, the larger scale will make the exploitation of economies-of-scale possible in service provision. Both parties to the controversy could thus, claim efficiency arguments for their respective standpoints.

Likewise both parties can raise arguments of democracy. In the polycentric city citizens exert their influence by ”voting with their feet”. But also ordinary political participation will be more efficient in the smaller units. In the unified and consolidated city the claiming of accountability will be facilitated, as it will be more evident who is responsible for different kinds of municipal tasks. In the polycentric city it might even be the case that a private citizen will lack the opportunity of electoral influence over activities and regulations important for her existence, simply because they are handled by municipalities that she is not a member of.

The six cities studied in this paper are the national capitals of Denmark, Norway and Sweden (Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm) together with the second cities of Norway and Sweden (Bergen and Göteborg) and finally Sweden’s third city Malmö. With regard to municipal structure the six urban regions are quite different from each other. Copenhagen is most similar to the polycentric city. The Danish metropolitan region is made up of two unitary core cities as well as three counties including totally 48 municipalities. Only a meagre fourth of the population of the urban region live in the city of Copenhagen. The issue of the organisation of the fragmented region has been on the agenda for almost the whole 20th century (Betænkning 1307/1995; Sørensen 1997). The solution of the early 21st century has been the formation of *Hovedstadens Utviklingsråd* – a joint committee with regional and transport planning, the operation of the regional transport system and co-ordination of economic development as its main tasks.

Bergen, Göteborg, Malmö and Oslo occupy the opposite pole of Copenhagen in this respect. All four urban regions certainly are divided into many municipalities, but not at all to the same extent as the Copenhagen region. To this could be added that the population share of core cities is considerably larger than in the Danish case. Even if these four regions thus are less fragmented than the Copenhagen region this does not mean that they are fully consolidated. In all four cases one has had to resort to various co-operative arrangements in order to solve the co-ordination tasks. The situation in Göteborg and Malmö is complicated by the fact that the discussion on how to co-ordinate the municipalities of the urban region has converged with another debate concerning the antiquated character of Sweden’s county structure, and a perceived need for larger regional units, especially as the base for growth and development policies. This has lead to reforms in 1997-8 of the division into counties in the two parts of the country where these two cities are located (Danielsson 1999; Johansson 1999; Fernández 2000; Nilsson 2000).

The Stockholm region is between these two extremes. In the 1970s the so called Greater Stockholm question was solved (Anton 1975; Hägglund 1987; Fritz 1996) through re-allocations of the county tasks of the city of Stockholm to the Stockholm county council. The county also took responsibility for more tasks than what is usual in Swedish county authorities, such as regional planning and local and regional transport. Nevertheless the region is highly frag-

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2 For a further argumentation challenging the arguments for small municipal entities see Newton 1982. For a discussion of the topic in a European context, as well as an account of the zig-zag course of metropolitan reorganisation in Europe see Keating 1998 pp 55-58.
3 They are unitary in the meaning that their territories are not parts of any upper-tier local authority. The two cities thus themselves perform the tasks of the county (*amt*).
4 The official English name of HUR is Greater Copenhagen Authority. A more faithful translation of the Danish name would be ”the Development Council of the Capital Region.”
mented, consisting of 25 different municipalities, among which the city of Stockholms accounts for about 40 percent of the total population.

**The constitutions of the cities**

One circumstance allegedly of importance for the extent that the centre has capacity to act is the constitutional arrangement with regard to the relation between the municipalities’ decision-making and executive bodies. In the constitutions of states there is a range from presidentialism and separation-of-powers where the executive is decoupled from the parliament to systems of permanent grand coalition between all parties, where the executive is directly dependent upon the parliament. In between we find parliamentary systems where the executive is dependent upon support of the parliament, but roles become distinct by the fact that the government is formed by only one or a limited number of the parties in the parliament that have succeeded in forming a coalition at least tolerated by parliament. The parliamentary system has been motivated with the need of the electorate to hold the power-holders accountable. Parliamentarism makes it more salient who is responsible for policies conducted. Another motive has been the strengthening of the capacity of the executive to act and steer. To the extent that the executive is freed from negotiations and bargaining internally and/or externally in the parliament, the executive becomes more capable to act.

Nordic local government is traditionally not parliamentary and leans towards permanent co-government rather than towards separation of powers. This fact is also reflected in the organisation of the big cities. In perspective of the six cities studied Copenhagen represents one extreme pole and Bergen and Oslo the other end of the scale, while Göteborg, Malmö and Stockholm line up somewhere in between.

In Swedish local government there was a transition from the traditional co-government model to a “limited majority rule” in connection with the second amalgamation reform in the 1960s and 70s (cf Wallin & al 1981). The “limited majority rule” implies that the political majority appoints all positions as committee chairs. This system was introduced well before the 1990s in the absolute majority of Swedish local and county councils, but actually not in Stockholm and Göteborg. In these two cities the classic co-government system was applied as late as until the 1994 local election. Thereafter the model of “limited majority rule” was implemented. The fact that this almost coincides with the neighbourhood reform is a historical coincidence, nevertheless likely to strengthen the capacity of the centre to steer the new sub-local tier.

The central governance model in the city of Copenhagen has differed, and still differs somewhat, from what is normal in Danish local government. The normal Danish system is a model very similar to the “limited majority rule” in Sweden. In Copenhagen instead the so-called magistrate model has been applied. The Magistrate, made up of the Mayor and six deputy mayors each responsible for a particular sector of the municipal administration, was the executive body of the Copenhagen local authority. There were no service sector committees, but the whole administration was directly subordinate to the magistrate and its members. There were committees in the council with a position analogous to committees in national parliaments.

The particular local government law for Copenhagen was abolished 1998. The city of Copenhagen then, in principle, had to comply with the local government law for all Danish local governments. The Magistrate was appointed by the Council applying proportional representation. Even if the individual deputy mayors had a strong position in relation to the administration, the Magistrate as a collective political body had a very weak position.

In the regulation (Styrelsesvedtægt 1997) enacted for the new system in Copenhagen it is ruled that the chairpersons of the committees (the Mayors) are to be appointed at large applying proportional representation. Thereby the co-government system has been codified. In
conjunction with the fact that the mayors now, unlike in the former Magistrate, have to share power over the municipal administration with a committee, the change actually implies that the conditions for governing the city have deteriorated. It has been pointed out that the Danish committee rule generally is an arrangement with a weak steering capacity (Mouritzen 2001). The particular shape the system has been given in Copenhagen does not strengthen that capacity.

Oslo’s central organisation at a first glance is similar to the Danish Magistrate rule. The popularly elected council appoints a City Government whose members are responsible for particular parts of the municipal organisation. As in the abandoned Magistrate system in Copenhagen there are no sector-wise committees, but preparatory committees in the council. The strategic difference between the Magistrate system and Oslo’s system, however, is that the City Government is not appointed proportionally but by plurality vote. There is a full-fledged parliamentary system applied in the City of Oslo. Since 2000 also the City of Bergen has installed a parliamentary system following the Oslo model.

As “limited majority rule” in Stockholm the Oslo model has been conceived and implemented almost simultaneously as the neighbourhood reform. In contrast to the case in Stockholm parliamentarism in Bergen and Oslo, however, can be regarded as integrated components of the neighbourhood reforms. It was deemed important to strengthen the centre’s capacity to act when substantial parts of decision-making were decentralised.

Evaluations of parliamentarism in Oslo show that the central objectives of more salient lines of responsibility, strengthened political influence, comprehensive view and better capacity to act largely have been achieved. (Baldersheim & Strand 1988). On the other hand, expected policy consequences seem to have failed to appear (Bukve 1996). In this respect characteristics of party political majority conditions have more obvious effects. Strong majorities become more action potent irrespective of constitutional arrangement (Hagen & al 1999). Neither do fears for an increased level of conflict in local political decision-making seem to have materialised (Lotsberg 1988).

The evaluation of the majority reform in Stockholm (Bäck & Johansson 2000a, Bäck & al 2001) indicates that the local political debate has been vitalised and also that the council has become more vivid. The better opportunities for holding decision-makers accountable following increased saliency, however, were not utilised by the electorate. Political steering of central administration appears to have been strengthened. The relation between majority and opposition is increasingly characterised by conflict and lesser by compromise and consensus.

**Strength of the party system**

In the section above we have discussed formal structure. When studying political systems one must, in order to understand how the system works, also see to the parallel party structure. Parties organise political decision-makers across the formal structure, and offer objects of loyalty competing with the formally defined objects (cf Bäck 2000). There is no pooled description of the structure of the party systems in the six metropolitan regions studied. In another study we described the party systems in five of the six cities (Bäck & al 2000). For that description we used measures of the volatility of the electorate, the fragmentation of the party system, and the share of votes received by established national parties. The ranking of the five cities with respect to average values over time for the period 1967-96 for these three dimensions was:
Table 1 Ranking of the cities according to dimensions of structure of the party system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Volatility</th>
<th>Fragmentation</th>
<th>Non-established parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Göteborg</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malmö</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oslo</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment: Volatility is measured as half the sum of party-wise changes in vote shares between two elections. Fragmentation is measured as $1-\sum p_i^2$ where $p_i$ is the share of votes for party i. As non-established parties we have regarded parties that never in the period since WW2 have participated in the national government.

It is obvious that Copenhagen occupies a special position, having an especially eroded party system. The volatility of the voters is the highest. So is party fragmentation and finally other parties than the nationally established ones receive a larger share of the votes than in the other cities. If any distinctions should me made between the other four cities, Malmö tends to appear somewhat more of a party city than the other three.

If we also suppose that Bergen will fall in the stronger category, the dimensions of municipal fragmentation, the strength of the party system and the constitutional legislative-executive relations can be combined in a matrix:

Table 2 Municipal fragmentation, the strength of the party system and constitutional arrangements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weak party system/co-government</th>
<th>Polycentric region</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>More consolidated region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stronger party system/</td>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td></td>
<td>Malmö, Göteborg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quasi-parliamentarism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stronger party system/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bergen, Oslo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parliamentarism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six urban decentralisation reforms in three countries

Sweden

The introduction of the institution of neighbourhood committees (NCs) in Swedish local government is clearly coupled with the amalgamation reforms of 1952-74. The mergers increased the population of the average municipality from 1,500 to 29,000. The motive for the reforms was the achievement of an economic foundation for the professionally manned organisation for service production. The guiding principle was economic efficiency. This gave rise to suspicions that democratic values would suffer.

The cure came to be the idea of sub-local political decentralisation. Instead of organising the committee and departmental structure of the local authority sector-wise, they now were structured territorially. The Local Bodies Act that made such an organisation legally possible was enacted in 1979, and the number of municipalities investigating the introduction of the new territorial model increased rapidly. In 1985 almost every second local authority had introduced NCs, had conducted an investigation about the introduction or was presently conducting such an investigation (Montin & Persson 1996).
A total number of 32 municipalities ever had some sort of NC system. The maximum number having the system at the same time, however, was 24, a number reached in 1986-7. In most of these municipalities the neighbourhood system did not cover the whole municipal territory. The largest number of municipalities with NCs covering their whole territories was 15, a number reached in 1991-2. In 2001 there were 11 municipalities with NCs covering the whole territory and seven municipalities with partial neighbourhood decentralisation.

Many neighbourhood decentralisation systems, thus, have not been very long lived. The most intense reform period when the systems were installed was the first half of the 1980s. Already during the following five-year period 1986-90 five municipalities abolished their NCs. In the first half of the 1990s six neighbourhood systems disappeared and one was downgraded. In 1996-2001 still four systems disappeared and two were downgraded. The interest for neighbourhood decentralisation thus peaked in the mid 1980s, when the focus of interest moved towards organisational changes within the New Public Management paradigm (Hood 1991).

The rapidly fading interest for neighbourhood reforms can be given different interpretations. One interpretation is that the reforms did not achieve their goals. The most important explicit objective of the neighbourhood reforms was counteracting centralisation and closing the gap between the citizens and their representatives. A "profonder" local democracy, increased citizen involvement and participation were the objectives to be achieved. No such effects, however, were observed. Instead the objectives of the reforms tended to shift back from democracy to economic efficiency (Montin 1989).

The three biggest cities are laggards in the reform process. Göteborg introduced NCs in 1989 and Stockholm and Malmö in 1997 (Bäck & Johansson 1998). The Göteborg reform has been evaluated in a large research project and one of the most prominent conclusions is that NCs have been very effective instruments in cut-down policies (Jönsson & al 1995, 1997, 1999). This conclusion points to an even more far-reaching shift of objectives than the one that Montin thought he could discern.

Another interpretation of the reform lag could be that the three big cities actually never had gone through any serious institutional crisis in the 20th century until they were hit by the crisis of the welfare state in the 1990s. The first institutional crisis for Swedish local government was the introduction of general and equal voting rights in the 1920s, a reform from which the representative system and the party system originated. These two institutions were
already well established in the cities before the democratic breakthrough. The amalgamation reforms in the years 1952-74 represented the next institutional crisis, which by the end of the 1970s and to the beginning of the 1990s gave rise to NCs. The big cities were only slightly affected by the amalgamation reforms. When the economic and ideological crisis of the welfare state subsequently hits all local authorities and perhaps especially the big cities, there are offered in the market for institutional ideas among other things the untried NCs (Bäck & Johansson 2000b; Bäck & al 2001).

The very idea of NCs is a top-down idea, invented by central government. The Commission for Local Democracy, commissioned in fear of the consequences of the merger reform, in a number of reports (Ds Kn 1979:10, 1979:11, 1981:8) launched the idea. The Law on Local Bodies made the transformation legally possible. Even within the three big cities the reforms are top-down initiatives, however, with different histories and different party political constellations. Göteborg displays the most consensual reform process of the three.

In Stockholm the situation was more complicated. The question of some sort of sub-local political bodies had been discussed and investigated for a long time, beginning as early as in the 1940s. The Social Democrats were, however, for a long time resisting the idea. After the 1988 elections the Social Democrats, however, began to change their standpoint and 1990-5 a trial with NCs in three neighbourhoods was conducted (Premfors & al 1994). The formal initiative to the reform that in 1996-7 established 24 NCs was taken in a declaration signed by all the parties in the City Council except the Conservatives. Conservative resistance has since continued and lead in the coalition negotiations after the local election in 1998 to a compromise where the number of neighbourhoods was reduced to 18 (Hanna Bäck 2000).

In Malmö the reform always has been controversial and threatened. As in Stockholm a trial was initiated in three neighbourhoods. The change of regime after the 1991 local election, when a Conservative led non-socialist coalition took power in the City Council, lead to the premature termination of the trial. Since Social Democrats had returned to power in 1994 they forced through the neighbourhood reform in 1995. The non-socialist opposition thereafter has promised abolition should they return into position. Petersson & Hagström (2000) show the extreme importance that party sympathies have for the attitude towards the Malmö reform.

Table 3 Changes in neighbourhood systems and changes in the party political majority situation (column percents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changes in the neighbourhood system:</th>
<th>Unchanged non-socialist</th>
<th>Unchanged Social Democratic</th>
<th>From non-socialist to Social Democratic</th>
<th>From Social Democratic to non-socialist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive changes</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative changes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comment: The introduction of neighbourhood decentralisation systems, as well as the upgrading of such systems from covering only parts of the territory to covering the whole territory has been classified as “positive”. Negative changes are analogous but reversed. (Source: Johansson 2001). Changes in the political majority situation are indicated by the changes in the party affiliation of the chairman of the Executive Committee in connection with the immediately preceding election.

It is clear from Table 3 that the party political majority conditions, and changes in these, are of importance for the reform processes. 75-80 percent of the reforms of neighbourhood systems have been “positive” under stable non-socialist or Social Democratic rule, or when power in the immediately preceding election has changed from the non-socialists to Social Democrats. This can be compared with the fact that more than half of the reforms were
“negative” when the immediately preceding election implied a change from Social Demo-
cratic to non-socialist rule.

Norway

The issue of sub-local political bodies in Norwegian local government dates back to the inter-
est for decentralisation in the 1970s (Kolam 1987; Larsen & Offerdal 1994; Klausen &
Opedal 1999). The number of municipalities in Norway was reduced from 744 in the late
1950s to 443 in the mid-1970s. Norwegian mergers of local authorities were thus far from as
dramatic as the Swedish ones. In Sweden the number of municipalities after the second re-
form period was only 11 per cent of what it had been before the mergers. The corresponding
figure in Norway is 60 per cent. Nevertheless, as in Sweden, internal decentralisation was
brought to the foreground by authority amalgamations. To begin with it was a matter of consultative
bodies. Such were introduced in many municipalities. In 19 municipalities, among them the
four bigger cities Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and Stavanger, local committees were introduced
in the 1970s. The new local committees were mainly to function as opinion committees. They
were to reply on proposals circulated for comments and they were supposed to give voice to
the interests of the neighbourhood.

These consultative local committees were criticised mainly because it was assumed that
participating in an activity not coupled with any real decision-making powers was uninterest-
ing. Exactly the same critique was launched against similar committees in Denmark and Swe-
den. From the mid-1980s there was within the framework of the free-commune experiment more far-reaching neighbourhood systems introduced in many municipalities. In these the
operation of service provision was delegated to neighbourhoods. The trials in Stavanger and
Trondheim were however terminated (Lie & Hauge 1991; Lie 1993; Olsen & Rommetvedt
1993).

Bergen had its first neighbourhood decentralisation order in 1974 following a merger
with four surrounding municipalities. In the period 1974-88 Bergen had 20 districts each with
its own political NC with mainly consultative tasks. In 1989 municipal activities within health
and social services got decentralised to the neighbourhoods and the number of districts was
reduced to 12 (Rugseth 1991; Jensen & al 1992). In 1997 an experiment with a more exten-
sive political and administrative decentralisation was launched in two of the districts (Rom-
metvedt & al 1999). The City Council in 1998 decided on a permanent system of decentrali-
sation enlarged to the whole municipality. This new system was taken in use in 2000.

Decentralisation to NCs in Norway has been somewhat less appealing to local authori-
ties than in Sweden. In 1995 14 municipalities (3 percent) reported that they had introduced
NCs according to paragraph 12 of the Local Government Act (Aarsæther & al 1998). This
figure could be compared with 8.5 percent of Swedish municipalities in 1986-8 and in 1991
having some form of NCs.

Oslo has the oldest and most developed neighbourhood decentralisation system
(Røiseland 1991a,b,c; Hagen & al 1998; Klausen & Hagen 1997; Klausen & Opedal 1999).
The first initiatives in Oslo were taken in the early 1960s. The first reform established 33
committees mainly performing consultative tasks. In 1985-6 experiments were conducted in
four neighbourhoods with decentralisation of provision of health and social services, and in
1988 the present system was established: 25 NCs responsible for service provision in the “soft
sector.”

5 The ”Free Commune Experiment” was a field trial first conducted in Sweden in the 1980s and 90s making it
possible for local authorities to receive dispensation from national government regulations. The Swedish ex-
periment was followed by similar reforms in the other Nordic countries (Balderheim & Ståhlberg 1994; Albæk
et al 1996).
Denmark

As in Sweden and Norway there have been structural reforms in Danish local government. An amalgamation reform in the 1970s reduced the number of municipalities from 1,336 to 275. The Danish reform was almost as radical as the second amalgamation reform in Sweden. The resulting number of municipalities was 20 percent of the number prior to the reform. One would expect this giving rise to demands for decentralisation to sub-local bodies. To some part this was also the case, but to a much lesser extent than in the two other countries.

When the local government law for Copenhagen was revised in 1978 it was proposed that the City Council be authorised to establish neighbourhood councils\(^6\). This proposal was, however, not approved by Parliament. In a government inquiry on decentralised democracy in 1977 the matter was discussed, but the Commission was satisfied with stating that it was already legal to establish consultative local committees. In the report it was stated that democracy in the smaller context was best created and secured through a developed system of “users’ democracy” (Kolam 1997).

As the other Nordic countries Denmark from the mid 80s conducted a free commune experiment. In this project the idea of local councils with responsibility for service provision again was brought to the fore. Only one local authority, however, (Herlev) established such a system (Andersson & al 1988; Gjelstrup 1989; Hansen & al 1996). The Herlev trial that began in 1986 was terminated eleven years later. The authors to the Herlev evaluation report mean that part of the answer to the question why there has been so little interest in intra-municipal political decentralisation in Denmark is the commitment to user involvement (Andersson & al 1989).

The Copenhagen experiment formally took its starting point in February 1995, when the City Council appointed a Structure Committee. In June the same year the council took a decision on the principles of the trial and in October four trial neighbourhoods were selected. Parallel with the municipal preparations Government and Parliament worked on an amendment of the Local Government Act for Copenhagen that would render the trial legally possible. The process was finished in March 1996 when the City Council decided on regulations for the four trial neighbourhoods. In spring 1996 the four NCs were elected and constituted. There were held direct popular elections to three of the councils in May, while the fourth (Kongens Enghave) was appointed by the City Council. The indirect appointment of the fourth council was generally perceived as a concession to the Social Democrats, who had been sceptical to the whole project. Following criticism towards this exception direct neighbourhood-wide elections were also arranged to the Kongens Enghave council in conjunction with local elections in 1997 (PLS Consult 1999).

In June 2000 the City Council decided to arrange a referendum on the future of the neighbourhood reform. The referendum was held on September 28, the same day, as there was a national referendum on Danish participation in the European Monetary Union. In the city at large there was a clear majority of votes against a continuation of neighbourhood decentralisation. Even the trial neighbourhoods displayed a negative majority, however less than in the whole city. As many as six neighbourhoods reported more than 70 percent No-votes, and none of these was a trial neighbourhood. Valby – one of the trial neighbourhoods – was the only one displaying a Yes-majority. In consequence with the result of the referendum the majority in the City Council decided to terminate the neighbourhood trial and abolish the four NCs. An important conclusion in the evaluation of the referendum (Klausen 2001) is that the No-votes cannot be seen as an expression of trust in the central organisation of the city. There

\(^6\) In Copenhagen sublocal political bodies have been called “neighbourhood councils” (bydelsråd) while in Sweden and Norway the terminology has been “neighbourhood committees” (kommundelsnämnder, bydelsutvalg) in correspondence with the naming of other council committees. There are exceptions to this rule, as Malmö, also using the “council” terminology (stadsdelsfullmäktige)
were more respondents that expressed scepticism towards the City Council among the No-voters than among those who voted Yes.

The Copenhagen trial was politically controversial from its beginning to its end. The trial was forced through by a majority that did not include the city’s dominating Social Democracy. The Social Democrats, however, gradually came to rally round the trial. Two right-wing parties were from the start direct opponents to the trial and a third changed standpoints in front of the referendum and took part in a massive campaign against city-wide neighbourhood decentralisation. The Social Democrats were internally divided and the Social Democratic Mayor did not declare his own standpoint, neither before, nor after the referendum.

It showed that sympathisers to the right-wing parties to a much larger extent than other voters voted in accordance with the recommendations of their own party. Those parties recommending a Yes-vote to the reform had a much weaker response from their sympathisers (Klausen 2001).

**Autonomous neighbourhoods or the extensions of city hall**

The introduction of sub-local political bodies in the municipalities implies the creation of a new territorial tier in the governmental structure. The construction of the relationship between these tiers is an important question. To what extent are actions of the authorities at one tier influenced by the authorities of another tier? I will here discuss the relation between city centre and neighbourhood in analogy with the concept of local self-government relating to the relationship between central and local governments.

Local self-government is a matter of the extent of discretion not restricted by central government that local government enjoys. One way to approach the concept of discretion is to take a starting point in the local budget decision. The budget decision can be looked upon as a choice among an infinite number of possible budgets. This number is reduced by a system of restrictions. If a higher-tier government directly has decided the restriction, we talk of restrictions on local self-government. Restrictions decided by lateral relations or relations to non-governmental actors do pose limits to local autonomy, but not to local self-government.

If the local council were a rational actor, there would be a municipal *preference function*. The budget decision then would imply the council choosing that budget out of those remaining after the impact of restrictions reaching the highest preference level (Jonsson 1972; Andersson 1979; Ysander & Nordström 1985). In real world what is to be the preferences of the local authority is decided by the outcome of the political game. Who participates, and what *power resources* and power positions these participants have at their disposal will decide the outcome. Not only politicians and parties, but also bureaucrats, professions, administrations, companies, associations, citizens and citizen groups take part in this game.

There is a diversity of restrictions. The *resources* at hand constitute one restriction. If local government is free to levy taxes the aggregate income of the municipal residents will be a restriction. If local government can not freely dispose with their population’s income, but is funded in some other way other factors will decide the amount of resources available.

The *costs* of achieving various objectives also must be considered. These depend among other things on the *magnitude of the needs* and the *prices of production factors* that the municipality has to acquire in order to attain its goals. The size of the needs is among other things decided by demographic conditions. The price level is in market economies only indirectly under governmental control. On the other hand there are sometimes *task specific central government grants* changing the price relations between different production factors necessary for municipal activities (of Hagen 1996).

*Central government orders* local government to perform *specific tasks*. Further it is customary in local government systems that local authorities are entitled to undertake additional tasks. This is the meaning of the *general competence clauses* of the Local Government
Acts of the Nordic countries. General competence clauses increase discretion. State imposed tasks imply diminishing discretion. This reduction could be compensated if central government sends money for the fulfilment of the mandatory tasks together with the order. Given that there is a particular imposition, central government furthermore can be varyingly detailed in its instructions for the fulfilment of the task in question.

The budget example points out a number of questions to be answered if we want to create a picture of local self-government:

- **The actors**: Who decides what actors are to take the decisions of the local authority, and what power resources will be available to the actors?
- **Resources**: Who decides what resources will be available to the local authority, and to how much will these resources be enough?
- **Tasks**: Who decides what the local authority must and may do?

Many criteria of local self-government that can be found in the literature can be coupled with these three questions. Larsen & Offerdal (1994) use representativity and task width as criteria. "Representativity" refers to the extent that the local unit is representing the population in the local territory. In accordance with the Convention on Local Self-Government of the Council of Europe Nilsson & Westerståhl (1997) discuss the decision-making organisation of the local political unit (the criterion is that members are elected in free elections), tasks and economic resources. Page & Goldsmith (1987) discuss the dimensions functions, access and discretion. The concept of access is concerned with the extent to which the two governmental tiers have access to channels to influence one another. Functions is analogous with the concept of task width, while discretion is about the degree of freedom of action that the superior party allows the subordinate party within the framework of current allocation of tasks. Hagen & Sørensen (1997) who discuss the dimensions of the concept of decentralisation point out the allocation of tasks, central government regulation of organisation and tasks, local freedom to decide about revenues and finally the size of municipalities.

I will now apply the three dimensions (actors/preferences, tasks and resources) – not to municipal self-government – but to the neighbourhood self-government systems of the six cities.

**Actors and preferences**

The central issue here is the question of direct or indirect elections to NCs. Should the eligible voters of the neighbourhood be entrusted with the selection of committee members, or should they be appointed by the City Council, and in each neighbourhood reflecting the party political composition of the council? In an international comparative perspective the Scandinavian countries represent deviant cases. The rule has been indirect elections via the local council. Opposition to direct neighbourhood elections has been especially strong in Sweden. Several central government commissions have proposed the creation of such an option (SOU 1996:162; SOU 2000:1) and several municipalities have applied for dispensation from current rules in order to be able to arrange direct neighbourhood-wise elections. So also the City of Stockholm did in connection with its neighbourhood reform. All such requests, however, have been turned down. Opposition has been particularly strong among Social Democrats. The Social Democrats in Stockholm, as part of the multi-party declaration that the reform was based upon, supported an application for an experiment with direct elections. This standpoint was, however, changed just before the government was do decide on the matter (Sandqvist 2000).
Oslo is one of the two exceptions to the rule. Oslo has in two consecutive local elections implemented separate neighbourhood elections in four trial neighbourhoods. The Norwegian Urban and Regional Research Institute (NIBR) has evaluated the trials (Hagen & al 1998). The evaluations show that the trials have had few effects. Expected positive consequences for civil involvement and participation have in the main not came about. On the other hand negative consequences that had been feared also were absent. Different majorities in the City Council and in NCs have not been the source of more conflicts between the tiers than what is normal. In Copenhagen all four NCs, as we have seen came to be selected in direct neighbourhood-wise elections. Some observations that were made in Copenhagen, was that turnout was considerably lower than in ordinary local elections. Furthermore a local list was very successful in the election in Valby neighbourhood. Finally it ought to be observed that due to the role as more independent political systems that the NCs got as a consequence of the direct elections and their outcomes, partially other majorities came to be constituted than in City Hall (PLS Consult 1999).

Even if members are top-down appointees many of the evaluations show that they have been able to develop extensive contacts with neighbourhood communities (Jönsson & al 1995, 1997; Petersson & Hagström 2000; Bäck & al 2001). This, of course, is not irrelevant to the shaping of the preferences of the committee. It is reasonable to suppose that the ability to develop contacts and local networks is dependent on “politician density”. The more citizens there are per politician the longer can the distance between the two be assumed to be. The cities differ in this respect:

**Table 4 Population size and politician density of the neighbourhoods**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Number of neighbourhoods</th>
<th>Average population</th>
<th>Largest neighbourhood</th>
<th>Smallest neighbourhood</th>
<th>Neighbourhood political body *</th>
<th>Population/politician **</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>743,703</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>41,317</td>
<td>63,826</td>
<td>15,178</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
<td>495,699</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34,210</td>
<td>45,574</td>
<td>15,515</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1,629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Göteborg</td>
<td>464,855</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22,136</td>
<td>50,661</td>
<td>4,487</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2,012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>229,140</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28,643</td>
<td>37,416</td>
<td>12,033</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2,203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malmö</td>
<td>256,504</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25,650</td>
<td>37,605</td>
<td>10,792</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oslo</td>
<td>499,161</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19,966</td>
<td>30,690</td>
<td>6,789</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1,536</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Number of members in committee
** Inhabitants per neighbourhood politician

In this respect the cities clearly fall into two groups: On one hand there is Bergen, Göteborg and Stockholm with more than 2,000 people per politician, and on the other hand are the more politician dense Malmö, Copenhagen and Oslo with a 1,300-1,600 population-politician ratio.

Among the influential actors in the NC beside the politicians the neighbourhood Chief Executive Officers has a special position. The neighbourhood CEO has a position that in some respects is similar to that of the City Manager or Town Clerk in a local authority. An especially important question is where the right to hire and fire the CEO is located. Is this a prerogative of the neighbourhood or of the city government? That CEOs were appointed by the centre in the implementation of the Stockholm reform was a source of conflict (Sandqvist 1999, 2000), while the neighbourhood CEOs in Copenhagen were appointed by each NC respectively.
Tasks
The very character of decision-making powers being decentralised differ between the cities. Decision-making competence has been most extensive in Copenhagen. Most tasks have been decentralised to the neighbourhoods for "selvstændig varetagelse" implying that the City’s central organisation is not allowed to interfere with or amend neighbourhood decisions. In these matters the neighbourhoods, quite the same as local authorities are subjects to control from central government authorities. In addition some tasks have been delegated from the City, and in this case it is possible for the city centre to enter into the decision-making process and to change decisions taken by the neighbourhoods. In this respect Copenhagen clearly differs from the other five cities, where decentralisation is more of the delegation type.

Also with regard to the allocation of tasks there are differences between the cities. We have made an inventory of what identifiable tasks are decentralised in the six cities. Some observations may be highlighted from this inventory:

- The core tasks for neighbourhoods are child-care and leisure activities for youth and children as well as care of the elderly. These tasks have been decentralised to the neighbourhoods in all the six cities.

- Also in addition to this there is a heavy emphasis on "soft" welfare services. Bergen, Copenhagen and Stockholm differ in that also some technical services have been decentralised.

- Big and important welfare sectors decentralised in some but not in others are primary education, retained at the central tier in Oslo, and primary health care, missing in the Swedish cities due to the fact that health care in Sweden is a county remit.

- Bergen and Copenhagen are the cities where the largest number of tasks have been decentralised.

Another way to approach the question of the width of the task portfolio is to consider the share of the neighbourhoods of the total city budget:

Table 5 The share of neighbourhood committees of city budgets (percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Göteborg</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malmö</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oslo</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Even if there are problems with the comparison of these data, it seems obvious that Oslo is a deviant case. Oslo’s neighbourhoods consume a considerably smaller share of the city’s

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7 Danish for independently taking care of
budget than what is the case for the neighbourhoods in the other cities. A tentative ranking of the cities according to the extent that tasks have been decentralised would result in three groups:

1. Bergen, Copenhagen and Stockholm are most decentralised.
2. Malmö and Göteborg form a middle group.
3. Oslo is the least decentralised.

Resources

The economic steering of the neighbourhoods has been constructed by combining three principles: The first is *formula budgeting*, the second is the principle of *general not task-specific grants* and the third is the principle of *steering by objectives*. These three principles appear both in the Scandinavian big cities, and at least in the Swedish context in other municipalities with NCs.

The municipal budget could be seen as a translation of citizen preferences as expressed in the choice between different party platforms on election day. Thus there is a thought chain: voters’ preferences → party platforms → municipal budget. What voters give a high priority guides their choice of a party that has a platform where the same activities are given a high priority. Finally it is the task for the elected representatives of the party to see to it that what voters have prioritised also receives a prioritised allocation of resources in the city’s budget.

This line of thought is somehow applicable in an organisation where the Council allocates resources to sector committees, responsible for different service branches. Both the preferences of the electorate and party manifestos can be expressed in these terms. The whole exercise, however, becomes strange when the council in the budget decision is allocating resources to territorial parts of the municipality. The solution to this problem has become the combination of formula budgeting with steering by objectives. Formula budgeting takes its departure in the idea that the costs for producing a given service mix in different parts of the municipality will differ, among other things depending upon the demographic structure of the population. Under the condition that it is decided (1) what service is to be provided by the local authority, (2) at what service level and (3) at what quality level, and that (4) the cost of producing one unit of service of a given quality is known and (5) that the size of the dependent populations in all neighbourhoods is known, the problem can be solved as a pure statistical exercise. The budgetary process is depoliticised, and turns into an administrative procedure. The democratic-political assignment no longer will be to make priorities allocating more resources to urgent tasks and less to less urgent tasks. Instead it will be a matter of supplying the premises to the administrative-statistical budget process.

It is an important part of decentralisation reforms that the right to prioritise should be decentralised. If local decision-makers judge the needs for a particular service in a neighbourhood as more demanding than there should be an option to use a larger share of the means allocated to the neighbourhood for this particular task. The decentralisation objective thus speaks in favour of the second ingredient - the *principle of general lump-sum grants*. Albeit the lump sum is to result from an arithmetic exercise where the centre’s political priorities are important premises, the receiving actor should have the freedom to make new priorities within the lump sum appropriation. It is obvious that there is a contradiction inherent in this line of argumentation. This contradiction is a reflection of the basic problem of finding the optimal equilibrium between centralisation and decentralisation.

In doctrine as well as in actual practice two solutions appear. One solution is the *doctrine of steering by objectives*: the centre can establish objectives for the neighbourhoods in which quantitative and qualitative requirements are put up. If this works as intended, objectives establish limits for which new priorities the local committee can make. This, however, is
not unproblematic. The tighter restrictions that the centre’s goal formulations imply, the less will the decentralised right to make new priorities be. Even within the framework of the steering-by-objectives system it is a question of finding the balance point between centralisation and decentralisation. The second solution is to establish restrictions for the range of lump sum appropriations. It could for instance be decided that the general grant is intended to concern only part of the operations of the local committee, or one could distribute a number of different grants for different purposes rather than a single appropriation. Stockholm for example has applied a system with two or even three different appropriations. Further restrictions to local discretion can be introduced by way of coupling revenues to the volume produced within a customers’ choice system. Such is the case with primary education in Stockholm where NCs receive grants depending on the number of pupils that the schools of the neighbourhood manage to attract.

The resource allocation model in Göteborg has been evaluated by Bokenstrand & al (1998). In the critical question of how the dilemma between central steering and local discretion has been solved, the conclusion appears to be that the tug-of-war has been won by the neighbourhoods:

Our assessment is that the model … does not imply any restrictions on … the making of political priorities. In the application of the model, however, these opportunities have not been fully utilised. Instead a very large number of small changes have been decided, and it is difficult to identify the political priorities behind these decisions.

The local neighbourhood politicians have been freed from the steering that in former times followed with the sector divided budget, and according to interviews with NC chairs freedom of action has increased. To this might be objected that analyses of the relation between actual expenditures for different activities and the corresponding shares of the lump sum appropriations of the committees generated by the target groups of these activities display extremely high correlations. Speaking of the relative lack of central steering the evaluators conclude that steering channelled through the own party organisation is more trusted: "…representatives of the City Hall majority … seem … more disposed to trust the opportunities to influence that are within the own party framework.”

Informal party steering

These last comments carry over to the more informal steering and coordination mechanisms. We have earlier in this paper discussed the coordinating function of the party system. The system for selecting neighbourhood politicians is of special interest in this connection. The indirectly by the city council appointed committees will directly reproduce the central party system at the local level, while the directly popularly elected members in Oslo and especially in Copenhagen have been able to develop an own party political structure in their committees.

Whether it depends on direct popular elections or on political culture is hard to tell, but in the evaluation of Copenhagen’s NCs the relatively insignificant role of party politics is underlined:

… party politics plays a relatively small role in the work of the neighbourhood councils. Thus the political identity of neighbourhood politicians to a greater extent appears to have its roots in a local identity than in a party political identity …

(PLS Consult 1999)

Another informal aspect related to party steering is the extent of holding overlapping offices. This has not been systematically investigated in all six cities. It is, however, well known that it is an unusual phenomenon in Oslo, and that it has not at all occurred in Copenhagen, due to
the fact that it is not legally permitted. The Stockholm evaluation (Bäck & al 2001) reveals the utmost importance of a small group (about 15 percent of all directly and indirectly elected) for the integration of the system. These people occupy important positions in the local hierarchy. They display a high degree of activity inwards in the NC as well as in relation to the local community. At the same time as they identify themselves as eager advocates of local neighbourhood interests, they are especially understanding of the need for integration in the city and unlike those politicians only holding local office they are not particularly interested in measures that would increase the freedom of action of the NCs.

**City implementation & Community Networking**

In the table below is summarised to what extent the institutional arrangements can be assumed to foster local self-government in the neighbourhoods. Arrangements presumed to have a positive impact on self-government have been denoted with plus signs. Those cities whose institutional solution instead is more characterised by favouring central steering and coordination instead have been awarded a minus. In some cases the sign has been put between parentheses. This concerns Oslo’s direct elections experiment and the task dimension, where we concluded with a trichotomy.

**Table 6 Tentative ranking of the cities according to the degree that institutional solutions favour local neighbourhood self-government**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Elections</th>
<th>Politician density</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Party steering</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copenhagen</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malmö</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oslo</td>
<td>(-)</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stockholm</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bergen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Göteborg</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(+)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is obvious from the table that neighbourhood rule in Copenhagen is of a rather different kind than the corresponding arrangements in the peninsular cities. In all respects we have awarded plus grades to the institutional set-up in Copenhagen. The assessments are so rough that it does not seem meaningful to make any distinctions between the other five cities on this summarising level. The conclusion thus is that the neighbourhood order created in Copenhagen was particularly apt for nourishing local neighbourhood self-government, but that these prerequisites are considerably more limited in the Swedish and Norwegian cities.

We started this paper with a discussion about the tension between differentiation and integration in the big city. Returning to that discussion it is obvious that Copenhagen constructed a neighbourhood system particularly expressing differentiation while urban integration appears more important in the remaining five cities. “Self-government”, however, is not totally irrelevant in the integrationist perspective either. When centrally decided policies are to be implemented it can be assumed that adjustment to local conditions is facilitated if there is a degree of local self-government. Strandberg (1995, 1998) studying local self-government doctrines has pointed out as an important distinguishing dimension the contradiction between “state integrationism” and the “local self-ruling community”. In the state integrationist end of the scale local government is assigned the job of implementing the centrally decided welfare policies, while in the other end of the scale the municipality is seen as an organisation for the satisfaction of the common needs of the local community. Inspired by this argument we would like to coin the term *city implementation* to characterise those neighbourhood orders
leaving little leeway for local neighbourhood self-government. For the other end of the scale we would like to launch the term community networking. Neighbourhood rule in Copenhagen thus could be characterised as community networking while the systems in the other cities better can be perceived as expressions of city implementation.

**Structure and institutions**

We have underlined the need for integration, steering and coordination of the urban area. We called attention to two structures able to contribute to the production of such integration. One was the municipal structure of the urban region, where we made a distinction between polycentric and consolidated structures. It was assumed that a consolidated structure better satisfies the integration needs, while a polycentric structure favours the impact of urban differentiation. The other structure pointed at was the party system. A fragmented party system with local variations and with unfaithful voters was assumed to render the satisfaction of integration and coordination demands more difficult.

In both these respects Copenhagen stood out as the deviant case. In both respects the structures were unfavourable to central steering and urban integration. There are fewer differences between the other five cities. In this perspective it seems paradoxical that Copenhagen installed a neighbourhood rule system in the first place favouring community networking in a structure already polycentric and fragmented, while the more consolidated cities established the more integrationist order described as city implementation.

The thus observed correlation could be causally interpreted in different ways. One interpretation could be that it might have been impossible to establish anything but a community networking system in the polycentric and fragmented Copenhagen. At the same time this added differentiating and fragmenting force gave rise to counter-forces finally destroying the neighbourhood self-rule system.

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