

Summary

The final phase of a political decision making process in local government take place in the local council. Nevertheless, the final phase is only one of many phases where policy formulation takes place. Local politicians play a main part in the final phase, but are absent in initial phases concerning agenda setting and innovative political development. As a result local politicians are decision makers and seldom policy formulators.

Using this as a point of departure, we examine municipalities where political decision making includes politicians in all phases from initiative to the final decision. Our goals has been to detect different methods of decision making involving politicians, examine the use of these methods and finally evaluate the impact politicians has on the issue at hand.

7 case-studies are conducted in 6 municipalities and in one county. The cases feature the implementation of new decision making processes involving politicians. Our data consists of documents and interviews with 38 councillors and administrators. The documents provided information regarding formal organisation structures and decision making processes while the interviews revealed experiences with the new mode of involving decision making.

Our analyses indicate several methods to involve politicians from initiatives to decisions. We observe more active politicians, they put new issues at the agenda, issues at hand are marked by the work of the politicians and politicians and administrators cooperate well. In practise politicians are involved where they previously were absent leaving the administrators to make political decisions. Succeeding to establish involving decision making processes leaves politicians with greater influence and possibilities to decide upon the main questions concerning the evolvment of their municipality.

Still there are some negative experiences. Increased political participation in the decision making process is especially applied in strategic and principal issues. Consequently politicians are equally less involved in minor questions. When all attention is devoted to the principal and strategic questions it becomes a problem leaving all other matters for the administration. The politicians are therefore not satisfied only to consider the totality of their municipality. Furthermore delegation of tasks to the administration has increased and they use considerable more time to carry out their role as a councillor. This combined with the fact that the local councillors rarely get in touch with the service production of their municipality, suggest that there are considerable challenges for the municipalities.

A critical factor to succeed is thus a clear call for a new process. Furthermore the change must be a local one, not an adaptation of a model used somewhere else. In addition it is crucial that the decision making is flexible, allowing the politicians to shop among different processes corresponding to the issues at hand. Attaining flexibility the municipalities will as well meet some of the negative experiences that the politicians have faced so far.