

Abstracts

The pleasures and sorrows of being a councilor

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It is often claimed that it can be difficult for local councilors to balance their political and their private lives. Not least after the local authority reform of 2007 being a councilor is quite time consuming. At the same time the power relation between the central and the local political levels has been claimed to be tilted to the advantage of the former, and the economic crisis puts the local government budgets under stress. However, survey results demonstrate that despite these external sources of stress, Danish councilors most frustrated about the internal working conditions at the council. The councilors emphasize that trustful relations to fellow councilors are key to their political job satisfaction. Comparing

surveys from 1995, 2003 and 2012, it is also demonstrated that what matters to the councilors in these regards have not changed significantly over time.

Councilors' view on state-local relations, casework, the administration and own political influence, 1995-2013

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In large-scale surveys among Danish councilors conducted in 1995, 2003, 2009 and 2013 the councilors have been asked to assess the state-local power relations, the balance between casework and policy formulation, the interplay with top administrative officers and their own influence relative to their fellow councilors. It is demonstrated that while some of the views are quite stable over time, changes can also be observed. For instance, today fewer councilors think that there is too much casework to leave room for more general discussions than two centuries ago. Another finding is that in amalgamated municipalities top administrative officers tend to have become more influential in regard to policy decisions than in non-amalgamated municipalities.

Councilors as leaders in policy innovation processes

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Several reasons for strengthening the councilors' political leadership are put forward and it is claimed that leading processes of local policy innovation is an important route to promoting the councilors in the local leadership game. Some municipalities try to facilitate this process by establishing so-called §17, 4 committees, and a first evaluation of the use of these committees in Danish municipalities is offered. The conclusion is that even though these committees were introduced are evaluated in positive terms, many municipalities are still reluctant to use them as a tool in policy innovation processes.

The interplay between councilors and administrative officers – is there a front-bencher/backbencher divide?

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The relationship between politicians and administrators is a classical field of inquiry and within recent years the politics-administration dichotomy model has been superseded by

a partnership model. However, hitherto much scholarly attention has been devoted to the top level of the political as well as the administrative organization. In this article we go beyond the mayor-centered approach and ask the backbench politicians if they think that they are partnering up with the administration. It is demonstrated that the partnership model is more acknowledged among front-benchers than among backbenchers in the political hierarchy within the local councils.

The councilors after the Structural Reform – ready for welfare leadership?

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In 2007, the local authority reform in Denmark amalgamated the municipalities into larger units. Since then, quite a lot of attention has been devoted to the councilors and their roles and tasks in local governments. The reform professionalized the administration whereas the role of the amateur councilors was not really addressed either in the debate or in the legislation. Therefore, this essay discusses the councilors' roles and lists seven potential ways for the councilors to cope with the new challenges and to perform welfare leadership at the local level. The essay is based on the author's inaugural lecture held April 24, 2013 when he was appointed honorary professor at Copenhagen Business School.