How to win friends and influence policy: An ethnographic study of municipal entrepreneurship and co-governance

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Abstract:

This paper is a preliminary discussion of possible research themes based on data collected through eight weeks of fieldwork within two neighboring Norwegian municipal organizations. The data presented is part of my ongoing PhD project that thematically encompasses collaborative processes in the production and implementation of municipal policy. During fieldwork, tales of “municipal entrepreneurship” became the main vantage point for the study, understood as the processes in which policy ideas and initiatives emerge and are realized in the dialectic relationship between local politicians and municipal administrators. Through deploying ethnographic methods I have given particular attention to the normative rules regulating social interaction within the municipal organization, as well as how these normative rules relate to the use of external relationships in the production and implementation of municipal policy.

The introduction in this paper provides an overview of the study, while the main body of the paper presents empirical examples of data that are not yet fully systemized and analyzed. The paper should thus be read as a preliminary presentation of empirical data, and basis for discussing further research and analysis.

All geographic references, names, and some personal details have been changed to protect the identities of those collaborating in this study.

Introduction:

The Municipalities’ ability to independently develop and launch new policy initiatives is considered an important indicator of municipal autonomy in Norway, and has historically made the municipalities an important path-finder in the development of the Norwegian welfare state (Næss et.al. 1987). During the three last decades, three grand narratives have dominated the description of developments within local government administration in Norway – each of which can be expected to have an effect on the municipalities’ ability to develop and implement new policy initiatives. These are: The rise and (perhaps) decline of NPM; the transition from government to “governance”; and increased integration between state and municipality, under the state’s control (Bukve 2012).

Through both observing ongoing policy processes and collecting informant accounts of past policy processes, the study described in this paper examines how new policy initiatives emerge in a dialectic relationship between local politicians and administrators within the municipal organization. Through
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the viewpoint of actors within the municipal organization, the study will thus critically examine the empirical relevance of the above mentioned grand narratives.

While the initial plan for the study was to examine the particular role of co-governance (Røisland and Vabo 2012) in municipal policy processes, a central finding during early stages of fieldwork led to a broadened perspective. As will be elaborated below, I found that the strategic use external and internal relations during policy processes was so tightly interwoven from my informants’ perspective, that the role of co-governance could not be isolated as object of study.

I therefore adapted a broader approach, exploring holistically how my informants in their day-to-day affairs worked towards achieving policy goals, mapping what relations and resources (both internal and external to formal organization) were made relevant by my informants in each separate policy process. I soon found that understanding my informants’ actions during policy processes required an intimate understanding of the social mechanisms at play during policy development. Particular attention was therefore given to my informants’ understanding of their own role as bureaucrats or politicians during innovative policy processes, and the particular sets of normative rules guiding behavior and defining scope of action within the separated roles of policy development. With the attention given to normative rules of policy processes, the study is influenced by processional approaches within political anthropology, and particularly the (non-mathematical) game theory approach associated with Fredric G. Bailey (1969 and 2001).

**Methods:**

Fieldwork was conducted through two separate one-month stays within two separate, but neighboring, municipal organizations. Both municipalities numbered less than 3000 inhabitants. While fieldwork was mainly confined to the municipal building in these two municipalities, I also accompanied representatives from these two municipalities to a number of external meetings with external stake-holders in different processes, and also institutionalized collaborative organs such as regional councils and similar institutions. The data collected therefore includes both locations and informants external to the two main municipal organizations.

During both fieldworks I was appointed offices within the Municipal Administrations main buildings, housing the executive administrators and political leaders of the municipals. I was given free access to interact with and interview members of staff, and to attend most internal meetings I found relevant. By individual request, I was also allowed to accompany political and administrative representatives of the two main municipals to external meetings.
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Within the municipal buildings I conducted participant observation through interacting with the personnel in day-to-day activities, and to some extent partook in daily work tasks (i.e. writing minutes). Notes of dialog during meetings, observational data and informal conversations were documented through daily writing of field notes. Towards the end of each stay, I further conducted unstructured interviews with a total of 20 key informants - most of which are recorded on digital tape. The interviews range from approximately 60 to 120 minutes, and several informants were interviewed a second time.

The selection of informants for interviews was done on the basis of observational data, where informants in key positions in relation to different policy processes constitute the main bulk. The interviews were largely unstructured talks where my informants were asked about situations I had encountered during fieldwork. Informants were also asked to account for their role in both past and current policy process processes. Additionally, I also asked my informants to share their reflections on a number of key issues I explored during fieldwork.

Additionally, data from participant observation and interviews were supplemented through collecting relevant documents. These include policy documents, strategies, minutes and reports.

Presentation of data

In the following I will give introduction to the thematic content of my project through examples of empirical data collected during fieldwork. The empirical examples are organized in a preliminary thematic organization summarizing the main themes of what I plan to explore further during the project.

Organizational boundaries

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, an early notion during fieldwork was the difficulty in analytically separating relations internal and external to the municipal organizations I studied. One important reason for this notion was the unclear organizational boundaries characterizing both the physical and social landscape of the municipal administrations that I studied. The following vignettes illustrate the blurred organizational lines of the municipal organization, and thus the blurred lines of municipal policy development:

A quick glance into the municipalities treasure office reveals a puzzling display of two separate sets of desktop computer arrangements complete with separate screens and keyboards – arranged in front of a single revolving chair. Firmly seated in the revolving chair is Mike, in charge of treasure collection.
Mike explains: The desktop on his right hand side is logged on to the treasure collection system of his own municipality, while the left hand desktop is logged on to one of the neighboring municipals treasure collection systems. This arrangement therefore allows him to handle cases within two different municipalities through a simple turn of his chair, without the time consuming process of logging in and out of the computer system with separate user accounts for the different municipals. The need for quickly accessing the computer systems of the neighboring municipal is caused by a long lasting informal intermunicipal collaboration, where he has been collaborating on the task of treasure collection with three neighboring municipals for several years.

Mike is currently working on formalizing this collaboration, and has recently delivered a draft proposal to the chief municipal executives of the four municipalities for what he has labeled a “virtual host-municipality model”. This model will allow the four separate municipalities to form a single treasure collection unit, without a physical centralization. With this model, he is hoping to avoid discussions of localization, known as a frequent trap door in the development of collaborative solutions. The choice of a “virtual” model is also enabled by a recently introduced computer system for treasure collecting that allows a single user account to access several municipal systems simultaneously - thereby eliminating the need for the current multi-desktop solution. However, such multi-municipal access cannot be enabled before a formal collaboration is established.

Among the executive offices in the centre of the corridor, you will find an office with the puzzling nametag: “Sissel: Project Manager MedNet”.

MedNet is a central government funded project for implementing a new electronic interaction system between different municipal and governmental health and care institutions. Despite appearances, Sissel is currently employed neither by her municipality of physical placement, nor any central governmental agency. Instead, her formal employer is a neighboring municipal administration formally hosting the project, while her formal leadership consists of an intermunicipal board with executive board members from all of the municipal organizations involved in the project. From her office on the second floor, she is currently coordinating separate project teams in each of the involved municipalities, while also receiving specialist assistance from the central governmental agency. In addition, she’s collaborating with a number of private companies providing technical solutions for the project.

Further down the corridor, there are two offices belonging to another intermunicipal effort, the “course development office” (CDO). The CDO is currently employing two fulltime employees, both of whom have been previously employed by the municipality in other positions. As with Sissel, their leadership consists of an intermunicipal board with board members on the executive level from the involved municipalities. Unlike Sissel, however, they are not employed by any particular municipality.
The CDO is instead organized as a permanent intermunicipal enterprise owned by the collaborating municipalities, with the board employing their personnel independently. Their main purpose is to provide courses to municipal employers within a wide range of specialized fields. While their core funding (i.e. the two positions) is provided by their municipal owners, much of their activities and courses are funded largely by central government and county authority funds. This makes obtaining external resources for their own activities an essential task. Through obtaining external funding, the board leader estimates that the CDO is actually tripling the amount of money that is put into it, by its municipal owners, when measured in the cost of their activity output. In addition to providing founding, CDO is also dependant on external partners in the development of courses, most of which are developed and carried out in close collaboration with different central government agencies, county authorities and private actors.

The above examples illustrate how both the social and formal landscape of the municipal administration is characterized by floating organizational boundaries. Although two of the above examples are somewhat pointed due to the administrators actually being employed in external enterprises, they are illustrative to the day-to-day affairs within the municipal hall characterized with a social landscape where most administrators are to some extent involved in collaborative efforts with external organizations in their daily tasks. Identifying the responsible actors, and organizational boundaries, for a particular policy process thus becomes an empirical question for the researcher – and also for the administrator who often operates in a landscape with different and shifting organizational boundaries depending on process. In other words: “The organizational frames are results of social situations, and subjected to change” (Giskeødegård 2013).

The latter notion leads to a second reason for abandoning the initial focus on co-governance as an analytically isolated research object. This second reason is that as strategic tools, for the individual administrator or local politician, the use of network resources seemed a highly individualized affair. Rather than the municipal organization acting as a single headed enterprise, my data indicates that network resources are often employed by individual actors as strategic tools in political struggles within their own municipal organization, thereby again blurring the lines between internal and external processes. I will elaborate on the latter point towards the end of this paper. First, I will however provide some examples of the normative rules regulating the internal mechanisms of policy development within the municipal organization.

Rules of Politics and Rules of Administration:
During the processing of the municipal budget in the Municipal Council, a discussion is raised concerning the proposed sale of several housing units owned by the municipality. After the Chief Executives briefing on the subject, Astri, a municipal council representative takes the stand.

Astri gives a speech concerning the importance of good municipal social housing planning, and argues against the sale of the concerned housing units. At the end of her speech, she does however also propose an alternative to selling the housing units on the open market:

(...)

According to the County Governor, there is no requirement that [the sale of] housing units are subjected to bidding rounds (...) so it is also possible to imagine that we, as a municipality, help people in need of social housing acquire their own house, by selling the municipally owned housing units to them (...) So it is not exact that we need to sell [the housing units] in a bidding round (...).

Immediately after Astris speech, an agitated Chief Executive asks to pose a question directly from her chair, and is allowed so by the mayor. The Chief executive asks Astri (now on her way down from the speaker’s chair):

You said that the County Governor is saying that there doesn’t need to be a bidding round?

Astri: Yes?

Chief Executive: When did the County Governor become responsible for the Public Procurement Act?

Astri turns around; now looking equally agitated, and returns to the speaker’s chair:

Well, I apologize for saying it like that, then. The County Governor did say.., because I have been asking around, about how we can, perhaps, convey housing units to people in need of social housing. Because there have been, among other things, TV-reports where in other municipalities, and I have also read about this, [they have] helped persons in need to acquire their own housing (...). And I have been looking into how this can be done, and checked according to the social housing plan, and according to the Social Services Act. Then, I have been asking around, in order to find out if there are any objections to a municipal doing it this way. Do we have to [sell] housing units through bidding rounds like we have done priory in [our municipality]? And we do not have to! There are no requirements stating that we need bidding rounds. It’s possible to do it in another way. That’s what I meant. But, the County Governor also stated that we have to comply with some rules (...) these are the options I want to exhibit. There are several options that we need to consider.

Following Astris’s speech, the Chief Executive takes the speaker’s chair:

Mayor, I will not delay this [any further], but I would like to ask for the reference [person] at the County Governor. Because, it is news to me that the County Governor has any kind of competence regarding
the Public Procurement Act. It is, in fact, the Ministry of Trade and industry, and the Competition Authority, that is tasked with the supervision of this legislation.

Meeting the eyes of an obviously discouraged Astri, the Chief Executive continues:

Yes, but... I’m open to suggestions, but this does sound rather peculiar.

At this time, the Mayor asks to end the case. Meanwhile another representative, Ingvar, takes the speaker’s chair. Ingvar, it should be noted, is a long time veteran of local politics in the municipality:

Yes, Mayor. I have to tell the representative [Astri] that it is good that she does research. But do not present such things to an assembled municipal council! Raise the issue internally to the municipal executive board. It is completely..., it’s close to undignified to discuss these assumptions, that [you] have asked the County Governor and stuff. I have seen this before, representatives asking questions during my term as mayor, then I told them that; “no, unfortunately I can’t answer that”. But “I can”, he said, “because I have been talking to the County Governor”. We can’t have it this way in the municipal council! You have to raise it through the administration – or through the executive board. Let that be said. It is [however] positive, if what your saying is correct. (…)

While the former part of the above vignette, involving council member Astri and provoked Chief Executive could be accounted as an, although exaggerated, exchange of professional opinions, the latter remark from an experienced council member (Ingvar) proved far more puzzling for the naïve ethnographer – unaccustomed to the ritual setting of the municipal council. Why did Ingvar, although declaring a positive attitude to the content of Astris proposal, find the scene so provocative? Why was Astri’s arguments deemed undignified?

The key to understanding the provocative nature of councilmember Astris’s argumentation lies in a central normative rule for both political and administrative behavior. That is the rule of separation between the political role and administrative role – with attached rules of conduct guiding behavior and relations for each role. More important however, and key to understanding the reaction to councilmember Astri’s actions, is the rules guiding movement and relations across the two roles.

The separation of politics and administration would be emphasized by my informants both in everyday interaction and during interviews, and would also be a frequent cause of anger and conflict within the municipal organization. Within the municipality hall of a small municipality, housing most of the municipal administration and only one or two politicians on a day-to-day basis, the separation would be particularly visible in the division between the political role of the mayor and the administrative role of the Chief Municipal Executive and his/her administrative staff.
Despite the strong emphasis on the separation of political and administrative roles, defining and formulating the actual rules of conduct confining these roles proved an elusive task. In the following, I will provide examples of politicians and administers own accounts of the two roles.

The first example originates from a discussion during interview with a Chief Municipal Executive (CME), concerning the role of the administration versus the role of the mayor in the communicating of developments within the municipal organization to the general public.

CME: (...) No, because it’s a word that externally, I think, doesn’t really matter.

Ethnographer: “administrative” you mean?

CME: Yes, administrative, it’s a kind of internal word.

Ethnographer: In this case I’m thinking about the separation between politics and administration.

CME: Yes, and there is a very high consciousness about that. And there are very clear lines on that internally. And, in which, at least, me and [the mayor] are having a very clear and sorted system on.

Ethnographer: When you say clear lines, are these written anywhere, I mean how?

CME: No, they are not written. But we have, in a way, a close dialog. And, then, if there is any doubt then we clarify as we go.

Ethnographer: Do you have any examples of incidents were this has been difficult?

CME: No, but it has not been difficult.

Ethnographer: But if you were to explain to me the difference between politics and administration in a few words, how would you say it?

CME: Yes, you can relate it to a case, the process of a case. From it is conceived, it is processed, proposed and carried out. Then there is a clear separation in time.

Ethnographer: Process?

CME: Yes, or time. As soon as the Chief Municipal Executive has provided its proposal, then the case has become politics. And then the Chief Municipal Executive and the administration will have to act in accordance to the decision that has been made, even if it is contrary to the recommendation of the administration — in an extreme case.

In the dialog above, the CME implies that the separation of politics and administration is an internal affair of the municipal organization. Concerning content of the division between politics and administration roles, the CME attributes the separation to a timely change in the course of a
developing case. The latter represents a common conception in the municipal organizations I studied: that the political level was one of decision, while the administrations role was to provide fact based processing for the municipal council to base their discussion — and to execute policy decisions in accordance to the councils orders. While my informants would usually be clear on the Municipal Councils role as decision making authority, formulating the exact rules of conduct consequently regulating political and administrative conduct was a far more elusive affair. Bellow follows some examples.

The first example is from a conversation with the Mayor of one of my case municipalities, where the Mayor is explaining how his (political) role differs from the administration in regards to external relations:

Ethnographer (...) Can you explain the differences in your role in opposition to the role of the administration concerning contact outwards [external to the municipal administration]?

Mayor: Yes, see, the administration does not have any linkage to the political milieu at all. They can send an application to the County Authorities of [county name], and get their share of the county founds for trade and industry development, for example. Or they can write a letter to the County Governor and get discretionary funds. These are the [only] alternatives the administration has. But if you are to get a solution — change something — for example getting a piece of road, then there has to be political pressure. Because the County Authority will have to move funds towards it and prioritize that piece of road, they have list of priorities.

Ethnographer: So you are separating between political and administrative [relations]?

Mayor: Yes, for example, they are now working on [a vital road in the municipality]. Those sharp turns over there. (...) The process has been standing still the whole time. But then there was a political incident. When 'the good man’ [name of former County Authority politician] was County Chief for Communications and Transport. I brought him there, and told him: [banging hard on the table with his fist] “the road is about to slip out!” Then the matter came up, it was brought up in the system, into their consciousness. [They then realized] “We will have to do something about this”. Then it got on the County Authorities’ list of priorities.

In the dialog above, the Mayor is implying there is a difference between administrative relations and political relations regarding who they can contact. Administrators, the Mayor asserts, cannot have relations with politicians, and are with their administrative relations only able to impact within the existing frameworks of incentives and grants. Actual “change”, as the mayor explains, is however dependent on political relations.
While being clearly implying that municipal administrators could not contact politicians in other levels of government, the Mayor was more ambiguous concerning whether municipal politicians could be in contact with administrators in other levels of government. A few minutes earlier in our conversation, the Mayor explained how he/she had on a previous occasion contacted administrators within the County Authorities to push them towards improving a stretch of road in the municipality. The Mayor had then asserted that contacting politicians within the County Authorities was a strategy used mainly when not succeeding through administrators. As I had previously in accounts both from administrators and politicians heard how the borders between political and administrative relations were crossed regularly, I decided to pursue the matter further with the Mayor during our conversation:

Ethnographer: But, if I’m a bit bold, and suggest that these borders [between politics and administrators] are crossed all the time. And that that is part of the techniques of both bureaucrats and politicians...,

Mayor: Well yes.

Ethnographer: And that you can, if you do not succeed in one way, that you try another way. You yourself told me that you would call bureaucrats, perhaps, first? 

Mayor: Yes, maybe I do that.

Ethnographer: But have you given any thought to if you actually have any other means at your disposal, any other sanctions? Does your role function in another way, if, say that we cross, or dissolve that separation [between politics and administrative contact].

Mayor: Well, there is probably a difference. I do think that my voice probably has a larger impact than the voice of a bureaucrat in [this] Municipality. If one writes a letter or whatever we do. I do actually feel so. In that way, one might have more power. Yes, you are allowed to growl a bit.

The mayor gave to examples of such “growling”. One involved another road issue with the County Authorities, regarding another county road improvement within the municipality. In this case, the improvement process had been publicly promised by an influential County Authority, but was later delayed. The mayor had then involved a local newspaper, which published several stories concerning the road and the delay of the improvement process. He argues that, in this case, the growling had an effect:

This matter has now had such [public] focus, that [the road improvement project] will be started by 2014 – they dare not delay it any further, to say it in that manner. It has been delayed and delayed.
And as long as there is silence about it (…,) they delay things (…,) so I have, you know, politicians are allowed to growl a bit, and to be in the media. And influence in that way.

A second example of such growling provided by the mayor involved his involvement in pushing Telenor, the major Norwegian telecommunication company (with the Norwegian state as a majority owner), into improving the cell-phone coverage within their municipality:

Mayor: (…) I have been very angry with Telenor. I’ve been pissed off. And I have had many meetings with a guy named [name of high ranking telenor official]. It did not help at all. So I wrote a letter, I thought I had to bring this matter further, to [the Norwegian Minister of Transport and Communications]. And we got an answer back; “well, if you are dissatisfied with Telenor and the coverage, then we should just raise the issue with Telenor”! Then, then I thought that now I’m getting angry. Now I’m angry. And I thought; now I’m going to travel to Oslo. And it’s on my agenda, but I have not done it yet. But I am going to. (…) But we do not have enough weight. Even if I get angry, it doesn’t help very much.

Ethnographer: But what your implying here. When you get angry, you are utilizing your network?

Mayor: Yes?

Ethnographer: But the bureaucrat might perhaps be a bit more bound, he might be as angry as may be within his office, but can only “growl” in the common room? But you are able to growl a bit further out?

Mayor: [laughing] yes, that’s my feeling. It’s true. I can go to the newspaper. Like I did now, I called [name of journalist in a regional newspaper] this morning, concerning that farming thing. That they want to place here. I told them “no way!” We will not allow them here with that stuff. A bureaucrat cannot do that [contact the media in such manner].

In the latter example, the mayor referred to a debate concerning the establishment of a particular kind of fish farming deemed problematic from an environmental viewpoint. The issue had been debated earlier the same day on a national radio show, where a partaker in the debate had suggested establishing such problematic fish farming in the regional area of the municipality. This prompted the mayor’s immediate response in form of contacting a journalist in a regional newspaper.

While the strategic use of media will be explored elsewhere, I will here pursue what the Mayor formulated as “growling”. While this Mayor was the only of my informants to apply the term “growling” in the description of political privileges, the expression of anger implied by the term echoed a common understanding I had heard during fieldwork. That is the understanding of a
division separating a rational modus operandi within the administration to the emotional mechanism of politics.

Another take on the emotional mechanism of politics was provided by Tom, who provides a particularly interesting account on the separation of roles due to himself at the time holding both an administrative role (as a midlevel administrator) and a political role (among others as a municipal councilor) within his home municipality. During a discussion on how he handled his multiple roles during a council meeting where he presented a case as administrator, Tom provided the following insights to the understanding of the separation between politics and administration:

Tom: (...) in such cases where I am the administrative spokesman for a case, then I retire [as a politician] and argue through my [administrative] role. I provide a professional assessment, and then I withdraw, and let the politicians make the decision.

Ethnographer: What do you mean when you say “professional assessment”?

Tom: It should be a professional assessment is in virtue of the position I hold. As [administrative position] it is my superior responsibility is to provide an overall picture to the case.

Ethnographer: And how does that separate from what can be labeled a political role?

Tom: In such cases it is important that you do not have any..., that you have the overall picture and don’t decent into particulars. (...) 

Ethnographer: But, many refer to this thing called a “professional assessment”, in contrast to something called a “political” opinion (...) but could you provide any examples on how these two categories differ from each other?

Tom: Yes, in my opinion they are different. Regarding the political level, then the location patriotism might become relevant. Because we are in a geographically widespread municipality, with [naming four different demographic centers the municipality]. Therefore we will often get political discussions that are a bit..., (...)

In careful wording, Tom is referring to a common political struggle in the municipal concerning the localization of institutions and other welfare goods within the municipality. The common term used among my informants for the phenomena was “village politics” (No: grendepolitikk), describing a claimed tendency towards local politicians, often having their electoral base within different demographic centers in the municipality, being more interested in serving their own “villages” rather than the municipality as a whole. In such cases, Tom asserted that the administrative role was to ensure that new developments favored the municipality as a whole, rather than the “location patriotism” of the local politicians. Tom provides an example from a discussion regarding the building
of new sport-and leisure arenas in the municipality, where the local politicians were arguing towards prioritizing the building of additional lighted ski-trails, soccer fields in each of their “villages”, thereby giving less priority to a project application for a skateboarding park:

Tom: (...) Then I argued (...) this time we should prioritize a skateboarding park. The reason was simply that we did not have a skateboarding park in [our municipality], while we did have three or four lighted ski-trails and two to three soccer fields. But we did not have a skateboarding park. Then I can, from my position [as an administrator] see the whole picture, and make a professional assessment. You can call it professional or whatever, but as a [administrative position] with the overreaching goals of providing services for everybody, and in this case their being not existing skateboarding park, it was obvious that we should prioritize that.

As Tom had not used the term “village politics”, but had introduced the more emotional linked term, “location patriotism”, I asked about the linkages between the terms:

Ethnographer: So, you are linking “political” opinion to emotions, and asserting these [emotions] to village politics?

Tom: Yes. In the assessment of such explicit project applications, then it is self-evident.

Ethnographer: But do you assert that, by implication, that as a politician, you are not responsible for looking after the whole picture?

Tom: Well, we do [have a responsibility]. That’s primarily what you have. But this is just one example of how local politics are done in a small municipality. We are often not able to see the whole picture, as we are unable to look beyond our own doorstep. When we achieve something in [one village], then it is hard to stomach that [the other villages] are not getting it. It’s often like that. That’s how local politics are.

A few minutes later, our conversation progressed towards a discussion of how Tom conducted his work as a politician, and how he handled the managed the switch between his political and administrative role.

Tom: [as a politician] I’m very active and impatient. If I think that things are moving too slowly, in the bureaucracy, at the County Authorities or in the state, then I will actively pursue my political party colleges at the County or in Storting. I have positive experiences of working in such manor. At one point, I even gathered the all members of Storting from our County, so that [a local enterprise in his municipality] could come down there [in Oslo] and present themselves. That’s how I do much of my political work. There is a fine balance here, and as I sad you have to be clear on who you are [and who you are representing]. (...) Of course we should as [politicians] be able to apply our political party organization. I think we could be doing more of that, no matter [what party you belong to].
Ethnographer: But is it possible? I understand that when you call people, you can present yourself as [political title], or as a representative of your political party, or as [administrative position]. And I do understand that doing this has some kind of effect. But I’m thinking, that when you employ your network, consisting of people that you already know, and that knows you and all your roles, is it then possible to be anything else than Tom, with all of the positions that you hold?

Tom: Well, what you’re talking about is important. That’s way it is important that we set things straight. When I present myself and take initiatives as [political position], or at least when I say that I’m taking initiative on behalf of our municipality, then I have to do so in understanding with the Mayor. If I take initiative on behalf of [the local branch of his political party,] or as member of the Municipal Council, then it is another matter. Separating the [different political roles] is also very important. And, as you are saying, they often accuse me of…, they often ask me — it is a challenge to be in both [political position] and [administrative] position — what hat I am wearing? (...) So I always declare that “tonight I’m wearing the [administrative] hat”, (…,) or “tonight I am actually [in a political role]”. It’s not a bigger problem than that. You can eliminate the whole problem.

Ethnographer: By declaring it first?

Tom: Yes

Ethnographer: But when you have declared yourself, does that in any way structure what you do next?

Tom: No, it doesn’t have any big impact on what I say. (...) But if I have been given a mandate, and go to a meeting on behalf of [our] municipality, if [the Mayor] can’t go, then it becomes more important that I structure myself (…) and become clear on the fact that I am currently representing the municipality. But it is not a problem: It has to be that way (…).

Ethnographer: But is it then okay to switch hats during the same meeting?

Tom: No, but thats not an issue, I can’t think of any occasion during the same meeting where?

Ethnographer: How about during lunch?

Tom: Well, during lunch, I think that when you are done with the formalities, and you are sitting down to have lunch. If there is then not enough ceiling, then we won’t get far in life.

Toms account adds another important piece to the division between politics and administration, the declaration of hats. In a small municipality, where many of the municipality’s employees would also have political roles, such switching of hats was a much debated affair. For some (as in the case of Tom) the “switching of hats” entailed a simple declaration at the start of any conversation, for some it entailed differentiation in behavior and available actions, and for some it entailed a situation to be avoided all together by refraining from taking political positions.
While the normative emphasis on the Municipal Council as decision making authority was highly emphasized by all my informants, my enquires into the lengthy processes of policy development did however also reveal a more complex picture of the dialect relationship between administrators and politicians.

How to win friends and influence policy

My entry point in to understanding municipal policy development came through examining cases of “municipal entrepreneurship” among my informants. My data on such processes consist of both observations during fieldwork, and accounts of a wider range of both smaller and larger past policy processes. While I found tracing the initial spark of policy processes extensively difficult, I would in most accounts be able to identify personnel (in some cases politicians, and in some cases administrators) identifying themselves as prime movers at some part of the processes. As my data on these accounts are not yet fully systemized, I will only provide a short description of some key points in this paper.

Most new policy developments encounter some degree of resistance or controversy within the municipal organization. Such controversy can include both political controversy and administrative controversy. As most new policy developments entail some degree of financial commitment, the initiative must also compete with other good causes within the constantly strained municipal budget — even if deemed desirable both by politicians and administrators. This applies to both politicians and administrators when working as prime movers for a policy development. Given the emphasis on the separation between politics and administration, the normative rules exemplified above do however differentiate between political roles and administrative roles in the regulation of how these are allowed to act as prime movers of a policy development.

My accounts of municipal entrepreneurship display how my informants, in both political and administrative roles as prime movers, work towards achieving policy goals through the strategic use of resources originating both within and outside of the formal municipal organization. Below follows some examples of key strategies applied by my informants in their effort to gain momentum for cause and achieve policy goals:

Creating alliances:

Both politicians and administrators emphasized the importance of creating alliances to the support of their case when acting as prime movers for new policy developments. The normative rules do
however regulate what kind of alliances is allowed to be formed by respectively politicians and administrators (i.e. who you are allowed to have relations with). However, despite the strong normative emphasis on these rules, “cheating” is a common part of the strategies applied when promoting a new policy development. This is done both directly through forming alliances between politicians and administrators, and indirectly through forming normatively “unlawful” alliances with external actors. The forms of alliances formed in the promotion of policy developments are therefore quite similar both among administrators and politicians within the municipal organization. As such alliances are formed by individual actors through relations both within and outside the formal municipal organization; they do as mentioned earlier blur the lines between internal and external processes during policy developments.

**Seeding ideas:**

“Seeding” was a common expression used by many informants in the description of the initial stages of policy development. With a normative rule limiting the administrations involvement in policy developments to carrying out requests from the Municipal Council, gaining momentum for a policy idea clearly originating from the administration could often be a troublesome affair. Seeding was thus the term applied for spreading an idea more or less covertly to other actors both internal and external to the municipal administration. Seeding would also be an important strategy for exploring the possibility of more stable alliances through later stages of policy development.

**Phasing:**

Particularly in cases of politically controversial policy suggestions, a common strategy would be the phasing of decisions either in the administrative leadership or in the Municipal Council, starting off with decisions of minor implications (for example a pilot project), thereby constructing a “path dependency” towards later realization of the entire policy project.

**Funding:**

Finding external funding for a policy development would provide a strong argument in many cases. However, as grants would usually be time limited and require some sort of co-payment (either directly or indirectly by administrative resources), the strong persuading power of external funding seems to be not solely related to the actual monetary resources gained. One possible explanation is that obtaining external founding also displayed strong alliances committed to the cause, and also in many cases (depending on the source of founding) provided strong arguments as “expert opinions” deeming its policy cause desirable.
In any case, securing external funding would often be a complex affair requiring extensive use of network relations and creative alliances often requiring both political and administrative roles at play.

**Concluding remarks**

Another central theme present in my data not explored in this paper is the normative content involved in the “act of representation,” critical to interpreting how both municipal administrators and local politicians act in collaborative forums. Through examining how the normative rules of the municipal organization come to play also in collaborative forums, I hope to develop a framework that links the internal and external mechanisms at play during municipal policy development — thereby increasing our understanding of how co-governance actually happens. By applying my empirical findings in a critically examination of the three grand narratives mentioned in the introduction of this paper, my hope is not only to explore the validity of these grand narratives, but also to examine the origins of the ideological and culture traits that underpin the normative rules and particular sort of municipal organizations I encountered during fieldwork.
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