

## Local councillors

*between local "government" and local "governance"*

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## **Local Councillors**

**- Between Local "Government" and Local "Governance".**

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Preliminary Version.

## Introduction.

Local government is - like government in general - in a state of change. Since the beginning of the 1980s a wave of reorganizings has taken place in order to "modernize" the political and administrative structures of government in the more or less developed welfare states of Europe and the "Western" world. These efforts to reorganize the institutions of central and local government are often characterized by the common denominator of "New Public Management" (NPM). - NPM has become a new discourse and guiding principle as to the institutional form and character of the advanced welfare states.

Commonly NPM is comprehended as a special - new - kind of administrative policy, aiming at the institutional organization and functioning of the administrative and service-delivering institutions of the public sector.

It is, however, not just the institutions and functionings of public administration and service-delivery that are being reorganized and "modernized" under the guiding principles of NPM. The reorganizing efforts since the beginning of the 1980s encompass the political institutions and ways of organizing politics and public decision- and policy-making as well.

In this regard the common denominator of "New Public Management" might be more accurately phrased as "New Public Governance".

The modernization policies of NPM can not be reduced to a new kind of administrative policy, dealing with the principles and institutional organization of public administration and service-delivery. It is a more far-reaching kind of policy - dealing with the principles and institutional organization of public politics and government - that is a new kind of "constitutional" policy. - It is the form of government that is being reorganized and "modernized".

In public and political debate this "constitutional" dimension and perspective of the ongoing modernization of the public sector is more or less neglected, however. As has been pointed out by the Norwegian political scientist and "new institutionalist" Johan P.Olsen, the modernization reforms of the Western welfare states accentuate the need for a public constitutional debate as to the kind and form of democratic government we are going - and want - to have. "Modernization" of the public sector is not just about public administration - it is the political and democratic constitution - the institutional form of government - that is at stake (Olsen, 1990,1991,1992).

Taking this comprehension of "New public management" as "New public governance" as a point of departure, the paper will focus on the NPM-reorganizings at the local level in Denmark. - Asking to the new or emerging role of local Councillors.

What characterizes the institutional reorganizations of local government in the case of Denmark? And what does the ongoing reorganization mean to the local Councillors and to their role in local government?

The paper will fall into two main parts. Firstly, the NPM-restructuring of local government will be characterized, pointing to a specific Danish "NPM"-model of local government. Secondly, the new institutional roles of Danish local government will be clarified, especially as to the NPM-role of local Councillors as "goal-steering" political leaders. The "goal-steering" role will be discussed and arguments be made as to the need of another kind of new "governance"-role on part of the local Councillors.<sup>1</sup>

### NPM at the level of local government.

As a common denominator of the various efforts to modernize the public sector of the advanced welfare states, NPM is somewhat of a mixed buy.

In the literature NPM is often descriptively encircled by way of shorter or longer lists as to the - many and varied - elements that have been on the agendas and put into effort as part of the different programmes of "modernizing the public sector" since the beginning of the 1980s. And often these NPM-descriptions are more or less "coloured" by the country-specific programmes and efforts of the particular states under consideration.

In order to characterize the different organizing principles and elements generally associated with the common denominator of NPM in a more conceptualizing manner, one may categorize these organizing principles and elements along two lines:<sup>2</sup>

- introduction of market and market-like mechanisms in the public sector
- incorporation of new leadership and management principles and mechanisms from private sector and business organizations into the organization of public sector institutions

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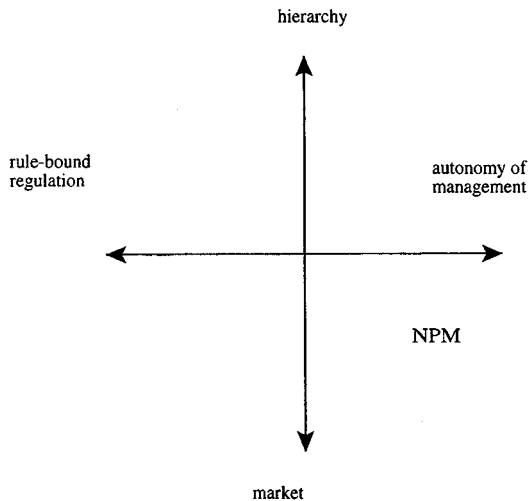
<sup>1</sup> The paper will - to some extent - be drawing on observations from an - ongoing - case-study of a Danish Municipality that has been on the "forefront" as to the instituting of a new "goal-steering"-role on part of the local Councillors.

The case-study is part of a bigger Research-project on "Democracy from below", investigating the institutional structures of local government and governance in regard to the problem of political empowerment and democracy. The empirical data of the case-study (consisting of documentary materials, participant-observations, questionnaires and interviews on part of local Councillors, chief-administrators, leaders and users of various service-institutions as well as a range of "lay" actors and ordinary citizens of the municipality) are on a state of closer examination and analysis. - So - the observations, drawn upon in this paper, are preliminary - open to further empirical examination - and - of course - discussion.

<sup>2</sup> This attempt to categorize NPM is inspired by Klausen and Ståhlberg, 1998 and Greve and Jespersen, 1998.

Using this two-fold distinction, NPM may be characterized by way of the following figure:

fig. 1



The vertical axis - from hierarchy to market - entails efforts to marketize the public sector - directly or indirectly - at the expense of the hierarchical and subordinating relations that have been a characteristic of the traditional organizational structure of the public sector.

Examples of this kind of reorganizing elements are:

- direct privatization
- contracting out
- purchaser-provider-models
- free choice-/exit opportunities on part of the citizens
- competition and economic incentives on part of the service-institutions

The horizontal axis - from rule-bound regulation to autonomy of management - entails efforts to organize the institutions of the public sector according to new principles of leadership and management developed in the private business sector - generally accommodated and advocated by way of Organization theory and the rapidly growing amount of management literature.

Common to this "managerial" kind of reorganizing is a new orientation of the public institutions towards the output and out-come dimensions of public decision- and policy-making at the expense of the input- and process-dimensions. In order to deliver high quality services in

an effective and responsive way - according to the need of the citizens and "customers" of the public services - the public institutions are being freed from traditional rule-bound and detailed regulations "from above". They get more possibilities and autonomy to manage their task-performance and service-delivery in varying ways according to criteria of efficiency and outcome. Examples of this kind of reorganizing elements are:

- decentralization to the service-delivering institutions and "producing" units
- user-influence by way of user-boards and -surveys
- goal-steering/management by objectives
- joint forums of strategic leadership
- efficiency monitoring
- systems of service- and quality-management ("Total-quality-management" and the like)

NPM may be seen as a complex combination of these two types of reorganizations - indicated by the lower-right quarter of the figure - whereas the upper-left quarter may indicate the organizing principles and structure of the "traditional" public sector.

This conceptualizing of the NPM-reorganizations of the public sector is general - covering a range of variations from one country to another - and from one period of time to another. In some countries the vertical axis can be the dominating one - in others and at certain periods of reorganizing, the horizontal axis may become dominant.

In the case of Denmark the kind of reorganizations indicated by the vertical - from hierarchy to market - axis have been if not totally absent then rather modestly at the fore during the last 15-20 years period of "modernization" at the central and local level of government. The Danish modernization programmes and efforts have been more of the horizontal axis-kind, encompassing a special profile that doesn't fit well into the more general NPM-concept outlined by way of the above figure.

This special profile goes especially for the reorganizations at the local level of government.

In a Danish local government context the market and meso-market ideas have not caught on and municipal efforts like privatization, contracting out, free choice-opportunities and competition are rare and far from widespread.

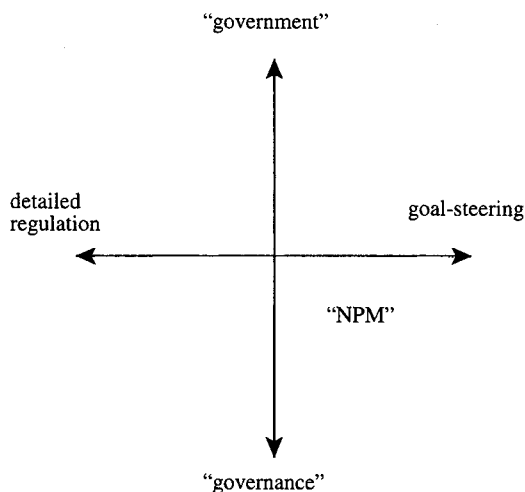
Thus, the local government reorganizations of Denmark have gone in a somewhat different direction than has been the case of for instance Sweden where elements of contracting-out, purchaser-provider-models, voucher-systems and other market-like mechanisms have been introduced and instituted in a range of municipalities (Wise and Amnå, 1993; Montin, 1990,1993; Knutson and Forsman, 1992, Klausen and Ståhlberg, 1998).



During the last few years - to some extent inspired by the Swedish restructurings - some Danish municipalities have chosen more market-like forms of organizing public decision-making and service-delivery - such as contracting out day-care of children and services for the elderly. But up until now it has not been the market-oriented forms of restructuring that have characterized the Danish local government level.<sup>3</sup>

Taking the horizontal - "managerial" - kind of public sector-reorganizations of fig. 1. as a point of reference, the municipal restructurings that have been going on at the level of local government since the late 1980's<sup>4</sup> may be indicated by way of the following figure:

fig. 2.



<sup>3</sup> The present financial situation of the Danish municipalities - negotiated and agreed upon by the central state government and The Association of Municipalities - has become very tight, inspiring new consideration on part of the municipalities towards more market-like forms of reorganization in order to get more and better services for the money spent.

<sup>4</sup> The early programmes and efforts of "modernizing the public sector" were up through the 1980s focussing at the central level of government and state-administration. Since the middle and late 1980s the public sector-reorganizing has caught on at the local level of the municipalities, becoming at the "forefront" modernizing restructurings.

Here the vertical axis - from hierarchy to market - is replaced by an axis from local "government" to local "governance"<sup>5</sup>. This line of reorganizing covers a structural change from one formal and authoritative centre of public decision- and policymaking at the local municipality-level to a multitude of more or less autonomous entities, public as well as private institutions, associations and actors, networking together within their respective domains of local governance. The traditional, vertical relations of local government "from above" are being supplemented and to some extent replaced by more horizontal relations and interactions between the many and different centres and entities of local governance.

This "multicentering" of local government is taking place by way of delegation and decentralization of more or less delimited decision-making competence and responsibility from the "central" local government, e.g. the elected Local Council, to the different producing and service-delivering institutions and their users, to various private associations, organizations and groups of citizens getting the status of more or less self-governing entities within their respective domains of governance.

This kind of delegation and decentralization of competence and responsibility along the vertical line is combined with a horizontal line covering a withdrawal of detailed, rule-bound regulation in favor of economic frame-regulation and superior "goal-steering" on part of the Local Council.

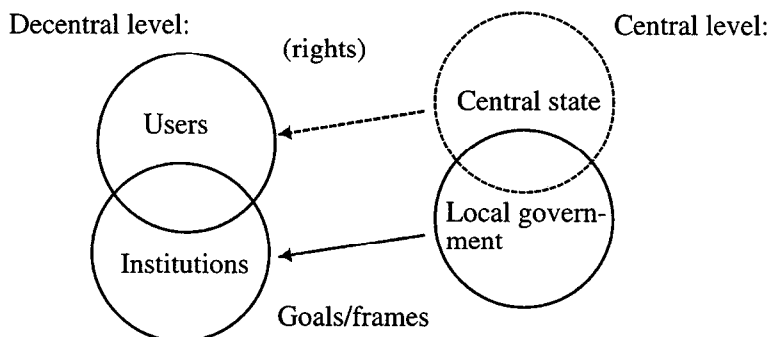
The profile of the specific Danish NPM-restructurings at the local level of government can be grasped as a combination of these two lines of restructurings - indicated by the lower-right quarter of the figure. Whereas the upper-left quarter may indicate the traditional structure of government at the local level.

As a result of the local government restructurings a new and combined model of government and public decision-making is taking shape at the local level - illustrated in the following, simplified figure:

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<sup>5</sup> These terms are borrowed from the British local government literature (Rhodes, 1997, 1999; Stoker 1997).

fig. 3.



The combined model of government that is taking shape at the local level in the case of Denmark

- here sketched in a simplified and "ideal-typical" manner - consists of three main-elements:

- Decentral self-governance. - E.g. delegation of decision-making competence and responsibility to the service-delivering public institutions such as nursery and primary schools, homes for the elderly, youth centres etc. The service-institutions become more or less self-governing, getting competence and responsibility as to their own finances and "production". - To lesser extent this goes for the more administrating and regulating divisions and units of the municipality as well - not indicated in the simplified figure above.

- User-participation. - The self-governing competence of the public institutions and units is carried out in formalized cooperation with the users of the various public services. The users are involved and assigned competence and influence on the institutions and their service-delivery - by way of elected user-boards functioning as governing bodies of the institutions in question.

- "Central" goal-steering (management by objectives) and economic frame-regulation. - The traditional detailed matters of the Local Council are being delegated to the various administrating units and to the service-delivering institutions. And the rule-bound and detailed regulations "from above" are being revoked in favour of broad-lined goals and objectives on part of the "central" Local Council, leaving room of manoeuvre on part of the service-institutions and administrating units of the municipality - within the economic frames allocated to the various institutions and units. - This economic frame- and political goal-steering on part of the elected Local Council belongs to the realm of municipal self-government. The municipalities are, however, not

autonomous entities of local government. They are interacting and negotiating with the central state government as regards the overall finances and bound by national laws and the entailed social rights of the citizens - indicated by the stiped part of the above figure.

This combined model of government recurs - in various versions - in many Danish municipalities where the model has been carried out - to a smaller or larger degree - since the end of the 1980s.<sup>6</sup>

One may speak of a specific Danish "New Public Management"-model of government at the local level. A model that entails a range of clear NPM-oriented and inspired elements, but deviates from the more general NPM-discourse on several points. The market-like elements of NPM are only modestly integrated in the model and as to the "managerial" elements, they are combined in a specific way, stressing decentralization and institutional self- and user-governance.<sup>7</sup>

This specific variant of "NPM" at the local government level of Denmark also deviates from the kind of NPM-inspired restructurings and new modelling of local government that have been carried out in the other Scandinavian municipalities of Sweden and Norway since the 1980s.

Compared to the Swedish local government restructurings, the weak integration of the market-oriented kind of restructuring comes to the fore. Besides, the Swedish as well as the Norwegian restructurings do not entail the same characteristics of decentral self- and user-governance, the Swedish municipal restructurings being of a more "managerial" kind and the Norwegian of a less NPM-oriented and more "traditional" public administration-oriented kind of restructurings, stressing the municipalities as local implementation-agencies of the welfare state. (Baldersheim et al, 1997; Vabo and Opedal, 1997)<sup>8</sup>

The Danish local government restructurings are - or have been up until now - a mingling of the "managerial" kind of NPM-reorganizations and a historically developed tradition of

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<sup>6</sup> Decentralization to the service-delivering institutions has been the most pronounced element of the Danish local government reorganizations, introduced in most of the municipalities. User-participation by way of formal user-boards has been instituted in all municipalities as regards primary schools, day-care of children and services for the elderly. Besides these - law-bound - forms of user-participation, other and less formalized kinds and forms of participation and influence on part of the users have become widespread on a wide range of service-areas. Goal-steering, embracing a more or less wide range of municipal tasks and services, have been introduced in about half of the Danish municipalities (Sehested et al, 1992; Andersen, 1996; Ejersbo, 1997, Klausen and Ståhlberg, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> The case-municipality of the Research-project on "Democracy from below" may be characterized as a "radical" variant of this Danish model of "NPM" at the local level - combining a thorough decentralization of competence and responsibility to the service-delivering institutions and their users and a "central" goal-steering on part of the Local Council.

<sup>8</sup> To a large extent these more welfare state-oriented kinds of municipal reorganizations were introduced and instituted in Denmark back in the 1970s - as part and in continuation of the local government reforms of the welfare state period (Hansen, 1997). - Due to the new "modernizing" restructurings of local government since the 1980s, the so-called "Scandinavian model of local government" has become less of a unitary model - the municipalities of the Scandinavian countries being restructured in somewhat different directions.

decentral local governance based on institutionalized norms and forms of participation and influence on part of local associations, groups of citizens and users.<sup>9</sup>

At the local level of government the NPM-discourse has become articulated and interpreted within a Danish institutional reality and form of local governance, giving the NPM-model of local government a specific profile characterized by the above mentioned combination of local self- and user-governance at the decentral level of the institutions and economic frame- and goal-steering at the "central" level of the elected Council.

### New governing-roles at the local level.

The new combined model of local government institutes a range of new governing-roles on part of the different actors of local government. - Five different kinds of institutional roles may be distinguished:<sup>10</sup>

- The citizens are being instituted as "users" of the public services. As users the citizens have got new specified rights and opportunities of participating and influencing the various service-delivering institutions and sectors of the municipality, being attributed distinct and formalized "voice"-opportunities as specially concerned participants in the decision- and policy-making-processes of local government.
- The professionals and employeeed of the municipal institutions and administrative units have got more competence and responsibility as "producers" of public services. This competence and responsibility is being exercised in accordance with the users of the services in question by way of new formal as well as more informal procedures of dialogue and cooperation. Thus, the formal user-boards of the institutions consist of representatives of the users as well as of the employeeed.
- The heads of the various municipal institutions and units are attributed a new and enhanced role as "leaders" and "managers". They have got more authority and responsibility internally, e.g. in regards to their "own" particular institution, as well as externally, e.g. in regards to leadership and management of the municipality as a whole.

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<sup>9</sup> Diverse and more or less extensive forms of participation and consultation became an institutional element of the welfare state period of local government reorganization during the 1970s - especially within the fields of education, social services and physical planning.

<sup>10</sup> The "role"-concept is here comprehended and used in a "new institutionalist" manner and perspective, e.g. "roles" are conceptualized as embracing formal and informal positions, competences and obligations as well as symbolic-discursive meanings and understandings as to the "appropriate behavior of the holders of various positions and offices in question (March and Olsen, 1989, 1995).

- The "central" administrative staff of the municipality are becoming "consultants" in regard to the decentral, self-governing institutions and "producing" units that they are to service within their respective realm of administrative capacity.
- The administrative chiefs have been attributed a new role of municipal leadership and management as "directors" - functioning as a forum of strategic leadership and as advisors and "sparring partners" in regard to the politically elected Council and the Mayor. - At the "central" level of municipal administration and management these new roles are often instituted in combination with an abolishment of the sector-oriented divisions and departments of the "traditional" administrative structure of local government - in favour of more cross-cutting and comprehensive units of "service-administration".
- Finally, the local Councillors have got a new and superior role as "goal-steering" decision-makers, formulating and deciding upon the overall goals and specific objects as well as the financial frames of local government. - Often this new "goal-steering" role of the Councillors are combined with more or less formalized and developed procedures of dialogue between the Local Council and the different self-governing institutions and their user-boards. And often the traditional standing sector-committees of the Local Council are being abolished and restructured in favour of fewer, more comprehensive committees and the Local Council as a united political forum.

According to the common perception and "discourse" of the new model of government at the local level of Denmark, these new governing roles and relations will make local government both more effective - giving more and better service-quality for the money spent - and responsive - according to the different needs and preferences of the local citizens - as well as more democratic.

In the official language local government will be strengthened and democratized "from below" - by the development of new forms of participatory democracy on part of the users of the public services - and "from above" - by a strengthening of the Local Councillors as superior and decisive "goal-steering" decision- and policy-makers in local government.

At one and the same time this new model of government is supposed to render more efficiency, more responsiveness and more democracy in local government.

As such a promising form or model of government, this NPM-inspired government-model and set of government-roles have been propagated by a host of municipal organization-experts and consultants during the last decade of public and local government reorganization and "modernization". And no wonder that the new model and roles of local government have been caught on and sought instituted - in various versions - and to a larger or lesser extent - in the municipalities.

Whether the new modeling of local government will render the promised effects as to the questions of efficiency and democracy "from below" is not a subject of this paper. The more limited purpose of the paper is a preliminary examination and discussion of the new leadership-role of the Local Councillors that are being instituted as a part of this NPM-inspired restructuring of government at the local level.

### The "NPM"-role of local Councillors.

Generally the new leadership-role of "goal-steering" is comprehended as a strengthening of the elected Councillors, being positioned as the decisive political decision- and policy-makers in local government - and thus as a strengthening of political democracy at the local level.

The alleged strengthening of the Local Councillors in the new model of local government is based on a new kind of NPM-distinction as to what is "political" and what is "administrative" decision-making and on a concurrent line of demarcation as to the roles of the elected politicians and the public administrators and service-delivers at the local level of government.

"Politics" and "polical" decision-making is seen, on the one hand, as the making of superior goals and objects in regard to the overall development and the various public services, tasks and obligations of the municipality. On the other hand, "administration" and "administrative" decision-making is seen as the operational management and running of the concrete delivery and performance of services and tasks, according to the political decision-makings and goals of the elected politicians.

According to the NPM-discourse these two kinds of "political" and "administrative" decision-makings must not be mixed up. The elected politicians have to abstain from interfering with the detailed matters of service-delivery and task-performance, giving the "administrative" and professional staffs and units of the municipality increased competence and room of manoeuvre in doing what they are good at, e.g. management and operation of task-performance and service-delivery.

By delegating management and operational competence and responsibility to the various service-delivering institutions and task-performing entities, the elected politicians will, concurrently, get more time and opportunities in doing what they are good at - and elected to do - e.g. making politics and policy.

This new distinction and line of demarcation between "politics" and "administration" has got much resonance at the local level of government.

In a historical and constitutional perspective there has not been such kind of distinction between political and administrative competence and decision-making at the local level of the municipalities.

Contrary to the central level of government, local government is not characterized by any constitutional power-separation or distinction between political and administrative agencies and roles. As an elected assembly of representatives and "ombudsmen" of the local citizens, the Local Council have been attributed an entire competence as to the - political and administrative - handling of local government-affairs. Since the local government reform of 1970, entailing a new statute of the municipalities, this competence has been carried out by standing Council-committees, being in charge of the immediate administration and management of their respective fields and realms of municipal authority and responsibility.

To an increasing degree executive and administrative competence has been delegated to professional staffs and units. However, decisions as to concrete cases and detailed matters have remained a considerable part of the work and concern of the elected Council and the standing Committees.

Due to the growing amount of public tasks and services allocated to the municipalities during the period of welfare state expansion of the 1970s and the new wave of "modernizing" decentralization from central state to local government of the 1980s (Hansen, 1997), the local Councillors became up through the 1980s more or less buried in detailed matters and concrete "case-work" - encouraging an increasing sector-specialization on part of the elected Councillors.

This combination of overload by detailed matters and increasing sector-orientation aroused growing critique of the local Councillors. They were accused of becoming "case-workers" and "administrators" - leaving the important political questions to the professional administrators who were, on the other hand, accused of becoming "politicians".

On this background, the NPM-discourse as to what is "political" and what is not, as well as the propagated new role of the Councillors as "goal-steering" policy- and decision-makers, evoked positive response in the municipal world. The new line of demarcation between "politics" and "administration" became a new "sesame" and solution as to the unsatisfactory state of local government affairs - with an unclear mixing of roles, growing overload by detailed matters and increasing sector-specialization on part of the local Councillors.

However, the efforts to institute this new role on part of the local Councillors have been far from successful.

Generally, the local Councillors have experienced many difficulties in their attempts to adapt to the recommended role of goal-steering decision-making. - "But sooner or later we will be able to handle it - and get a better grasp of political goal-steering - we just haven't been used to it and learned it yet" - the Councillors are consoling themselves and each other - being criticized of their "falling back" upon and their continuing engagement in the concrete, detailed matters of municipal "administration" and management.



The question is whether the experienced difficulties of the local Councillors is just a matter of getting used to and learning their new role of a superior, goal-steering political leadership.

Two set of problems may be raised as to this new role of the local Councillors:

- the role of "goal-steering" decision-making does not fit well into the reality of democratic politics and public decision-making at the local level.
- the new leadership-role of the local Councillors does not match the democratic challenges of local "governance".

These two set of problems - or hypotheses<sup>11</sup> - as regards the emerging new role of local Councillors will be discussed in the following.

#### "Goal-steering" and the reality of democratic politics and public decision-making at the local level of government.

From one perspective the municipalities may be seen as service-delivering entities that are and may be governed "from above" by objects and goals, functioning as guiding principles as to the concrete management and delivery of services on part of the different "producing" units of the municipality. - This is the perspective of the NPM-oriented reforms of local government.

The municipalities are, however, also democratic political institutions, organizing the public and common concerns of the citizens of the municipality. This perspective have been absent or neglected in the NPM-discourse.

Concurrently, the Councillors are more than goal- and decision-making leaders of the various service-delivering institutions. They are elected representatives of the plurality of meanings and interests of the citizens as regards the common concerns and affairs of the municipality. To make the plurality of voices, meanings and interests heard, to make them agree and compromise in public deliberation and decision-making is the "bottom-line" of democratic politics and policy-making.

From this democratic and political perspective, the distinguishing dimension of the role of the elected Councillors is to be able to comprehend a subject-matter from different points of view, to take them into account, to compromise conflicting interests and make judgements as to what is the most reasonable and appropriate to do in a given situation. And this is what the local

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<sup>11</sup> These problems as to the new goal-steering-role of the local Councillors are under closer investigation by way of the empirical data of the case-municipality-study. - And as mentioned earlier, the discussion here will be of a preliminary - and still hypothetical kind.

Councillors are learning in practical political life and what they are trying to be good at in local political decision-making.

This "genuine" political and democratic dimension of the role and skills of the elected Councillors is not easily combined with the propagated role of "goal-steering" decision-making.

Firstly, when public decision- and policy-making takes form and character of making superior goals and objects concerning the development and the various tasks and services of the municipality, politics and policy-making is raised to a level above the many different meanings and conflicting interests of the municipality. Usually different meanings and interests are not articulated and confronted at the level of superior goals and objects. At this "abstract" level, agreement is often easily arrived at and the need of listening to, arguing with and reconciling the many different points of view and interests are not at stake. So the peculiar and distinguishing political skills of the local Councillors are difficult to bring out and develop in the making of superior goals and objects as regards municipal service-delivery and task-performance.

Secondly, due to the line of demarcation between "politics" and "administration", the local Councillors get out of touch with "real life" of the task-performing and service-delivering municipal institutions and with the different meanings and interests that are manifested at this decentral and concrete level of local government. They are dealt with by the self- and user-governing institutions themselves, being of no concern to the central "political" level of the Local Council and the Councillors.

Although the reorganized municipalities have instituted more or less formalized procedures of "dialogue" between the central, goal-steering level of the Local Council and the decentral level of the self-governing institutions and user-boards<sup>12</sup>, the contact between these two levels of local government has become thinner and distant - as well from the point of view of the local Councillors as from the perspective of the service-delivering institutions and their users.

With the delegation of self-governing competence and responsibility to the service-institutions, they have become their "own masters" within the superior goals and frames decided upon by the Local Council. However, the opposite side of this medal is to be left "alone at home". - The same might be said as regards the Local Council and the Councillors as "central" goal- and decision-makers.

Due to the distant contact to and the missing information and knowledge as to what is going on at the level of the institutions and the users, it becomes difficult for the local Councillors to connect their efforts of goal-steering with the real life problems of the institutions and the users.

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<sup>12</sup> Formalized "dialogue"-procedures between the Local Council and the various userboards of the self-governing areas and institutions are one of the pronounced organizational elements of the case-municipality that are being investigated in the research project on "Democracy from below".

The goal-making and -steering on part of the Local Council and the Councillors will easily become extrinsic to and more or less out of touch with what is going on "out there" - both in the service-delivering institutions and among the users of the various services as well as among the citizens at large.

This is the experience and comprehension on part of many local Councillors, seeing their goal-steering efforts as more or less meaningless and without much relevance. And they have become somewhat pessimistic as to their promising new leadership-role as goal-steering decision-makers. - "But we just have to learn how to do it - and get better", the more optimistic ones say.

Maybe they will succeed in getting better. Until now, however, the new role of the local Councillors does not seem to have contributed to any strengthening of the local Councillors as decisive political decision-makers in local government.

Rather than being strengthened, the local Councillors have as goal-steering decision-makers become more solitude and invisible in local political life. They seem to get side-tracked, standing more or less passively aside local politics and policy-making going on anywhere else than at the level of "central goal-steering" on part of the Local Council and the Councillors.

So - the local Councillors are in need of and searching for new ways that may revitalise their role as important political actors and decision-makers in local government. And here they are in a mess - hunting high and low for new ways to go.

They are in no intention of returning to the traditional role as "case-workers", preoccupied with and getting buried in detailed matters of municipal service-delivery and task-performance. Getting back to "the good old days" is not seen as any solution to the experienced problems of getting out of touch with reality of local politics and decision-making.

On part of the municipalities and the local Councillors much talent is being invested in various efforts to make the new role of goal-making and -steering more politically meaningful and important as to the real life problems of local politics and policy-making.

Attempts are being made as to concretize and operationalize the superior goals and objects, making the goal-decisions on part of the Local Council more intervening and steering as regards the concrete services and outcomes of the institutions. - Often, this is what the local Councillors are being recommended as "the way" to go in order to strengthen and make their goal-steering-role more relevant and important.

Other attempts are being made to improve the contact between the central level of the Local Council and the "real" life-world and problems of the different service-institutions, the users and the citizens at large. Information- and "dialogue"-procedures are being elaborated and remedied in order to render the local Councillors more visible and more knowing about what is "going on."

Generally, these kinds of efforts to make the goal-steering-role of the local Councillors more politically important and meaningful are comprehended within a concept of central "government". What is being searched for is new ways and means that may bring the elected Councillors "back in" at the stage and at the centre of local decision- and policy-making - without any returning to the traditional institutional structure and roles of local government. - The instituting of the NPM-concept of a goal-steering political leadership-role has turned out to be problematic in regard to the expected strengthening of the local Councillors as decisive political leaders and decision-makers at the local level. So - new ways and means of strengthening and "reinventing government" is searched for by the local Councillors - fighting for a revival and renewal of their political life and leadership-role in local government.

However, the "big" question is whether such efforts of "reinventing government" is what is needed to meet the new challenges of political democracy and decision-making at the local level.

This question will be - tentatively - discussed in the following and last section of the paper. Here I shall point to and make some arguments as to the need for another kind of role on part of the elected Councillors - a role that may be phrased as a new kind of "governance"-role. Some dimensions of such a new "governance"-role on part of the local Councillors will be suggested - in a quite preliminary and sketchual manner.

#### The new challenges of democratic governance at the local level.

As illustrated in the above fig. 2 on the Danish "NPM"-model at the local level of government, the "modernizing" reorganizations since the late 1980s have been contributing to a change of the traditional structure of local "government" - towards an emerging new structure of local "governance". The formal-constitutional centre of political authority and decision-making has been reorganized into a more fragmented, decentralized and multicentered, structure of governance, consisting of a range of more or less self-governing institutions and entities, being in charge of their "own" affairs.

No doubt, this kind of government-restructuring has come to stay. The different service-delivering institutions are in no intention to give up their attributed self-governing competence and responsibility. Neither are the users. Nor the local Councillors. The new institutional forms

of local self- and user-governance "from below" are not to be rolled back to the traditional form of local government "from above".<sup>13</sup>

Even if the local political opinion and "wills" should change in favour of a recentralization of the delegated competence and responsibility, local political decision-making has become too complex an affair to be handled by one centre of authority, governing "from above" on behalf of the citizens of the municipality.

If public decision- and policy-making is no longer within the solitary sphere of one centre of local authority and not to be controlled "from above" on part of the Local Council and the elected Councillors, this new "fact" of decentering and multicentrism of local decision- and policy-making has to be recognised and taken into account. - And the democratic challenge is to make - and how to make - the plurality of decision-making entities on the different levels and fields of competence accountable not only to their "own" but to the common concerns of the municipality.

In order to meet this challenge two things seem to be of importance.

Firstly - and contrary to the NPM-discourse and demarcation as to what is "political" and what is not - the various self-governing entities, institutions and users must be recognized as political and governing entities and actors - along with the elected Councillors. They are not to be seen as "just" administrative and managerial in character. - Local government and decision-making has to be recognized as and to take institutional form and character of a local co-governance between the elected Councillors and the many other units and actors of local governance.

To comprehend a subject-matter from different points of view, to take them into account and to make judgements as to the appropriate things to do must also become a concern and skill on part of the many governing entities and actors of the municipality. The peculiar political skills of the elected representatives have to become a skill of and to be learned by all the actors and participants of local governance.

Authoritative public decision- and policy-making can not be left to the Local Council and to the elected Councillors as the one and only governing-body, being in charge of and accountable as to the common concerns of the municipality.

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<sup>13</sup> A new kind of political identity - phrased "the every-day-maker" - has been suggested to capture the kind of identity on part of the ordinary citizens that may be homologous to and implied by these institutional restructurings. Contrary to the traditional kinds of political identity as members and followers of right- and left-wing parties, movements and "grand" ideologies, the citizens are as "every-day-makers" more oriented towards the "small" problems of local and personal every-day-life, engaging in politics on a more ad hoc, issue-oriented and part-time basis (Bang and Sørensen, 1997).

This is what the NPM-discourse and concept of a new political role of goal-steering leadership is telling, neither paying attention to the "genuine" political and democratic dimension of public decision-making nor taking the emerging new "fact" of a decentered structure of political decision-making and governance into account.

Secondly, another and new kind of "governance"-role is needed on part of the elected Councillors.

Instead of being strengthened as "central" political leaders and decision-makers, governing "from above", the elected Councillors have to become participant "co-governors", contributing to public-oriented interactions between the various institutions and actors of local governance. The traditional vertical kind of political relations and interactions "from above" and "from below" on part of the elected Councilors and the electing citizens have to be supplemented with horizontal relations and interactions "inside out" and "outside in" on part of the institutions, the professionals and the users, being politically integrated into and made publicly accountable as to the common concerns of the municipality and citizenry at large.

Without a political integration on part of the decentral institutions and the users and without development of a public structure of co-governance between the local Councillors and the many, self-governing institutions and units, there is a risk of fragmentation and exclusivity, inherent in the local structure of self- and user-governance, as well as of increasing marginalization on part of the elected Councillors - being decoupled from the problems and meanings "out there" amongst the decentered entities and actors of the local structure of governance.

This new kind of "governance"-role on part of the local Councillors has to be instituted and developed - a "governance"-role that emphasizes other role-dimensions than the ones that are being stressed by the NPM-discourse and concept of political leadership "from above".

As elected representatives of the citizens, the local Councillors have to be guardians as to the "all-embracing", public concerns of the municipality, ensuring that the plurality of meanings and interests of the municipality get voice-opportunities and that no one are being excluded from the various decentered processes of public opinion- and decision-making. - No other body or institution is able to fulfil such a guardian-role in local governance. And such kind of role-taking has become ever more important because of the tendency towards particular and exclusive self- and user-interests on part of the various decentral service-institutions and units of the municipality.

To be guardians as to the public concerns and the plurality of meanings and interests in local governance is to some extent more a matter of procedure (governing "how") than of substance (governing "what").

Thus, an important dimension of the new "governance"-role of the Councillors is one of organizing and "staging" public decision- and policymaking at the different levels and fields of

local governance, ensuring a public deliberation as to the common concerns in and between the many decision-making entities and actors of the municipality.

As regards the substance and subject-matter of public decision-making, the role of the local Councillors has to become more of an active and decisive participant in public and political opinion-making than of a decisive and central goal- and decisionmaker. - Besides making overall "central" decisions as to the budgets and economic frames of the municipality as well as other kinds of public decisions that may not be delegated to decentral self- and user-governance, the Councillors have to participate and engage in public discussions and deliberations as to the common concerns of the municipality, ensuring that the plurality of meanings and interests on part of the citizens are being voiced and taken into account in public opinion-making and on the various levels and fields of local decision- and policy-making.

These "governance"-dimension of the role of the local Councillors are absent from or neglected in the NPM-concept of political leadership and not met by the various efforts of "reinventing government". To develop and institute such a new kind of "governance"-role on part of the local Councillors, combining "government" and "governance in an institutional structure of local co-governance, is one of the big challenges of the emerging new structure of governance at the local level.

### Conclusion.

In the case of Denmark, the specific "NPM"-reorganizations of local government has contributed to a restructuring of local government towards a more decentered structure of local "governance", characterized by increased self- and user-governance on part of the various service-institutions and task-performing units and organizations of the municipality.

Rather than a strengthening of the elected Councillors as central and decisive goal-steering leaders, advocated by the NPM-discourse and aimed at by the various efforts of "reinventing government", this restructuring calls for another and new kind of "governance"-role on part of local Councillors.

In order to meet the problems of self-governing fragmentation and exclusivity inherent in a de- and multicentered structure of local governance, the institutional structures of "government" and "governance" has to be combined into a new structure of local "co-governance" - attributing the elected Council and the Councillors a role as "co-governors" and guardians as regards the "all-embracing", public concerns and the plurality of interests and meanings of the municipality.

The Local Council and the Councillors can not be the one and only governing body that is in charge of and accountable to the public and common concerns of the municipality. As elected

representatives the Councillors are, however, the one and only body that can fulfill the role as guardians as to the public concerns and the plurality of meanings and interests in local governance.

And this guardian-role has become more important than ever in order to ensure and develop a democratic form of governance at the local level.

How to develop such a new combined structure of local "co-governance" and how to institute a new kind of "governance"-role on part of the elected Councillors seem to me to have become some of the "big" challenges implied by the ongoing NPM-oriented restructurings of local government.



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