

Politisk styrning av kommunal tjänsteproduktion i egen regi

En flerfallsstudie av sjukvård och äldreomsorg

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Akademisk avhandling

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Abstract

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Political steering of local government operations under own management. A multiple case study of elderly care and health and medical services

This thesis addresses the overall question of how effective the political system of the local government is regarding management – steering – of the production of welfare services under own management. This is done by case studies of two county councils and three municipalities. What are the areas that are steered? What areas are not steered? How strong is the steering intensity, and how strong is the impact? How effective, in total, is the political steering?

The investigation shows that the political system's steering in general is limited, both in terms of scope and intensity. The major exceptions are cost levels and the general focus of operations. To the degree that other issues are steered, the focus is primarily changes in the organisation and structure, although the impact of these steering measures is often low or limited. The steering intensity of costs and finances is, with a few exceptions, high while the intensity in other issues is generally weak. To summarise, the degree of impact of the political system is limited. The instrumental view of steering, which the Local Government Act is based on, and the idea that the local government operations are steered on the basis of the political system's established objectives, is not matched by the reality.

Both the steering (political) bodies and the steered (service operations) bodies are guided by their own goals and how they experience and understand reality, which differ between them. Their goals and understandings are explained, in turn, by different theories; primarily by public choice, original (or neo-institutional) organisational theory, new institutional organisational theory and a sociological systems theory inspired by Niklas Luhmann.

In summary: The self interests and established behavioural norms (institutions) provide guidance for decisions and actions. However, reality is understood in varying manners by the various political bodies and by the various administrative authorities, which all function as autonomous and self-referring systems in which the behavioural norms and experience of reality is developed. Hence, steering – seen as communication between the autonomous systems – is interpreted and assessed in different manners and influenced by varying priorities and interests. The various operating bodies' self-understandings are institutionalised and offer resistance to the decisions which they deem to be irrelevant or inappropriate. The consequence is a loose coupling or de-coupling from such decisions.

Key words: political steering, political administration, political management, political control, local government, political system, self-referring systems

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