

By the same author (Nirmala Rao)

GOVERNING LONDON *(with Ben Pimlott)*

LOCAL GOVERNMENT SINCE 1945 *(with Ken Young)*

THE MAKING AND UNMAKING OF LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT

REPRESENTATION AND COMMUNITY IN WESTERN DEMOCRACIES *(edited)*

REVIVING LOCAL DEMOCRACY?

TOWARDS WELFARE PLURALISM: Public Services in a Time of Change

Transforming Local Political Leadership

Edited by

Rikke Berg and Nirmala Rao

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and ending in 2000 after almost three years of experience with the new committee form. The study was carried out as three single case studies, primarily based on qualitative data. The study included more than 70 interviews of elected officials and bureaucrats, analysis of documents (formal agendas, reports from meetings, articles from local newspapers, etc.), observations of meetings held by the standing committees, questionnaires to all council members in the three municipalities and questionnaires to all chairmen of the local party groups (Berg and Pedersen, 2001).

6. All members of the cabinet were elected to a four-year term.
7. The seat allocation system here was also a straightforward d'Hondt proportional representation system.
8. There are different approaches to empirical studies of power and most of them (if not all) are associated with several methodological problems. In order to avoid some of the problems, the qualitative study of the power in Copenhagen, Odense and Aalborg combines three methods to reveal the actual power of the politicians: the method of position (Mills, 1959), the method of decision (Dahl, 1961) and the method of reputation (Hunter, 1963).
9. The response rates in Copenhagen, Odense and Aalborg, respectively, were 71, 86 and 94 per cent.
10. Only council members who were members during the cabinet model too were asked this question. The response rate in Copenhagen, Odense and Aalborg, respectively, were 77 (N = 25), 94 (N = 17) and 96 (N = 24).
11. It is important to note that the initiative to develop new policies may depend on a range of factors besides time and pressure of work, for instance the leadership role, traditions of administration, the norms of the leading officials, etc. (Berg, 2000).
12. The response rates in Copenhagen, Odense and Aalborg, respectively, were 71, 86 and 94 per cent.
13. In the interviews, the officials validate the statements by examples of cases, where the recommendations from the officials to the committees were in opposition to the political opinion of the chairman.

8

Laymen and Executives in Swiss Local Government

Andreas Ladner

Swiss local government is distinguished by the extent to which laypeople are directly engaged in policymaking. This is made possible in large part by the very small scale of its municipalities, together with the country's constitutional tradition of direct democracy. This chapter identifies the key features of Swiss local decision-making and the nature of public involvement in holding their elected representatives to account. Like other countries, Switzerland has experienced reform movement, albeit modest in scope. The final section of this chapter reviews recent changes and shows their limited aspirations working within the basic assumptions of the Swiss political system.

The characteristics of Swiss local government

Swiss municipalities and their governments are generally very small, with more than half of them having less than 1000 inhabitants. However, the importance of the few big municipalities stems from the fact that about 60 per cent of the population live in municipalities with more than 5000 inhabitants (see Swiss Federal Statistical Office, 2000b).

Despite their small size, the municipalities play an important role in the Swiss political system. According to the principle of subsidiarity, all activities which are not assigned to higher political levels remain within the realm of the municipalities. The activities of the municipalities include issuing the communal code, appointing the executive and the administrative authorities, administration and control of the communal finances, assessing the tax rate, care for elderly people, including constructions of homes for the aged, social security and public health and hospitals, schools, education, waste, sewage, electricity, water and gas supply, local roads, culture, communal citizenship and maintaining

municipal property. The fact that their share of public spending is less than 30 per cent, relatively low, is mainly due to the existence of an intermediate layer, called the cantons, which are responsible for rather more than 30 per cent of the overall public spending.

The several features that make Swiss municipalities different from those in many other countries is their far-reaching fiscal autonomy. They not only set up their own budget according to their financial needs, they also fix the tax rate. Transfers from higher political levels are comparatively very low, by pulling less than 20 per cent. Their main sources of funding are local taxes (46%) and fees and charges (24%). The local taxes paid by the citizens amount to about one-third of the total individual taxation and are paid directly to the municipality; taxes differ considerably between municipalities in different cantons and even within a canton.

Due to the small size of most municipalities and to the existence of the cantons, the scale of the municipal administrations is rather small. For the core administration, which covers tasks like registration of the citizens, finances, tax, building and planning and social assistance, the average figures range between less than two full-time jobs in municipalities with fewer than 500 inhabitants and 3800 in the big cities (see Table 8.1).

To this must be added the municipal employees in the different public utilities and services which range up to an average of 3420 employees, excluding teachers. It is in the medium-sized executives

where economies of scale seem to work whereas in bigger municipalities the administration becomes more complex and covers a range of different tasks.

Swiss municipalities enjoy a remarkable degree of freedom with regard to their organisation. This has led to a number of distinct political systems developing throughout the country (Ladner, 1991). Since the political organisation of a municipality is not governed by national but by cantonal legislation, there are 26 different laws dictating how municipalities should set up and organise their political institutions (Council of Europe, 1998). However, there are quite a few common characteristics as well as the distinctive differences as far as their executives, their administration and their legislative bodies are concerned.

In comparative terms, the Swiss local governments belong to the continental group (Wollmann, 2004). On one hand, there is an elected council – or the assembly of the citizens – as the supreme local decision-making body and on the other hand a local executive in a collegial form, which is also directly elected by the citizens.¹ The most outstanding common features are the direct election of the executives by the citizens and the representation of all important parties in local government. Important differences concern their size and their degree of professionalism. A distinction has to be made between municipalities with a parliament and those with an assembly.

Two different legislative systems: parliament or assembly

There are basically two different ways the Swiss municipalities are organised politically. Some municipalities reflect a division of power in the sense of Montesquieu, at least as far as the executive and the legislative bodies are concerned, and have a *municipal parliament* representing the citizens (see Figure 8.1). Others have a *municipal assembly of the citizens*, which covers at least partly the legislative function (see Figure 8.2), and which represents a form of direct democracy in the tradition of Rousseau and the old Greeks.

The competences of parliament and assembly are very similar. They have both a control and an input function and decide on all important projects and proposals which are not in the realm of the executive or the citizens at the polls. Typical concerns of parliament or assembly are municipal projects of particular importance and with financial consequences above a certain amount of money, minor changes of municipal decrees and regulations, and the acceptance of the municipal account, the budget and the tax rate.

Table 8.1 Size of the administration and size of the municipality

	Administration (limited)			Administration (extended)		
	No. of employees	Employees per 100 inhabitants	N	No. of employees	Employees per 100 inhabitants	N
<500	1.8	1.01	751	0.8	0.36	679
501–1,000	2.4	0.33	380	2.4	0.34	361
1,001–2,000	3.5	0.25	346	4.1	0.29	339
2,001–5,000	8.1	0.26	319	11.0	0.35	313
5,001–10,000	21.1	0.31	119	30.6	0.45	116
10,001–25,000	67.4	0.45	68	90.6	0.62	63
25,001–50,000	219.6	0.65	5	194.0	0.66	5
50,000–	3800.0	1.72	5	3420.0	1.68	5

Source: Local Secretary Survey 1994, in Geser *et al.* (1996)

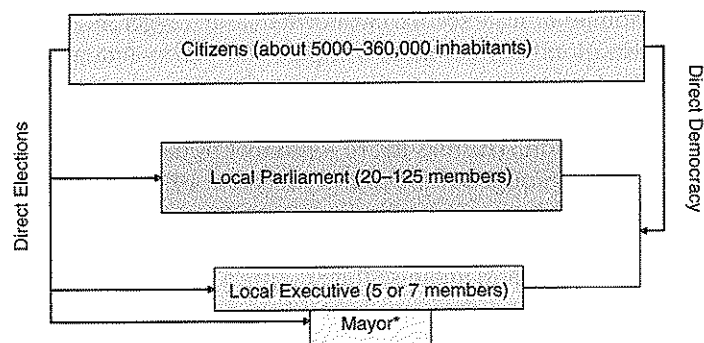


Figure 8.1 Municipalities with a local parliament (about 500 municipalities).

Notes: * The Mayor is a member of the local executive

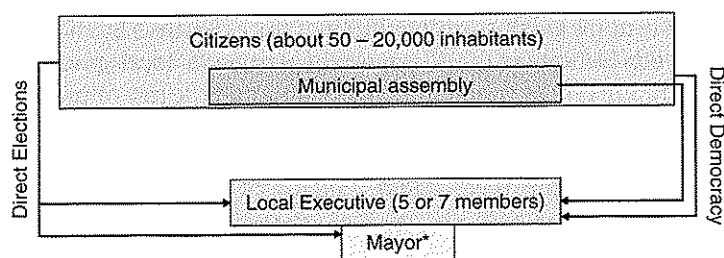


Figure 8.2 Municipalities with a local assembly (about 2300 municipalities).

Notes: * The Mayor is a member of the local executive

Which form a municipality chooses depends on its size and on its cultural background. Bigger municipalities are more likely to have a *parliament*, and parliaments are more widespread in the French-speaking cantons.² Given the smallness of the Swiss municipalities and the larger number of municipalities in the German-speaking part, fewer than 20 per cent of the about 2880 municipalities have a local parliament (see Ladner, 1991: 81 ff.). Nevertheless, some municipalities with well above 10,000 inhabitants have a local assembly.³ The division of power prohibits the mayor and the other members of the executive from being at the same time members of the local parliament. Given the multi-party character of the executive, work within the parliament is based

on a commission or committee system, in which all the parties are represented.

The *municipal assembly* is a genuine form of direct democracy. It is a gathering of all citizens entitled to vote in the municipality, taking place three or four times a year. In these gatherings, binding decisions are made on changes of communal rules, on public policies and public spending. Everyone is entitled to have a say, and the decisions are made – unless a secret vote is requested – by a show of hands. Despite the decisional power of the municipal assembly the rate of electoral participation is rather low. The average rate of participation in municipalities with fewer than 250 inhabitants is about 30 per cent of these citizens entitled to vote. This figure steadily falls as the size of the municipality increases. In municipalities in the size bracket 10,000–20,000 inhabitants, the average rate of participation is below 5 per cent (see Ladner, 2002: 823). The main reason for such a low turnout is the demanding character of this form of deliberation.

For the executive it makes quite a difference whether it faces a local parliament or a municipal assembly. The local executive enjoys more freedom when it has to deal with a municipal assembly. The mayor together with the executive and supported by the administration propose political projects for approval by the citizens. Sometimes, the decisions of the citizens may be unpredictable, depending, for example, on the people turning up at the assembly. In municipalities with a local parliament, the executive has to deal with parties and party politics. This means that there is a more open political debate and the positions of the different actors are known in advance. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to believe that the parliament is effectively able to control and steer local politics. The gaps in political knowledge and understanding between the members of parliament and the members of the executive make such a task very difficult.

Regardless of whether they have a parliament or an assembly, all Swiss municipalities also have other forms of direct democracy like referendums and initiatives, which affect the functioning of the local executive and the local parliament (Ladner, 1999, 2002). In municipalities with a parliament, direct democracy is directed against decisions of executive and parliament, in municipalities with an assembly, direct democracy addresses the executive as well as decisions of the assembly.

Electoral systems

In the Swiss municipalities, the executive is *directly elected* by the citizens. The same applies to the Mayor, who is a member of the executive.⁴

Unlike the executive at the national level ('Bundesrat', federal council), the mayor ('Stadt-/Gemeindepräsident') is more than a *primus inter pares* (Geser *et al.*, 1987). He is the one who represents the municipality, and when it comes to a professionalisation of the executive body, it is usually the mayor who is the first to be employed full-time. The mayor chairs the meetings of the executive and of the municipal assembly. Usually, he is also responsible for the local administration. However, in the executive he does not have more formal decisional power than the other members, except for being able to cast his or her own decisive vote when the executive is unable to reach a decision due to deadlock.

In municipalities with an assembly, a number of commissions (finances, schools, social security, construction, etc.) are appointed or elected. Their functions differ considerably, ranging from the control of the executive to the support of the member of the executive in policy-making. Usually the respective member of the executive is a member or even the chair of the commission. If the municipality has a parliament, the parliament is elected by the citizens too, within a separate ballot usually taking place the same day as the election of the executive. The mayor, his colleagues in the executive and the members of parliament are thus all directly and independently legitimatised by the electorate. There are no formal rules forcing parliament and executive to have the same political forces or parties represented as in a system with a governmental party and an opposition. Nevertheless, the balance of power in executive and in the parliament usually corresponds fairly closely. If a municipality has a municipal assembly, it is only the executive and the major which are directly elected by the citizens.

The electoral systems used to elect executive and parliament differ from canton to canton and there might even be differences within a canton. About 70 per cent of the Swiss municipalities elect their executive through *majority systems*, compared to 30 per cent using *proportional representation*. Under the former, the voter casts up to as many votes as there are seats. To allocate the seats the majority system takes two different forms: if the candidates winning a plurality of the votes are elected, it is called a 'relative majority' or single-ballot system, because it always produces winners. In the second form, the 'absolute majority system', a candidate needs a minimum percentage of the votes in order to be elected, equivalent to 50 per cent plus 1 of the votes cast per seat. If the first ballot does not fill all the seats, a second ballot based on a relative majority takes place to fill the remaining ones. In proportional elections, the votes do not go to candidates but to political groups (parties) or lists. The seats are allocated to the different groups according

to the percentage of the votes obtained. Majority voting favours personalities from the big parties; proportional representation fosters the representation of smaller parties.

The *local parliament* is in general elected in a proportional representation system. Again, there are a few exceptions. About 25 per cent of the municipalities – generally the smaller ones – elect their parliament in a majority system (Ladner, 1991: 88). In municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants, there is hardly any majority system to be found. The size of the local executives varies between 3 and 30 members with an average of about 6 seats per municipality. In general, the executives are smaller in municipalities with a parliament than in municipalities with an assembly. The size of the executive increases with the size of the municipalities and reaches its peak in municipalities with between 10,000 and 20,000 inhabitants. In cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants, the size of the executive is smaller again. This effect occurs due to the professionalisation of the executives: in medium-sized municipalities the increasing workload is divided among a larger number of lay executive members, whereas in bigger municipalities their part- or full-time employment allows a reduction of the number of executive seats.

There has been a slight tendency to adapt to smaller executives in recent years. In 1998, about 7 per cent of the municipalities reduced the number of seats for the executives (see Ladner *et al.*, 2000). This trend is more marked in municipalities with an assembly, but there are also municipalities where the number of seats has been increased. The reasons for smaller executives are attempts to make them more efficient and reduce costs as well as the problems encountered in finding enough candidates. In smaller executives it is on the other hand more difficult to meet the demands for an adequate representation of the different groups and parties in the municipalities, the smaller parties find it more difficult to be represented in local government and the workload for each member of the executive increases.

The size of the local parliament varies between 9 elected representatives in some municipalities in the cantons of Geneva and Neuchâtel and 125 (Zürich) or 130 (Basel), the average size of the local parliament increases with the size of the municipalities. A crucial threshold seems to be 100,000 inhabitants, where the size doubles compared to the lower size bracket.

The Swiss political system is strongly reliant upon the principle of power sharing (see Linder, 1994; Lijphart, 1999). This also applies to the local executives. There are hardly any single party executives and the most important parties are usually represented in the local executive.

This might at first sight be surprising, since the majority system is the rule in the majority of the municipalities. In accordance with the principles of *consociational democracy* ('Konkordanzdemokratie'), however, a 'voluntary proportionality' ('freiwilliger Proporz') is practised. The leading party abstains from presenting a full slate of candidates to make room for opposition party candidates. In smaller communities, of course, abstaining from running for all seats is not always voluntary, as it can be difficult to find suitable candidates for each available seat. Running for all seats also carries the danger that some of the same party candidates might take votes away from each other and fall behind the candidates of the other parties. And sometimes the parties present fewer candidates to avoid the risk of possible defeat, especially when running against current office-holders. One common strategy for the leading party is to abstain from running for all seats under certain conditions. The smaller parties are offered a number of seats in accordance to their strength in return for their approved candidates by the stronger parties.

Involvement of laypeople in local government, professionalism and recruitment

Politics in Switzerland are strongly based on laypeople. The so-called '*Milizsystem*' (militia system) is an important pillar of the Swiss political culture. Even the members of the national parliament are not considered to be full-time politicians and are comparatively poorly remunerated.⁵ There is no official data available concerning the degree of professionalism in local government as far as the executive is concerned and we have to rely on our survey results. In 1994, the local secretaries provided us with information about the degree of professionalism in their local executives (see Geser *et al.*, 1996). More than 90 per cent of the municipalities have no full-time politicians in their local executive. If the local executives happen to have one it is in most cases the mayor. Only in the big cities, all members of the executives receive a full-time salary. In quite a few municipalities there is an elaborate mixture of honorary, part- and full-time executives.

Full-time local politics in Switzerland means that politicians do not need another job to make a living. It does not mean that they have enjoyed a special training or that they have ever been assessed. The most common pattern for a career as a local politician is to start with a seat in one of the numerous commissions and then get elected for the local executive. Many of the local politicians withdraw from politics after two or three legislatures. In recent years, there have been a few cases of

municipalities looking for a mayor by means of an advertisement in the newspapers.

Legally there is no difference between small and big municipalities, as well as between those with an assembly and those with a parliament, as far as their tasks and services are concerned. In practice, of course, the difference between the very small municipalities and the cities is enormous. In a city, each member of the executive heads a department ('*Ressortsystem*') with an extended administration. The City of Zurich, for example, has an executive with nine members, covering Presidential Department (Mayor), Finances, Police, Health and Environment, Road Construction and Waste Removal, Building, Public Utilities (water, gas, electricity, public transport), School and Sports and Social Services. Each of these departments has several hundred employees. In small municipalities there is hardly any administration apart from a local secretary. Here, the members of the local executive are also engaged in operational routines and everyday policy tasks like, for example, social security benefit claims or decisions on construction permits, since the workload is not big enough to have it done on the basis of employed administrators.

In recent years, there has been a slightly increasing trend towards more professionalised executives. The results from our 1998 local secretary survey (Ladner *et al.*, 2000) reveal that municipalities with a parliament have moved more towards a system with a professionalised mayor than have assembly municipalities. Only very few municipalities undertook reforms in this direction. And even if we look at bigger municipalities (more than 5000 inhabitants), where such reforms make more sense, only one out of ten municipalities has professionalised the function of the mayor in the last ten years.

The Swiss militia system and the smallness of the political units lead to high degree of citizens' involvement in holding public office. Taking the seats in the local executives and parliament together with the various commissions in the different policy fields, an average of about 50 different political functions per municipality have to be fulfilled by the citizens. In small municipalities, one out of eight or ten citizens holds a public office. This can be seen as a form of social capital. In recent years, however, this high demand to fill offices has increasingly encountered problems on the supply side. The municipalities and, more particularly, the local political parties, which are the most important *recruitment* agents for public office holders, find it increasingly difficult to recruit enough qualified candidates. The fact that a municipality has a parliament can, on one hand, make it easier for the parties to recruit candidates among the members of the parliament to run the elections

for the local executive. On the other hand, they have to find enough candidates for their seats in the parliament in the first place. According to our survey results, it is most difficult to find enough candidates in the middle-sized municipalities. In the cities, public offices are sufficiently prestigious and, in the case of a seat in the executive, well remunerated. In the very small municipalities these offices are less time-consuming and it is probably more difficult to refuse an invitation, if it becomes obvious that there is nobody else who can do the job.

Relations between laymen and bureaucrats

The most notable feature of the relation between the members of the local executive and the local administration is the paradoxical situation that professional administrators, with expertise in their policy areas, are subordinate to lay people who are responsible for the activities undertaken by the administration. Whereas the civil servants very often remain in their jobs for a lifetime and, at least the younger ones, have enjoyed a specific training, the members of the executives envisage a political career of limited durability and often start their political job with very little relevant preparation. In larger municipalities, and especially in those with a parliament, it is more likely that the newly elected members of the executives can bring to the role some previous political experience in a parliament or in any of the innumerable commissions. This comparative advantage, however, is countered by a bigger and more complex administrative burden. Recent reforms, especially those based on the principles of New Public Management (NPM), attempt to clarify the relation between the members of the executive and the administration, giving the former a stronger strategic orientation and the latter more operative freedom.

The members of the local parliaments are far more distant from the members of the local administration than are the members of the local executives, and the differences between the professional administration and the lay politicians are even more accentuated. Traditionally, the lay politicians interact with the administration through parliamentary instruments (demands, interpellations, postulates), while the members of the executive stand between them and the administration. Personal links between members of parliament and chief bureaucrats, which are known to play an important role at the national level, are considered to be of lesser importance at the local level. This is due to the fact that politics at the local level does not reach the same degree of politicisation, making political considerations of lesser importance when it comes to the selection of local bureaucrats.

In the course of the recent NPM reforms, which have been undertaken in quite a few bigger municipalities, there have also been parliamentary reforms to compensate for shift of competences to the executive and to the administration. The most important features of these reforms were the introduction of standing parliamentary commissions to increase knowledge and continuity among the members of parliament. These commissions prepare the different projects and proposals to be decided in the parliament and exercise a certain control function vis-à-vis the executive. In order to do so, the commissions are given the right to address members of the administration directly or to invite them to report in their meetings. More support was also accorded to lay members of parliament to compensate for their distance from executive matters.

The balance of power between the executive and the parliament, the question what kind of decisions fall in the realm of the parliament and how these decisions can achieve the status of a long-lasting binding character have also been addressed by parliamentary reforms. In general, the members of the local executive are in a much stronger position than the members of the local parliaments, since they are much better informed and have direct access to the administration. But since the local executives are multi-party executives, the possible imbalance of power vis-à-vis the parliament is averted.

Being a member of a multi-party government makes the relation between party fellows with legislative or executive responsibility sometimes rather problematic, especially where, combined with the standard practice, decisions of the executive are taken jointly and controversial positions within the executive are not made public ('Kollegialitätsprinzip'). As soon as a parliamentary group turns against the government it, at least formally, turns also against its party members in the executive. Members of the executive have wider orientation and are expected to put public interests before party interests, whereas members of the legislative are likely to defend the interests of their party.

Political leadership, co-ordination and political accountability

The Swiss political system does not favour strong political leaders. At the local level, however, the direct election of the executive and of the mayor gives them a stronger position vis-à-vis the parliament. Nevertheless, their power is controlled by means of direct democracy. For bigger and more expensive projects they have to consult the citizens. And the fact that the government unites different parties without them

having to agree on a joint political programme sets limits on any attempt to take a strong political lead. Their joint and secret decision-making, finally, causes a lack of accountability.

Systemically, Swiss politics is based on *co-ordination and co-operation* among different political actors and across the different policy areas, through the mechanisms of multi-party government, joint decision-making and direct democracy. To promote a political proposal successfully it requires not only the support of a majority of the members in the executive and in the parliament, but also the approval of the citizens. The elaboration of such proposals is usually very time consuming and the proposals tend to become rather costly, since it is easier to get the necessary support if a majority of those involved see advantage in accepting it.

In the course of recent reforms there have been attempts to bring more continuity and efficiency into local policies by setting up plans and programmes which link political goals for the years to come with the available financial resources. These attempts are usually initiated by the administration or by the executive. However, the more these plans are given a binding character the less the members of the parliament are inclined to tie their hands by accepting them.

Compared with the 1970s and 1980s, when particularly younger and left-wing people complained that the political elite has lost touch with the citizens, an improvement of the responsiveness of the local governments is no longer the most important reform claims. Although there were attempts in the 1990s to increase citizens' involvement in local political decisions, especially by means of information at an earlier stage or by letting the citizens take part in the development of projects, it would probably be misleading to infer that there were serious shortcomings in this area. The intensive culture of direct democracy fosters a close contact between the members of the local government and the citizens, and for local politicians to hold office for an extended period has become an exception.

Recent reforms

Swiss local governments, like local governments in other countries (see Wollmann, 2003: 18), have undergone certain reforms in recent years. However, it has not been the relation between the politicians and the citizens which has consulted the core of these reforms. More important than political accountability and responsiveness has been the rethinking of the relation between the members of the executive and the

professional administration, and between the local parliament and the executive. As a general trend, municipalities have tried to make decision-making easier and more efficient by shifting more powers to other bodies (executive, commissions, administration), by reducing their size, or by reducing the number of commissions. In some cases they extended their administration or transferred services and tasks to the private sector. Reforms of the political system are less common. As far as the electoral system for the local executives is concerned, there is a slight net tendency to replace majority voting by proportional representation (PR) (but there are also shifts from PR to majority voting).⁶ Also, municipalities with rather large executive bodies have tended to reduce the number of seats. All these changes can be considered as minor reforms, hardly capable of increasing the overall performance of the municipalities.

Even though there has been a shift in responsibilities and power towards the various parts of local government (executive, commissions, administration), Swiss municipalities are by no means governed by entrepreneurial mayors or city managers. As we have seen above, there are only very few full-time members in local executives, mainly in very large municipalities and cities, and there is no chief administrator assigned to run the municipality. Nevertheless, the concepts and ideas of NPM have influenced the reorganisation of local government considerably, especially in the bigger municipalities. Figure 8.3 shows that about two-thirds of the municipalities with more than 5000 inhabitants stated that they had already undertaken first steps within the area of NPM reforms. A closer look at the different elements of these reforms reveals that the hardcore elements of NPM like product definitions, performance agreements and global budgets are rarer in municipalities with an assembly than in those with a parliament. Among the other NPM reforms, which are less related to a new NPM-like form of political steering, the differences between the two groups of municipalities are of lesser importance. A delegation of power to the administration, the promotion of competition between external providers, a stronger reliance on external experts, the elimination of the civil servant status and the introduction of performance-related pay is even more widespread among municipalities without a parliament.

In Switzerland, there has been little transformation of local decision-making. Inter-municipal co-operation, the amalgamation of municipalities, the division of tasks between the canton and the municipalities and the reform of the administration have been much more important. The reforms aimed directly at the local executive cannot be considered

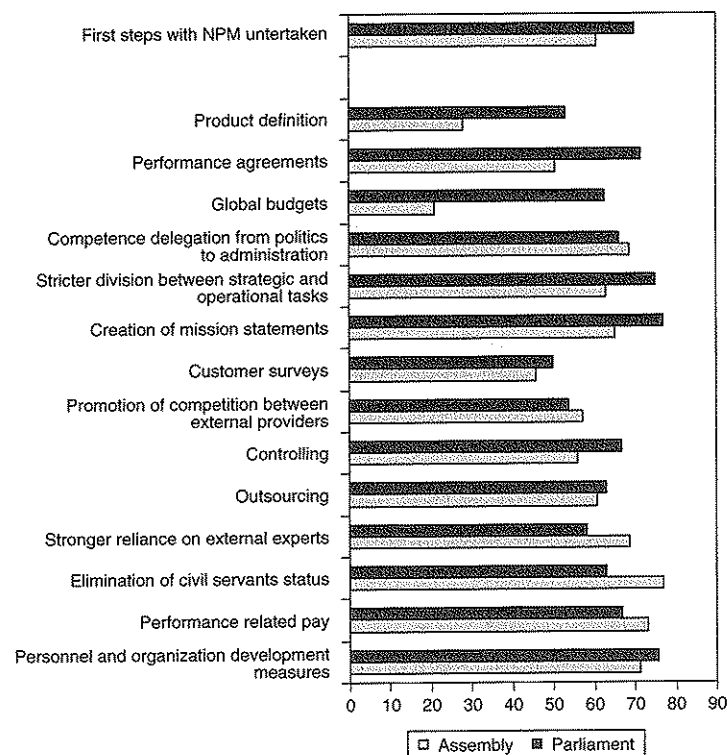


Figure 8.3 NPM-reforms in municipalities with more than 5000 inhabitants (municipalities with an assembly and municipalities with a parliament).

as a fundamental change, and no conclusive judgement can as yet be made as to their likely success.

The way Swiss local government is organised undoubtedly helps in finding policy solutions which are acceptable to a majority of parties and citizens. Compromises or political packages are needed to reach a decision and to take different interests and demands into account. The main problem that local governments actually face is the recruitment and selection of willing and capable citizens to do a time-consuming job on a voluntary basis. To this have to be added the increasing difficulties in keeping the lead vis-à-vis a more professionalised administration needed to govern in a complex environment. And finally, the executives find it difficult to put forward sustainable concepts in a long-term perspective, facing citizens unwilling to give them decisional power and

facing a parliament with changing majorities and a similar reluctance. Despite these shortcomings, there are no fundamental changes in local government in sight. Power sharing, direct democracy and laypeople politicians will continue to determine the functioning of most of the executives at the local level, and all the recent reforms in local government only aim at making them work better rather than differently.

Notes

1. Historically this dual form goes back to the French Revolution (see Wollmann, 2004).
2. In the German-speaking part of Switzerland, municipalities with 8000 to 10,000 inhabitants and more have a parliament, whereas in the French- and Italian-speaking municipalities this might be the case in much smaller municipalities. In the cantons of Geneva and Neuchâtel, all municipalities have a parliament, even those with fewer than 1000 inhabitants.
3. This is especially true for the canton of Zurich, where about half of the municipalities between 10,000 and 20,000 inhabitants have a municipal assembly.
4. The only exception is the French-speaking canton of Neuchâtel, where every municipality has a local parliament and where it is the parliament that elects the executive.
5. Many of the national MPs, however, nowadays make their living in jobs closely related to their political work (e.g. in unions, interest associations) and cannot be considered as laymen either.
6. Regardless of the voting system adopted, all important parties are usually represented in the executives due to the so-called 'freiwilliger Proporz' (voluntary proportionality). A shift from majority to PR voting cannot necessarily be considered a shift from a 'concentration of power' to 'power sharing' but rather a formalisation of an informal rule for power sharing.



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