

The policy making of digital politics: Examining the local level in Sweden

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Paper to be presented at the 2nd International Conference on Public Policy, Milan, July 1-4, 2015.

Introduction

There is no controversy in arguing that much of modern politics are digital (Chadwick, 2006). Potentially this can alter the exchange between actors within political settings; posing a relaxation of the traditional entities of space and time and their influence on political processes (Papacharissi, 2010). Albeit technology has changed modern democracy in its foundation, ICTs (information and communication technologies) as tools for bringing democracies closer to its utopian ideals have not yet been realized. Paraphrasing Lijphart (1997) the fundamental argument of this study is that the only 'unresolved dilemma' of modern democracy, meaning more of an equal participation in political processes, is neither solved nor diminished with the help of digital politics.

Significant variations in opportunities for citizens to politically engage through ICTs have been proved to remain, even between (e.g. Åström, Karlsson, Linde, & Pirannejad, 2012; Lee, Chang, & Berry, 2011; Vaccari, 2013) and within (e.g. Bonsón, Torres, Royo, & Flores, 2012; Holzer, Zheng, Manoharan, & Shark, 2014; C. Reddick & Norris, 2013; Zheng, Schachter, & Holzer, 2014) otherwise fully democratic states. The main reason for the presented argument is the considerable variation of government supply of conditions for online involvement. Engagement is first and foremost dependent on the right opportunities, meaning the supply of such services (Rose, 2005; Saglie & Vabo, 2009). Local governments, representing the arena with the lowest barriers for civic engagement, are specifically decisive for augment in digital politics.

No comprehensive reason for varieties in possibilities for local engagement online has, though, been given. Whereas quantitative scholars studying the local level have hitherto only been able to deliver snapshots of evidence (cf. Bimber & Copeland, 2013), and thereby neglected appropriate tools for

capturing rapid and continuous technological innovations, qualitative researchers have struggled with providing anything more than ideographic findings. Not surprisingly, more integrated perspectives have been called for (Parvez & Ahmed, 2006). This study combines cross-case explanations with in-depth studies on the varying supply of governmental digital politics from a Swedish perspective. *The objective is to explain varying levels of supply of digital politics among the local Swedish political arena as well as to explore insights in cases in where such opportunities have proven to be utterly poor.* The empirical field being Swedish municipalities, the study draws both on data that includes all 290 local governments in Sweden for a period of five years and combine this with qualitative material collected within the frame of two case studies. The latter are selected for exploring insights into cases in which participation into digital politics appears to be particularly restrictive and can thereby function as providing additional explanations to a field that still is theoretically immature.

Sweden represents a well-developed example of a society in which ICTs have had a great impact on many different sectors of society. At the same time, Sweden is characterized by a considerable variety at the local level, including everything from metropolitan areas to extreme sparsely populated municipalities. The combination of fundamentally good prerequisites for digital politics and substantial subnational varieties creates specific possibilities to provide insights into the question on development of digital politics.

Perspectives on digital politics

A declining civic engagement has been one of the most significant apprehension of the development of modern democracies (e.g. Putnam, 2000). An early optimistic era equipped the rise of ICTs with capacities to counteract such tendencies (Barber, 2003; Rheingold, 1993). Potentially, technology can be a remedy to this problem by empowering citizens and create new spaces for interactions. Still a critical look is required for analyzing how such tendencies are played out and, possibly, combined (Papacharissi, 2010).

Theoretical claims on how to understand the appliance of ICTs in political processes, often summarized into concepts such as 'e-democracy', 'digital democracy' or 'e-participation', have most rightfully been characterized as a challenging endeavor (Sæbø, Rose, & Skiftenes Flak, 2008; Susa & Grönlund, 2012). The reason is a field still being theoretically immature with embedded vague concepts but growing efforts aim to identify different positions within this area of research (Dahlberg, 2011).

In a review of varying definitions of the concept of e-democracy, Coleman and Norris (2005) establish that e-democracy is about the use of ICTs to enhance democratic structures and processes. This being something of a point of departure for definitions, alternatives exist that try to narrow its scope. In a

much-quoted article, Chadwick (2003) separates out two alternatives, one in which information spreading and some features of deliberative processes are supplied by the public, while the other has the ambition of being a virtual public sphere involving the civic sector (Papacharissi, 2002). Instinctively, this strategy seems reasonable, separating vertical linkages between citizens and the government from horizontal relationships among citizens in civic society. Moreover, these two perspectives are analogous to how previous empirical research can be categorized. The tradition proposed here measures the supply of digital politics. To be more specific, this is about maintaining the channels that are preconditions for citizens' to engage in digital forms of politics. Saglie and Vabo (2009, p. 388) state that this aspect is crucial for citizen engagement: "*Online citizen participation in local democracy depends on the opportunities offered by the municipality. For example, citizens can hardly send e-mail to local councillors unless the addresses are posted on the municipal website.*" Hence, this is an essential part of the overall understanding of the concept, since it is institutionalized in the political system and thereby could mean actual citizen influence.

The preconditions discussed above call for a definition that can cope with these delimitations without being too specific or losing its empirical applicability. A review of the literature reveals one convincing argument that stresses the advantages of regarding digital politics from a procedural perspective (Grönlund, 2003; Macintosh, 2004; Vedel, 2006). As Vedel argues (2006), the concept is then embedded in democratic theory, which will add the core issues that form the structure of e-democracy. The most explicit perspective is the one defined by Grönlund (2003), which states that the term e-democracy is only convenient shorthand for ICTs that are used in democratic processes. Both Macintosh (2004) and Vedel (2006) elaborate such a view by referring to how such a perspective can be applied to all the perspectives of the policy processes, ranging from activities relating to the supply of information to discussion and decision making. Deriving from these persuasive arguments, digital politics is defined as: *the use of information and communication technologies in democratic political processes concerning information, discussion, and decision making.*

Explaining digital politics from local perspective

Explaining the phenomenon under study requires a theoretical understanding for how political changes are brought about. Three arguments are put forward on the topic on how structure and agency can coincide. First, social structures embeds practices of digital politics and can pose crucial influence on the conditions for agency (e.g. Chadwick, 2011). Second, social change is forced forward by individuals. Thus, satisfactory explanations must ultimately be anchored in hypotheses about individual behavior (Elster, 2007, p. 36). Third, identifying agency requires the uncovering of actors

motivations and interplay when reconstructing processes of decision, including those links of relevance for outcome of digital politics (Farrell, 2012).

Starting with structural conditions, previous research points toward a number of important circumstances that can enhance the development of digital politics. Above all, such approaches have focused on how transformations of the economy toward a postindustrial society result in social and political changes. Bell's (1973) paradigmatic description of the emergence of a postindustrial society is intimately related to the information technology that knowledge economies today are dependent on. An advanced and knowledge-based economy occupied by a well-educated workforce demand online services to a larger extent (C. G. Reddick & Norris, 2013; C. Reddick & Norris, 2013) which will lead to incentives for the public sector to invest in digital politics. Closely relate to such ideas are notions related to an economy of scale. Development of this character is costly because of its technological infrastructures and because the right human resources have to be secured. *Ceteris paribus* a larger society should have better economic opportunities to develop its online tools in accordance with economies of scale (Viborg Andersen, Henriksen, Secher, & Medaglia, 2007). Findings from everywhere from Scandinavia (Lidén, 2013) to Southern Europe (Borge, Colombo, & Welp, 2009) and North America (Scott, 2006) emphasize size as a crucial factor for success in digital politics among local-level municipalities. Another argument, pointing at a similar pattern, imply that a smaller size would lower motives for efforts in digital politics since a closeness is anyhow present between political representatives and citizens. Comparative findings are robust, pointing out a negative relationship between municipality population size and citizen activities of reaching out to local stakeholders (Denters, Goldsmith, Ladner, & Rose, 2014)

Without reasonable levels of a technological infrastructure digital politics are no alternative, a position inspired from writings in technological determinism (Rose, 2005). The mechanisms are sketched out by Norris (2001) in terms of how technology sets the boundaries for public incentives to develop online functions; theories in this vein state that the technological infrastructure is the single most important factor for digital politics. This notion has been verified in cross-national studies (Åström et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2011; Williams, Gulati, & Yates, 2014), but the results from examinations at the local level are more ambiguous. However, Bonsón et al. (2012) find that technological development related to investment in e-government services also seems to trigger also at the local level.

Digital politics could revitalize democracy. This could be done through increased distribution of and transparency in the spread of political information as well as by encouraging new and more inclusive forms of political participation. However, the success of digital politics could be conditional on the success of other forms of political development. Norris (2001) has argued that the traits of democracy

can function as factors that strengthen e-democracy and contribute empirically, and has provided evidence supporting this idea. Some examples of this subject in a North European local context (Lidén, 2013) do, though, report opposing results. That is, high levels of voter turnout, measured as a proxy for political engagement, are found to be negatively related to the work with digital politics. Drawing from this, it could be speculated that achievements in e-democracy are above all regarded as necessary in municipalities with troublesome democracies and thereby as a potential measurement for handling a low level of engagement.

Shifting the analytical level to micro circumstances two dimensions are emphasized. First structural circumstances will influence crucial stakeholders. Developments of technological and societal character will put pressure on actors to be alert and modernize (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013). Second, assumptions on agency behavior could provide crucial guidelines. In relation to the focus of the study, two relevant actors can be identified, politicians and public officials. The effect of technological alternations on such actors have arose as an increasing focus in the literature (e.g. Pollitt, 2011) and resulted in assumptions on agency behavior. Deriving from previous theoretical contributions two assumptions can be made.

Labeled as the 'middleman paradox' Mahrer and Krimmer (2005) claim that politicians will oppose the development of digital politics. The reason would be that politicians can experience such alternations to be a step back from the representative democracy that in the end would risk their own power. Deriving specifically from a local perspective Firmstone and Coleman (2015) add another background to this argument. Their findings are hard to interpret as anything else than a halfhearted attitude towards digital politics among targeted politicians. Budget constrains are described as the dominant motive.

Turning to assumed agency of public officials, previous studies from inquiries at the local level have described top officials as 'community builders and enablers of democracy' (Nalbandian, 1999, p. 187). Besides such noble motives the current literature also provide motives from a more administrative perspective. Put short, digitalization could strengthen discretion and autonomy for bureaucrats and are therefore desired (Buffat, 2015).

Research Methods

The theoretical framework requires a mixed methods design for ensuring inquiries of both structure and agency. Drawing from different types of data this study will combine statistical analysis with two case studies. The integration of such data will be reached through case selection based on findings from statistical models (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). The two different methods will be described in turn.

Statistical Analysis

The operationalization of municipalities' supply of digital politics is collected from an annual examination carried out by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. This investigation is an extensive content analysis of the websites of Swedish municipalities. One theme is of particular importance, transparency and influence. As stated in the reports, the focus in this section is on issues that consider how citizens can reach information supplied by the municipalities and elected politicians as well as on issues concerning insight about and participation in the democratic process (SKL, 2013)

Through the content analysis it can be seen whether features relating particularly to information but also, though in a restricted extent, to discussion fully or partly exist on municipalities' websites (cf. Vedel, 2006). This study creates an index out of 32 of these factors, awarding a full existence with the value of 1.0 and a part existence with 0.5. A mean average is then calculated, meaning that this measurement can vary between 0.0 (no supply of digital politics) to 1.0 (full supply of digital politics).¹ The collected data set consists of all 290 Swedish municipalities.²

Three different themes of structural preconditions that can affect municipalities work with digital politics have been discussed, and they will in this section be operationalized into variables.

A traditional line of argument found in research that focuses on the role of technology in societal development (Bell, 1973; Norris, 2001) is that knowledge societies, characterized by a modern and well-developed economy as well as a considerable level of human capital, can provide the right conditions for e-democracy. Hence, a higher level of *average income* and the *proportion of citizens with a postsecondary education* can be assumed to positively influence demand for digital politics. Moreover, economic conditions can be related to *population size*, creating reasons for including this variable. Investment in digital politics can be costly for a municipality. This can certainly be related to its potential due to population size, but the present economic situation in the municipality could also be an influence. To account for this a measurement of *financial solidity* will be applied.

In line with previous research, the technological infrastructure could be more than a condition for digitalization of politics: it could also be a driver for development. Arguments from technological determinism combined with the evidence from studies (Bonsón et al., 2012), make it reasonable to account for such aspects. Focusing on the physical infrastructure would, though, be a troublesome restriction, and to cope with this, data for both wired Internet access (DSL) and wireless Internet

¹ See the data appendix for details about this index.

² Temporally, the dependent variable is measured on five occasions, 2009-2013, while the independent variables, besides those of political character, indicate the years before these (*t-1*) and therefore range from 2008 to 2012. The index is based on indicators being internally significant, an estimation of the Cronbach's Alpha for data reflecting 2013 gives a value at 0.783.

access will be included. Therefore, a higher proportion of municipalities' citizens having *access to the Internet through DSL*, through *Wi-Fi* or through *fiber* can be assumed to pose positive influence on work with digital politics.

Theoretical ideas about how political factors can influence digital politics have rarely been examined in quantitative research. Although some scholars in the field have tried to draw from democratic theory (Lidén, 2013), this vein of digital politics is especially undeveloped (cf. Macintosh, Coleman, & Schneeberger, 2009). Due to these uncertainties, this study derives from the idea that political civic engagement can positively influence the political system (Putnam, 1992). As a proxy for political engagement two measurements are used, voter turnout and use of preferential voting. Hence, a high proportion of *voter turnout* and the use of *preferential voting* can be assumed to positively influence digital politics

Qualitative analysis

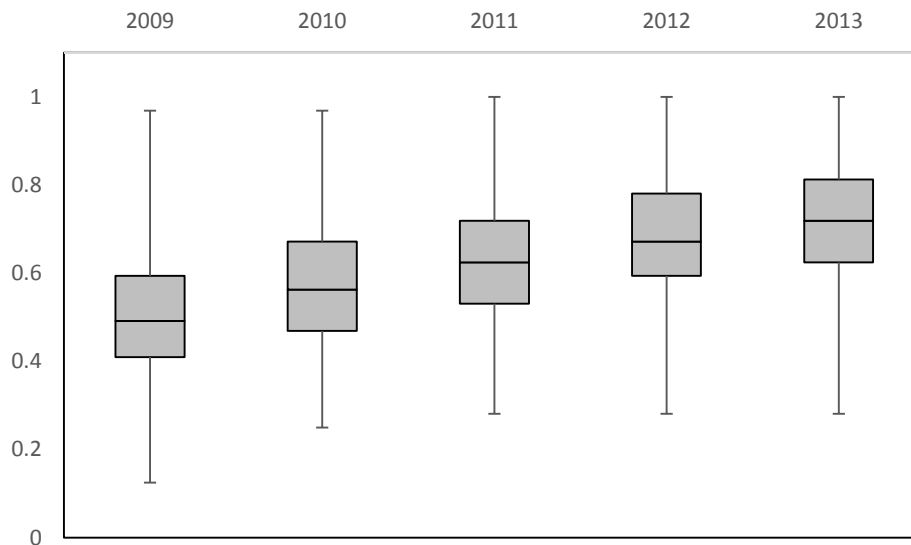
Statistical findings are complemented with within-case analyses. In analogy with the rationale of the study, two extreme cases are selected, that is cases in which the opportunity for digital politics have proven to be utterly poor (Seawright & Gerring, 2008, p. 301). This strategy is chosen for illustrating the considerable variation within otherwise fully democratic states, such as Sweden, and to shed light on the decision-making process that has created such an outcome and thereby generate potentially additional explanations to the phenomenon under study. The time frame of 2009 to 2014 is chosen since it corresponds to the quantitative data.

Exploring and mapping digital politics in Sweden

The appliance of ICTs in political processes is a modern feature. Analogous to democracy, this is not a static phenomenon, and due to the never-ending development of technological innovations it seems reasonable to assume that the technological infrastructure, obviously a crucial part of the concept, will create additional opportunities for increasing the level of digital politics.

In Figure 1 Swedish municipalities' level of digital politics over times is illustrated through a boxplot. As being evident from this visualisation the general tendency is an annual increase in services of digital politics although the growth rate has diminished over the years. At the same time a quite polarized development is made visible. As an example, the lowest value in the distribution has not increased from 2011 to 2013. In addition, a significant proportion of Swedish municipalities remains scoring low at least since 2010. In the light of a rapid technological development and the fact that the index measures the same factors in 2009 as in 2013 this must be regarded as quite surprising.

Figure 1 Boxplot over level of digital politics among Swedish municipalities



Explaining the variation in digital politics

The analyses of local digital politics in Sweden are conducted as separate multivariate regressions for each year. The five models in Table 1 present OLS analysis of Swedish municipalities' level of digital politics from 2009 to 2013. The general impression of these estimations points to well-specified models, with an explanatory power of between 34 and 44 percent. However, the explanatory power is declining over time. Since this is a trend that inverts the increasing level of digital politics, it could signify that something is lacking in the theoretical development.

Concerning the effect of the variables, there are some variations over the years. Considering conditions related to economy and development, level of education is significant during the first two years but shows up a decreasing effect. Instead, population size, has unquestionably, the strongest effect on the dependent variable of all the predictors (Borge et al., 2009; Lidén, 2013). In addition, the financial solidity of each municipality reports positive significance in three of the five models and thereby implies that the economic situation could positively enhance conditions for digital politics (Viborg Andersen et al., 2007). Turning to technological dimensions they show significant results in only one model. Internet access through wireless connections yields a significant effect in 2010. Finally, regarding the influence of political variables, the effect of voter turnout reveals a similar pattern, only being significant in one of the five years. The direction is, though, unexpected even if previous research (Lidén, 2013) has reported similar results. Further, the predictor of preferential voting reveals a similar pattern, reporting a negative effect in 2013.

Table 1 Estimations of the local level digital politics in Sweden

Cross-section analyses					
	Model 1 (2009)	Model 2 (2010)	Model 3 (2011)	Model 4 (2012)	Model 5 (2013)
Average income	2.947E-4 (3.409E-4)	2.225E-4 (3.722E-4)	1.947E-4 (3.347E-4)	1.23E-5 (3.247E-4)	-3.1E-5 (3.21E-4)
Proportion with secondary education	0.005* (0.002)	0.005* (0.002)	0.004 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)
Population size (log)	0.065** (0.012)	0.073** (0.012)	0.065** (0.012)	0.060** (0.012)	0.058** (0.012)
Financial solidity	0.001* (3.393E-4)	7.45E-5 (3.827E-4)	3.947E-4 (3.668E-4)	0.001* (3.616E4)	0.001* (3.695E-4)
Internet access – DSL	-0.208 (0.107)	-0.241 (0.139)	-0.071 (0.121)	-0.027 (0.123)	-0.066 (0.120)
Internet access – Wi-Fi	0.139 (0.144)	1.422* (0.578)	0.460 (1.171)	0.105 (1.198)	0.309 (1.343)
Internet access - Fiber	-0.014 (0.034)	-0.006 (0.036)	0.008 (0.032)	-0.012 (0.032)	-0.005 (0.033)
Voter turnout	-0.004 (0.002)	-0.004 (0.003)	-0.005* (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)
Preferential voting	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.003* (0.001)
N	290	290	290	289	288
Adjusted R-squared	0.424	0.428	0.375	0.345	0.337

Note: Entries are coefficients followed by standard errors. All independent variables are lagged one year besides voter turnout and preferential voting. Multicollinearity is controlled for, not allowing a VIF larger than 5.0. *Significant at the 0.05-level, **Significant at the 0.01-level

A qualitative look on digital politics – selection of cases and analytical techniques

Selecting extreme cases builds on the logic of identifying cases that represent unusual values, meaning that a strategic selection on the dependent variable will be utilized. As discussed extensively in the literature (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994) this could make both descriptive and causal inference challenging since there are no variation to address. However, applying this approach in conjunction with the logic of a most different systems design (Przeworski & Teune, 1970) creates a design in which evidently important structural factors are eliminated as decisive. This enable an analytical shift to the micro level in which the unravelling of the black-box of decision-making can be approached and future factors decisive for digital politics be identified.

Applying this logic the two selected cases are the municipalities of Gagnef, located in the middle of Sweden, and Kiruna, the northernmost municipality in the country. In Table 2 average data for these cases on four variables are presented, counting the dependent variable and the three determinants from cross-sectional analysis that shows significance for at least two of the five examined years. The values that are given are based on average means.³ In connection with the logic for a method of agreement, variation is apparent among otherwise influential structural conditions.

Concerning the municipalities' supply of digital politics both Gagnef and Kiruna report quite extreme values in which opportunities for digital politics through government channels have been poor for all examined years. As an example, Gagnef and Kiruna reported in 2012 the lowest value for the index of municipalities with a population above 10 000 inhabitants. Likewise, they have a lower increase of the index over the measured years than the national average. Some difference do though exist but the general tendencies of falling behind are consistent.

Turning to Gagnef and Kiruna's score among the independent variables they all show a variation. Gagnef is placed below the national median of population size while Kiruna is placed above. Concerning the proportion of citizens with secondary education the both cases have, on average, quite similar values. However, five out of six years have reported considerably larger differences between the cases than captured by the average mean that tends to indicate an incorrect equalizing effect. As an example, in 2013 Gagnef reports a 0.36 percent difference in relation to Kiruna. Finally, Gagnef

³ All calculations are derived from municipalities as the applied unity. Independent variables reflects mean for the years of 2008 to 2013 whereas the dependent variable reflects the years of 2009-2013. Since a few number of Swedish municipalities have a much higher population size than the large sum, median values are calculated for each year and then averaged over the years.

reports a significantly lower financial solidity than Kiruna, notwithstanding that both municipalities are below the national average.

Table 2 Summarizing cases

	Gagnef	Kiruna	National average
Average index of digital politics	0.394	0.366	0.617
Average population size	10063	23025	15274 (median)
Average proportion with secondary education (%)	17.05	16.97	18
Average financial solidity	28.9	37.8	50.1

Both municipalities were visited in the autumn of 2014 and six interviews with informants were held in each. Besides interviewing the chair of the municipal executive board also leading opponent politicians were included. Interviews were also held with a number of public officials, such as municipal chief executives, other public officials in leading positions as well as those working directly with these questions. Interviews were of semi-structured character and recorded and thereafter transcribed. An interview guide were employed that included three more generic themes⁴ as well as specific questions related to the local conditions. Concerning specific questions, such were raised with the help of an extensive study of documentation. Through the record of each municipalities protocols from the executive board and the local assembly were screened for errands of any relevance for digital politics and, when such were detected, additional documentation was required.

The data will be exploited with the ambition to reconstruct those decision-making processes that has resulted in a poor level of digital politics. Since structural conditions are controlled for the two assumptions of agency behaviour will guide the interpretation of the material. First, politicians is expected to oppose the development of digital politics (Mahrer & Krimmer, 2005). Second, public officials, on the contrary, will support the development of digital politics (Nalbandian, 1999). An intensive focus enables a process-tracing strategy that has the ambition to explain a specific outcome (Beach & Pedersen, 2013, p. 18) through reconstruction and categorization of occurred events. Besides achieving data triangulation (Yin, 2009) the temporal dimension will be crucial this analysis. The employed cases have a temporal dimension expressed through an ambition of reconstructing relevant events through a within-case approach. This strategy will make it possible to model a reasonable causal ordering.

⁴ These were: (i) general perspectives on democracy in the municipality (ii) description of efforts concerning digital politics (iii) explanations to constraining or supporting circumstances concerning digital politics.

Gagnef

Gagnef, a smaller Swedish municipality located in the eastern part of the middle of the country, resembles the historical illustration of Sweden with its pastoral scenery of a traditional agricultural landscape with the largest Swedish river, the Dal River, ever present in the surroundings. The dominant competing parties in Gagnef has been the Social Democratic Party and the Center Party. The latter has, during the latest two terms of offices, ruled the municipality together with the other parties from the Alliance. Through interviews the local democracy is described in ambiguous terms. Informants are indeed united in that the municipality is a polity constituted by an engaged citizenry, specifically expressed through a strong civil society. This is exemplified by the latest chair of the executive board, Sofia Jarl, (22102014): *"We usually use the road maintenance in the municipality [as an example]. The municipality has almost no charge for road maintenance... it is the 70 road maintenance associations that handles this"*. Still this exchange is largely characterized by conventional forms of communication. The internal democracy within the municipality is narrated in a gloomier picture. Irene Homman (22102014) the leading opponent politician during 2012-2014 describes the local politics as lacking transparency and being ruled by a limited elite. Albeit this could be a tendentious apprehension, the creation of a new party 'Kommunal Samling' to the election in 2014 with its leading parole 'It is time to reintroduce democracy in Gagnef' (Kommunal Samling Gagnef, 2015) strengthens this perception. Significant parts of the electorate appeared to share this opinion, indicated by the party gaining around 13 per cent of the votes.

Reconstructing Gagnef's work with digital politics from 2009-2014 give at hands a phlegmatic process in which the relations between politicians and public officials resembles a continuous power struggle. The domain for the government website was registered as early as in 1995, being one of the first municipalities online (Hellquist, 08082011). Any long-term plan for developing these issues does not, though, exist (Gyllander, 22102014). The latest more strategic efforts were done in 2006-2010 in which the aim was to develop a better match between citizen demand services and what was supplied. However, the development of the website during the examined years is described by the official in charge of information as quite absent, hence verifying quantitative data. Some deviant examples is that parts of the administration have launched their own Facebook sites and that a specific project in which adolescences have been consulted through a text-message panel on topical questions (Stenberg, 27102014). Quite surprisingly, this issue is still described as targeted with an increasing political attention during the latest two terms of office than previously (Hellquist, 22102014).

Although the public official in charge for these issues has continuously applied for funding enabling more substantial work with these issues, it has not been prioritized by the politicians in charge. Thus,

what can be interpreted as a perception of an increased political engagement has, hitherto, mostly been empty words. Even if leading public officials have had a desire for enhancing digital politics they have allocated sufficient funding. As stated by the official in charge of information Thomas Hellquist (22102014): *“But there is no budget. Then I mean that it is not prioritized... and I have stated that we will not engage in anything lukewarm for then not being able to handle these issues”*. However, completely without funding has related ambitions not been. In 2010 the executive board appointed a committee with the aim to deliver a proposal of a strategy for the web, mainly focused on the design and content of a new website (Hellquist, 08082011). Guiding in this process has partially been the indicators for measuring digital politics as the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions has employed. This development ambitions have, though, been considerably delayed. So delayed, due to down prioritization among the administration, that the timeframe of this study has not been able to take a new website into account.

There are, though, evidence of leading politicians to a growing extent putting this issue to the fore. The top leader for the liberal-conservative Moderate party, Stefan J. Eriksson has frequently raised the question of a neglected digital politics. Two significant examples of proposals can be displayed. In 2011 Eriksson proposed that council meetings should be filmed and made available through the website (Eriksson, 2011). The executive board actually approved this motion though with reservation of first instructing the administration to investigate necessary conditions concerning technology and economy. However, with the help of consultancy the conclusion was that this got too costly (Hellquist, 22102014). In 2014 Eriksson proposed vigorous efforts for involvement in additional digital channels under the message that it was inexcusable that the municipality was not present in those channels where their citizens were (Eriksson, 2014). To some extent is it surprisingly that Eriksson's intense engagement, two other suggestions on the same theme were launched in late of 2014, has not been materialised concerning the fact that his party was the second largest within the ruling alliance. Regarding this matter, Eriksson (22102014) clearly states that his ideas has not gained hearing. It is not that alliance colleagues opposes Eriksson's ambitions but they have not been willing to prioritize them.

Summarizing Gagnef's work with digital politics 2009-2014 points towards some contradictory events. From the point of perspectives emanating from the administration any significant ambitions have not, besides the ongoing project of a new website and the one targeted at adolescences, been able to identify during this period. Shifting focus, an increasing support is noticed among politicians, indicating that this issue, in the long term, must thenceforth be focused on but during the examined time it has not yet lifted. Three main reasons for a lacking support of digital politics can be identified. First, taking into account structural preconditions, such as population size and educational levels, the

fact that much of political engagement appears to be channelled through a traditional civil society a strong surrounding demand for digital politics appears to have been quite absent. Second, lack of political priorities concerning this matter cannot be discarded. Some form of resistance, at least of financial matter, is evident, specifically bearing in mind that the ruling elite still has incorporated a strong proponent of digital politics. Third, the administration has reported a somewhat cautious attitude towards engaging fully in digital politics. Referring to financial reasons and not being willing to engage without doing it whole-hearted, it still raises questions if the present conditions could not lead to a higher stakes. The downplaying of a new website adds to that understanding.

Kiruna

The northernmost region of Sweden, where Kiruna is placed, has for about 6000 years been settled by the Sami people, making the modern life of the city that was founded in 1900, accounting for only a brief period of its history. The modern era of Kiruna dates back to 1890 and since then Kiruna has been highly associated with the mining of iron ore. Since then Kiruna has expanded as a settler town and now faces a completely unique processes since the current town center will be moved for enabling future mining. Kiruna is known for hosting several local parties that has created quite unusual and broad coalitions as well as some political turbulence. The dominating force has, though, always been the Social Democratic party and during the examined time, 2009-2014, the chair of the executive board has represented this party, though at time in coalition with everything from left-wing parties to more liberal ones. The current chair of the executive board from the Social Democratic Party, Kristina Zakrisson, does describes the local political arena as being characterized by a tough atmosphere (26012015), a situation that has influenced also digital politics. In this case, the rough climate is the main reason for her not engaging in social media even if she communicate online through a blog. Likewise, the leading opponent politician, Gunnar Selberg representing the Center Party utilize similar arguments, although he takes part in online discussions: *"Facebook is just a nightmare... There are so many haters there... First there are those who are profoundly ignorant... Then we have some who only want to write crap."* (1112015). Nevertheless, a digital sphere for local discussion appears to be apparent. If it is progressive, is, though, another question.

Kiruna's work with digital issues has went through a number of phases. Ulrika Hannu, in charge of information at the municipality, describes previous websites exploiting a design based on the internal organization. The perspective was, in regards of that, not originating from citizens' point of views. However, in 2013 an updated version was launched which included a changed graphical profile, although without adding new services. However, such functions that enhance dialogue has not, besides claims for engagement in social media, been requested by citizens at all. The quantitative

information gives at hands that this change was small steps in a positive direction. Following from this, a few examples from the organization have got their own Facebook pages. A comprehensive strategy has, though, not been reached (Hannu, 1212015). According to leading public officials a long-term strategy, including measures for taking more of a holistic approach concerning these matters has been lacking. Another illustrative example is the fact that Kiruna, as the only municipality in the county, chose to not participate in the creation of an e-committee with the ambition to realize national ambitions for e-society. Due to uncertainties, such as risking local influence as well as hazards related to technological harmonization, public officials recommended the leading politicians to refrain from this cooperation (M. Dahlberg, 1112015; Kiruna Municipality, 2013).

Several circumstances can assist in creating an understanding of this development. Hannu (1212015) describes diminishing resources for working with these issues during the latest decennium. This has been expressed through a lower number of employed staff today compared to earlier. Others, such as the deputy municipal chief executive Mats Dahlberg (1112015) states that most resources have been directed towards the development of strengthening digital infrastructure. Concerning the work with digital politics a process driven by the administration is most apparent. The municipal chief executive, Peter Niemi (1112015), cannot recall any significant differences on this matter due to different political leadership. Dahlberg (1112015) stresses that these issues have been initiated by the administration as consequence of screening for relevant examples of development. However, politicians have been perceptive when presented with needs for developing digital channels, although they have not constituted any driving force. Selberg presents a similar narrative, indicating that those measures taken is public officials' ambitions about portraying the municipality as a serious organization. Put in his own words: *"It is not about getting the democracy to work. It is about creating the image, strengthening the trademark... I think public officials want to tell municipal chief executives from other municipalities, when they are attending any conference for municipalities and county councils, well what have you done I Kiruna then? One cannot say that... we have not done anything. That would be embarrassing* (1112015).

A somewhat unexpected circumstance noticed in Kiruna is how media, compared to other cities outside the metropolitan areas, rather tend to expand than lowering its local coverage. As Peter Niemi (1112015) says: *"Kiruna has always been interesting concerning media coverage. But now it is exceptional."* On a straight question whether this has lowered the pressure from the municipality to act as a local distributor of information, several of the informants state that this has probably increased citizens' feeling of being up-to-date. As Hannu (1212015) argue: *"I suppose one feel not uninformed"*. Similarly, great distances and at least a considerable population does not appear do constrain ways of communication with the local municipality. Niemi (1112015) says that citizens in Kiruna are used to

straight ways of communication. If they want something they visit the town hall, telephone or send an email and it is not more complicated than that.

When summarizing the analyzed events in Kiruna two of circumstances seem particularly decisive for the outcome. Concerning the internal organization, the development appears to be driven almost completely by the administration. Any demands from citizens, channeled through their representatives, or originating from leading politicians themselves are hard to grasp. Rather, aspirations from the administration of reaching up to at least descent levels represent the dominant force. Resources, in addition, being lowered will lead to definite limitations on what ambitions that are achievable. Moreover, citizens in Kiruna have good opportunities for information of local politics. Through a vibrant local media and an uncomplicated, albeit mostly traditional, communication with the municipality, demands for more of digital services appears to have been circumvented. Any deficit of information is hard to reckon, that being said the quality is another matter. As indicated by interviews, online dialogues are frequent and, at least partially, characterized as being tough. Hence, a continuous discussion of the local democracy are occurring in Kiruna. One could imagine if more information straight from 'the horse mouth', or additional forms for exchange with the official side of Kiruna could lead to a more fruitful discussion.

Comparing cases

With the logic of the criteria for case selection Gagnef and Kiruna diverges on potential structural determinants of digital politics. As has been evident from the depiction above differences also appear from a closer look at local circumstances. Whereas there appear to be no noticed demand for online dialogue in Gagef, Kiruna constantly faces rather dramatic and harsh disputes online. Further, local media gives in Kiruna unusual reports on local matters whereas Gagnef, instead, must be described as having a civil society embedded that is coined by traditional associations as crucial actors for local engagement. More interesting is to attend to the common characteristics. Three circumstances should be highlighted. First, a long-term strategy is absent in both cases. An interpretation close at hands is that this has neither been called for by the political leadership nor has it been prioritized by a highly pressured administration. As indicated by research from other contexts (Firmstone & Coleman, 2015), this can be due to a lack of expertise and challenges in moving to more socio-political questions. Second, without one exception no leading politician has described ambitions of digital politics in any enthusiastic way. Examples from Gagnef is telling, in which the profound engagement of the local leader of the Moderate Party has not been sufficient for creating substantial advancements. This represent an observation that is close to verify Mahrer and Krimmer's (2005) assumptions of politician being resistant, even if the motives for this is hard to uncover. Third, behavior of public officials is in

no way self-evident. Compiling it would indicate a fairly motivated administration that keep the 'floor sufficient' but hesitates to do more without funding. Hence, taking a role as community builder is not apparent (Zheng et al., 2014).

Conclusions

A positive trajectory of digital politics among Swedish municipalities is apparent during the examined time period. However, great differences still exist for citizens, due to residence, when it comes to opportunities for engagement in local politics via official municipal sites.

There is ample evidence to suggest that population size has a positive influence on Swedish municipalities' level of digital politics. It can be theorized that the scope that population creates in conjunction with economical preconditions are decisive in this case. Expanding the assumptions by Viborg Andersen et al. (2007) that efforts of this kind is costly with the notion that larger societies have better conditions for carrying such costs, theoretical refinements are emphasized. Further, this implies that methods of distributing information and channels for maintaining continuous forms of dialogues are to larger extent digital in larger and more well-of societies, while 'analogous' methods prevail in smaller and poorer ones. Even if such societies could also reflect well-functioning political systems, there is a risk of increasing differences among municipalities, in which citizens in one municipality face a battery of possibilities, while in another their options are much more restrained.

Measures of education shows a declining pattern with the index of digital democracy. That levels of education could have a positive causal effect on the dependent variable is in line with micro studies assumptions on individual behaviour concerning online engagement (e.g. Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2010). One potential reason for education losing its importance can be related to circumstances related to how a new generation grows up. This new citizenry is fully accustomed to the current technological landscape which could make the age structure a more decisive proponent of digital politics.

Turning to the two extreme cases that equip their citizens with poor possibilities for online engagement a few circumstances at the micro level are yielded up. In accordance with theoretical assumptions (Mahrer & Krimmer, 2005), politicians efforts concerning digital politics appear to be modest. Despite some pressure from other politicians and the administration leading politicians have resisted, mainly referring to economic restraints. The combination of non-committed leading politicians and reserved and loyal public officials create a scenario in which the local arena government driven digital politics will be lame. This new insights provide well-founded hypotheses to be tested in future studies.

Appendix A. Descriptive statistics

	Year	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation	Source
e-democracy	2009-2012	1159	0.125	1.0	0.592	0.152	SKL (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012)
Average income	2008-2011	1160	183.2	467.5	233.4	30.716	Statistics Sweden (2013b)
Proportion with secondary education	2008-2011	1160	9.57	45.90	17.14	5.822	Statistics Sweden (2012)
Internet access – DSL	2008-2011	1160	0.520	1.0	0.956	0.073	Swedish Post and Telecom Authority (2012)
Internet access – Wi-Fi	2008-2011	1160	0.354	1.0	0.990	0.044	Swedish Post and Telecom Authority (2012)
Voter turnout	2008-2011	1160	59.5	90.5	79.850	3.577	Statistics Sweden (2013a)
Preferential voting	2008-2011	1160	33.391	71.97	19.137	7.640	Election Authority (2013)
Population size (log)	2008-2011	1160	4.266	5.928	3.391	0.405	Statistics Sweden (2012)
Financial solidity	2008-2011	1160	-14.2	87.2	51.000	18.551	Database for Local and County Councils (2012)

Appendix B The dependent variable

Indicator presented on the webpage	
1. The complete budget	2. A simplified version of the budget
3. General information about the about how the municipality compares with other municipalities	4. General information about how complaints and opinions are handled
5. The work on how complaints and opinions are handled	6. Information on distribution of seats from the latest election
7. Information about coalition, alliance, and technical cooperation in elections or the like	8. Contact information for chairpersons of the municipal council, municipal executive board, and committees
9. Information about e-mail addresses for all the politicians in the municipal council and on the committees	10. Information about the telephone numbers of all the politicians in the municipal council and on the committees
11. Frequently asked questions (FAQs) are collected	12. A search function and an index from A-Z with municipalities' responsibilities and contact persons for these, is presented
13. The complete annual report is presented	14. A simplified version of the annual report
15. Possibility of subscribing to electronic newsletters	16. Information (or details of agenda, time, and place) of municipal council meetings
17. Information of (or details of agenda, time, and place) to municipal executive board meetings	18. Information (or details of agenda, time, and place) of municipal committee meetings
19. Documents for municipal council meetings before meetings have occurred.	20. Documents to municipality executive board meetings before meetings have occurred
21. Documents for committee meetings before meetings have occurred	22. Protocols of municipal council meetings
23. Protocols of municipalities executive board meetings	24. Protocols of committee meetings
25. Possible of citizens to search in the municipality's records?	26. The webpage is adapted to be easy to read
27. The webpage allows information to be heard	28. The webpage is adapted for the visually handicapped
29. The webpage allows information in sign language	30. Information about municipality activities are found in languages other than Swedish
31. Municipal council meetings are distributed through web-tv	32. Information about municipalities' insurances

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