Policy Learning in Local Government: The Role of Reflexive Leadership

*Jostein Askim**

*Harald Baldersheim***

The paper addresses three interrelated issues in policy learning, based on survey data from a representative sample of all Norwegian councillors. The authors ask: What characterizes the policy learning behaviour of local councillors? This issue is addressed through data on what councillors find to be useful information sources in their capacities as decision-makers and agenda-setters. The paper documents three policy-learning profiles: cosmopolitans (who draw largely on external sources of information), locals (who draw on internal sources), and party loyalists (who draw on party sources). The authors also ask if policy-learning profiles make a difference to councillors as decision-makers and agenda-setters. The paper documents that cosmopoli-

CROATIAN AND COMPARATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

───────────

        * Jostein Askim, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, Norway (izvanredni profesor Odjela za političku znanost, Sveučilište u Oslu, Norveška, e-mail: jostein.askim@stv.uio.no)

        ** Professor Harald Baldersheim, Department of Political Science, University of Oslo, Norway (redoviti profesor Odjela za političku znanost, Sveučilište u Oslu, Norveška, e-mail: harald.baldersheim@stv.uio.no)

tans are the most active agenda setters. Do new patterns of policy learning indicate the emergence of a new type of leadership in local government? It is argued that political interest in publicly available information that contextualizes the municipality's current performance is part of a larger syndrome, which we term 'reflexive leadership'.

Key words: policy learning, reflexive leadership, local government – Norway, cosmopolitans, locals, party loyalists

1. Introduction

The article[1] addresses three interrelated issues in policy learning, based on survey data from a representative sample of all Norwegian councillors. The first question is: *What characterizes the policy learning behaviour of local councillors*? This issue is addressed through a marriage of decision-making and leadership theory and data on what councillors find to be useful information sources in their capacities as decision-makers and agenda-setters. The use councillors make of publicly available information that contextualizes the municipality's current performance (external information) is of particular interest in this article. Policy-learning profiles are classified into three categories: cosmopolitans (who draw largely on external sources of information), locals (who draw on internal sources) and party loyalists (who draw on party sources). Based on analysis of data material, it is concluded that the three profiles do exist among Norwegian councillors.

The second issue addressed is: *Do learning profiles matter*? It is analysed whether policy-learning profiles make a difference to councillors as decision-makers and agenda-setters. Are councillors who are overall active policy learners more active as agenda-setters? And are agenda-setting initiatives associated with particular profiles of policy learning? It is hypothesized and found that cosmopolitans are the most active agenda-setters.

The third question is: *Who are these cosmopolitans and when do they emerge*? What triggers reflexive leadership? What are the situations in which this

CROATIAN AND COMPARATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

type of behaviour is likely to appear? Are there certain personal qualities that characterise these councillors?

The findings on these issues inform a more general discussion: *Do new patterns of policy learning indicate the emergence of a new type of leadership in local government*? It is argued that this is indeed the case. It has been demonstrated elsewhere that Norwegian councillors (elected representatives to municipal councils) make extensive use of benchmarking information (Askim, 2007, 2009; Askim & Hanssen, 2008), in contrast to more reticent attitudes in this respect among politicians in other countries (Pollitt, 2006). It is argued that political interest in contextualizing information is part of a larger syndrome that is termed 'reflexive leadership'.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: The second section presents the theoretical framework, the third the data and methods applied; the fourth section documents the empirical analysis, while the final two sections discuss the findings and provide conclusions.

2. Reflexive Leadership: Policy Learning, Decision-Making and Leadership

Taking a clue from a classic text by Robert C. Tucker, *Politics as Leadership* (1981/1995), we see the essence of political leadership as that of setting directions for processes of collective choice. The need for leadership arises when a group, an organization or a state encounters novel situations for which there are no readymade recipes for action, when crises strike or an existing policy has conspicuously failed. Uncertainty may trigger policy learning. There are, however, many 'takes' on the concept of policy learning: cognitive, interactive, epistemic, etc. (Freeman, 2006). For our purposes, we define policy learning as *the process of searching for information that may enlighten policy choices*. It is partly lesson-drawing in the sense outlined by Richard Rose (1993), but we also wish to highlight the interactive aspect of policy learning or how policy "puzzles" are created (Heclo, 1974).

The policy learning characteristic of reflexive leadership in local government is setting directions *through the judicious use of intermunicipal comparisons* (comparative information). Comparisons can create pressure for change and entail specific visions and directions for future development. It is argued that growing availability of digital data banks, fast computers, the internet, and a multitude of web sources has made it easier for coun-

cillors to engage in this type of leadership behaviour. Reflexive leadership relates to so-called transformational leadership (Macgregor Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985) and possesses features akin to those of the 'cosmopolitan leader' as outlined by Robert Merton (1949). Our conceptualisation of the more precise workings of reflexive leadership draws on the foundations of cognitive leadership as developed in particular by Herbert Simon (1957) and Cyert and March (1963).

It is demonstrated that political interest in external information is part of a larger syndrome which we term reflexive leadership. Of course, there is variation with regard to local leadership. Many elected councillors are leaders, formally, but only a minority of leaders can be expected to be *reflexive* leaders. The fivefold typology of mayoral leadership developed by Kotter and Lawrence (1968) (ceremonial, individualistic, caretaker, executive, entrepreneurial) may have captured realities of the 1960s and 1970s but lacks an adequate category for leaders who take advantage of today's highly informatized environments.

Councillors can practice reflexive leadership at three stages of policy-making. First, as they search for political guidance among sources that contextualize the municipality's current performance (search); second, as they set issues on the local agenda to create visions and set directions for change (initiative); and third, as they refer to comparative information to rally support for new policy initiatives (support).

Search: Councillors receive all sorts of feedback on their municipalities' performances; formal information as well as informal; oral as well as written; prose as well as numerical; and information gained through systematized channels as well as ad hoc. Councillors vary particularly much in the extent to which they expose themselves to informal, unfiltered feedback. Some engage emphatically in face-to-face, telephonic and electronic interaction with stakeholders, others much less so. One councillor interviewed for this project made a point out of his extensive external contacts in this way: »I often call the City of Oslo and ask how they address various problems. I have also contacted the City of Copenhagen. It is a wise strategy to collect this sort of information; I search the Internet a lot to find it« (Councillor A, City of Stavanger).[2]

Such exposure can influence politicians' beliefs and preferences and subsequently their search behaviour. The reflexive leadership approach leads

---

[2] Quotes are drawn from interviews conducted with elected and appointed leaders in selected Norwegian municipalities in 2005.

us to expect politicians who interact extensively with stakeholders (1) to be more likely to encounter critical views regarding the municipality's current performance, (2) and therefore to become worried and question the municipality's performance and (3) to seek information that further clarifies the matter. This can be achieved through comparisons with the organization's own previous performance (all-time highs or over-time averages), with some normative standard (set by the organization itself or by someone else) and with the performance of other organizations (Simon, 1939: 106; Wholey, 1983; Mausolff, 1999: 2; Moynihan, 2005: 212). Reflexive leaders are particularly inclined to consult information on other organizations' performance levels, be it group averages or positive outliers (so-called 'best cases'). Access to ICT tools lowers the bar for searching for such information as indicated by one particular councillor who said that he made use of the Internet a lot to access information to supplement documents provided by the municipal administration: »I have the National Association of Local Authorities, the Parliament and the national ministries as permanent [web browser] book marks« (Councillor B, City of Drammen).

Initiative: According to Samuels (2003), »expand[ing] the limits of the possible« is a hallmark of leadership. One of the ways politicians can achieve this is to present ideas that substantially raise the level of group aspiration by stimulating collective visions that appeal to followers' values, motives and self-perceptions (House, 1995). Reflexive leadership coins a specific way of performing such leadership; it is about activating discourse on directions for change by contextualizing current performance through publicly available information. Referring to the performance of other organizations – within or outside the organizational field of local governments – can serve several purposes. Politicians in field leading organizations can refer to the laggards and say »let's widen the gap«. Laggards can refer to field leaders to illustrate opportunity space and make colleagues and followers want to close the gap. In both cases politicians consciously activate discourse based on external information to raise the level of group aspiration. The politicians in both types of cases exert leadership behaviour that has features of transformational leadership as outlined by MacGregor Burns (1978) and Bass (1985).

The reflexive leadership approach leads us to expect, first, that some politicians explicitly refer to external information when setting the local political agenda, and second, that the most active agenda setters are to be found among politicians whose search activities are externally oriented. The former exemplifies explicit, conscious use of public knowledge; the

latter exemplifies what Weiss (1980) calls 'knowledge creep' – a gradual awareness and incorporation of information.

Support: Reflexive leadership can, furthermore, be used to rally support for policy initiatives. Samuels (2003) describes three strategies leaders pursue to gather support for their initiatives – 'inspiring', 'buying' and 'bullying'. Which strategy, or mix of strategies, is suitable varies with the circumstances and with the leaders' and the target groups' traits, skills and qualities. Politicians engaging in reflexive leadership (reflexive leaders) activate a mix of 'inspiring' and 'bullying' to rally support. Inspiration comes from illustrating opportunity space through comparisons with positive outliers: Look, it's possible! (To ban smoking in bars, to halve HIV infection rates, to triple the proportions of hydrogen-fuelled cars, etc.).

Reflexive leaders can be said to 'bully' political colleagues and civil servants into supporting their initiatives when they use comparisons to activate pride or shame. Many councillors are notoriously patriotic towards their municipalities. Change initiatives' chances of faring well hence increase when agenda setters convincingly argue that their initiatives will close »humiliating« performance gaps. Furthermore, activating professional pride by referring to the superior performance of their peers in other municipalities can effectively neutralize potential implementation veto points in the municipal hierarchy.

2.1. When Is Reflexive Leadership Likely to Emerge?

As suggested by Robert Tucker, leadership is likely to be in demand when situations are ambiguous (to provide purpose and meaning), e.g. when there is disagreement over the direction of municipal development, when non-routine situations are encountered, in situations of organisational stress and conflict, and in situations that call for negotiations across organisational boundaries (Tucker, 1981/1995). Reflexive leadership may emerge when someone questions (the quality and relevance of) municipal performance. This may happen when environments change rapidly (»are we doing the right things when so much around us is changing?«), when resources become more scarce (»should we lower our performance?«), more abundant (»what do we do with all these new resources?«), when people with new ideas enter the organisation (e.g. after an election), and when technological advances make it easier to collect and process information. More precise hypotheses are formulated in the next section.

The occurrence of reflexive leadership may also vary with institutional contexts. It is our opinion that contexts that encourage *facilitative* leadership (Svara, 1993) will be more receptive to this type of behaviour compared to settings that reward power brokerage or bossism. Norwegian local government has many of the features identified by Svara as congenial to the facilitative type of leadership, such as the council-manager type of local government found in many American cities. However, testing this hypothesis will have to wait until comparative data is available. It is mentioned here primarily to indicate that reflexive leadership may also depend upon specific institutional settings.

3. Data and Methods

Data for the analysis stem from a survey conducted among Norwegian councillors in October-December 2005. Questionnaires were sent to a random sample of 1,500 councillors from all over the country (the universe of Norwegian local councillors is 11,138). The response rate, after one probe, was 50 per cent. The survey was part of the project 'ICT and Local Democracy', funded by the Norwegian Research Council and conducted in collaboration between the Norwegian Institute for Urban and Regional Research (NIBR), the University of Oslo and the University College of Oslo. The analysis also uses municipality-level data from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) and Statistics Norway (SSB).

To address the issue of what characterizes the policy learning behaviour of councillors, we analyse the survey material using frequency tables and factor analysis. To address whether policy learning profiles make a difference to councillors as decision-makers and agenda-setters, correlation analysis is used. Triggers of reflexive leadership are identified through regression analysis.

4. Analysis of Reflexive Leadership among Norwegian Councillors

4.1. Policy Learning Profiles

As a starting point for analysing the spread of reflexive leadership, we have carried out a frequency analysis (Table 1) and a factor analysis (Table

CROATIAN AND COMPARATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

2) of councillors' search behaviour. The analysis was based on responses to the query: »When taking a stand on issues on the agenda of the municipal council, how often do you seek out additional information from the following sources?« The sources ranged from web-based data banks, web pages of national government agencies and party programmes to local case documents.

Table 1: Councillors' uses of data sources (N = 718)

Data source consulted by councillors	Percentage of frequent users*
Party programmes and other documentation of your local party's policies within the area in question	51
Case documents from previous cases in the municipality	48
Performance information in the municipality's annual report or in balanced scorecard documentation	43
National databases with benchmarking data	33
Results from satisfaction surveys conducted among users/inhabitants	29
The web-pages of the political party you represent	24
Reports from researchers or consultants	23
The web-pages of central government, regional government, trade unions or the Association for local governments	18
The web-pages of other municipalities	7

* Percentages of councillors who said they consulted the respective information sources »very« or »quite often« (as against »sometimes«, »rarely« and »very rarely«).

Question in survey »When you are in the process of taking a stand on a specific case, how often do you actively and single-handedly collect information *to supplement the pre-prepared case documentation*?« The rows in the question matrix named nine potential sources for supplementing information. These are listed in Table 1. The question was accommodated to Likert-scale items, with responses falling along a continuum regarding the level of frequency of use. The scale's values ranged from one to five: Very often, fairly often, occasionally, fairly seldom and very seldom – or n.a./do not know.

Table 1 shows that the most sought-out information sources in connection with decisions on the agenda of the municipalities are party programmes and other documentation on the policies of local parties' in the field in question, case documents from previous cases and performance information from the municipality's annual report or from balanced scorecard documentation. These sources are regularly consulted by about half of all Norwegian councillors. Information sources less frequently used include

the web pages of central government, regional government, trade unions or the Association for Local Governments, and the web pages of other municipalities. Overall, party sources and internal documents from their own municipality dominate the informational diet of local councillors in Norway. Nevertheless, up to one third of the councillors seek to enrich the local diet with fare from outside sources. However, the web pages of other municipalities are consulted much less frequently than other external sources.

In sum, these findings demonstrate a surprisingly high level of search activity, keeping in mind that the councillors were asked to specify the information sources they consulted *in addition to* reading the regularly prepared case documentation for council meetings. It should also be kept in mind that the office of councillor is unpaid and honorary, and that incumbents are expected to carry it out in their spare time.

A factor analysis of the survey data on search behaviour yielded three components (see Table 2). Based on the substance of the preferred information sources, we interpret these behavioural components as externally oriented search behaviour (component 1), internally oriented search behaviour (component 2) and party oriented search behaviour (component 3). On this basis, policy-learning profiles are classified into three categories: cosmopolitans (who draw largely on external sources of information), locals (who draw on internal sources) and party loyalists (who draw on party sources). It is concluded that there is indeed a distinct group of councillors – the cosmopolitans – who are characterized by the search behaviour we associate with reflexive leadership – search for external sources of information that may contextualize the performance of their own municipalities.

CROATIAN AND COMPARATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Table 2: Factor analysis of policy learning profiles* (N = 718)

Data source consulted by councillors	Components		
	1 Cosmopolitans	2 Locals	3 Loyalists
Case documents from previous cases in the municipality	0,052	*0,602*	0,322
Results from satisfaction surveys conducted among users/inhabitants	0,158	*0,767*	0,099
Performance information in the municipality's annual report or in balanced scorecard documentation	0,309	*0,741*	0,061
Party programmes and other documentation of your local party's policies within the area in question	–0,025	0,326	*0,788*
The web-pages of the political party you represent	0,465	0,049	*0,748*
The web-pages of other municipalities	*0,724*	0,087	0,41
The web-pages of central government, regional government, labour unions or the Association for local governments	*0,827*	0,07	0,304
Reports from researchers or consultants	*0,733*	0,358	–0,126
National databases with benchmarking data	*0,756*	0,229	0,023

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization, a Rotation converged in 9 iterations.

Survey question: see Table 1.

4.2. Do Policy-Learning Profiles Matter for Decision-Making?

Table 3 explores how policy-learning profiles relate to other important decision-making behaviour, namely direct interaction with stakeholders and agenda setting. To aid this analysis, the respective items that make up the three search components were combined into three indices that reflect cosmopolitan, local and loyalist search behaviour. To recapitulate the argument above: we expect extensive councillor interaction with stakeholders to trigger dissatisfaction with or worries over existing policies and therefore a) a tendency to search for better policies, and b) a subsequent desire to set new directions or correct existing directions by trying to influence the municipal agenda.

In the first row of Table 3, data on councillors' contacts with various stake-holders have been aggregated into a summary index (indication of worry signals). Correlations show that councillors who are much exposed to contacts demonstrate active search behaviour overall (the three correlation coefficients are positive and statistically significant in the range from .40 to .32); it is also noted that the strongest correlation is that between stakeholder contacts and externally oriented search behaviour – the behavioural linkage expected by reflexive leadership.

Table 3: The relationship between policy learning profiles and other decision making behaviour. Correlation coefficients (Pearsons r). (N = 718)

	Policy learning profile:		
	Cosmopolitan+	Local+	Loyalist+
Frequency of interaction with stakeholders++	.40*	.34*	.32*
Frequency of agenda setting initiatives+++	.18*	.14*	.17*

*) Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

+) Items of indices of policy learning profile, cf. components in Table 2. A summary index was calculated

++) The data source is responses to the following question: »How often are you in contact with the following actors?« – list of alternatives: other politicians, CEO, other executives, other functionaries, citizens, media, associations/interest groups (daily – never). A summary index was calculated

+++) Q: »How often have you taken an initiative aimed at putting an issue on the agenda of the municipal council or a council committee?«

Furthermore, Table 3 indicates (row 2), that councillors who actively search for additional information before deciding on important political issues generally try harder than less active information-seekers to influence political agendas (positive and significant correlation coefficients although the relationships are weaker than those for interaction and search behaviour). Next, with regard to variation between the three learning profiles, it is noted that politicians biased towards consulting *external* information sources (cosmopolitans) are somewhat more active agenda-setters than the other two groups. The variation among the three groups in this respect is rather modest, however.

In sum, the findings indicate that councillors who are overall active policy learners are more active as agenda-setters than others are. Among the

active policy learners, the cosmopolitans are slightly more active than the others. In other words, policy learning of a particular type is related to acts of leadership, i.e., setting directions through agenda-setting initiatives.

4.3. Triggers of Reflexive Leadership

The last research question concerns the triggers of reflexive leadership: When is this type of leadership likely to emerge? It has been noted above that calls for leadership are most often heard in situations characterized by crises, break-down of routines, needs for inter-institutional action, and other types of ambiguity. Consequently, we expect reflexive leadership to emerge most clearly in these types of situations or to be associated with personnel likely to encounter such situations.

At the contextual level, we expect councillors in communities undergoing rapid change to feel they face uncertainty more often than councillors working in more stable environments – they may think their municipalities have to adapt services to changing circumstances. This, in turn, may induce councillors to look for new and better sources of information on how to improve municipal performance. Furthermore, governing large-scale municipalities may present greater leadership challenges than small-scale governing does, due to larger control spans and more frequent emergence of unprecedented situations. Consequently, we believe reflexive leadership is most likely to occur in large municipalities. At the managerial level, vicissitudes of resource flows and financial difficulties may create grave challenges for municipal leaders. We expect, consequently, situations of resource squeeze to instigate frequent searches for new solutions and visions. At the individual level, we expect council members with formal positions of responsibility (mayors, committee leaders, etc.) to be most exposed to non-routine issues and to face stronger expectations for providing directions. They may therefore be more inclined to search for solutions 'farther away from home' than rank-and-file councillors do.

Finally, we introduce the notion *of enabling factors* – factors that *facilitate* search for and use of information that contextualizes current performance. Potential individual-level enabling factors include education, experience and technical competence. However, the coin may also have a reverse side. It is well known that there are divides in the population at large with regard to the possession of politically relevant resources; in recent years the so-called »digital divide« has emerged as a subject of much debate and research (Haywood, 1998; Norris, 2002). The same factors

that shape the digital divide may also create contrasts between local coun-
cillors with regard to their capacity to engage in reflexive leadership. Such
contrasts may emerge when the data are analysed according to education,
political experience or gender. The optimistic version is that the relatively
easy availability of comparative information levels the playing field so that
there is little variation among individual councillors as to propensity to
engage in reflexive leadership.

These hypotheses are explored in Table 4, where councillors' engagement
in externally oriented search behaviour constitutes the dependent variable
(cosmopolitan learning profile). The suggested triggers function largely as
expected. One contextual factor, municipality size, holds significant influ-
ence on the councillors' propensity to demonstrate this aspect of reflexive
leadership; contextual (in)stability does not. The organisational-level fac-
tor fiscal situation (availability of slack resources) does not seem to play
a significant role.

Table 4 Contextual, institutional and personal features related to reflexive
leadership behaviour. Regression analysis. Standardised beta coefficients
(N = 718)

	Cosmopolitanism: Externally oriented policy learning behaviour+
Gender (1 = female, 2 = male)	–,003
Age (years)	,089*
Educational level (5 point scale; 5 = university, 1 = primary school only)	,096*
Political experience (Number of 4-year electoral periods in the municipal council. Survey)	,066
Mayor (1 = yes; 0 = no)	,162***
Deputy Mayor (1 = yes)	,127***
Member of the executive committee(1 = yes)	,101*
Fiscal situation of municipality (Average net annual budgetary result for the period 2002–2004 per capita. NOK. Data from Statistics Norway)	–,022
Municipal size (Number of inhabitants 2004. Data from Statistics Norway)	,093*

CROATIAN AND COMPARATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Contextual (in)stability (Net in-migration 1994–2004 as the percentage of total number of inhabitants 2004. Data from Statistics Norway)	,075
Adjusted R2	,069

Levels of significance:* .05, ** .01, *** .001

+ Index construction: see Tables 1 and 2.

Several individual-level factors trigger reflexive leadership. The most important factor seems to be leadership responsibility. Responsibility triggers reflexive leadership. Interestingly, the relationship between responsibility and reflexive leadership increases with rank: Mayors are more 'reflexive' than deputy mayors and deputy mayors are more reflexive than executive board members. It appears that the demands of higher office make office incumbents value and seek out external sources of information that may help them assess the performance of their own municipality and find directions for their community.

Furthermore, education has the suggested effect on reflexive leadership: Higher education enables councillors to seek out the type of information in question. Long political experience is not related to reflexive behaviour, however, contrary to our expectations.

Does familiarity with digital technology enable reflexive leadership? To test this we included gender and age in the analyses, as proxies for technology mastery (research on digital divides has demonstrated that younger people and men are more likely to be heavy users of information and communication technologies (Haywood, 1998; Norris, 2002). Interestingly, our data show that older councillors are more likely to consult external data sources more than younger ones, while there is no difference between male and female councillors in this respect.

5. Discussion

The article started with the notion that a new type of leadership, reflexive leadership, is emerging in local government. Reflexive leadership takes advantage of new governance tool such as the spread of new information and communication technologies and data banks with easy-to-access comparative information. We have provided Norwegian examples of such information sources and illustrated municipal leaders' attitudes towards

them. Attitudes and experiences are mixed, but indicate that a process of adoption is underway. Previous research has been sceptical about councillors' actual use of these opportunities and the benefits they might bring to local governance processes. We have tried to demonstrate, theoretically and empirically, the leadership potential inherent in these tools, including how they may provide political guidance to astute, 'reflexive' leaders.

We have modelled reflexive leadership and investigated whether the connections stipulated by the model actually unfold in local government in Norway. On the whole, the suggested connections have been found: First of all, the interest in publically available information that contextualizes a municipality's performance is quite widespread, with a third of all surveyed councillors indicating that they do check relevant data banks and other external sources of information. The article shows a higher level of usage of such information among Norwegian councillors than what the existing research (ter Bogt, 2004; Pollitt, 2006) leads us to expect.

Agenda setting is a concrete expression of political visions, and hence an essential leadership function. The article shows that councillors who actively search for additional information before deciding on important political issues try harder than less active information-seekers to influence political agendas. Politicians biased towards consulting external information sources are, however, the most active agenda-setters.

A further finding is a clear relation of reflexive leadership to existing responsibility patterns. Councillors with roles involving extensive responsibilities (mayors, deputy mayors, board members) demonstrate more reflexive leadership than rank-and file councillors. The challenges of decision-making under uncertainty entailed by higher office seem to induce councillors to seek new sources of information and to be on the lookout for comparisons and examples that may point their municipalities in the »right« direction.

6. Conclusion

Reflexive leadership draws on evidence-based policy learning – that is, examples from and data about other municipalities. However, examples do not work like magic out of the blue, they have to be put on the agenda of a particular municipality. That is the role of leadership. We believe the reflexive style of leadership will become more and more common in local government. As suggested by Tucker, leadership in general is likely

CROATIAN AND COMPARATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

to be in demand when situations are ambiguous (to provide purpose and meaning), e.g. when there is disagreement over the direction of municipal development, when non-routine situations are encountered, in situations of organisational stress and conflict, and in situations that call for negotiations across organisational boundaries. The reflexive style of leadership as a response to ambiguity will spread as local governments increasingly face wicked problems and decision-makers become bogged down in situations of information overload that give computer literate councillors an edge in the race to set the local agenda.

References

Askim, Jostein (2009) The Demand Side of Performance Measurement: Explaining Councillors' Utilization of Performance Information in Policymaking. International Public Management Journal 12(1): 24-47

Askim, Jostein, G. S. Hanssen (2008) Councillors' Receipt and Use of Citizen Input: Experience from Norwegian Local Government. Public Administration 86(2): 387–409

Askim, Jostein (2007) How Do Politicians Use Performance Information? An Analysis of the Norwegian Local Government Experience. International Review of Administrative Sciences 73(3): 453–472

Baldersheim, Harald, Morten Ùgærd (1997) Kommunekompasset. Evaluering i kommunal organisasjonsutvikling. Teorier, metoder, praksis. Oslo: Kommuneforlaget

Baldersheim, Harald (2011) Folkevald kommunen: Representantrolla under press? In: Harald Baldersheim, Eivind Smith (eds.) Lokalt demokrati uten kommunalt selvstyre? Oslo: Abstrakt forlag

Bass, Bernhard M. (1985) Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations. Boston: Allyn and Bacon

Bertelsmann Foundation (1994) Carl Bertelsmann Prize 1993. Democracy and Efficiency in Local Government. Vol. 2 Documentation of the Symposium and Award Ceremony. Güthersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers

Bogt, ter, H. (2004) Politicians in Search of Performance Information? Survey Research on Dutch Aldermen's Use of Performance Information. Financial Accountability and Management 20(3): 221–252

Brechtschneider, Stuart, Fredrick J. Marc-Aurele, Jr., Jiannan Wu (2004) »Best Practices« Research: A Methodological Guide for the Perplexed. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 15(2): 307-323

Burns, James MacGregor (1978) Leadership. New York: Harper & Row Publishers

Cyert, Richard M., James G. March (1963) A Behavioural Theory of the Firm. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall

Freeman, Richard (2006) Learning in Public Policy. In: Michael Moran, Martin Rein, Robert E. Goodin (eds.) The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Gephardt, Robert P., Jr. (1996) Simulacral Environments: Reflexivity and the Natural Ecology of Organizations. In: David B. Boje, Robert P. Gephardt, Jr., Tojo Joseph Thatchenkery (eds.) Postmodern Management. London: Sage

Haywood, T. (1998) Global Networks and the Myth of Equality. Trickle Down or Trickle Away? In: Brian D. Loader (ed.) Cyberspace Divide. London: Routledge

Heclo, Hugh (1974) Modern Social Politics in Britain and Sweden: From Relief to Income Maintenance. New Haven: Yale University Press

Kuhlmann, Sabine, Jörg Bogumil, Hellmut Wollmann (eds.) (2004) Leistungsmessung und – vergleich in Politik und Verwaltung. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag

Mausolff, Christopher (1999) Organizational Learning in Response to Performance Monitoring: A Study of Four Employment Programs. PhD Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh

Merton, Robert (1949) Patterns of Influence: A Study of Interpersonal Influence and Communication Behaviour in a Local Community. In: Paul Lazarsfeld, F. Stanton (eds.) Communications in Research, 1948–49. New York: Harper and Brothers (Republished as Patterns of Influence: Local and Cosmopolitan Influentials. In: Robert Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, 1968, New York: Free Press)

Moynihan, Donald P. (2005) Goal-Based Learning and the Future of Performance Management. Public Administration Review 65(2): 203-216

Norris, P. (2002) Revolution, What Revolution? The Internet and U.S. Elections, 1992–2000. In: E. C. Kamarck, J. S. Nye, Jr. (eds.) Governance.com Democracy in the Information Age. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press

Platt, R. (1989) Reflexivity, Recursion and Social Life: Elements for a Postmodern Sociology. Sociological Review 37(4): 636–667

Pollitt, Christopher (2006) Performance Information for Democracy – the Missing Link? Evaluation, 12(1): 38–55

Pollner, M. (1991) Left of Ethnomethodology: The Rise and Decline of Radical Reflexivity. American Sociological Review 56(3): 370–380

Rose, Lawrence E. (2012) Good Local Governance: What Is It? How Can It Be Promoted? In: Harald Baldersheim, Jozef Bátora (eds.) The Governance of Small States in Turbulent Times. The Exemplary Cases of Norway and Slovakia. Opladen: Budrich Publishers

Rose, Richard (1993) Lesson-Drawing in Public Policy: A Guide to Learning across Time and Space. Chatham, N. J.: Chatham House

Samuels, Richard J. (2003) Machiavelli's Children. Leaders & Their Legacies in Italy & Japan. Ithaca: Cornell University Press

Simon, Herbert A. (1939) The Administrator in Search of Statistics. Public Management, April, Vol. 21: 106–109

Simon, Herbert A. (1957) Administrative Behaviour. A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organizations. 2nd edition. N. Y.: Free Press

Svara, James H. (1994) Facilitative Leadership in Local Government. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers

Tucker, Robert C. (1981/1995) Politics as Leadership. Columbia: University of Missouri Press

Weiss, C. H. (1980) Knowledge Creep and Decision Accretion. Knowledge 1(3): 381–404

Wholey, J. S. (1983) Evaluation and Effective Public Management. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co.

APPENDIX:
The Infrastructure for Reflexive Leadership in Norway

Measuring municipal performance and constructing comparative performance data bases is spreading throughout Europe (see Kuhlman et al., 2004 for a review). In Norway, two data bases cover practically the whole range of services and activities Norwegian municipalities perform. One is *KOSTRA* (abbreviation for the Local Government Data Registration and Information Scheme), which was introduced by the Government in the late 1990s to help central government keep track of local government expenditures and activities and to allow municipalities to undertake valid comparisons amongst themselves. Annual reporting to *KOSTRA* was made compulsory for all municipalities in 2002. The other full-range data base, the *Better Municipality* (*Bedre kommune*), was initiated by the Association for Local and Regional Authorities (KS) in 2004.

Whereas *KOSTRA* contains data on productivity and efficiency, the *Better Municipality* focuses on measures of service quality – many constructed from standardized satisfaction surveys. In addition to these two, there are a handful of Government-initiated data bases with comparative performance information covering single policy areas only (public management policies, education, water and renovation services, etc.) and a few bottom-up initiatives where smaller groups of municipalities have initiated comparisons on their own (e.g. the cities of Kristiansand, Tùnsberg, Bèrum and Skien).

To enhance utilization of these data bases the Government and the National Association of Local Authorities initiated a voluntary benchmarking project called *Networks for Renewal and Efficiency* (*Kommunenettverk for fornyelse og effektivisering*) in 2002. More than 300 municipalities have

since taken part, grouped in 40 benchmarking networks (Askim et al., 2006).

Other illustrations of municipalities' use of benchmarking to stimulate organisational development include the *Municipal Compass*, a benchmarking system derived from the German *Bertelsmann Test* (Bertelsmann Foundation, 1993) and widely used by Norwegian and Swedish municipalities since the mid-1990s (Baldersheim and Ùgærd, 1997). Recently, indictors on the quality of local democracy have also become available on the web http://www.bedrekommune.no/ (cf. also Baldersheim, 2011; Rose, 2012).

POLICY LEARNING IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: THE ROLE OF REFLEXIVE LEADERSHIP

Summary

The paper addresses three interrelated issues in policy learning, based on survey data from a representative sample of all Norwegian councillors. The authors ask: What characterizes the policy learning behaviour of local councillors? This issue is addressed through data on what councillors find to be useful information sources in their capacities as decision-makers and agenda-setters. The paper documents three policy-learning profiles: cosmopolitans (who draw largely on external sources of information), locals (who draw on internal sources), and party loyalists (who draw on party sources). The authors also ask if policy learning profiles make a difference to councillors as decision-makers and agenda-setters. The paper documents that cosmopolitans are the most active agenda setters. Do new patterns of policy learning indicate the emergence of a new type of leadership in local government? It is argued that political interest in publicly available information that contextualizes the municipality's current performance is part of a larger syndrome that we term 'reflexive leadership'.

Key words: *policy learning, reflexive leadership, local government – Norway, cosmopolitans, locals, party loyalists*

CROATIAN AND COMPARATIVE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

POLICY UČENJE U LOKALNOJ SAMOUPRAVI: ULOGA REFLEKSIVNOG VODSTVA

Sažetak

U radu se istražuju tri međusobno povezana pitanja policy učenja, na temelju podataka prikupljenih anketnim istraživanjem na reprezentativnom uzorku lokalnih vijećnika u Norveškoj. Pitanje je bilo što obilježava policy učenje lokalnih vijećnika. Do odgovora se pokušalo doći preko podataka o tome što vijećnici smatraju korisnim izvorima podataka u njihovom poslu donošenja odluka i utvrđivanja političkog dnevnog reda (agenda-setting). Nađena su tri profila vijećnika s gledišta policy učenja: kozmopoliti (koji se u velikoj mjeri oslanjaju na vanjske izvore informacija), lokalci (koji se oslanjaju na unutarnje izvore) te stranački poslušnici (koji se oslanjaju na izvore političke stranke). Istraženo je i utječu li ta tri profila vijećnika na odlučivanje i postavljanje političkog dnevnog reda. Utvrđeno je da su kozmopoliti najaktivniji postavljači dnevnog reda (najviše utječu na to koja će pitanja doći na dnevni red političkog odlučivanja). Postavilo se i pitanje ukazuje li nova struktura policy učenja na pojavu novog tipa vodstva u lokalnoj samoupravi. Autori smatraju da je politički interes u javno dostupnim informacijama koje se bave uspješnošću lokalnih jedinica dio šireg sindroma koji se može nazvati refleksivnim vodstvom.

Ključne riječi: policy *učenje, refleksivno vodstvo, lokalna samouprava – Norveška, kozmopoliti, lokalci, stranački poslušnici*