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Presidentialisation on the executive arena at the local level? The case of Norway 1992–2012

It is empirically contested whether the phenomenon of presidentialisation, i.e. the concentration of power around the leading political positions in non-presidential systems, is taking place or not. This study sets out to investigate whether presidentialisation on the executive arena takes place in a collegial political system, more specifically in Norwegian municipalities. Using several independent empirical data in the period from 1992 to 2012, the main conclusion is that there are few traces of presidentialisation on the Norwegian local level. However, there are tendencies towards political concentration in the sense that political power is centralised in the political elite. Rather than presidentialisation or centralisation of power around one position, this can be regarded as an institutional centralisation of power.

Keywords: presidentialisation, concentration of power, Norway, municipalities.

Introduction

During the last two decades, local authorities in Norway have re-organised and introduced several governance procedures and principles closely associated with the ideals found in NPM. Most prominent are the changes towards more market based organisational structures (result units, market based units), an increasing use of business types organisations to provide semi-commercial services (water, energy, etc.), cooperative arrangements between other municipalities, regional and state agencies and private businesses to provide services and to solve “wicked problems” (physical planning, pollution/climate, crisis management), and foster a transition from direct steering through hierarchical relations to more steering “at arm’s length” (from ex-ante to ex-post) (Jacobsen, 2009; Øgård, 2014). All these different reforms have one thing in common; fragmentation of the

traditionally unitary municipalities (Jacobsen, 2008a). While provision of services in Norwegian municipalities through the 1980s was characterised by “in-house” production, the picture today is one of a multitude of different organisational forms of production, as well as ways of steering.

One recurring hypothesis is that this fragmentation has triggered a reaction resulting in an increasing focus on coordination, both on the national (Christensen & Lægveid, 2007a, 2011) and the local level (Røiseland & Vabo, 2012). These coordination initiatives come in a wide variety, ranging from an increasing use of cross-sectoral and cross-functional network arrangements, via amalgamations into more multi-task units, to an increasing coordinating power located at the political-administrative apex.

In this article, we focus on whether the recent decades saw a strengthening of the executive position of political leaders in Norwegian municipalities. Theoretically, the article departs from the notion of “presidentialisation”, i.e. stronger concentration of power around a person or a small group of persons at the political apex. Empirically, we study the changes taking place in Norwegian municipalities in the period between 1992 and 2012. The phenomenon of presidentialisation is conceptualised in two different ways. The first looks at presidentialisation as something

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taking place at the institutional level, indicating whether it is possible to detect institutional or structural changes in the organisation of local politics favouring the political elite. The second perspective focuses more specifically on the concentration of power around the top political leaders: the mayor and the vice-mayor. Here, we look into whether mayors and vice-mayors are becoming full-time employees, whether their relative resources are increasing, and whether there is an increasing tendency to appoint members of the mayor's/vice-mayor's political party to other top political positions.

Presidentialisation on the executive arena

The concept of presidentialisation was introduced by Foley (1993), but was made popular by Poguntke and Webb in their book *The Presidentialisation of Politics in Democratic Societies: A Framework for Analysis* (2005). Their main thesis is that parliamentary systems, prominent in Europe, are transformed into systems increasingly resembling presidential systems, even though the formal structures remain unchanged. In short, this transformation process results in the concentration of power around one or a few persons at the political apex.

Presidentialisation, according to Poguntke and Webb, takes place on three different arenas in the political process. First, there is the party arena, where it is hypothesised that political leaders are becoming more autonomous vis-à-vis the political party they represent. In parliamentary systems, political leaders are expected to govern through their party, getting their mandate from party decisions, and involving the party in political decisions and processes. In this arena, presidentialisation makes it possible for political leaders to act more autonomously from their own party, for instance by consulting the party less frequently or fronting political agenda that is not necessarily broadly supported by the party. Second, in the election arena, presidentialisation manifests itself by a much stronger focus on the political leader. Election campaigns will become more personalised, with a few personalities getting the most attention, also at the expense of the political

party. Finally, presidentialisation takes place in the executive arena. Here, presidentialisation becomes visible through the concentration of resources around one or a few politicians at the apex, centralisation of decision-making power, and marginalisation of the rest of the cabinet. In this study, we narrow the focus to the executive arena.

Presidentialisation is a contested concept (Karvonen, 2010). On the one hand, it is discussed whether the phrase "presidentialisation" is appropriate in parliamentary systems (Dowding, 2013; Webb & Poguntke, 2013). "Personalisation" has been proposed by some as a better concept (Mancini, 2008), especially on the electoral arena (Elmelund-Præstekær & Kjær, 2013, Krauss & Nyblade, 2005), while "concentration of power" seems to fit the executive arena more aptly (Kolltveit, 2013). Still, we choose to use the concept of presidentialisation as a metaphor for the concentration of power at the political apex, and because the original theoretical and empirical framework of Poguntke and Webb (2005) seems fruitful to use even if presidentialisation is not exactly the best description of the phenomenon (see Webb & Poguntke, 2013). However, we make a clearer distinction between the concentration of power around one person (prime minister or mayor), and a more general strengthening of the power of a smaller group of elected politicians (a political elite). This follows a recent study of Norwegian cabinets, where Kolltveit (2013) found a tendency to shift decision-making power from the cabinet as a whole to a smaller group of ministers, and the establishment of such a "sub-cabinet" is clearly a structural strengthening of the power of a smaller group of politicians. Another structural change strengthening the power of the political elite would be to reduce the number of members in the cabinet, placing more power in fewer hands, or to reduce the number of committees so that more coordinating power is concentrated in one or a few committees. Concentration of power around one person, i.e. the position of the prime minister in a parliamentary system or the mayor in local authorities, will take on the form of increasing resources being allocated to the person holding the position of prime minister/mayor, like for instance higher budgets and more assistants representing stronger decision-making capacity.

Previous studies of presidentialisation on the executive arena have used a wide variety of indicators (Helms, 2005), both regarding the personal power of the prime minister/mayor, and the concentration of power within a smaller group of political leaders. One of the most common indicators is to study how ministers are appointed, transferred, and dismissed. In general, it is assumed that presidentialisation will manifest itself through the fact that the prime minister appoints weaker ministers, i.e. ministers with less experience, especially from the party and/or Parliament, and by an increased turnover of ministers across different positions so that they will gain less experience in one specific field (Bäck et al., 2009, 2011; Huber & Martinez-Gallardo, 2008; Kolltveit, 2013). Other indicators include the establishment of sub-cabinets, indicating a concentration of power within the cabinet in a smaller group of cabinet members (Kolltveit, 2013), how participation rights in certain areas are limited to one person occupying the apex (Bäck et al., 2009), and the amount of resources reserved for the prime minister/mayor (Lobo, 2005).

Nevertheless, empirical studies show wide variations in presidentialisation across democratic systems (Karvonen, 2010; Poguntke & Webb, 2005). Some of these variations may stem from the fact that what is often lumped together under the heading “parliamentary systems” may differ widely, also regarding the possibility and the need to presidentialise the system. The *possibility* refers to the institutional constraints imposed by the political system, and thus the space available for the concentration of power in fewer hands (Kenig & Barnea, 2009). The *needs* reflect differences in how relevant concentration of power is as a means to solve problems.

Poguntke & Webb (2005: 16) point to both these elements when it comes to explaining the causes of presidentialisation. The needs are related to four different factors. The first is, as discussed in the introduction to this paper, an increased complexity, both in the political tasks themselves and in the political-administrative organisation. The more complex and fragmented the system, the stronger the need for coordination. The second factor is associated with the internationalisation and globalisation of politics. An increasing importance of international agreements and institutions

results in an increasing participation of the political elite on the international arena where important political topics are debated and decided upon. This process creates a need for the strengthening of the political capacity of the elite; it also represents concentration of critical information in fewer hands (Johansson & Tallberg, 2010). The third factor relates to changes in the mass media, arguing that media have created a situation with an increasing focus on politicians as individuals rather than on political parties and party policies. The media individualise politics, giving more attention to major politicians, thus boosting their power on behalf of the party (Boumans et al., 2013). Finally, voters have become more individualised, and traditional bonds to political parties have been severely weakened. Voters become more “fleeting”, party programmes become less important, and they are more easily mobilised by strong political personalities than by political ideas and visions.

The possibility for presidentialisation is first and foremost linked to the constraints represented by the political context. At the local level, it is probably important how the mayor is elected, i.e. indirectly by the council, or directly in general elections. It seems probable that the directly elected mayors have better possibilities to evolve into “presidents” compared to the mayors elected from among the members of the local council. In addition, one has to take into account the general political support (i.e. the proportion of votes) for the political party in power. How this will influence presidentialisation is, however, ambiguous. On the one hand, a strong popular support for the mayor’s party will reduce the need for coordination, and thus for presidentialisation. On the other hand, it will increase the possibility for presidentialisation as the power granted to a dominating party or coalition makes it easier to select and appoint the desirable candidates, and to take decisions without consulting other parties. Furthermore, as emphasised by Kolltveit (2013), the type of cabinet will also influence both the need and possibility for presidentialisation. In an (extreme) situation, with a one-party cabinet having a majority in parliament or a coalition cabinet without a majority in parliament, the need for the concentration of power will be low, but the possibility is proportionally high. The opposite situation, i.e. a minority coalition cabinet, will

represent a greater need but a lower possibility for presidentialisation.

On a final note, the individual characteristics of the politicians may also be of great importance (Puguntke & Webb, 2005). This element is not a part of this study, so we do not discuss this topic any deeper.

Presidentialisation in the Norwegian local government system

Most researchers applying the presidentialisation approach study parliamentary systems at the national level. Studies at the local level have been scarcer and more heterogeneous in their approach, focusing more on leadership and institutional reforms like direct election of the mayor than on the concentration of power on the executive arena in a local “president” (see Delwit et al., 2009; Reynart et al., 2005). As the phenomenon of presidentialisation is clearly context dependent, the specific context of Norwegian local government has to be described in more detail.

As a nation, Norway is characterised by strong egalitarian values, and the power distance is among the smallest in the world (Olsen, 1983; Skarpenes & Sakslind, 2010). It could be argued that these general cultural values also spill over to the political system. Traditionally, the position of the Norwegian prime minister vis-à-vis the ministers has been rather weak (O'Malley, 2007). The cabinet is a collegium, as we find in many other parliamentary systems, and it can be argued that the collegial features stand stronger in Norway than in many other European countries (Christensen, 2003). With respect to presidentialisation this could work in two different directions. On the one hand, one could assume that presidentialisation is a less probable process in Norway than in many other countries with weaker egalitarian values and lesser emphasis on collegiality. On the other hand, a country with weak executive powers might be more in need of a strong executive centre to handle more complex policy issues and processes. Therefore, it is an open question whether Norway is the least, or the most, likely case concerning presidentialisation.

Norway is a unitary system, indicating – in principle – that all the powers are delegated from

the national to the regional and local levels. Nevertheless, the local level displays a great amount of autonomy, not least by having direct elections every four years, but also through generating substantial incomes on their own through local taxes, fees, and payment for services. In addition, the general law on local government in Norway provides a great deal of freedom concerning local variations in political and administrative organisations. The only organs mandated by the law are the council and the executive committee. The law only defines the minimum number of members in these bodies, leaving to the municipality itself to decide about the size of the council and the executive committee.

The political system at the local (municipality) and regional (county) level is purely collegial. Councillors are elected in general elections every four years. Representation in the council is proportionate, and voters can vote for both political parties and individual representatives. Formally, there is no formation of a cabinet, thus there is no formal position and opposition in the council. There is an executive body (“formannskap”), but this is formed on a proportional basis, mirroring the representation of parties in the council. This is not a cabinet, but rather a “micro-edition” of the council. The mayor and the vice-mayor are elected from among the council members, and the mayor chairs the council meetings and has a double vote if necessary. He/she is also the formal leader of the executive committee. Norway conducted an experiment with directly elected mayors in a limited selection of municipalities in the periods 1999–2003 and 2003–2007, but this project was abandoned in the following years. Currently, there are no directly elected mayors in Norway. As the executive committee is a smaller, more decision-oriented arena, we will – if presidentialisation has occurred – assume that the executive committee will be strengthened relative to the general council. This can manifest itself by the executive committee gaining strength versus the council by becoming relatively larger in the number of members, and more active (measured as the number of meetings and issues handled).

Leaders of the specialised sub-committees are appointed by the council following negotiations between the parties represented in the council.

Formally, the party(ies) constituting the majority in the council stand free to appoint their political members as leaders of the sub-committees, but – it being a collegial system – it has been an unwritten norm that such positions should be given to all political parties of a certain size. Contrary to ministers, leaders of sub-committees are elected for the whole four-year period, so dismissals and reshufflings during the elected period are not possible. Thus, presidentialisation at the local level must manifest itself differently than that at the national, parliamentary level. Here, we will assume that local “presidents” to a larger degree will appoint members of their own party, thus breaking the informal rules embedded in the ideals of a collegial system. Over time, we will assume to find an increase in the relative number of sub-committee leaders being members of the mayor’s party.

Traditionally, the position of the mayor (and vice-mayor) was held in addition to a “normal” job. The ideal of the layman – i.e. politicians should reflect the ordinary men and women – still stands strong. Historically, this implied that being a mayor was an unpaid job, or at least only symbolically paid. If presidentialisation has taken place, we will assume that the layman principle is fading, and that being a mayor more and more becomes a full-time, paid job.

Studying presidentialisation at the local level within one single country also opens up some possibilities that country studies seldom provide. Norway has 428 municipalities, 425 of them with identical political systems (three have a parliamentary system), but with highly varying values regarding such aspects as population size, surface area, centrality, economic munificence, political concentration and economic activity. We will argue that *population size* can be used as a proxy for three of the four driving forces for presidentialisation outlined by Poguntke and Webb (2005). First, larger municipalities will have a more heterogeneous population, resulting in both more complex societal problems to solve, and in a more diverse political composition of the council (see Dahl & Tufte, 1973 for a general argument). Second, the media pressure will be the strongest in the largest municipalities due to the fact that regional newspapers, as well as regional offices of the national mass media, are located

in these municipalities. Thus, both the physical proximity, and the fact that large municipalities take decisions on significant resources, make these municipalities journalistically interesting. Third, large municipalities are more prone to pressure from international institutions. For instance, large projects shall, according to the EU rules, be subject to competitive tendering. As large municipalities mean more large projects, this set of rules affects the larger ones the most. Only the last element, a more “fleeting” electorate, is unrelated to the municipal size, as fluctuations between parties across elections are independent of the number of inhabitants. As a general hypothesis, we will expect to find more presidentialisation in large municipalities than in smaller ones.

Method and data

Currently, Norway has 428 municipalities and 19 counties. As this study is on municipalities, and not counties, the following concentrates exclusively on the local level. Out of the 428 municipalities, three have been granted the possibility to convert to parliamentary systems. These three were discarded from the analysis, as were two others for which there were no available data. The total number of units is thus 423. Norwegian municipalities differ in the number of inhabitants – from now on referred to as “size” – from just under 300 to more than 500,000, with the mean number of inhabitants being approximately 11,000 and the median just below 5000. A large municipality in Norway is defined as one with more than 20,000 inhabitants (Statistical Bureau 2013), and 50 municipalities (12%) fall into this category. In the following analysis, we will compare municipalities with under and above 20,000 inhabitants.

To measure the concentration of power at the institutional level, the following indicators were used:

- The number of representatives in the council,
- The number of issues discussed on average in the council and in the executive body (“formannskap”),
- The number of political sub-committees.

If presidentialisation is taking place, we will assume that: a) the mean number of representatives in Norwegian municipal councils is decreasing, b)

that the number of issues decided in the municipal council will decrease while the number of issues in the executive body will increase, and c) the average number of political sub-committees will decrease. At the individual level, we used the following indicators:

- The party political background of sub-committee leaders,
- The percentage paid position for mayors and vice-mayors,
- Administrative resources devoted to the mayor/vice-mayor (i.e. the existence of a personal secretary and/or political advisor).

Presidentialisation will have taken place if:

a) more of the sub-committee leaders will come from the same political party as the mayor/vice-mayor, b) if the position of the mayor and vice-mayor increasingly becomes a (full-time) paid job, and c) administrative resources allocated to the mayor/vice-mayor increase over time.

The party political background of the sub-committee leaders will of course be heavily dependent on the number of seats in the council allocated to the different parties (Kenig & Barnea, 2009). If there is a tendency to appoint more leaders to sub-committees belonging to the political party of the mayor or the vice-mayor, it could only reflect a general concentration of mandates to these parties. Thus, not to draw any wrong conclusions, we control for the general political concentration in the councils using the Herfindahl index. This index measures the concentration around one party, taking into account the total number of parties in the council and their size. It ranges from 0, indicating that all parties have the same amount of seats in the council, to 1, indicating that one party has all the seats. Thus, the higher the value, the higher the concentration around one party.

The data come from several independent sources. The number of meetings and issues in the councils and executive committees, as well as the data on the percentage paid position for mayors and vice-mayors originate from a survey conducted by NIBR every four years since 1995 (Blåka et al., 2012). The response rate is very good overall, and the number of municipalities varies between 313 and 338 (response rates between 74 and 80). Here we have the data for the period from 1995 to 2012. The number of members in the

council, of sub-committees, parties in the council and their respective number of seats, as well as the political party adherence of sub-committee leaders, was gathered from a yearly publication published by the municipalities' interest organisation (KS – Kommuneneøkkelen). These data go back to 1992, and include all the municipalities except five (N = 423). The data on the presence of a personal political secretary and/or advisor were collected through a web survey circulated to all mayors and vice-mayors in Norway, resulting in a response rate of 84% for the mayors and 71% for the vice-mayors. 1992 was not selected randomly. A revised Municipality Act was passed this year, and one – perhaps *the* – most significant change was associated with the organisational freedom given to municipalities. Before 1992, many sub-committees were mandated by law, as was the number of representatives in the council and the executive committee. After 1992, the municipalities could to a much greater extent choose different ways to organise their political activity, including the total abolishment of sub-committees.

Analysis

Starting with the most general information about the council and the sub-committees, Table 1 shows the trend from 1992 to 2011/2012 on a subset of indicators.

If presidentialisation had taken place, we would expect: a) the number of sub-committees to decrease, and b) the relative strength (measured in members) and activity level between the council and the executive committee to change in favour of the latter. Table 1 gives only support to a), and to a lesser degree that the executive committee has gained strength relative to the council measured in members. If we compute the ratios between the executive committee and the council members/meeting/issues, the result is counter to the hypothesis of presidentialisation. The ratios are displayed in Figure 1.

Even though the number of representatives in the councils decreases while the number of representatives in the executive committee is rather stable over time, the decline in meetings and issues is much stronger in the latter than in

Table 1: Changes in political structure over time

	1992	1995/1996	1999/2000	2003/2004	2007/2008	2011/2012
Number of political sub-committees (a)	5	5.1	4.7	3.8	3.2	3.2
Number of members in council (a)	29.6	29	28.1	25.6	25.6	25
Number of meetings in council (b)	n.a.	9.7	9.6	8.9	9.1	9
Number of issues in council (b)	n.a.	124.9	117.2	105.9	111.7	108,4
Number of members in executive committee (a)	7.6	7.5	7.4	7.5	7.4	7.4
Number of meetings in executive committee (b)	n.a.	20.7	18	16.4	15.6	14.6
Number of issues in executive committee (b)	n.a.	210.1	156	126.5	125.2	114.1

Sources: (a) Kommunenøkkel (N = 423), (b) Blåka et al. (2012) (N = 313-338). n.a. = data not available.

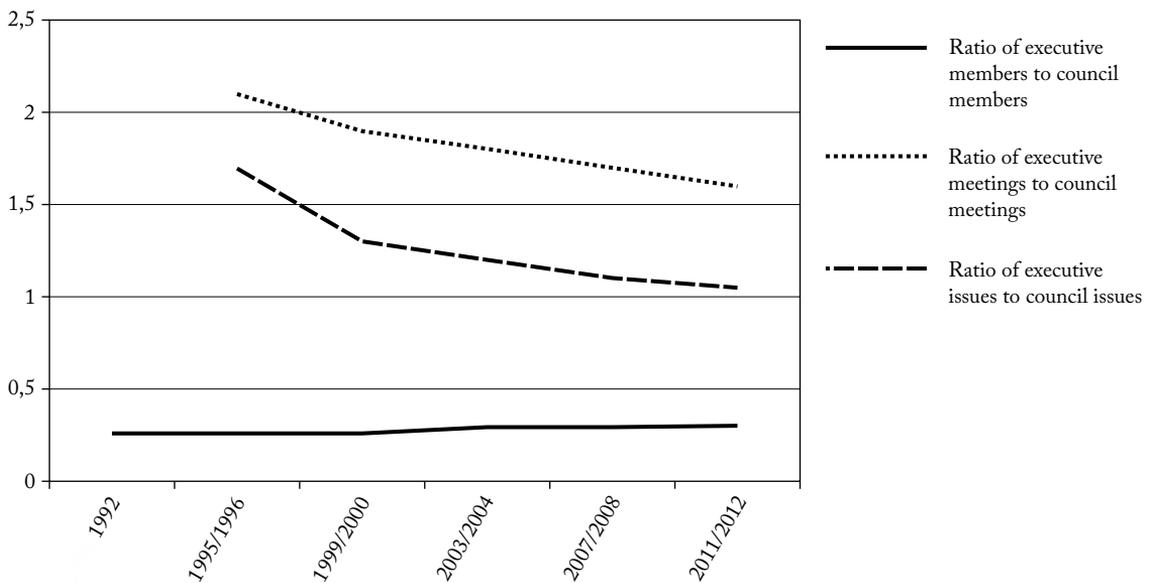


Figure 1: Ratios of executive committee members/meetings/issues to council members/meetings/issues

Source: own elaboration.

the former case. Relatively, the council has become the more active part. However, in total terms, both the activity in the council and the executive committee has decreased. This happens in a period where the activity in Norwegian municipalities is

far from declining, indicating that some decisions have been moved to other arenas. The data give us no indication as to what these arenas might be, so we do not engage in any speculation about this phenomenon. The general decline in activity

Table 2: The party political background of sub-committee leaders

	1992	1995/1996	1999/2000	2003/2004	2007/2008	2011/2012
Percentage sub-committee leaders of mayor's party	47,4	44,6	38,3	39,7	41	41,8
Percentage sub-committee leaders of vice-mayor's party	39,5	34,3	25,5	24,3	27,3	24,9
Percentage sub-committee leaders of both parties	64,4	59,4	52,3	53,3	53,6	56,2

Source: Kommunenøkkel. (N = 423).

Table 3: Percentage of Norwegian municipalities with mayors/vice-mayors in full-time position

	2000	2004	2008	2012	2014
Mayor full-time	83.3	77.2	78.2	95.3	95
Vice-mayor full-time	2.9	3.1	2.7	3.5	3.1

Source: Blåka et al. (2012) (N = 313-338).

may also be an artefact, created by a change in the way the councils discuss and decide political issues. Other studies indicate that there are fewer single issues concerning details, and that more of these issues are “lumped together” in larger, more principled “packages” (Blåka et al., 2012).

Another set of indicators focuses on the political party affiliation of the sub-committee leaders. If presidentialisation has taken place, we would assume the “president” to allocate powerful positions to his or her political supporters, excluding politicians from the opposition.

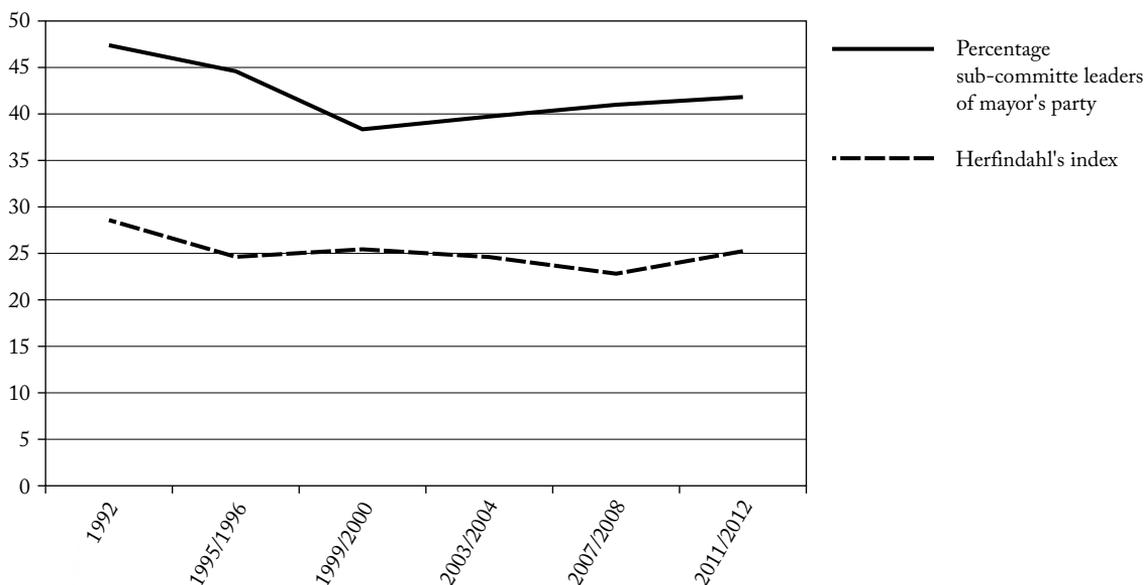


Figure 2: Percentage of sub-committee leaders of mayor's party compared with the Herfindahl index

Source: own elaboration.

For all the three indicators, the trend is U-shaped in the sense that the highest concentration is found at the beginning of the period, declining up until 1999/2000, and then increasing. Presidentialisation is most closely related to concentration around party affiliates of the mayor, and this is also where the increase from 1999/2000 until today was the most visible. As Figure 2 shows, this increase cannot have been caused by an increasing concentration of votes given to the mayor's party as the Herfindahl index showed a declining tendency until 2007/2008, indicating less political concentration around the largest party in the council. The increase of concentration around the mayor's party in the last period can be partly explained by an increase in the political concentration around this party.

Finally, we focus on the resources allocated to the mayor and the vice-mayor. Table 3 shows the percentage of municipalities with full-time, paid job for mayors and vice-mayors. These data are only available from 2000.

There has been a steady increase in municipalities with a full-time, paid mayor. Currently, only a handful of the smallest municipalities

engage mayors for less than a full-time position. Very few municipalities – only the largest ones – have a vice-mayor at a full-time position, but the percentage paid position for the vice-mayor has also increased steadily over the last 15 years. Blåka et al. (2012) show that while 70% of the municipalities in 2000 did not pay the vice-mayor anything, this percentage has decreased to 28 in 2012. Concerning the resources in the form of political advisor/secretary, our web survey revealed that only four municipalities (four of the 4 largest, except for those with parliamentarism) had such arrangements.

The strongest indicators of presidentialisation are arguably a decrease in the number of sub-committees, and an increase in the percentage of sub-committee leaders from the same political party as the mayor and the percentage position of the mayor. On the aggregate level, these indicators hint at a general, although weak presidentialisation from the beginning of the millennium. As noted in the theoretical section, we would assume significant variations between municipalities regarding their size. Empirically, we would expect: a) fewer sub-committees, b) a higher percentage

Table 4: Regression analysis (OLS). Dependent variable: number of sub-committees in municipalities.

	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012
Municipal size	.13**	.30**	.39**	.41**	.47**	.49**
Herfindahl index	-.05	-.05	.00	-.04	-.02	.00
R ²	.01	.09	.15	.17	.22	.23
F-value	3.54*	20.50**	37.29**	43.59**	60.01**	65.08**

N = 423. Beta-coefficients. * = sig le. .05, ** = sig le. .01.

Source: own elaboration.

Table 5: Regression analysis (OLS). Dependent variable: percentage position for the mayor

	2000	2004	2008	2012
Municipal size	.24**	.28**	.14**	.07
Herfindahl index	.07	-.04	-.05	.00
R ²	.06	.08	.02	.00
F-value	11.78**	14.84**	3.54**	.69

N = 313–338. Beta-coefficients. * = sig le. .05, ** = sig le. .01.

Source: own elaboration.

Table 6: Regression analysis (OLS). Dependent variable: percentage of sub-committee leaders being members of the same party as the mayor

	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2012
Municipal size	-.07	-.06	.10*	-.04	-.03	.09*
Herfindahl index	.48**	.37**	.28**	.23**	.29**	.30**
R ²	.23	.14	.09	.05	.08	.10
F-value	62.59**	34.42**	21.68**	12.87**	19.31**	23.88**

N = 313-338. Beta-coefficients. * = sig le. .05, ** = sig le. .01.

Source: own elaboration.

of sub-committees leaders being members of the mayor's party, and c) a higher percentage position for the mayor in larger municipalities.

Contrary to the hypothesis, large municipalities have a higher number of sub-committees than small municipalities. Size also becomes more important as an explanatory factor over the years. Prior to 1992, the number of sub-committees was to a large extent standardised. The revised Municipal Act relaxed this standardisation, resulting – as Table 4 clearly demonstrates – in a situation where large municipalities have significantly more sub-committees than small ones.

Table 5 shows that municipal size does have a significant effect on the mayor's percentage position. A larger municipality indicates a higher percentage position. The size effect is still positive in 2012, but not significant. This may be interpreted as an indicator that a full-time position for the mayor has become the norm, independent of the size of the municipality.

The variations in the appointment of sub-committee leaders can be mainly explained by the general political concentration around the largest political party, which in almost every case is the party of the mayor. Municipal size has an ambiguous and mostly non-significant effect.

Conclusions

As noted in the theoretical section, it is empirically contested whether the tendencies outlined by Poguntke & Webb (2005) really take place (Bäck et al., 2009; Kefford, 2013; Kolltveit, 2013; Sundström, 2009). This study supports

these doubts. Certainly, there are tendencies suggesting a concentration of power in Norwegian municipalities on the aggregate level, as indicated by a decreased number of council members and a decrease in the number of political sub-committees. Political power has been concentrated in the hands of fewer persons, and a de-specialisation has taken place in the form of fewer sub-committees. This trend is probably best interpreted as stronger *organisational* coordination, not as presidentialisation. Fewer, and thus larger and more functionally diverse, sub-committees will result in more diverse tasks and functions being handled by one political unit. This can clearly be seen as a reaction to a fragmented situation with many, highly specialised, sub-committees, but it is difficult to interpret as presidentialisation.

The trend towards fewer and more functionally diverse sub-committees may also be linked to a general decrease in the activity of both the councils and the executive committees, especially the latter. The more diversified the sub-committee structure, the stronger the need for coordination at a higher level, i.e. in the executive committee and the council. Thus, the decrease in issues and meetings in these two arenas probably suggests that more coordination takes place in fewer, and larger, sub-committees. In other words, the sub-committees have become more important arenas for coordination. This trend could have been interpreted as presidentialisation if it had been combined with an increasing tendency for the mayor's political party to occupy the leading positions in these sub-committees. On the contrary, we find that there has been a decrease

in the percentage of sub-committee leaders being members of the mayor's political party since 1992. At the level of the individual municipality, much of this concentration cannot be interpreted not as presidentialisation, but rather as a mirroring of the general political concentration in the council. When the mayor's party gets bigger, there is a strong tendency for the mayor's party to occupy more leader positions in the sub-committees. One is tempted to say: of course.

Furthermore, the arena where the mayor has the strongest potential influence – the executive committee – seems to have lost much of its central position, as indicated by a strong decrease in the number of issues and meetings. Relatively, the council seems to strengthen its position, as the reduction in issues and meeting is much lower in the council than in the executive committee. One plausible interpretation is that both the sub-committees and the council have become more, and the executive committee less, central, a trend that goes counter to that of presidentialisation. In general terms, however, the activity of both the municipal council and the executive committee is declining, indicating the shift of power to other arenas. The sub-committees are candidates for this, but the data do not allow to test this assumption. Thus, we should encourage further research on this topic.

The only indicator directly supporting presidentialisation is the increasing tendency for the mayor to be a full-time, paid position. However, one could argue that this is the development of a general national norm rather than a sign of presidentialisation. Today, almost all mayors have a full-time position, independent of the size of the municipality. In addition, the allocation of resources exclusively to the mayor in the form of political advisors/secretaries is very rare in the Norwegian case.

The trends sketched out in this paper do not support the thesis of presidentialisation. Still, it is possible to interpret the changes taking place as an increased emphasis on coordination. A decrease in the number of members in the councils accounts for a more homogeneous group of politicians, probably increasing the probability of reaching decisions more quickly and possibly more unanimously. A decrease in the number of sub-committees also suggests an increased

emphasis on coordinating different functional areas at a lower level than the council.

Of course, these quantitative indicators do not offer a full picture of presidentialisation on the executive arena, as both Kolltveit (2013) and Karvonen (2010) point out. They say very little about how decisions are made, and what the role of the mayor is in these processes. To answer such questions, we need more qualitative studies probing into decision-making processes in the municipalities.

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Prezydencjalizacja władzy wykonawczej na szczeblu lokalnym? Przypadek norweski – lata 1992–2012

Dowody empiryczne świadczące o zjawisku prezydencjalizacji, tj. koncentracji władzy wokół kluczowych stanowisk politycznych w systemach innych niż prezydencki, są niejednoznaczne. Prezentowane badanie omawia kwestię prezydencjalizacji w odniesieniu do władzy wykonawczej w systemie politycznym opartym o zasadę kolegialności, przede wszystkim na przykładzie gmin norweskich. Niezależne dane empiryczne z różnych źródeł dla lat 1992–2012 wskazują, że na szczeblu lokalnym w Norwegii występują nieliczne oznaki prezydencjalizacji. Widoczne są natomiast tendencje zmierzające do koncentracji politycznej w znaczeniu skupienia władzy w rękach elity politycznej. Zjawisko to można uznać raczej za instytucjonalną centralizację władzy niż za prezydencjalizację lub skupienie władzy w jednym stanowisku.

Słowa kluczowe: prezydencjalizacja, centralizacja władzy, Norwegia, gminy.