

**LOCAL POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND  
POLITICAL REPRESENTATION:  
THE MULTIFACETED REPRESENTATIONAL ROLE  
OF DANISH MAYORS**

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**Political leadership and representation**

At least since the heydays of community power studies (Hunter, 1953; Banfield, 1961; Dahl, 1961) local political leadership has been a well-established field of research in the US with a long and unbroken supply of important studies as the outcome (Kotter & Lawrence, 1974; Yates, 1977; Ferman, 1985; Stone, 1989, 1995; Bowers & Rich, 2000; Flanagan, 2004; Svara, 1990, 1994, 2009). It is probably safe to say that in Europe for many years the tradition for studying local political leadership has not been equally overwhelming. However, since the turn of the millennium research on mayors and their local political leadership seems to have been no less than blooming within the European scholarly community (John & Cole, 2000; Leach & Wilson, 2000, 2002; Gissendanner, 2004; Lowndes & Leach, 2004; Berg & Rao, 2005; Haus & Sweeting, 2006; Copus, 2006; Steyvers et al., 2006; Bäck et al., 2006; Berg & Kjaer, 2009). This is not the place to try to explain the reasons for this sudden rising in studies on local political leadership in Europe. It is interesting, however, that the intensive scholarly focus on local political leadership arises in the wake of, or in tandem with, another major trend in local government studies, namely the tendency to model local politics in terms of 'governance' instead of 'government' (John, 2001). So even though the local governments which the leadership activities is to be directed at has changed towards more governance there still seem to be room for leadership if not even an increased call for a political leader to initiate and to use Svara's term 'facilitate' the governance processes (Svara, 1990). Implicitly, contemporary students of local political leadership rejects more exaggerated contingency theories claiming that the institutional set-up and the situation determines politics leaving no room for the political leader and giving no credit to the initiatives of the individual leader. Instead, although not explicitly, a reactionist position (Helms, 2005) is adopted. According to this position the contingency of national legislation, the local government

charter, the partisan composition of the council, the economic development in the area etc. is clearly recognised – as Stone puts it: “No leader has a blank tablet on which to write at will (Stone, 1995: 113). But at the same time a clear room for local political leadership is claimed: the views and the activities of the political leader matters (Blondel, 1987).

Beside the widespread recognition among students of local political leadership of the importance of the local political leader, i.e., the mayor, also a preference for analyzing the leader according to leadership functions or activities seems to be prevalent. In the more general literature Talcott Parsons has distinguished between the leadership tasks “determination of goals”, “getting things done”, “resource management” and “system maintenance” (Parsons quoted in Kotter & Lawrence, 1974: 46) and when Kotter and Lawrence in 1974 published their seminal book “Mayors in Action” they along the same lines identified the leadership functions “agenda setting”, “task accomplishment” and “network building” (Kotter & Lawrence, 1974). Several other authors have offered their distinguishing between different leadership tasks – Ferman claims that the leader should “persuade others”, “control policy arenas”, “extend their influence within city government”, “implement priorities” and “mobilize support” (Ferman, 1985: 6); Svara that leaders make decisions in the four dimensions of the governmental process “mission – goals and purpose”, “policy – programs and plans to accomplish goals”, “administration – the implementation of politics and delivery of services”, and “management – coordination and control of resources to accomplish the purposes of the organization” (Svara, 1990: 213); Leach and Wilson speaks about “maintaining cohesiveness”, “developing strategic and policy direction”, “representing the authority in the external world”, and “ensuring programme implementation” (Leach & Wilson, 2000: 17), whereas Gissendanner distinguish between “agenda setting and policy initiation”, “policy implementation”, “coalition maintenance”, and “external representation” (Gissendanner, 2004: 51). Despite differences in degree of detail and the exact wording the authors seem to agree that political leadership in functional terms mainly boils down to three dimensions, namely those of agenda-setting, policy-implementation and coalition-formation.

However, this apparent consensus about which functions are imbedded in the position of mayor may also hide other functions which could be equally important for the understanding of local political leadership. For instance it seems quite peculiar that in most studies *political representation* is not addressed in an explicit way – in many cases not even mentioned at all. The lack of focus on the representational function is even more difficult to understand, when at the same time the political systems at the local level in

most countries so clearly have been established within the normative hegemony of representative democracy. Local politics is, in most European democracies, organized around the same principles of representative democracy as known from the nation states such as periodical elections where voters choose among candidates with competing political programmes and where the candidates elected in the electoral term serve as representatives for their electors. It is difficult to imagine that students of local political leadership not paying attention to political representation would claim, that mayors do not perform political representation while in office. More likely the sin of omission is to be explained by the fact, that it seems too self-evident that mayors are conducting not only political leadership but also (as a part of that) political representation. It is true that as well Leach and Wilson as Gissendanner in their dissection of mayoral functions includes some references to representation when they talk about “representing the authority in the external world” (Leach & Wilson, 2000: 17) and “external representation” (Gissendanner, 2004: 51), respectively. As we will comment on later in the paper there is much more to political representation than this external representation which not at all covers for instance the representation of policy preferences of the electors by the mayor.

The widespread neglecting of the function of political representation in leadership studies is even more surprising when it can be observed that the study of councillors (or backbench politicians in general) is indeed focussed on the question of political representation. The classic discussions within the study of political representation as for instance the debate on representational style and focus – how and who should the representative represent (Wahlke et al. 1962; Pitkin, 1967) – has been regularly addressed in regard to councillors (e.g. Svara, 1990: 126ff; Rao, 2005; Copus, 2008). Just as absent as explicit discussions of political representation seem to be in analyses of mayors, just as dominant they seem to be when councillors are analysed. The difference can be further illustrated by the way mayors and councillors, respectively, are typologized. Studies of local political leadership often results in a typology of mayors where the types are built on how mayors perform in regard to certain leadership tasks. Kotter and Lawrence, for instance, identifies ‘ceremonial’, ‘caretaker’, ‘individualist’, ‘executive’ and ‘programme entrepreneur’ (Kotter & Lawrence, 1974), whereas John distinguishes between ‘concensual facilitator’, ‘caretaker’, ‘visionary’, and ‘city boss’ (John quote in Leach & Wilson, 2000). Svara very clearly builds his classical typology on how the mayors score on two dimensions, namely effectiveness in policy initiation and effectiveness in implementation (Svara, 1990: 104), i.e., how they perform on two of the leadership dimensions identified above: agenda-setting and policy-implementation.

Identically studies of councillors also very often have a typology as a result, but in these cases the typologies are based on how the councillors perform their representational roles. For instance Newton distinguishes between ‘the parochial’, ‘the people's agent’, ‘the policy advocate’, ‘the policy broker’, and ‘the policy spokesman’ (Newton quoted in Copus, 2008). In most cases the typology is constructed by observing differences in how councilors ideally represent their constituents when doing politics – and performing political representation – at the council.

If the first peculiarity in the literature pointed at is that the political representation part of political leadership seems to attract only very scant attention, a second wonder must be that as well students of mayors as students of councillors seem to have an inclination to study the intra-group variation between mayors and councillors, respectively, whereas studies focusing on the inter-group variation, i.e., the differences between mayors and councillors, are far more rare. By combining these two gaps in our knowledge about local politicians it follows that we know very little about how mayors and councillors eventually vary in their way of conducting political representation. And that is exactly the focus of this paper: How do mayors do political representation and do they in this respect differ from their colleagues in local politics, the back benching councillors?

The paper will build on the assumption that we deal with political systems where politicians are supposed to perform a kind of political representation, and where at the same time there is at least some kind of room for political leadership. Such room for leadership can not be automatically assumed since in very formalistic “standing for” versions of political representation (as Pitkin has labelled them): “[t]he representative is not to give new opinions to his constituents , but to reflect those they already have” (Pitkin, 1967: 90). We move beyond this version of political representation and assume that leadership per definition includes some goal-orientation (Burns, 1978: 455) and agree with Patzelt when he concludes that “... responsiveness is only one aspect of representation. Its twin aspect is leadership, which means influencing political views of the voters” (Patzelt, 1999: 264). Developing a sense of direction and influencing the voters is a key leadership task for the mayors ((Leach & Wilson, 2000: 73; Elcock 2001: 107).

### **Studying mayors’ political representation**

In order to answer the question about how mayors do political representation, and if they differ from back benching councillors in this respect, we will in

the empirical analysis – given the limited existing research – choose a quite explorative approach. Our emphasis will be on identifying different representational functions that the mayor conduct and not least in this regard look for representational functions which are specific to the mayor. Given the explorative approach we will choose to conduct the study as a series of in depth case studies of a limited number of mayors – thereby not only taking the usual route for explorative studies but also getting in line with the general trend within studies of local political leadership (Bowers & Rich, 2000: ix; for examples see Svava 1994, 2009; Henig & Rich, 2004).

We have chosen to conduct the study as a single country study. We are very well aware of the fact that the formal institutional set up in the municipality can affect the way the mayor does political leadership and the way he does the representational part of it. Even though the “individual-system dualism in leadership research” (Morrell & Hartley, 2006: 495) has not been finally settled, most scholars recognize the considerable effect of the institutional set up on the local political leadership (see especially Svava, 1990) and this goes whatever the institutional set up is labelled ‘formal government structure’ (Kotter & Lawrence, 1974: 30), ‘formal institutions’ (Baumgarten, 1989: 124), ‘political system’ (Ferman, 1985: 8), or ‘the instruments [the leaders] have at their disposal’ (Blondel 1987: 25). Since we are somewhat claiming that mayors and councillors are not identical when it comes to the conducting of political representation we will choose a country where the mayor in terms of the formal institutional set up is as much alike the councillors as possible – if we can find differences under the structural conditions where it is most unlikely it will strengthen our point. This means a country where the mayor 1) is indirectly elected and therefore at the same time as being the mayor also a member of the council and 2) scores low in regard to formal power vis-à-vis the council. We have chosen Denmark as the case since in Denmark the mayors are indirectly elected, i.e., they are appointed by the council among the councillors and since in Denmark the mayor is in terms of formal indeed a ‘weak’ mayor. The mayor chairs the meetings at the council and oversees that the administration implement the decisions of the council but besides of that he do not formally have more power than each of the councillors. In the Danish Local Government Act he is not even named mayor but ‘Chairman of the council’. It should be noticed, though, that everywhere else he is named mayor (‘borgmester’) and that his informal power is substantial (Berg & Kjaer, 2007, 2009). Although the mayor in for instance Sweden and Ireland might be even slightly weaker than in the Danish case Denmark is also chosen because the study could be part of a greater research programme focussing on the Danish mayor (Berg & Kjaer, 2007, 2009).

Among the Danish mayors four have been chosen to participate in the study. The formal institutional set up is the same in all Danish municipalities<sup>1</sup> and instead some variation has been sought on a number of other dimensions when the four mayors were sampled for the in depth studies. As in most qualitative studies we have not aimed at representativeness but instead at some variation (Maxwell, 1996), and therefore the mayors varies on the following dimensions: occupational background, number of years in office, party affiliation, level of conflict in the municipality, majority status and municipal size (Berg & Kjær, 2007: 27).<sup>2</sup>

For each of the mayors three kind of data has been collected and analysed, namely documents, observations and interviews. The documents are for instance minutes from the meetings at the council and articles from the local papers. As for the observation each of the mayors were observed in four different situations: when leading a meeting of the council, when leading a meeting in his party group, when leading a meeting of the finance committee and during a full day on the job as mayor (including everything from sparring with top executive officers over talking to individual constituents to giving speeches at local meetings) – in sum 16 observations. As for the interviews, not only the mayors themselves were interviewed but also a number of political friends and foes (a councillor from his own party, the chairman of the local party branch but also the leader of the opposition party at the council) just as political editor of the local newspaper, the CEO in the municipality and an important person in the mayors local network (for instance the CEO of the local bank or the chair of the local chamber of commerce) – in sum 31 semi-structured interviews each with a duration between one and two hours.<sup>3</sup> Even though we have included four mayors the purpose is not to elaborate on the potential differences between the four of them but instead to focus on what they seem to have in common, thereby identifying features that exist across the municipalities and the mayors sampled, and instead being loyal to the point made in the first part of the paper and focus not on the potential intra-group differences among the mayors when it comes to political representation but instead on the potential differences between the mayors and the councillors.

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<sup>1</sup> Four of the municipalities have slightly different rules – see Berg, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> The sampled mayors are Per Tærstøl of Elsinore, Michael Aastrup Jensen of Randers, Kent Skaanning of Egvad and Steen Dahlstrøm of Middelfart (for a closer description of the four see Berg & Kjær, 2007: 31-34). For a full analysis of the political leadership of one of the four mayors, that of Steen Dahlstrøm from Middelfart, see Berg & Kjær, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> All observations and interviews were conducted in the period between November 2004 and March 2005 – for specific names and dates see Berg & Kjær (2007).

## **The representational functions of the mayor**

When analyzing the four cases it is very noticeable that the mayors do indeed, like their fellow councillors, carry out the function as political representative. Danish mayors are not at all symbolic figureheads – on the contrary they are *in realia* the most active and influential politician in the municipality. They are performing a political task being a politician in a representative political system and thereby they surely perform the representational task of ‘a representative’. This finding does not come as much of a surprise, since the mayor is in the first place elected as a councillor and only after the internal appointment procedure at the council elected mayor. Therefore he has been running a political campaign for the council just as the rest of the councillors and in many ways before conquering the mayoralty bound to be a councillor and take up task of being a representative. Danish local politics is also highly party politicized and therefore he is initially running a campaign a representative (as its chairman). This being said, it should also be emphasized that this does not mean that the mayors and the backbench councillors fill out the role of Representative in the exact same manner – actually the empirical material demonstrates that this not at all the case. We will get back to the differences in the way mayors and councillors perform their task as Representative, for now the important point is that they share this function and that political representation in the Danish case seems to be an important dimension of local political leadership.

Another important finding from the empirical analysis is that when analyzing the mayors a number of additional representational functions can be identified. Whereas there are several councillors in each municipalities (mean number 17) there is by definition only one mayor and this one-of-a-kind-ness seem to imply that the mayor are ascribed additional representational functions. By studying the four mayors in the case studies and their representational behaviour, we have identified three such extra representational functions which are more or less exclusively conducted by the mayor. The three functions, which supplement the function as Representative, we will label Master of ceremonies, Local secretary of state, and Ombudsman, respectively, and each will be described in turn below. As for the councillors, Svara has pointed to the “complex and multifaceted nature of the council member’s job” (Svara, 1990 : 123) – we will claim that the mayors’ job is not even more complex since a leadership dimension is added but also that even the representational task that councillors and mayors share are even more multifaceted in the case of the mayors.

## **The Mayor as “Master of Ceremonies”**

It is evident that the mayor from time to time acts as a Master of ceremonies. There is nothing new or surprising in the fact that the mayor performs such a task – already Kotter and Lawrence speaks in their seminal work on mayors of “the ceremonial pattern” and exemplifies it by telling about one of the mayors in their study that “... he gave speeches at banquets, he welcomed conventions, he cut ribbons at all types of openings, he gave out keys of the city, and so on” (Kotter & Lawrence, 1974: 107). Also Svava speaks about “the ceremonial functions” of the mayor (Svava, 1990: 107) and this ceremonial aspect of being the top political figure in the municipality is easily recognized in the Danish case study too. When the Danish royal family visits a city they are officially welcomed by the mayor. When sportsmen return to their home city after winning medals at for instance the Olympics the mayor invites them to make their first stop at City Hall so that he, on behalf of the city, can be their first congratulator. And when the Christmas tree in the main square of the city is to have its light switched on for the first time, this is always left to the mayor. It should also be mentioned that in Denmark registry-office weddings are handled by the municipality at the City Hall and the official person who conduct such weddings are in most cases: The mayor. On rare occasions the mayor can be prevented from being present at such events and one of the more senior councillors will have to stand in, but without underrating the efforts of such substitutes, the solemnity is only completed when the mayor himself is present and is wearing the official “Mayors chain”, which, besides the city arms, is the only official municipal symbol (contrary to the national context there is no language, coins, flags etc. here).

When analyzing the mayor as Master of ceremonies, the case studies clearly demonstrates that while performing this task the mayor is at the same time somewhat constrained in regard to acting as a politician. In some of the situations such normative restrictions are more or less self-evident – probably most bride and grooms would find it not only odd but also a bit inappropriate if the mayor campaigns for two more future votes during the ceremony. And in the case of hosting the Queen the situation would probably be even more awkward, since the Queen by constitutional laws and norms is not allowed to take part in political discussions. However, there are also situations in which the mayor acts as Master of ceremonies where it could be possible to squeeze in a political message and where the roles of the mayor could be a little more blurred. Especially this goes for the ribbon cutting part of the ceremonial function. There is not an opening of an exhibition, an anniversary of an institution, a cutting of the first turf etc. where the event makers do not wish

to see the mayor having a lead role. At these occasions the mayor is supposed not only to create publicity but also to say a few words for the people gathered. For the mayor this could be an excellent platform for sending out a political message. If a new water treatment plant is opened he could send an environmentalist message; if a private day care centre is celebrating an anniversary he could promote the importance of private alternatives to the public sector institutions; if the first turf is cut for a new school he could promote his stand in the maybe heated discussion on whether to have one big or more smaller schools which led to the project etc.

In the case studies it is very obvious that the mayors are well aware of the fact that they have this somewhat golden opportunity to promote a political idea. It is equally clear, however, that they are also very much aware of the very strong norms within the local political realm that prevent them from taken advantage of their one-of-a-kind-ness and the hearing which they therefore get at such ribbon cutting occasions. The norms found stipulate that the mayor on some of these occasions can send a political message but not a partisan political message. He can not advocate for environmentalism, contracting out, bigger schools etc. unless in the more unlikely situation where there is consensus on such matters on the council. Instead he can – when acting as Master of ceremonies – send those political messages to citizens, companies, national government departments etc. on which there is a general consensus among the councillors and the parties represented at the council. It is ok, if not even expected, that the mayor send the signal that the municipality is active in supporting business entrepreneurs, that the municipality encourage people to participate in local democracy, that the municipality needs more power vis-à-vis the state etc.

An example of this somewhat delicate balance which the mayor has to find can be given from one of the municipalities, where the mayor is invited to give a speech at a museum located in the municipality and partly sponsored by the municipality. The occasion is the ten years anniversary of the museum and the mayor is given the official speech just as he did at the opening of the museum ten years prior. In the speech he clearly send the message that he find it important that the municipality, even though it is situated in the more rural part of the country, also hosts cultural institutions with a broader scope (in this case the museum focuses on pottery and therefore is not a local museum). Instead of making partisan statements about the success of his own party's support to public sponsoring of the museum he emphasize, that he is happy about the success of the museum and not least the decision taken by "the entire council" ten years back.

When acting as a Master of ceremonies, the mayor can not act at his own discretion – very strong norms exist that he has to play the role without a political or at least without a partisan agenda. The mayor is – not least because of his one-of-a-kind-ness – playing the part of a symbol for the municipality. According to Pitkin a necessary prerequisite for maintaining the legitimacy of such more symbolic political representation is that the political leader acts as a symbol and not for instance as a politician (Pitkin, 1967: 102). To be able to function as a figurehead when required, necessitates that the mayor on these occasions play the role of figurehead and do not blend in other of his leadership tasks (Pitkin, 1967: 102).

### **The Mayor as “(Local) Secretary of State”**

As already mentioned the one representational function which is sometimes in the literature on political leadership ascribed to the mayor is the “external representation” (Gissendanner, 2004: 51). Svava denotes the role that the mayor plays on these occasions as “the promoter role” and sees it as in many ways forming a simple extension of his ceremonial tasks (Svava, 1990: 111). The mayor promotes the municipality to external actors whether these are neighbouring municipalities, the regional government, central government departments, the national association of local governments or the like. No matter whether the ongoing negotiations are on distribution of central government funds, inter-municipal cooperation or regional matters, the mayor is almost always the person who are sent to safeguard the interests of the municipality. And more and more so – according to some observers “this external representation task is growing in relative importance and occupying more of the local authority leader’s time” (Leach & Wilson, 2000: 107). We will in this paper denote this function as Local secretary of state. We know that the municipality is not a “state” and that the municipality not in any formal way has a person who is appointed to represent the municipality “abroad”, i.e., outside the municipality. But maybe this lack of a formal spokesperson on the external arena is the reason why it apparently seems so natural to send the mayor. Again his one-of-a-kind-ness seems to imply that he is ascribed yet another representational function. And the informal norms tell him to carry out this task in a way that makes it obvious to liken this role to a secretary of state.

The point is, that when the mayor participates in such discussions and negotiations he is expected to represent the municipality and be able to speak on behalf of the council. In many cases the main reason why only person participate from the municipality in the negotiations is that of the efficiency of

the discussions – if too many voices are to be heard in the debates they not only take more time but also impede the possibilities of reaching an agreement. Therefore the intra-municipal discussions are supposed to take place first, where after the opinion of the (majority) of the council can make its way into the negotiations in which the municipality is taking part. Or at least this might be the idealized chain of events – in real life things might go forth and back between the different forums.

The negotiating partners seem in most cases to be very satisfied with this division of labour and welcomes the mayor when he is the one acting as a Local secretary of state. The explanation is quite straightforward – they need to have at least some assurance that the spokesperson of the municipality can indeed speak for the municipality, which in this case means the council majority. And here the mayor comes out as a natural choice since he is not only – although informally – the highest ranking politician in the municipality, but also, and perhaps most importantly, since he is supposed to be among the councillors the most able negotiator or at least the most able when it comes to the art of having a grasp of the representational situation. As already mentioned above, one of the main tasks constituting local political leadership is “coalition maintenance” (Gissendanner, 2004: 51), and it seems obvious that handling the delegate situation and promoting the (majority of the) council stands when negotiating on behalf of the council is indeed connected to successful coalition maintenance.

However, the overall agreement that there seem to be in the case studies among as well councillors, mayors and external actors that the mayor can serve as a Local secretary of state, also in many ways imply that the mayors when performing this task keep very loyal to the mandate given to them by the council. The mayor is not sent as for instance a Conservative or a Social democrat but indeed as the mayor of his municipality. Therefore he is not supposed to conduct partisan politics when he is “abroad”, i.e., outside the municipality – on the contrary other norms exist on these occasions, and he would probably be politically penalized if he moved outside his mandate and started to act too partisan. When the mayor is taking part in discussions with neighbouring municipalities, national government departments etc., he does not bring members of for instance the opposition with him. However, being on his own in many ways – and this can sound a bit counterintuitive – limits his discretion since it somehow obligates him also to represent the opposition which are not present. Also this golden opportunity for promoting a political programme can be dangerous to try to take advantage of – the case studies very clearly points out that the flip side of so convincingly having a monopoly on functioning as Local secretary of state is, that the mayor when performing

this task has to be very careful to represent the council and not his party or himself.

An example of this can be seen in one of the case studies where the mayor for several years on a regular basis has been participating in a formal network consisting of six neighbouring municipalities trying to act in concert and taking common initiatives on a number of issues (not least on industrial policy). Each of the six municipalities are represented by their mayor (which again is accompanied by their CEO) and even though the six mayors do not have the same party affiliation they have been quite successful in coordinating their efforts to attract new growth to the area building on a philosophy that given their common geographical destiny it is better to compete other areas of the country instead of competing each other “to death”. One precondition for the mayor’s legitimate participation in this forum is very clearly that he acts as a representative of the council.

### **The Mayor as “Ombudsman”**

Yet another representational function can be identified and ascribed exclusively to the mayor, namely what we will denote the ombudsman role. The term ombudsman is sometimes used with somewhat different connotations and therefore a clarification is needed. In some political systems a formal ombudsman, most often an administrative officer, is appointed to “safeguard citizens’ rights ... and investigate allegations of maladministration, ranging from the improper use of powers to the failure to follow procedures and simple incompetence” (Heywood, 1995: 355). In the Danish example this is actually the case on the national political level, where a Parliamentary Ombudsman is appointed (and staffed) to oversee the administration conducted by the government departments. As for the local governments in Denmark no such institution exists, neither in each municipality nor as some kind of nationwide unit (as it for instance is the case in England with the function of a local ombudsman being located at the Commission for Local Administration (Wilson & Game, 2006: 162)). When the mayor acts as an ombudsman, he is therefore filling out an informal role not a formal position.

Sometimes a kind of ombudsman role is ascribed to the councillors as for instance when Svava writes on councillors and says that “[s]ervice responsiveness involves providing intervention as an ‘ombudsman’ to assist individuals and groups in dealing with the governmental bureaucracy” (Svava, 1990: 128). In our view this service responsiveness version of the

ombudsman is included in the somewhat more broad and definitely more commonly described representational function called doing casework. The point is that when a politician is doing political representation in terms of case working he is basically helping constituencies promoting their case, whereas an ombudsman is more of a safeguard against maladministration. It should also be made clear that the lack of a formal local ombudsman in the Danish case does not mean that Danes cannot formally complain about decisions made by the municipal administration – a well established web of formal complaint departments exists. And in general an ombudsman is not to be seen as a substitute for such traditional ways of complaining about municipal decisions – “[t]he role of the ombudsman is to supplement, not replace, normal avenues of complaints such as administrative courts or elected representatives” Heywood, 1997: 355).

What can be observed in the four Danish case studies is, that the task of acting as an informal ombudsman (in the safeguarding sense) is exclusively a task performed by the mayor and not by the rank and file councillors. The explanation of this informal division of work – and this extra function to the mayors’ task portfolio – is twofold. Again the mayors’ one-of-a-kind-ness is at play. When one person or a few person is asked for to perform a task, the mayor seems like a natural choice since he is already “special” – and the function of ombudsman has to be handled by one person, since if all councillors acted like ombudsmen the system would be overloaded. The other reason for the widespread assignment of the informal ombudsman role to the mayor is, that he has privileged access to the administrative system, since he 1) is the only full-time employed politician in the Danish municipalities and therefore also the only politician with an office at City Hall, and 2) is formally responsible for the administrations implementation of the decisions made by the council.

If a councillor acted as an ombudsman and addressed the administration directly in a specific case where a constituent had a case under review by the administration it could be regarded as untimely interference, whereas for the mayor it is acceptable since the councillors acknowledge that somebody has to fill in the position and that the mayor is the best suited since he is accustomed to balance several considerations (and that his relationship with the administration is already in some ways more blurred). As for the administration they actually not only accept but also in many ways approve that the mayor perform this function. They are more comfortable with the mayor as being the ombudsman than anybody else, since they know that the mayor has the insight to determine whether maladministration has actually taken place (and some correction is needed) or not. And, maybe even more

importantly, they feel that the administrative system can take advantage of the aura which in the eyes of the citizens exist around the mayor – in the main part of the cases where malpractice has not been done by the administration, the mayor can serve (and he is indeed willing to this) as a lightning rod who can dampen the unsatisfied citizens.

As an example one of the mayors in the study received a letter from one of his constituencies complaining that her old mother had been declined some personal help (for cooking and cleaning) that she had asked for at the municipality. The mayor knew that neither the daughter nor the mother were persons often in contact with the municipal social system, and he knew that they had never received these kind of benefits before, much less complained about the municipal administration. Since he could read from the letter that the daughter felt that the mother had waited for a long time to ask the municipality for help and that the help today was quite crucial for the well being of the mother, the mayor asked the social worker who initially rejected the request to take another look at the case. It turned out that the social worker by this renewed look at the case could see that a mistake was made in the first place – according to the rules the old lady was actually entitled to receive the personal help asked for and the mistake was corrected right away (it should be mentioned, though, that in most cases the decisions are not changed).

### **The Mayor as “Representative”**

As already pointed out in the introductory part of the paper the three functions described above – Master of ceremonies, Local secretary of state and Ombudsman – are functions which only the mayor performs. And these functions supplement the function as Representative which as well mayors and councillors perform when participating in local politics. In more general terms the function as Representative – when politicians do political representation – is quite well described in the literature (e.g. Pitkin, 1967; Birch, 1971; Manin, 1997) but the more normative discussions about how representatives should represent is still very much undecided. Especially two dimensions of the representational puzzle have attracted attention, namely the style and the focus of political representation (see the introduction).

As for the style of the representation the discussion go whether the representatives should act as delegates and literally represent the preferences that the constituents have expressed when sending them into political office ,or whether the representatives should act as trustees and use their own discretion when presented for political problems and suggested solutions

(Wahlke et al., 1962). This is the normative debate which Pitkin has labelled “the mandate independence controversy” (Pitkin, 1967). When it comes to the Danish case studies it seems that mayors and councillors alike have found and stroke the happy medium – a position which Wahlke and colleagues labelled “politico” (Wahlke et al., 1962) and which Pitkin in many ways describe when she more normatively says that: “The representative must act independently; his actions must involve discretion and judgment; he must be the one who acts. The represented must also be (conceived as) capable of independent action and judgment, not merely being taken care of. And, despite the resulting potential for conflict between representative and represented about what is to be done, the conflict must not normally take place. The representative must in such a way that there is no conflict, or if it occurs an explanation is called for” (Pitkin, 1967: 209).

As for the focus of the representation, the story is slightly different – in the case studies systematic differences between mayors and councillors could be observed in regard to representational focus. When studying representational focus it is the “who is the representative representing”-question which is addressed. The representative can have several different (and sometimes overlapping) focuses for his representation. Maybe he is representing all the citizens in the municipality, all voters, the voters who voted for his party, the voters who voted preferentially on him, the party leadership, the organization who promoted him in the campaign, people living in the same part of the municipality as himself, people of same age, gender, occupation, education or race as himself etc. As Rao puts it: “Focus ... refers to the extent to which a representative is guided in his decisions by a concern for the welfare of the political unit as a whole, for that of his immediate constituency, or for that of particular sectional interests within it” (Rao, 1998: 31). As in most other cases there is no formal guidelines for the Danish mayors and councillors as to whom they should have as their focus when being representatives. Politicians in general, and also Danish local politicians, have in most cases to define their representational focus themselves and therefore some variation, even within the same legislature, is not uncommon.

The difference between mayors and councillors observed in the case studies is that whereas the councillors to some extent is concerned for what Rao denoted their immediate constituency and their particular sectional interests within it, the mayors have the entire municipality (or the welfare of the political unit as a whole) as the focus of their political representation. This difference could be expected from the results already presented elsewhere on the representational difference between executive and non-executive councillors, as for instance when Copus states that: “The difference being,

those councillors outside the executive will see their role much more specifically as a conduit for the views of their constituents into the council policy-making processes” (Copus, 2004: 237). Or when Rao points out that contrary to the councillors with executive obligations, ”...the role of non-executive (‘backbench’) councillors is to represent their constituents” (Rao, 2005: 47).

More surprising than the observed difference between mayors and councillors in regard to representational focus is that the mayors’ focus on the entire municipality is so clear-cut as it turns out. For instance the mayors are very deliberate not to represent one part of the municipality more than another – to have the entire municipality as the focus on what Rao calls the areal dimension of the representational focus (Rao, 1998: 31). As an example one of the mayors very deliberately promotes the construction of a municipal sports arena in the one of the two twin-cities in his municipalities where he himself not lives. As he explains, the arena would have been located better in his own (and more populous) city, but by building it in the other city he very clearly demonstrates that he is the mayor for the entire municipality. The mayors are also very deliberate not to be associated with specific interest groups – to have the entire municipality as the focus on what Rao calls the pressure group dimension of the representational focus (Rao, 1998: 31). As an example one of the mayors, even though he is a Conservative and even though he was himself a self employed merchant before he became a mayor, has obdurate rejected the invitation as the mayor to join the lodge of merchants in the city. As he explains he does not want any constituents to suspect that he give preferential treatment to merchants. The mayors are even cautious not to be too associated with the political party under which label they are elected – what Rao calls the party dimension of the representational focus (Rao, 1998: 31). When they become a mayor they see their representational focus as broader than “just” their own voters – they would like to bridge the political gap between the opposing parties and represent the entire municipality. As an example one of the Labour mayors have a kind of a “good cop bad cop”-deal with one of his closest associates in the Labour group in City Hall. When ever Labour locally has to make a statement which for instance criticize the conservative government in Parliament or make a statement on a local political issue with some more ideological undertones, not the mayor but the associate begins to speak at the council meeting. And when some issues where no partisan conflict has to be debated at the council the mayor speaks for the Labour group.

In sum the mayors to a very high degree lives up to the more normative call for mayors having a very broad focus in their representation put forward

elsewhere: “... political leaders should share some of the values that pertain to living in a democratic society, for example, accepting diversity, and seeking to take into account the interests of all constituents not just those who share one’s political allegiances” (Morrell & Hartley, 2006: 488).

## Conclusions

In this paper we have dealt with political leadership and political representation with the underlying basis that political leaders do perform some kind of political representation but that they do not necessarily conduct it in the same way as the backbench councillors with whom they sit at the council. This explorative qualitative study of four municipalities in Denmark identifies four representational functions that the local political leader, i.e., the mayor, performs, since we find the mayor as Master of ceremonies, Local secretary of state, Ombudsman, and Representative, respectively. The first three functions identified are performed exclusively by the mayor, whereas the councillors is “only” acting as Representatives. In each of the different representational roles the mayor is acting as a representative for different groups and representing these groups to yet another different groups and this web of representation is summed up in Figure 1, where also the difference between the mayors and the councillors is included.

Figure 1. Representational functions included in mayoral political leadership.

	Mayors	Councillors
Representing whom to whom		
as Master of ceremonies	The municipality to the citizens/the external world	-
as Local secretary of state	The council to the external world	-
as Ombudsman	The citizens to the municipality	-
as Representative	The citizens to the council	The citizens to the council
Representational style	Politico	Politico
Representational focus	The entire municipality	Particular sectional interests

We can only speculate why the focus differs between mayors and councillors, but we will put forward the hypothesis, that the additional functions identified adds to this difference. In the three functions that the mayor has to deal with on top of his function as Representative he is one-of-a-kind and the norms tell him to have the entire municipality as his scope of representation. These norms – and possibly also that the mayors need to reduce complexity, cf. Figure 1 – spills over into the representation done when acting as a Representative and therefore he has a broader representational focus in the function as Representative than his colleagues at the council. Of course we can not test this hypothesis on the same data as we used to derive the hypothesis from, and therefore we call for additional research to address the hypothesis in a more systematic way. In more general terms we also encourage students of as well political leadership as political representation to put more emphasis on the intersection of these two fields of research.

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