



**LUNDS**  
UNIVERSITET

# **Can administrative autonomy be enough?**

Experiences of administrative autonomy as a political and  
administrative asset in a Swedish municipality

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to first and foremost thank God for the strength and ability to come this far. Also, my sincere thanks to Sweden, Östra Göinge Municipality, for offering me shelter as a resettled refugee, and an opportunity to realize my academic journey.

The culmination of this master's thesis would not have been able without the permission of Östra Göinge Municipality to be used as a case study. Therefore, I thank the municipality chief executive-Jonas Rydberg- for giving me the opportunity to study the municipality. Also, I thank all interviewees starting from senior civil servants- Tommy Johansson, Mattias Larsson, Tomas Carvonen, Charlotta Lundberg, Mikael Torberntsson, Monica Dahl, and Ulla Wram-the finishing lines of this thesis would not have been able without your perspectives. My sincere thanks to the municipality politicians who contributed with their perspectives- Patrik Åberg, Anders Bengtsson, and Daniel Jönsson.

Special thanks to all my professors at the department of master's in political science at Lund University for their contribution with insights in one way or the other, mostly professor Ylva Stubbergaard with whom i found interest in the subject matter.

I want to thank my supervisor, Professor Tomas Bergström. I would not have reached this far without his support, encouragement, guidance, patience, and challenging me to open my eyes to new ways of thinking. Thank you.

Finally, my greatest thanks to my family. I dedicate this work to my dearest father who has always encouraged me to shoot for the stars. I wish he were here to witness the reality of his words. I thank my Mother for the support and motivation when i needed the most. I also thank my dearest brothers Nelson Tusiime, Carl Mujaguzi, and Liam Waern for motivating, bearing and enduring with me during my dissertation writing process. I can never thank my family enough. I could have not done it without you.

## Table of contents

Acknowledgement.....	2
Table of contents .....	3
1. Introduction.....	6
1.2 The rationale for the study .....	8
1.3 Background of the study.....	9
1.4 Problem area.....	9
1.5 Relevance to Political Science .....	10
1.6 Purpose and research question.....	10
1.7 Delimitation.....	11
1.8 Disposition .....	11
2. Theoretical framework and literature review .....	12
2.1 Bureaucrats and management values .....	12
2.2 Politicians and political roles.....	14
2.3 Administrative autonomy and its theories .....	14
2.4 Political control-counterarguments for administrative autonomy .....	18
2.5 Relationship between administrative autonomy and political control.....	20
2.6 Previous research .....	21
2.7 Discussion on the application of the theories .....	23
3. Methodology .....	24
3.1 Qualitative approach.....	24
3.2 Case study- Östra Göinge Municipality.....	25
3.3 Data gathering and choice of respondents.....	26
3.4 Sampling Techniques .....	27
3.5 Research ethics.....	28
3.6 Data analysis .....	29
3.7 Discussion on research quality.....	30
3.7.1 Reliability .....	30
3.7.2 Validity .....	30
3.7.3 Reflexivity and subjectivity.....	31
4. Result and analysis .....	32

4.1 Governance in Östra Göinge Municipality before .....	32
4.2 The aftermath: experiences of administrative autonomy by senior civil servants, and politicians in Östra Göinge Municipality .....	34
4.2.1 Boosts professionalism .....	34
4.2.2 Powerful seed for creativity .....	36
4.2.3 Flexible and efficient .....	37
4.2.4 Clear roles and responsibility for civil servants.....	41
4.2.5 Trust building and cooperation .....	43
4.2.6 Vague roles for politicians .....	44
4.2.7 Low engagement level for politicians.....	45
5. Discussion/Reflection .....	48
6. Conclusion .....	55
7. Further research recommendations and other reflections .....	57
8. References .....	59
9. Appendix .....	64
9.1 Interview questions to senior civil servants.....	64
9.2 Interview questions to politicians .....	65

## **Abstract**

The struggle of power between politicians and civil servants in relation to introduction of different administrative reforms have always been a hot topic, specifically in issues to do with delegation of administrative autonomy from a political to administrative level. Advocates of administrative autonomy argue that administrative autonomy is a good administrative reform that spikes performance, trust and a more citizen-oriented governance as it allows professionals- senior civil servants- to use their knowledge and skills which are valuable for boosting motivation and quality. Critics contend this argument and state that administrative autonomy can result to moral hazards, and make politicians illegitimate as representatives of the people.

This study explores and resolve the debate further through examining and understanding experiences of administrative autonomy in Östra Göinge Municipality, as a political and administrative asset. That is through qualitatively interviewing politicians and senior civil servants in Östra Göinge Municipality. Therefore, through the scope of administrative autonomy and political control theory, it is argued that administrative autonomy significantly impact experiences of both senior civil servants and politicians in Östra Göinge Municipality in the light of professionalism; creativity; trust and collaboration, performance in terms of efficiency, flexibility and effectivity; and decrease in overload for politicians. However, it spikes political consequences such as undermining politicians' engagement, and causing vague roles for politicians. It is argued that trust and interaction between politicians and civil servants are salient for balancing administrative autonomy as an administrative and political asset.

*Key words:* Administrative autonomy, discretion, political control, trust-based governance, Östra Göinge, Sweden

*Words:* 20, 531

# 1.Introduction

*“Welfare proffs shall be proffs”- we need to leave New Public Management for welfare governance in which career ethics govern actions.”*

That was the Swedish prime minister-Stefan Löfven- words at one of the workshops organised by the quality magazine, but the same works are on different debate articles (Quality Magazine, 2015). This statement started flourishing in 2013 in which the Swedish prime minister began thinking on how to put a budget aside for building up trust reforms. The Swedish state ministers’ statement conjoins with the refugee situation in 2015 (Ibid). For Stefan Löfven, Swedish prime minister, it was essential to stop with detail governance in public sectors and slightly shift to a governance type that offers civil servants more autonomy while taking into consideration all civil servants’ competence. To increase quality, pleasant working environment and make deliverance of welfare services attractive (Ibid).

How to govern or administrate public sectors has been controversial contemporary with so many managerial ideas transmitting from private sectors to governmental organizations. Views on the reformation of public organizations have been created, recreated, and disappeared (Rhodes, 1996). Since the quality of a public sector performance is dependable on governance, diverse knowledge on the management of public sectors has been created worldwide (Ibid). From the usual traditional hierarchical to more market- and trust-based governing (Ibid). Sweden is not an exception in the developments of these new ideas of managing public sectors. The question of how to govern or manage public organizations in Sweden has, as well, been debatable and a ‘thing’ just like in any other countries experiencing changes and introduction of new ways of governing public sectors (See, Bringsellius, 2018,pp.25-41). Sweden’s journey on the introduction of new models on how to govern public sectors dates back from the 19<sup>th</sup> century (SOU, 2018:47, p.52). That is the period when the Swedish government put aside a high budget for the construction of the Swedish welfare public sector funded by the state (Ibid).

The development of new welfare public organization meant the efficient implementation of policies to do with employment, health care, education, and infrastructures (Ibid). Within this period governance or management of public and state sectors were mostly centralized. However, in the year 1989 debates were sparked in Sweden around the argumentations of sidelining citizens voices in setting, implementation, and deliveries of public services (Ahrne 1985; Granholm 1986, cited in SOU, 2018, P.52). The fact that the state did not give citizens democratic rights to

participate in the formation and deliveries of social services. Denying citizens democratic rights topped up the major crisis that Sweden was experiencing at that moment in which there were substantial deficits in public finances (Bergerström et al., 2008). The result meant proposals and decisions by politicians, the Swedish social democrats, to decentralize governance through delegating more powers and autonomy to public servants and citizens, and, also govern through goal and result management with much emphasis on leadership (Social Democrats, 1980 cited in SOU, 2018, p.52; Bergerström et al., 2008). That is to say, the introduction of a more goal and result-based management that would increase competition for different public sectors and fulfill the needs and expectations of the citizens. Also, as NPM-New Public Management- inspired by neo-liberalism governing ideas of the market, individuals, and competition (Brante,2014 cited in Bringsellius, 2018, p. 31).

Therefore, Swedish public sectors saw the rising of NPM at that moment. More control and market-based bottom-up management based on professional leadership in which administration managers do not have political affiliations. Also, a public organization based on competition, effectivity, and quantification (Ibid). The NPM model allowed for title shifts from public sector manager to the public director (Lundquist, 1993, cited in SOU, 2018, p.54). As though NPM gave some results in Sweden, there were critics of the governing model. The fact that the system changed beliefs to the untrustworthy, economic system, and replicating traditional hierarchical governance through controlling and focusing on details rather than giving public servants to work in-depth with their professionalism (Bringsellius, 2018, p.31). A journalist first manifested the critics of the NPM in Sweden in 2013 whereby the journalist published an article on the Swedish newspaper DN, Maciej Zaremba, entitled “Vad är det som dödade Herr B-What is it that killed Sir B”.

The article was on how the NPM governing model hinders health workers from accomplishing their work through causing health workers to put a bunch of their time on writing reports and quantifying results to do with budget and production, rather than qualitatively working with patients (Ibid). The critic of the NPM and after the Swedish government hearing about the article resulted to the creation of an institution that would work with the introduction of trust-based governance in public sectors, also known as, Trust Delegation (SOU, 2018, p.60). Trust delegation is formed in June 2016 (Ibid). The institution was given a mission by the Swedish government to accomplish the goals of managing or governing a system that delivers welfare services that have high quality and meets citizens expectations and needs (Ibid, p.60). Therefore, this meant that delegation got the task to promote and spread the ideology of trust-based management in regional and local councils (Ibid, p.60). What this means in terms of effectivity and organization is an open question that is yet to be discovered.

Since the introduction of trust-based management, a lot of local councils in Sweden have been adopting the governing model of trust, in the inclusion of Östra Göinge Municipality that is the

study object of this paper. Bringselius (2018, p.43) defines trust-based management as the relationship we have to another person or institution in which we think that person or the institution can function without control, alternatively administrative autonomy. She lists down amongst other principles, the principle of relationship between top administrators and politicians on administrative autonomy that this paper focuses on (Ibid). Moreover, the principle of delegating authority to the administration means delegating autonomy and, also being clear on who does what, and, also achievements on conditions for public workers to get their work done. It results in the separation between politics and administration. Following this, politicians focus on strategic issues to do with “what questions” and public servants with the autonomy to do with operational questions consisting of the “how questions” (See, SOU, 2018). Since Östra Göinge Municipality is one of the local councils in Sweden using this governing philosophy, it is interesting to know how politicians and public servants in Östra Göinge experience this way of governing.

## 1.2 The rationale for the study

The rationale for studying experiences of administrative autonomy comes from personal interests and curiosity. Interest on policy processes (implementation), actors, and consequences triggered me to apply for an internship at a small Swedish municipality, Östra Göinge municipality. The primary purpose of the internship was to learn how a local government is governed in terms of leadership and management related to NPM-goals specifically result-based management. Besides, the internship was supposed to educate me on the procedures adopted in analyzing different implementation processes of policies. Moreover, I was also interested in studying experiences of public sector experts that work close to politicians concerning the issue of autonomy (how much politicians should give autonomy and what the challenges are). While at my internship there was a lot of rhetoric’s by politicians, public servants, and even the executive chief director on the concept of administrative autonomy. The fact that administrators need not detail governance but rather autonomy to ensure that they work within their area of expertise was puzzling. With this, I developed an interest in exploring and studying the practical aspect of the concept of administrative autonomy in Östra Göinge Municipality.

My research tends to focus on what are some of the political and administration experiences of administrative autonomy and delegation of authority from politicians to senior civil servants and what we can learn from it.



## 1.3 Background of the study

Broadly described, administrative autonomy in the public sector is the ability of public institutions, governed by the administrators, to independently determine their preferences and translate them to authoritative actions without the control of the political system (Bach, 2016). Unfortunately, the public organizations in every country do not work under isolation from the actors within the political system. Elected officials and executive politicians contribute extensively to the operations and decisions made by senior public servants. The introduction of administrative autonomy to create trust in the public sectors is a new administration reform that has spread in the public sectors in Sweden. It has also acquired a different point of departure and perspective in comparison to the debatable NPM. Therefore, changes in the working processes within departments, and in politics of public sectors must be affected, especially in Östra Göinge Municipality. This way, the public sectors in Sweden will achieve organizational needs and possibilities. These changes are not only interesting to study but also necessary for Östra Göinge Municipality; thus, making it academically relevant to study administration autonomy.

## 1.4 Problem area

Rhetoric and theory usually do not reflect action. Within, the field of political science, proposers of administrative autonomy argue that the concept saves time and eases planning processes (SOU, 2018, p.188). However, some researchers argue on cooperation and integration of politics and administration because experts and public workers do not engage in the strategic formulation of policies (Bergström et al., 2008). This, therefore, means that the role of politicians should involve controlling the policy implementation process since they formulate policies that are responsive to citizens. Conversely, administrators should only focus on facilitating the implementation process. However, both politicians and administrators should coordinate to enhance the delivery of desired results. These counterargued statements have over the years made it difficult for researchers, administrators, and policy makers to determine the role and authorities of each category of personnel within the public organizations.

## 1.5 Relevance to Political Science

Historically, during the Athenians time, the tension between administrative autonomy and political control developed the topic on administrative autonomy because the events of that time were based on how politicians could delegate autonomy to civil servants while politically controlling the organization (Andersen et al., 2018). The arguments presented during the Athenian time made the study of administrative autonomy relevant to political science since political scientists distinguish the roles of all individuals in public organizations. Additionally, the study of administrative autonomy breaks the controversial question of administrative authority vs political control. Previous research has only theoretically focused on the implementation of administrative autonomy without studying live experiences of its procedural governing. Also, most researchers have only studied administrative autonomy in schools, health care, and social departments. Little research exists on administrative autonomy on a leading level of the public sector in between politics and top administration. Besides, studies on trust relations between public servants and their employees are not readily evident (See, SOU, 2018, p190-208). Lastly, the relation between senior civil servants and politicians on experiences administrative autonomy and political is less studied.

## 1.6 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand senior civil servants and politicians' experiences of administration autonomy. The study will help manifest "empirically" the role that the concepts of "autonomy" and "control" have in the governance of a public sector. Also, it will explore how the tension between political control and autonomy is addressed in the public sector. That will be through a study object of the governing philosophy in Östra Göinge Municipality in which I interview both civil servants and politicians.

The following are the research questions:

1. What are the experiences of delegating administrative autonomy from politicians to administrators in a local government?
2. What is the relationship between trust and the use of administrative autonomy between politicians and administrators in public organizations?

## 1.7 Delimitation

It is important to note that this paper is not studying the construction of the meaning of administrative autonomy. The research paper is limited only to the experiences of administrative autonomy amongst politicians and senior civil servants. Therefore, the research looks at what happens in a municipality when politicians delegate administrative autonomy to senior civil servants. The responses from the research participants will show the administrators' thoughts and experiences on the issue of administrative autonomy. Besides, the views of politicians are also considered. The analysis of the data provided focus on the effectiveness of administrative autonomy and the availability of positive results. Lastly, the analysis determines if the results provided good or bad perspective that academia and other public sectors could learn from the entire study.

## 1.8 Disposition

The introduction of the paper presented background, rationale, problem area, study relevance to political science, purpose of study, and research questions. Chapter two discusses theoretical framework and literature review of administrative autonomy and political control since these two concepts are related. Chapter three introduces and explains the methods for finding results for this study. Chapter four presents the result and analyze results in relation to previous theories and research. Chapter five discusses and gives a reflection on the research results and analysis in relation to trust and administrative autonomy while also introducing the main monster or barrier. The chapter also recommends remedies for tackling the monster to administrative autonomy. Chapter six concludes. Chapter seven recommends further studies. Chapter eight includes references, and nine interview questions both in Swedish and English.

## 2. Theoretical framework and literature review

The following section integrates the theoretical model and previous research. It indicates and discusses what is known and anticipated from previous research related to delegation of administrative autonomy to civil servants. I used previous research to inspire this research. Also, I discuss the theories surrounding administrative autonomy and political control and how politics influence public management. Although there is previous research within the field of public administration and politics on the topic of administrative autonomy, most data mainly focus on the conceptualization, implementation of administrative autonomy, and the importance of the theoretical framework on the impact on public administration and the consequences of administrative autonomy. There is limited empirical research on administrative autonomy in terms of experiences (Banch, 2018). Identifying and understanding how civil servants and politicians experience administrative autonomy contrasts the practical world to the theoretical assumptions that underline administrative autonomy.

### 2.1 Bureaucrats and management values

Different scholars define bureaucracy as a system utilized by governments in making essential decisions using state officials instead of other elected or appointed representatives. On the other hand, administrative autonomy is the ability of public institutions to make their choices and translate them into authoritative actions (Lægreid, Verhoest & Jann, 2008). Administrative autonomy is like bureaucracy because the two terms are used as synonyms within the global encyclopedia of public administration, public policy, and governance (Bach, 2018, cited in Farazmand, 2018). Therefore, I used the two terms interchangeably in this study, because they mean the same thing. It is crucial to explain the underlying theories behind the roles of bureaucrats and their management value. In this case, senior civil servants, and politicians within the politics of public administration and on the level of Sweden government are assumed to adopt bureaucratic methods. This research aims to

discover perspectives of civil servants and politicians on administrative autonomy. Therefore, understanding the roles civil servants, also known as bureaucrats, and the management values they have will give a clear picture of how interviewed bureaucrats experience administrative autonomy.

Researchers define bureaucracy through the specs of organization and administration. Under the lens of organization, bureaucracy is a process that contains structures, rules, resources, and goals (Poocharoen, 2013, p.1). Conversely, as an administrator in a government, bureaucracy has the primary role of executing the will of the state (Ibid). Under the above definition, bureaucracy functions in the presence of a bureaucrat or a public servant. Max Weber's theory is presented by the analysis of Freund 1996 which describes a bureaucrat as a professional and entirely waged expert within a public sector. The individual is tasked with the duty of providing services and fulfilling the wills of the government through the competencies and areas of expertise they hold (Serpa et al. 2018, p.14). For Max Weber, technical skills and professionalism of bureaucrats are essential (Ibid). The division of work occurs with high specialty (Ibid). Weber's assumptions are that bureaucrats should be left to accomplish their task using the knowledge they uphold (Ibid). Thus, politicians should not control them. Bureaucrats' knowledge and technical competencies should be appreciated. Weber further argues that bureaucrats should be watched over by politicians when accomplishing tasks. He is one of the theorists that raised the salience of professionalism.

Moreover, bureaucrats in this case top civil servant hold managerial values that elected officials cannot meet (Wilson, 2013, pp.31-32 cited in Grant, 2014). These values are the needs of the institution since elected officials- politician's- tenure is short, and their focus limited (Ibid). It is important to shade light on the fact that bureaucrats or senior civil servants have values to do with performances which does exist separately from political values (Ibid). These values are subordinates to political values (Ibid). Therefore, politicians within the management sphere cannot be effective managers of government henceforth civil managers have to do more, thus salience of administrative autonomy to accomplish the accountability they hold as civil servants (Ibid). Within the Swedish context, a public servant or bureaucrat is legally defined by public municipal law as an individual who works on citizens' mission and realizes political wills and decisions. This means that he/she follows the rules and regulations, is knowledgeable and neutral, and is effective and service minded. At the same time, he/she has the freedom to speech and media approach (Swedish Government Office, 2018). Arguments that surround the theory of "bureaucracy" and the concept of "bureaucrats" are that bureaucrats want to be regarded as public managers who can use their knowledge in implementation rather than be controlled (Poocharoen, 2013, p.3).

## 2.2 Politicians and political roles

The questions many researchers ask when identifying administrative autonomy are: Who are politicians and what roles do they have? The roles and definitions of politicians take us back to the concept of democracy where the government is of the people, for the people, and by the people (Katz, 2014, p.183). Politicians are elected officials that represent the collective voices of the electorate, also known as the people, to keep order. They are elected by voters to represent their ideas in parliament or local government settings (Liverani, Hawkins & Parkhurst, 2013, p.77). Citizens delegate their powers to political officials and expect results in terms of well- produced services (Katz, 2014, p.183). Therefore, the politician within the public sector has the role of listening to citizens' ideas and administrate them further. To produce legitimacy, politicians must control and govern implementation processes within public sectors to fulfil the expectation and needs of the citizens; this way, they give citizens value (Jacobsson a, 2017, p.13). Within the Swedish context, politicians are elites that practice power over the people due to their leadership skills. They are chosen by the electorate to represent them and the ideas of the people (Karlsson et al., 2014).

## 2.3 Administrative autonomy and its theories

Administrative autonomy is one of the most defining characteristics of agencies. It can be defined as governing philosophy that is about discretion and the extent to which an agency can decide about matters that are important to the organization (Verhoest et al. 2004a; Verschuere 2007; Roness et al. 2008 cited in Verhoest et al 2010, pp.18-19). The concept of administrative autonomy has always sparked arguments within the field of political science and public administration (Badie et al., 2011). The concept has its origin on the discourses of NPM-New Public Management during the 1990 when there was the creation of semi-autonomous organizations, also known as quasi- nongovernmental organizations (Kalimullah, Alam & Nour, 2012, p.1). During this period, governments in the western parliament were confronted with giving autonomy to their integrated central systems and retaining control over autonomous bodies (Badie et al., 2011). Additionally, the economic and financial reforms of the 1990s resulted in the liberalization of the market and the

breaking of public economies. This was relevant in boosting and creating discourse around administrative autonomy. Badie et al. (2011) state that in these times, deregulations led to reregulation as contracts and property rights within these new systems needed supervision. This, therefore, brought the question of who controlled the autonomous organizations.

Furthermore, the concept of administrative autonomy emerged after the introduction of the neo-economic theories within the public organization and political science. They also introduced contract theories and the principal-agent rhetorics (O'Flynn, 2007, p.353). Within the contract theories, dogmas of principal-agent, and transaction costs resulted to the rise of concepts such as “contract, costs, monitoring, and information asymmetry” which started to dominate the talk within political science and public administration. The result was the growing attention of “administrative autonomy” (O'Flynn, 2007, p.353). Administrative autonomy within the school of New Public Management is discussed in terms of disaggregation of large bureaucracies into semi-autonomous and single purposes at arms’ length agencies (Verschuere et al, 2012, p.250). This means that authorities and mandates are delegated to civil servants who are at the lower levels of the organization (Ibid). Verschuere et al, 2012, p.250 also state that an assumption for this way of management is to increase effectiveness and to enhance autonomies of managers, place services close to citizens, reduce political meddling, and also enable those at higher political positions manage salient issues. It is also this kind of autonomy that promotes policy operation divide between policy between policy making and policy implementation, the “what” and “how” of a policy (Ibid). Usually, the concept is synonymous to bureaucratic autonomy and administrative discretion. However, this study persists on administrative autonomy.

Writers that define and discuss administrative autonomy have broken it down to two different distinctions (Badie et, 2020; Yesilkagit et al., 2010 cited in Bach et al., 2020). The De jure administrative autonomy, also known as the formal administrative autonomy, and the De facto administrative autonomy also known as real administrative autonomy. According to Badie et al. (2020) De jure administrative autonomy refers to the formal-legal prescriptions concerning the relationship between politicians and public organizations. These formal-legal prescriptions state how a political-principle and its administrative agent should interact in theory. Bach et al., 2020 citing Yesilkagit et al., 2010, calls it a top-down view focus in which formal authority is delegated to public servants by political decision-makers. De facto administrative autonomy, on the other hand, is defined as a reflection of De jure autonomy. That means that De jure administrative autonomy determines the level of actual autonomy. However, even though the nature of De jure administrative autonomy can determine the level of actual autonomy in terms of effectivity and efficiency in an organization, it is all dependent on the reputation of professional works, in this case civil servants, who work with the agencies according to a research done by Krause et al. 2005 cited

in Badie et al.2020, p.3. Bach et al., 2020 citing Verhoest et al. 2004 et al., 2010 define de facto administrative autonomy as the ability for public servants to shape the preferences of political decision-makers.

Administrative autonomy has gained rhetorical popularity in Sweden. Public organizations view it as a model towards organizational developments and arrangements, Östra Göinge Municipality is not an exemption. The rhetorical popularity of administrative autonomy is rooted from the ideologies of New Public Management and Trust-based governance, as stated earlier (Kalimullah, Alam & Nour, 2012, p.1). Louise Bringseluis a researcher who got a mission by the Swedish government to develop a method for introducing and implementing trust-based governance, is one of the researchers in Sweden that has discussed the salience of administrative autonomy. Bringseluis 2017 discusses administrative autonomy concerning the relationship between administrators in public sectors and elected politicians. Therefore, according to Bringseluis 2017, p. 18 relations between politicians and administrators in the issue concerning administrative autonomy involves politicians avoiding detail governance. That means that the politicians reduce the number of goals and objectives, and, delegate more authority to top public servants to use their professionalism in implementing the work of politicians.

Therefore, public administrators are supposed to have the autonomy to govern themselves and lead departments. Bringseluis 2017 categorizes this as a part of trust- based governance. Administrative autonomy can be said to occur when public servants are offered the power to work with operational issues while politicians work with strategical issues without interfering in the “how” (Bringseluis, 2017). This definition of administrative autonomy has been used in Östra Göinge Municipality (Östra Göinge Municipality, 2020). The assumption is that administrative autonomy through its dividing roles between politicians and public servants’ results to flexibility amongst politicians and boosts the effectiveness within the public sectors (Ibid). Also, this concept reduces administrative burdens, increases work happiness, and quality within the organization. Additionally, according to Bringseluis 2017 administrative autonomy shifts administrative work to bend towards quality governance through enforcing and giving administrators space to work with their skills and knowledge much closer to the needs of the citizens since they are also “democratic watchers.” And professionals.

Furthermore, Jacobsson et al. 2015, p.31 in his book *Governing the embedded state* studies administrative autonomy in relation to embedded systems. He states that governance is dependent on organizational factors such as trust and autonomy, which help politicians create space and time for reflection and, consequently, open in intelligent ways. Also, Administrative autonomy reduces “tame problems that only professionals within the public organization can handle since they have the competence and expertise (Jacobsson et al.



2015a, p.42). Therefore, for Jacobsson in the same way as Bringselius, 2017, offering administrative autonomy to public servants underweight politicians' tasks to allow them to focus on essential issues. Additionally, according to Jacobsson citing Max 1957, and Waldon 1948, in p.44 elected officials create a public organization. Also, Jacobsson (2015a), assumes that through politicians delegating more mandate and autonomy to the administration, they focus on salient issues and formulate clear and strategic goals and objectives. He assumes that this is timesaving for politicians. Albeit, politicians have the technical knowledge on who the relevant actors are and what solutions are available, they cannot handle issues related to the "how because they simply do not have the time to meet the enormous decision they face.

Moreover, Jacobsson et al. (2015a, p.5) state that reforms that focus on autonomy results in administrations that think critically, search for new purposes, and have a focus on effectiveness. He gives an example of the hands-off strategy in Sweden such as that adopted by the Swedish Central Bank. The politicians delegated full mandates to the legislation as they had no competency in the economic sphere. That was assumed to increase the credibility of decisions which would then result in stability (Ibid, p.61). Overman (2016), in his work "Great Expectations of Public Service Delegations" reveals expectations and effects of delegating administrative autonomy in terms of authority from the political level to the local administrative level within the sphere of public organizations. He attains this by analyzing 250 peer-reviewed articles within the field of public policy and administration. In his findings, correspondingly to Jacobsson 2015 and Berguilius, 2017, assumptions of delegating authority, he assumes that administrative autonomy is functional, economic, political, and organizationally beneficial. Economic assumptions argue that effectivity does increase if monopoly on governing authority breaks down to "what" and "how" with politicians managing the "what" and administrators having the autonomy to managing the "how" (Nickan 1971 cited in Overman, 2016, p. 1245). In that way, incentives to enhance services increases to be competitive partners (Ibid). Administrators become more accountable to their communities and more innovative through working closer to the citizens.

On a more political level, quality, and impartiality in terms of policy implementations are achieved if delegation takes place and more administrative autonomy is awarded. According to Batorey 2012, and Majone, 2012 cited in Overman (2016, p.1246) this increases political stability and trust/relations between politicians and administrators. Organizationally, it results to higher commitment, flexibility, and productivity when administrators get more delegated powers and administrative autonomy (Coggburn; Turner 2012 cited in Overman, 2016). This occurs because employees work more closely to their clients and have more room to be innovative (Osborne and Gaebler 1992, cited in Overman, 2016). Paul. S. Adler (2001), in his work about market, hierarchy, and trust within organizations, argues that autonomy

has uniquely capable properties for the coordination of knowledge within an organization. For Paul (2001), neither market nor hierarchy can solve the issues of knowledge. This is because hierarchy and the market governing method are based on the principle of control and legitimate power in which knowledge is treated as a scarce resource. It is, therefore, concentrated along with responding decision rights. It becomes hard for the employed/administrators to use their knowledge comes from the executives; in this case, politicians since autonomy could be lacking. He also assumes that administrative autonomy in an organization can increase cooperation and teamwork since contracts are reduced to handshakes. Evans et al. (2019) state that administrative autonomy is an inevitable and potentially highly beneficial feature of bureaucratic organization. This is because it is more responsive, effective, and brings rapid environmental change due to its professionalism context. It gives administrators the authority to carry out their tasks as experts. He continues and explains that when public servants do not get autonomy it can result in coordination problems and lack of motivation to work.

## 2.4 Political control-counterarguments for administrative autonomy

The theories of administrative autonomy cannot be discussed in isolation of political control, who are critics of administrative autonomy. Therefore, political control arguments counterargues the existence of administrative autonomy. It is important to give a brief definition of political control since counterarguments of administrative autonomy are based on the prerequisite of political control. Political control refers to a mechanism and instruments that are used by controlled actor such as politicians and ministers for the sole reasons of influencing the decisions and the behavior of the controlled actor in this case civil servants (Verhoest et al, 2010, p.24). Since political actors do have political responsibilities for the citizens, they execute control in public organizations through hierarchical demands, and accountability which is related to steering and control. That is to say one actor, in this case, the executive manager of the public organization is responsible to another actor such as politicians in achieving objectives, fulfilling tasks or respecting norms which are set and controlled by the politicians (Ibid, 2010). Within a political governed organization there are three different types of political control that in Verhoest et al, 2012, p.24 is categorized as the *ex-ante*, *ex-nunc* and *ex-poste*. Ex-ante control assumes that control is salient in the planning and target settings such as politicians formulating political goals and objectives to

be implemented. *Ex-nun* lays emphasis on political control of measurement and monitoring whilst *ex-post* on political subsystems of evaluation, reward and sanctions and feedback.

“By using control of results (outputs and effects, or quality), the superior body can check whether or not the intended set of organizational goals and result targets have been achieved by the agency, and whether there is a need for corrective future actions by means of ‘after-the-fact’ controls (Thompson 1993), such as ex post monitoring and evaluation. Accountability here is focused on achieved results and performance, which can be formulated as efficiency, effectiveness, quality, value for money and responsiveness” (Verhoest et al, 2010, pp.24-26)

“According to Fukuyama (2014: 519 cited in Andersen et al, 2019), a key challenge of successful modernization is how to ensure that “democratic electorates grant their governments an appropriate degree of discretion and yet remain in firm control of the policies and goals that bureaucracies are meant to serve?”

Therefore, it is important to shed light that other scholars within the context of political control argue that administrative autonomy in terms of political responsibility has limitations. Andersen et al. (2019, p.285) state that a challenge with administrative autonomy to administrators or public servants from the politics is on the issue of how to avoid the well-educated public official from promoting their agendas at the expense of the policies favored by the government, in this case, politicians. That according to researchers such as Bach 2016, p.3; Jacobsson, 2015b, p.34, Fredriksson et al., 2018 can result to risks of moral hazards since the information favors agents (the administrators). Administrators can end up ignoring the needs of the citizens and the organization; therefore, raising the needs for controlling bureaucrats. Jacobsson 2015b states that politicians have a legitimate responsive role to the will of the people. Therefore, control or monitoring of bureaucracy at a certain extent is always salient for politicians to meet up with service deliveries that match up the expectations of the citizen (Ibid). It is vital to introduce organization culture that can govern an organization in a uniform way of executing tasks (Frederickson et al., 2018). Also, according to Jacobsson in his discussion about the results of NPM-New Public Management-administrative autonomy to public servants, he states that politicians are unable to uphold the desirable distinctions between politics/goals and administration means. That is when roles are divided separately, with autonomy as the leading tool, where politicians deal with “what” and administration with “how.”

Additionally, administrative tasks are political at a fundamental level. It is challenging to unbundle politics from administration by offering more administration autonomy to

administrators or public servants while ceasing political control (Waldo 1946 cited in Frederickson et al., 2018). Another risk that is discussed in Bach (2016) is that granting of autonomy from the top politicians to civil servants can be used as a method to prevent political opponents from controlling administrative decision-making after taking power. This I believe poses as a risk that results from unbalancing of power and control of administrative tasks within the political aspects of local government.

## 2.5 Relationship between administrative autonomy and political control

Political control has a relationship to administrative autonomy (Verhoest et al,2010, p.24). Administrative autonomy from its conceptual definition previously is an issue of delegating authority to civil servants but also divisions of roles with politicians focusing on political aspects concerning strategical “what” and public servants having the autonomy to deal and work with the operation of “how” implementation process without political interferences. Most researchers term this aspect as the separation of politics from administration. The administrative autonomy theory assumes that administrative autonomy spikes effectivity, flexibility, reduce overload, promotes quick decision making, creates innovation and facilitates working close to citizens. The risks, on the other hand, in terms of politics, assume that delegating of autonomy results in moral hazards and fostering illegitimate issues.

Nonetheless, it seems that both positions are salient, the fact that civil servants should have the autonomy to accomplish their tasks without political interference is vital for senior civil servants to achieve performance, and bend towards quality management of customer-orientation, but controlling and monitoring is salient for politicians who are legitimately responsible and responsive for the needs of the citizens up to the results. They have, according to the theory of political control and principal-agent to be actively engaged in the whole process of public administration. The debate over here is based on the tension between autonomy vs political control, or democracy vs legitimacy.

Also, how both administrative autonomy and political control can be compromised for better governance. Previous historical research has had to do with the same argument how a political organization can operate under a constant balance between administrative autonomy and political control, how politicians can strike a balance between degrees of autonomy and the degrees of control to develop efficient management (Andersen et al., 2019). It will be engaging through the interview analysis to see how senior civil servants and politicians in

Östra Göinge Municipality experience administrative autonomy, whether their perspectives confirm or add up to the theoretical assumption of administrative autonomy. Also, how tradeoffs between administrative autonomy and political control are compromised to answer previous controversies.

In any case, these theories and previous research inspire this study and will facilitate understanding inferences drawn from the study. What makes this study unique from previous research is its focus on a local government and the inclusion of politicians' perspective. Most of the focus has been on the state level. That will contribute to new and undermined perspectives. Through the theoretical assumptions, there is a tension between democracy and legitimacy or autonomy and control. The fact that civil servants' administrators need to have autonomy and use their professionalism, and it is important for politicians not to delegate authority and control democrats since they have accountability to represent citizens voices.

## 2.6 Previous research

Previous research shows that administrative autonomy can be conducive to transparency, clear lines of responsibility, and a sense of control since it increases trust between politicians and public servants. Empirical research on the experiences of administrative autonomy to public servants within a local government are scarce and scattered. Bouchard et al. (2018) study administrative autonomy concerning the wicked problem of immigration. They study policy-making and administrative autonomy about the case of immigration. That is through interviewing Canadian Quebecois immigration agents. They find that offering administrative autonomy to public servants in complex political situations such as immigration eases the process of addressing the situation since professionals who are experts in different complex fields use their knowledge in solving the situation.

On the other hand, Winsvold et al. study delegation and administrative autonomy concerning its impact on accountability in Norwegian municipalities. They study the perceptions of councilors and administrators in the Norwegian municipalities on the topic of the delegation of administrative autonomy. They question the extent to which administrative autonomy undermines political accountability. Their findings argue that autonomy through delegation is conducive to transparency, clear lines of responsibility, and a sense of control since it increases trust and introduces new mechanisms of control such as benchmarking and exposure to competition. However, they also find out that it can undermine the link between citizens and their politicians in the sense that it makes it difficult for citizens to contextualize

where responsibility for decisions lies and instigate blame avoidance.

Furthermore, Christensen et al. (2003) on “Coping with complex leadership roles: the problematic redefinition of government-owned enterprises” based on elite interviews study the role of autonomy delegation to government-owned enterprises using Norway and New Zealand as case studies. They conclude that delegation of autonomy by the government/politicians has made the role of central leaders more complex and ambiguous and undermined traditional political control. Also, the fact that such kind of autonomy given can result to public servants undermining political signals and considerations for decision-making. As though he studies state-owned companies, his work is still relevant. It inspires this study on the experiences of political delegation and administrative autonomy since few empirical studies are focusing on the experiences of political delegation and administrative autonomy within local governments. Additionally, Yamamoto (2006) studies the performance of semi-autonomous public on the linkage between administrative autonomy and performance in Japanese agencies. The findings in their study show that there is a causal relationship between operational autonomy and organizational effectiveness, efficiency, and quality of services. However, Overman et al. (2015) on agentification and public between sector performance by comparing 20 countries found a negative effect of agentification on both public sector output and efficiency.

Moreover, Carboni et al. (2010) have studied New Public Management on the trade-off between administrative autonomy and political control in relations to roles in the Italian Civil Service. Through interviewing both politicians and public servants, their inference is that administrative autonomy has resulted in productive collaboration, reconciliation of the dilemma administrative autonomy and political autonomy. Also, responsiveness, performance, and policy orientation have been boosted. On the other hand, Engel 1970 studied the effects of administrative autonomy on professional autonomy through sampling solo practitioners from highly urbanized area in California. He concluded that as the degree of bureaucracy that is more controlled and dominant increase, the more professional autonomy would decrease. He defines professional autonomy as the freedom to practice profession in relation to one’s trainings. Also, Hirst et al (2011) study decision-making in both centralized and decentralized environment through surveying 330 employees in 95 teams at Taiwan custom bureau. He found that a “performance- proves” and creative was positively related to creativity under low formalization, and decentralized environment.

Bergström et al. 2008 study leadership complexity in the Swedish local government by interviewing public servants and politicians; They state that difference between politics and administration is evident in theory but less so in practice. The researchers work relevant for this study since the primary way to implement and entirely use administrative autonomy is through divisions of roles with politicians focusing on the “what”, and administrators with the

“how” without politicians controlling in details the “how”. According to the researchers separating politics from the administration could result in overlapping functions between leading politicians and senior management in a local government, and formulations of ambiguous goals by politicians. Through the interviews, the researchers contextualized that many politicians thought that they must handle detailed knowledge to make the right decisions. Also, political respondents stated that it is hard to know when issues become political since they get limited information. That makes it hard for politicians to relate goals. They conclude that administrative leadership and political leadership cannot be discussed separately; neither can they be separated into different roles. The researchers state that it might be hard to strike a balance for politicians due to their roles in detail and control. For the researchers, the only way to handle a political administration is through constant dialogue and not separation of roles as though autonomy or control is evident. Between the politicians and the civil servants/ administrators.

## 2.7 Discussion on the application of the theories

It is not the motivation of this research to test theoretical assumptions and inferences from previous research. Therefore, assumptions and inferences from theories and previous research of administrative autonomy shall be used as a tool for analyzing and understanding empirical findings. This could confirm previous theories of administrative autonomy and political control, counterargue, add up or cover the gap. This will be done through reflecting empirical results or findings to theories and previous research.

## 3. Methodology

A qualitative interviewing and analysis method based on the case study and its relevance to the research shall be discussed. Moreover, this section shall discuss why a case study was used and chosen. Thereafter, a description of study object Östra Göinge Municipality governance philosophy shall follow with a motivation on why Östra Göinge Municipality is chosen as a study object. Lastly, data analysis through thematic analysis shall also be discussed in this section.

*“Every whole story, Aristotle tells us, has a beginning, a middle, and an end (Butcher, 1902). To give the details of their experience a beginning, middle, and end, people must reflect to their experience” (Seidman, 2006)*

### 3.1 Qualitative approach

A qualitative case study method through semi-structured interviewing approach shall be used for studying and exploring the inferences of this research hypothesis. Qualitative research is used for understanding, enlightening, and potentially extrapolating the results to similar situations (Sławecki, 2018, p.16). Knowledge in qualitative research is close to the social actors' perspectives. Similarly, this research involves learning about the issue of administrative autonomy by analyzing the experiences and views from participants (politicians and public servants) (Lowndes et al.2018, p.237-244). Therefore, it includes personal observations and reflections from participants within a selected political institution. Cresswell 2014, p.183-185 states that qualitative method is a suitable method for understanding experiences. Qualitative research shall be used because it understands and analyzes the complexity and dynamics of social relations and several areas of human behavior that cannot be quantified (Almeida, 2017, p.70). The ontological position of this research assumes there are many realities to the experiences of administrative autonomy which can only be understood through experiences of the participants. This can be achieved through coming close to the participants and understanding their reality and perception. Through studying experiences and gathering reflections from participants view, a full



understanding of administrative autonomy from different perspectives is conveyed.

### 3.2 Case study- Östra Göinge Municipality

A case study is relevant for this study to help in understanding experiences of public servants and politician on the importance of trust to achieve administrative autonomy in a local government, specifically in Östra Göinge Municipality. In Blaikie (2010), a case study is defined as a way a social unit is studied. A social unit, in this case, is referred to as “real” individuals, social event, and a group of people (Blaikie, 2010). Also, it is a single bounded entity studied in detail with a variety of methods over time. Case studies are usually divided into single and multiple case studies (Ebneyamini & Sadeghi Moghadam, 2018). For this research, a single case study is implemented as the study is mainly focusing on the experiences of administrative autonomy applied to a single case of Östra Göinge Municipality. Besides, it looks at the delegation of administrative autonomy through offering public servants’ administrative authority and the power to discretely work and implement process without politicians interfering at Östra Göinge Municipality.

Some municipalities in Sweden are still relying on the traditional political control method for governing public institutions. Therefore, the need for multiple case study becomes irrelevant. Using a case study is of an advantage as it addresses real-life events and uses a wide variety of practical tools (Zainal, 2007). With this, the exploration of intricate holistic patterns is explored rather than statistical or causal relations. It is argued by some researchers (Blaikie, 2017, p.191, Knutsen et al.,2012, Yin 1984&1993, cited in Zainal 2007) that single cases study manifest terms of generalization. The question of often asked is: how can a study be generalized on a single case? The fact is that a single case study cannot theoretically generalize a complex issue. While the argument is recognized, it does not mean that conclusive inferences from the case of Östra Göinge Municipality represent a conclusion on experiences of administrative autonomy on a general level.

Inferences can only depend on the types of unit of analysis. However, Östra Göinge Municipality is among the few organizations using the governing reform of delegated administrative autonomy from politicians. Therefore, inferencing from Östra Göinge Municipality will provide guidance for other municipalities or open ways for more research within the studied field. Moreover, triangulation using theories and previous research to conform experiences and perspectives of the interview correspondents can, to a specific extent, aid in generalization of this study. Before delving in more profound to presenting Östra Göinge Municipality, it is essential to give a brief background on the politics of municipal governance in Sweden. There are 290 municipalities, also known as local

governments, in Sweden (SKR-Sverige's Kommuner och Regioner *Swedish Municipalities and Regions*, 2020). The governance of municipalities in Sweden is related to the state in which according to Swedish municipality law municipalities should have self-governance or governing autonomy from the Swedish state (Ibid). However, at individual extent, states still intervene, and control issues related to state budget (Ibid). The municipalities in Sweden oversee social services matters such as schools, employment, health, and elderly care. 70 per cent of income sources for the municipalities come from taxes while 30 per cent is funded by the state (Ibid, 2020).

Additionally, municipalities are usually governed by local politicians who are democratically chosen by the people within each municipality. Östra Göinge Municipality located in the southern part of Sweden is one of the 290 municipalities in Sweden with approximately 15000 demographics (Ibid,2020). This study looks at the experiences of the delegation of administrative autonomy from the political level to top administration at Östra Göinge Municipality. I chose this municipality because I had an opportunity to do my internship within the department of strategic planning and evaluation. During that period, I noticed the circulation of the concept of administrative autonomy was rhetoric within the municipality for both politicians and public servants. With theoretical knowledge and interest in the implementation process in relation to governing models, and, also tensions of administrative autonomy and political control, I became curious to research further about administrative autonomy in Östra Göinge Municipality's staff experiences and success factors.

Furthermore, Östra Göinge Municipality has recently gained much popularity because it has acted as an inspiration to other municipalities regarding its governing reforms (Kristianstadsbladet, 2018). The governing philosophy has over time been cited as an excellent example by Trust delegation in Sweden (See, Bringseluis, 2017). Making Östra Göinge Municipality more credible to be studied.

### 3.3 Data gathering and choice of respondents

A qualitative semi-structured interviewing method is used to gather data necessary to answer the research questions. Roulston, 2013, pp.2-3 states that when using interviewing techniques as a method of gathering data, the theoretical assumption is for that the parties involved engage in asking and answering questions. To elicit answers, on the other hand, Seidman, 2006, p.9 argues that interviewing is not only about asking and answering questions but also about understanding peoples live experience. In conjunction with the purpose of this study, which is understanding the experiences of administrative autonomy not just conveying

description of experiences, a hermeneutics and phenomenological approach to interviewing is used. The phenomenological approach seeks to describe lived experiences while hermeneutics seeks to understand and interpret these described experiences. Therefore, from a phenomenological interviewing approach, my focus is to explore how experiences of administrative autonomy by public servants and politicians and how they make sense of it.

Conversely, from a hermeneutic approach, I focused on interpreting and understanding the explored experiences of administrative autonomy by public servants and politicians at Östra Göinge Municipality. I seek the interviewing approach to describe, understand, and examine the interpretative meaning aspects of lived experiences, in this case, experiences of public servants and politicians adopting administrative autonomy. A reflective dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee was used to encourage reflections and clarify understandings of different concepts that respondents bring to the table (Dinkins, cited in Roulston, 2013, pp.12-13).

Furthermore, interpretations of the interviews were made throughout the interviewing processes rather than as a separate momentum after interviewing (Roulston, 2013). It was suitable to use semi-structured with open-ended questions to get in a comprehensive perspective. The participants could formulate their own words concerning administrative autonomy in Östra Göinge Municipality (Roulston, 2013). Further, Roulston, 2013 describes that semi-structured open-ended interviews work as probes to get respondents to give more information and knowledge. However, they also help the interviewer to reflect on what and how the respondents answer questions. The theme and purpose of the research, together with the interview questions, were specific and clear to facilitate a response from respondents (Roulston, 2013, p.7). The interviewing method for this research is suitable and beneficial since the investigation of organizations and governmental reforms can only be understood through the experience of individuals who make the organization, as stated by Seidman, 2006, p.10. Also, it offers a direct understanding of human behaviors and attitudes (in this case being politicians and senior civil servants) through allowing the researcher to interact with individuals. Therefore, building knowledge on social constructions (Mosley, 2013, p.2).

### 3.4 Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling selection, also referred to as judgmental, was used in choosing the participants for this study. The samples for the interviews were chosen using non-probability (randomly) in relation to the purpose of this research (Mosley, 2013, p.18). I chose eight top public administrators and four politicians randomly. The top public administrators consisted of the municipality director, the managers in charge of social

development, economy, social health, education and work, analysis, planning, and quality. Conversely, the politicians represented ruling political parties in Östra Göinge Municipality, social democrats, moderates, and Christian democrats.

Senior civil servants were chosen since they work closely in relation to politicians and delegate tasks from the top to department/ first-line managers. Also, this research looks at administrative autonomy from the political level to top public administrators and politicians. Setting up the stage and recruiting interviewees were a challenge due to the Corona crisis that put most managers and politicians at alert and off duty. However, before interviewing, a thorough study and research on the context, Göinge governing philosophy and each manager to be interviewed was carried to ensure that the researcher and the interviewees could be on track during the interviews (Roulston, 2013). Additionally, I gathered a lot of information on the Göinge governing philosophy in relation to administrative autonomy at Östra Göinge Municipality. I consulted 15 civil servants that gave a further introduction of the philosophy. Besides, since this was a qualitative study, I searched online for articles related to the Göinge governing philosophy. After, having enough information through researching and consulting on the related topic, I requested consent for studying Östra Göinge Municipality from the Municipality chief executive. A green light was given, and I went on further to email selected senior servant and politicians to be interviewed. One of the senior servants declined the request due to the COVID-19 crisis related to backlogs at work. Also, some politicians such as the center, and Swedish democrats did not reply to my request. Still, I knew I would almost get a piece of similar information from the other political parties (moderates and Christ democrats) since they operate as an alliance with almost the same political opinions to governing reforms.

### 3.5 Research ethics

To be transparent, clear, and ethical the email consisted of the research theme, the purpose of the research, and the fact that they could choose to be anonymous or not. Also, the email stated that the participants could voluntarily participate. All interviewees were promised access to interview transcripts and report if so wish. Silverman, 2013, p.149 states that informed consent is central to ethical guidelines in research. Research subjects have the right to know what is being researched. Besides, they have the right to be informed about the nature of the study and the right to withdraw at any time. Moreover, According to Roulston, 2013, interviews should be carried out in an environment that is convenient for the interview participants. For this purpose, almost all interviews were done at the municipality house, and a few through skype for those that worked from home due to the corona virus pandemic.

### 3.6 Data analysis

The interviews were recorded using Evernote, which is a phone app for recording interviews. Notes were taken down as a backup. After the interviews, I listened actively to recorded interviews and transcribed. The transcription process consisted of active engagement and familiarization with the data I collected. Also, it involved reflecting on what I could hear and making assumptions that I was seeking from the data. A thematic analysis was used as an analytical tool for the transcribed data. This is because the purpose of the research was in exploring and understanding experiences and sense-making of administrative autonomy in a local government in Sweden (see, Floersch et al., 2010). I intended to confirm or add up to theories of administrative autonomy. The process for analysis consisted of coding, data categorization, and thematic representation.

Firstly, coding and labeling were applied to sections of the transcribed data. Coding and labeling help to represent data that can be relevant to the researched topic (Roulston, 2013, p.4). The strategy of coding I used involved thoroughly reading and engaging with every transcription to formulate and define codes at the side margins of each transcription. I focused mostly on the labels that were related or categorized under the theoretical framework of administrative autonomy such as flexible, effective, efficient, innovative, creative, decrease on the burden, moral hazards, illegitimate and any other new criteria of experience that elapsed where relevant. Within the coding process, I made sure I went back to each earlier coded transcription to compare and check whether emerging concepts were present. This was useful in grouping together repetitive coding (Roulston, 2013, p.4). While coding the transcribed data, I managed to stay as close as possible to the data being coded. Through the iterative and recursive process, as stated by Roulston, 2013, a list of relevant preliminary codes related to experiences of administrative autonomy was collected. They were then adjusted, collapsed, and exhausted to compress them into categories.

Secondly, was categorization which is defined as concepts that analysts use to organize the codes that have been generated through examinations (Roulston, 2013, p.6). The collected codes were read and re-examined to develop ideas about the data and put them into single, more significant issues of categories (Ibid). These categories were then presented as results before through applying Wolcott 1994 analysis dimension of description, analysis, and interpretation. The reduced categories (experiences collected) were described and then analyzed and interpreted in relation to each category, and previous theories (Roulston, 2013).

## 3.7 Discussion on research quality

The limitations of Qualitative interviewing methods is always bent towards issues to do with reliability, validity, reflexivity.

### 3.7.1 Reliability

Reliability is the confidence we place in each measurement of research (Mosley,2013, pp.20). The extent to which collected information is correct and if the same information would be collected. That is to say; the collected data should be replicated and give the same collected data if another researcher would decide to collect. Reliability is one of the weaknesses that qualitative research suffers. The qualitative interviewing research method has been criticized for providing indirect information filtered through the eyes of the interviewed participants (Cresswell, 2014, p.191). To address the weakness of qualitative interviewing method, I not only transcribed collected data but also recorded directly. The voice record can be consulted for future check-ups (Mosley,2013, pp.20-21). Also, during data analysis, triangulation has been used through comparing what each interviewee has said and then extracting of repetitive phrases (Ibid). However, it is also essential to state that the original data collected was in Swedish, and the whole interview was in Swedish, which is a different language to the presentation of the paper. I am fluent in Swedish and English both at an academic level; therefore, i made sure I translated line by to stay consistent with the words of the interviewees. I have used English as a language of presentation because i want this work to be read and understood internationally amongst non-Swedish speakers.

### 3.7.2 Validity

Validity is the extent to which one's measurement, in this case, interviewing, gauges the propertied that it is supposed to measure (Mosley,2013, pp. 22-23). Explanatory, the data collected from interviewing politicians and civil servants at Östra Göinge Municipality should gauge with the theoretical assumptions and prior knowledge before research. Validity is appreciated as one of the strengths of the qualitative interviewing method (Cresswell, 2014, p.201). To keep a record with the strength of validity, I analyzed what has been learned in previous interviews to check the validity of future interviews. That is through capturing all perspectives from civil servants and politicians. Also, I evaluated interview data that i collected to other empirical materials, such as previous research and theoretical assumptions. States that causality chains can be reconstructed through multiple paths and a range of

methods (Lamont et al., 2014). Also, I emailed the final report draft to the interviewee do they could review, and also to some peers for debriefing just to confirm that everything is written as clear as much as valuable (Creswell, 2014, p.201-202).

### 3.7.3 Reflexivity and subjectivity

Reflexibility is the reflection of the roles and the backgrounds that can shape the interpretations of the study (Cresswell, 2014, p.186). Also, according to Roulston, 2010, the researcher can be able to self-consciously refer to him or herself in relation to the production of knowledge about research topics (Roulston 2010). It contains commitments to how the interpretation of the research is shaped by the researchers' background (Cresswell, 2014, p.202). Mosely states that individual traits can affect the research process; therefore, it is salient for the researcher to state subjectivism (Mosely, 2013, p.12). Also, subjectivity is an integral part of one's apprentices as a reflexive researcher (Roulston, 2013, p.5). As a researcher, my background as a young researcher, a black female immigrant, a former employee and intern, and politically active in Östra Göinge Municipality can affect the interpretation and collection of data. I see my subjectivity as both a problem and credibility. As a young researcher interviewing power elites, I could get no response for the interview, have access problem, or get little from the interviewee. The strategy I applied to avoid this coincidence was to first and foremost create trust between the interviewee and me through introducing myself and the reasons for the interview and how and where it shall be published.

Moreover, as a black female immigrant, I risk to not get specific confidential responses for my interview or also, I can be undervalued for knowing little about Swedish governance and political system; therefore, not get sufficient information. As though Mosley (2013) argues that it can be easy for a researcher with a foreign background to get more information than a local as interviewees feel more comfortable. My background as a former employee and intern and a free time politician is credibility since I understand and have experiences and have observed governance in Östra Göinge Municipality, therefore reducing the amount of invalid information I get from the interviewees.

## 4. Result and analysis

### 4.1 Governance in Östra Göinge Municipality

Before turning to the result and analysis, it is important to discuss how Östra Göinge Municipality was governed, opinions regarding that method of governing, and how it is governed now. Previously, Östra Göinge Municipality was governed in a traditional way. This meant a more hands-on approach or control, with most decisions being made by politicians and extensive control of departments by the politicians, while also boosting political engagement. The traditional governance in Östra Göinge Municipality consisted of fragmented departments in which each department was to focus only on its specific mission without interfering in the duties of other departments (response from interviews). There were multiple organisations, for which the committee board was responsible. The board implemented the decisions that were made by the municipality council, which today is mostly done by the organisation through the mandate of the municipality director. The committee board, which consisted of free-time politicians, also had autonomy in making draft decisions. In 2006, financial crises and challenges within the municipalities sparked discussions and debates on implementing a new model that would establish clear role division, speed up decision-making and increase professionalism for the purpose of managing the crisis. The interview responses below offer perspectives on the traditional method of governance and reasons behind the introduction of the delegation of administrative autonomy and mandates; though this is not the focus of this paper, it is nonetheless useful contextual information. According to the municipality strategist:

“During 2006 we had a finance crisis amongst the population. That drove the change. It was a period of economic difficulty in the municipality. We saw that we must do something drastic. That way, one could limit the committee and administration. Then we thought we should test this model” (municipality strategist and one of the initiators of the model).



The traditional way of governing was a negative tool of governance in terms of enforcing clear roles and responsibility; as the Municipality strategist puts it:

“Experience said that we must have clear roles; sometimes one should just decide and see how new changes can work. It was constructed on this” (municipality strategist).

Moreover, the traditional way of governing in Östra Göinge Municipality, which involved politicians at the centre having a greater mandate, while senior civil servants had a lesser mandate, was also seen as ineffective and weak in terms of solving crises in the municipality. The municipal chief executive has commented that:

“The old way of governing was not working anymore. It was ineffective, the economy was poor, and all was devastating. There was a crisis in the municipality. There were not a lot of people that wanted to go that way.”

Moreover, some high-ranking civil servants, such as the senior civil servant for education and employment, stated that the traditional way of governing paved the way for politicians to interfere with “how” issues-policy implementation- that were to be handled by those civil servants who had knowledge of the issues, henceforth civil servants focusing on issues that were not relevant to the department.

“I think, when I started at the municipality, it was not trust-based, and politicians worked a lot with the implementation issues. This influenced our autonomy and focused more on irrelevant issues that the department did not need” (senior civil servant for education).

The fact that there was a financial crisis, unclear roles and responsibility, and ineffective governance in the municipality meant that a new governing philosophy that would enable the management of the crisis, while clearly defining roles and responsibilities, had to be introduced. Therefore, the political and administrative roles would become divided. This resulted in the abolishment of the committee board, who were responsible for the governance of departments. Instead, autonomy and mandate were handed over to the organisation and its civil administrators, which saw the rise of Östra Göinge’s governing philosophy and model. There were no more committee boards, and departments were merged into one administration and management, with trust between politicians and senior civil servants and between department managers and their employees being the tool for

accomplishing the model. The philosophy addresses some of the weaknesses of the traditional model discussed above, such as introducing clear role divisions between political and administrative tasks, to achieve the objective of administrative autonomy. More specifically, politicians in Östra Göinge Municipality have a role to play in “what” policy initiation, and administrators have complete administrative autonomy in the how-implementation process. Therefore, it is important to study experiences relating to the governing philosophy of delegating administrative autonomy and mandate, for better or worse. It is helpful to consider whether it complied with the expectations of the municipality in creating clear roles and responsibilities, managing crises, and increasing effectiveness.

## 4.2 The aftermath: experiences of administrative autonomy of senior civil servants, and politicians in Östra Göinge Municipality

### 4.2.1 A boost to professionalism

According to Fox (1992, p.13), professionalism is a calling to serve the best interest of the general population and enhance its welfare through the advancement of specialised techniques, skills, and knowledge. Max Weber stipulates that the technical skills and professionalism of bureaucrats are essential and that bureaucrats should be left to accomplish their given tasks using their knowledge and skills (Serpa et al., 2018, p.14). Moreover, for Weber, civil servants are tasked with the duty of providing services and fulfilling the will of the government through the competencies and areas of expertise they hold (Ibid). While questioning senior civil servants in Östra Göinge Municipality on their experiences of their administrative autonomy from politicians, some of the respondents stated that administrative autonomy is a tool that boosts competencies, knowledge and education in order to meet the needs of the citizens, as compared to the previous traditional way of governing in which civil servants’ competencies were less frequently exploited. The municipality chief executive stated that:

“Through governing using administrative autonomy, we take consideration of our employees’ career knowledge more than an organisation where politicians are detailed and controlling.”

The municipality strategic planner, who was also one of the initiators of the Östra Göinge governing philosophy, experienced administrative autonomy not only as a tool for boosting professionalism but also as a way of prioritising work that leans towards citizens' expectations. He stated that:

“The most important question was whom we belong to? which is the citizens. And who works close to the citizens? Which are the departments. Most of the employees have education and knowledge. One must trust the education and competence that most employees have, instead of politicians interfering.”

The response, indicating that administrative autonomy does increase the level of professionalism through creating space for knowledge and skill use, relates to and reflects the arguments made by Engel (1970, pp.12-13), Bringseluis (2017), Christen (199, p.310) and Evan et al. (2019). According to these authors, autonomy is an important element of professionalism. For instance, Engel identified a link between administrative autonomy and professionalism, with those in a slightly bureaucratic setting with autonomy perceiving themselves as having more professional autonomy, while those in the highly bureaucratic settings with more control perceived themselves as having less professional autonomy. Bringseluis (2017) specifically argues that administrative autonomy shifts administrators' role, applying their skills and knowledge more directly to the needs of citizens. Administrators become more accountable to their communities, as illustrated by the interview responses. This is deemed to increase the quality of the services provided by an organisation.

Furthermore, the interviewees' views regarding the fact that motivation and expertise are increased when administrative autonomy is delegated to senior civil servants relate to Evan et al.'s (2019) argument that administrative autonomy gives administrators the authority to carry out their tasks as experts, which may boost their motivation. Therefore, based on documented experiences of administrative autonomy, previous research, and theoretical assumption, it can be argued that administrative autonomy boosts professionalism since civil servants are given a platform to use their skills and knowledge. This is beneficial in that it motivates civil servants to provide enhanced services to citizens.

#### 4.2.2 Powerful seed for creativity

Employee engagement and creativity is important for an organisation's survival and innovation (Amabile, 1998; Goldham and Cummings, 1996, cited in Hirst et al., 2011, p.624). The data from the interview also indicated that senior civil servants viewed the administrative autonomy distributed by politicians as a powerful catalyst for engagement and creativity in their daily work. That is because they are given the freedom to make decisions and come up with suggestions using their knowledge, skills and expertise without any political interference. According to the interviewees, this boosts their engagement and willingness to be more creative in their role. As the most senior civil servant for health and care has put it:

“Creativity flourishes, the result of tasks become important to report than to abstractly report on goals. That is because the decision is made by the managers and employees that have the will to engage”

The correspondent's response, which implies that administrative autonomy boosts creativity, aligns with Jacobsson et al.'s (2015a, p.5) assumptions that administrative autonomy results from organisations that think critically and seek new purposes. It also relates to Overman's (2016) view that administrators working in an autonomous environment become more innovative as they gain the opportunity to work more closely with citizens. In addition, the interviewees stated that they became more engaged when they were given more opportunities to devise ways of implementing their own tasks. As the most senior civil service manager for education and the labour market put it:

“I believe that out in the departments, the more responsibility one gets, the more one grows, the more engaged and important one feels as a whole.”

The contribution of administrative autonomy relates to Hirst et al.'s (2011) argument that centralised decision-making in a more controlled centralised setting reduces opportunities for individuals to generate original ideas, while decision-making in a more decentralised setting with more autonomy (such as in Östra Göinge Municipality) encourages individuals to contribute and actively engage in decision-making, which affords individuals an opportunity to express their views and contribute through proactive engagement in potential challenges that face the

organisation. The civil servants in Östra Göinge Municipality have spoken of a similar experience to that described above. Therefore, from the Östra Göinge Municipality interviews, in connection with previous research, it can be concluded that administrative autonomy is a positive strategy for boosting creativity and engagement in public organisations since civil servants get the opportunity to express their views and apply their knowledge.

#### 4.2.3 Flexible and efficient

The rhetoric of performance, which relates to the flexibility and efficiency associated with administrative autonomy, was common amongst both senior civil servants and politicians during the interviews. Most of the civil servants stated that administrative autonomy results in the efficient contextualisation of remedies and resolutions. This is because they have the autonomy and responsibility necessary for managing their own resources and governing the organisation. Moreover, according to the interviews, the decision-making process is streamlined since they, the senior civil servants, are given the necessary autonomy and independence from politicians to draft various complex decisions. This, according to some senior civil servants, facilitates exposure of effects since they can be read faster. Some of the interviewees argued that this would not have been possible under the traditional mode of governance since issues would have to be debated through several political phases and platforms:

“It creates a prerequisite to be efficient in finding solutions, which depends on our having the responsibility for the resources and organisation. It is something that is not achievable in the traditional way” (municipal chief executive).

“It becomes easier to reach decisions and achieve results; it becomes flexible, giving us a comprehensive perspective based on our collective results. If we were using a traditional mode of governance, the decision-making process would be long and complex since issues would have to be debated by every politician and political committee. We were never able to make decisions efficiently when we used the traditional mode of governance” (municipal chief executive).

“The decision-making process is much shorter and therefore the effects can be seen quickly. The delegation’s orders and mission are clear about what politicians want and what they may wish to focus on in four years’ time. In other municipalities, politicians have been more involved in the decision-making that is here decided by civil servants” (senior civil servant for education).

“It segregates out decision-making as far as possible, compared to the traditional way of governing that we had, which also means that it raises fewer political issues, which allows politicians to focus on the right things. It also increases the effective ability of the organisation to work on the right things” (senior civil servant for social development).

Further, some politicians state that the governing philosophy of delegating administrative autonomy reduces the time and labour involved in the decision-making process within the sphere of politics and policy implementation. This is because it allows politicians more space to focus on reflecting the strategic goals and their results, while leaving the implementation process to civil servants.

“It reduces the number of political issues, so that politicians can focus on the right things, and the organisation can work with the right things, thereby increasing effectivity. The governing philosophy gives politicians a chance to think politically” (leader of the moderate political party).

The municipal chief executive compared Östra Göinge Municipality with other neighbouring municipalities that still use the traditional governing philosophy’s higher levels of political control and centralised decision-making.

“The governing philosophy in Östra Göinge Municipality frees up more time, allowing us to use the time to follow up on departments rather than making a lot of decisions on detail. This lets us see how we had thought and why it has become the way it is” (municipal chief executive).

Additionally, according to the municipal chief executive, in his experience it takes a great deal of time to come to decisions in other municipalities since there are more politicians involved and issues have to be debated by the municipal executive committee, and the municipality assembly before they reach to administrative and operation level. He gave an example related to the migration situation in 2015 when autonomy was delegated from political level down to administrative level in which senior civil servants had to find solutions for the overloaded early child care system in Östra Göinge Municipality. This was well handled by civil servants since it involved an area of expertise and was left to the experts, according to the municipal chief executive:

“Regarding effectiveness, in other municipalities, if someone is going to do something, it takes a lot of time, but here in Östra Göinge civil servants can predict situations early and react to them. The best example of this is that one civil servant initiated an early childcare programme and politicians read about it in the newspaper. It was an emergency during the migration crisis.”

In relation to administrative autonomy and the effective management of crises, this is what the group leader for the moderates had to say:

“It is effective. One trusts that the professionals have knowledge of different issues, and they are given the responsibility to administrate, make decisions and manage the situation. It has allowed for quick response times during periods of crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic. Our civil servants have the autonomy to manage the crisis and we have managed it well in Östra Göinge Municipality.”

An acknowledgement of administrative autonomy as sustainable reform in facilitating management in times of crisis was also expressed by other senior civil servants and politicians. Some stated that administrative autonomy had resulted in a rapid response amongst administrators in times of crisis, such as the migration crisis and COVID19. According to the municipal chief executive:

“We would not have been able to handle the crisis if we had not had administrative autonomy and clear role divisions. Managers and employees become quick to manage the situation. Without this governing model, it would have been more difficult with regard to preparedness, voting and all that. We managed to get 50 quick places for immigrants’ children; we managed to find housing; we employed people and were able to start up departments. We decided in December 2015 and the beginning of January 2016 that a new department should be established without political input or political interference.”

Moreover, the municipality director stated that Östra Göinge Municipality would not have coped with the 2015 migration crisis had it not been for the governing philosophy on the delegation of mandate and administrative autonomy. As the municipal chief executive has put it:

“I claim that we would not have managed if we had the old, traditional way of working. There would have been conflict between the committees regarding who

should pay, and all that. We are one organisation; we have one accountability and we work together.”

According to a senior civil servant for the department for social development, crises are easily solved under the philosophy of delegated mandate and administrative autonomy because this makes it clear as to how administrators need to cooperate to resolve issues collectively using their technical training. A senior civil servant for the department of social development has stated that:

“It becomes easier to resolve organisational stakes such as corona, for example. It becomes clearer as to how we cooperate. We own the issue and we solve it collectively. There is the possibility to solve such problems.”

The documented experiences of administrative autonomy in relation to performance as a model that boosts effectivity, efficiency and flexibility affirm the assumptions of previous researchers. Firstly, the hypothesis that administrative autonomy is effective in times of crisis was also contextualised by Bouchard et al. (2008), who interviewed Canadian and Quebecois immigration agents on their discretion and autonomy in times of migration crisis. They argue that decision-making in complex and controversial policy areas is left to civil servants, meaning that civil servants can use their discretionary or autonomous power to make decisions that will have significant rational consequences. They found that the reason for the effective management of the migration crisis was partly since civil servants held a powerful role in times of the crisis because they had relevant knowledge and understood the issue better.

Similarly, Bristles (2017) states that the power of administrative autonomy in distinctive roles increases effectiveness as each administrative operative (and in this case senior civil servant) is able to focus on their area of expertise. Also, productivity increases as employees get the chance to work more closely with citizens. This is evident through the interviews cited above. On the same topic, Jacobsson et al. (2017, p.12) discuss the role of administrative autonomy in the light of the reduced burden for politicians, which allows them to focus on more important issues. According to them, autonomy provides space and time for reflection for politicians, which serve as a catalyst for more productive forms of decision-making, a view that is supported by the interviewees cited above. Therefore, delegating administrative autonomy to civil servants can reduce the pressure on politicians, who generally do not have the time to address the significant decision-making tasks they face, compared with the traditional mode of governance. This allows them to focus on important essential issues and formulate clearer, more strategic objectives.

On the same note, Nickan (1971, cited in Overman, 2016, p.1245) argues that efficiency increases when the monopoly of governing authority is divided into “what” and “how” tasks,



whereby administrators get more delegated autonomy for policy implementation. This generates accountability, with one actor (such as a civil servant) being accountable to another for achieving objectives, fulfilling tasks or respecting norms that are determined or controlled by the second actor (Verhoest et al., 2010, p.25). In addition, Overman et al. (2016) argue that autonomy, which they regard as synonymous with agentification, results in performance improvements in areas such as effectiveness, efficiency and compliance because it results in specialised, expert public services, which leads to a closer correlation between client demands and services. This is evident in the comments of the deputy mayor, who is a politician:

“That is why the results within the municipality have been very positive, economically, over the past 10 years, as compared to when we had the traditional way of governing. I think the important element is the mode of governance, because the organisation has a clear mandate and autonomy to do things and does not have to wait while politicians consider the issue.”

From the above experiences and previous research that sheds light on the effectiveness of administrative autonomy in crisis situations, it is clear from both the case of Östra Göinge Municipality and the triangulation of other previous research that administrative autonomy is a viable governing model that boosts performance in public organisations specifically in times of crisis. Some researchers, such as Overman (2016, p.617) would argue that there is a negative relationship between administrative autonomy and performance, but these findings prove such arguments wrong, and also contribute to the scarce empirical research on the relationship between administrative autonomy and performance in public organisations.

#### 4.2.4 Clear roles and responsibilities for civil servants

During the interviews, some senior civil servants stated that they had found that administrative autonomy as a governing philosophy made their roles and responsibilities clear in ways that the traditional mode of governing did not. It allowed an opportunity to distinguish between what is political and what is administrative, thereby reducing the need to go back to politicians for clarifications. This is because they get the autonomy to focus more on the implementation process that their roles are designed for, rather than on the “what” agenda, also because of the autonomous working environment that provides them with an open strategy on how to act. As the municipal chief executive and strategic planner have noted,

“For us civil servants it is easier; it is straightforward. We know what our

responsibilities are and what our authority is, and we know what results we can achieve” (municipal chief executive).

“It is easy to understand what needs to be done by us” (municipal chief executive).

“Since we established a clear governing philosophy, it has been easy for me to know what I should do and what I should not. It is also clear what I should say. We do not need to go back to politicians, as we did when we had the traditional way of governing; we know from the documents what politicians think and want. We have significant administrative autonomy, which depends on there being clarity in the governance documents regarding strategy, objectives and goal planning” (strategic planner).

“The delegation of administrative autonomy model is a near-ideal solution. We have one senior civil servant at the top, who maintains relations with the politicians. It is very clear in that sense, compared to the traditional model, where we would have three managers who would meet politicians with the same level influence as the municipality director. That has never been effective as it was hard to have everything together since responsibilities were not delegated” (senior civil servant for societal development).

This view on administrative autonomy having a positive synergy to clear roles and responsibilities was not only held by senior civil servants but was also reiterated by some politicians, such as the deputy mayor:

“I think it is working well with this delegation of mandates, autonomy and role division between politicians and organisations. It becomes really clear who is doing what” (deputy mayor).

Some senior civil servants and politicians in Östra Göinge Municipality experience administrative autonomy, though focusing on the “how”-policy implementation-, as a tool that defines clear roles and responsibilities. This confirms, to some extent, a correlation or positive relationship between administrative autonomy, clear roles and responsibility. This, therefore, brings the discussion about the dichotomy regarding the separation of political and administrative roles to a close. This relates to the arguments and assumptions made by Christensen (p.7) that clear roles reduce corruption and political meddling, guarantee more accountability, and facilitate a more professional merit-based democracy. Similarly, regarding the interview responses on

administrative autonomy, clear roles and responsibility, within the school of NPM it is assumed that autonomy, clear role division and responsibility can encourage civil servants to be more efficient and effective in aligning their services more closely with the needs of citizens. This is because civil servants become more conscious of the roles they are required to play. This argument was also put forward in the interviews, with the senior civil servants the for social and health department, and the schools and employment department stating, respectively:

“Because there is clarity in what we do or are allowed to do on different levels, in accordance with the philosophy of administrative autonomy, an environment that determines effective roles for employees is achieved.”

“We are free to analyse our own departments and can, therefore, take the most effective action.”

#### 4.2.5 Trust-building and cooperation

Some senior civil servants viewed the governing philosophy of politicians delegating mandates through administrative channels as a means of establishing trust and cooperation not only between politicians and civil servants, but also between civil servants from different departments. Some civil servants believe that in gaining delegated administrative autonomy from politicians, they have also gained a sense of trust, and are therefore more able to commit to a political agenda using their own knowledge and training. In addition, some civil servants believe that delegated administrative autonomy is a significant source of internal trust-building and cooperation, in that it allows departments to autonomously organize themselves during the implementation process and handle collective issues together, compared to the traditional model, in which departments could only focus on their own specific issues and report directly to the relevant political committee.

“Politicians have shown us significant trust within the municipality. They show their trust in us when they delegate to us the decision-making process regarding how certain issues must be tackled” (municipal chief executive).

“Since we were given administrative autonomy over the implementation process, it has been easy to work as an organisation in terms of cooperating between departments. This results in trust amongst us while reducing the administrative load. Under the traditional model, we were only concerned with our departments and did not get the chance to interact beyond our departmental borders in important collective issues” (senior municipality civil servant for education).

The synergy between administrative autonomy and trust-building through cooperation and collaboration has been addressed by Carboni (2012) with regard to administrative autonomy and political control in Italy. This synergy leads to understanding and reconciliation between politicians and administrators.

#### 4.2.6 Vague roles for politicians

Some politicians and senior civil servants stated in the interviews that administrative autonomy that focuses on the “how” without political interferences can cause political roles to become vague, as it tends to only give politicians autonomy in strategic roles whilst blocking the previous traditional political role of interfering with the implementation process of the “how”, which was the main reason for active political participation. As the municipal chief executive has put it:

“This model is challenging for the politicians; in that it gives them another political role than the traditional one.”

“Though I am not a politician, I think that it can be hard for them to find roles. Often, if one engages politically in the municipality, one does so on the basis that there is something concrete that one wants to change. This results in a situation in which politicians feel that they cannot change something concrete through the organisation since it is the civil servants who mostly work on that. Instead they feel that they must exert their influence.”

The perception of vague roles for politicians was also reiterated by one of the politicians, who is a group leader for the moderate party in Östra Göinge Municipality. As much as he appreciated

the governing philosophy of delegating more autonomy and mandate to senior civil servants to allow them to focus on the “how”-implementation process, he was critical of the fact that there are difficulties with the governing philosophy in terms of finding the balance as a politician and therefore not to evade the stare passage more in discerning the roles of the “how” and “what”.

“Administrative autonomy should focus on “how”, and strategic autonomy on “what”; it is hard sometimes to accept that the philosophy can be implemented. It is hard sometimes as a politician to find a balance and not lose direction.”

The negative relationship between administrative autonomy and political roles has been addressed by Christensen et al. (2003), who state that the devolution and decentralisation of autonomy makes the roles of politicians more complex and ambiguous, which undermines a traditional way of governance that was based on control and legitimate relations with the electorate (p.819). Waldo (1946, cited in Frederickson et al., 2018) argues that administrative tasks are political at a fundamental level, which means that it can be a challenge to disentangle politics from administration when politicians offer more responsibility and autonomy to senior civil servants. Hansen et al. (2002, p.738, cited in Bergström et al., 2008) remind us that it makes no sense to talk about the political without talking about the administration and vice versa; they are, to a substantial extent, integrated, and this is evident from the responses of the interviewees. The border between politics and administration is highly porous.

This issue can only be resolved by formulating a model that can balance the political and administrative roles.

#### 4.2.7 Low engagement level for politicians

Some researchers, such as Carboni et al. (2010), have identified a link between administrative autonomy and the field of politics in terms of pricing reconciliation, collaboration and solving the dilemma between administration and politics. This was not the view that was expressed, however, when I interviewed politicians in Östra Göinge Municipality. Some administrators and politicians stated during the interviews that some free-time politicians felt that they had little to say and made few decisions compared to the traditional way of governing. As a politician, one does not really get to fulfil their aims of detailed governance, which is one of the primary reasons for political engagement. This is because many issues are administrative in nature and require an administrator’s expertise. As the strategic analyst has noted:

“We understand that politicians have said that they have little to say. This

is because politicians make few decisions these days, because we have clear delegation.”

This is what one of the politicians in the ruling party in the municipality—the moderates—had to say:

“There is no space for detail issues as a politician, which is one of the most important factors as to why one becomes a politician. How should politicians at the lower levels engage?”

The view of political engagement was reiterated by the deputy mayor, who is the most senior politician. He too claims that the issue is not simply concerned with reduced political engagement for other politicians but also with how to localise politicians that think strategically:

“It is a challenge to get political engagement on the right level. It is a challenge in every trust-based governance in which autonomy and some mandate are delegated to the administration level, but it is the right path to follow. The challenge for politics is to recruit politicians that have the capacity to think and act strategically.”

Furthermore, the argument regarding the view that the delegation of administrative autonomy to execute the “how” leads to low political engagement was mostly expressed by the municipality’s political opposition, who thought that, while the governing philosophy is good for administrators in terms of performance and clarity, it does not favour the role of politicians since few politicians get the opportunity to engage and are blocked from understanding how issues are managed on a more administrative level. The opposition leader for the social democrats in Östra Göinge Municipality states that:

“Democracy is built on the fact that people should engage and participate; there should be space for people to discuss and defend politics. The potential for this has decreased in our municipality. We no longer have political committees. There is a smaller arena in which to talk about the future of the municipality, and less opportunity for people to participate in politics. The organisation and the municipal chief executive make the decisions.”

“As an opposition party, there is not much opportunity. Under the traditional model, we would have greater potential because we would decide issues through

committees; we no longer have that arena. Now it is so much top governance. The opposition has less ability to influence politics.”

Administrative autonomy in the implementation process can be used as a method to block engagement of political opponents from having any control over administrative matters (Bach, 2016). This is evident in the current study; the interviews indicate that some politicians do not get the chance to actively engage in issues. The interviews also confirm Fredriksson et al.’s (2003) argument that the use of administrative autonomy in implementation can make the roles of politicians ambiguous and may undermine the traditional political role itself. It is evident from the statements given above that administrative autonomy can undermine legitimate political roles. This aligns with the view held by Jacobsson et al. (2017, p.13) that politicians have a legitimate role to play in detail control, which is important in meeting the expectations of the electorate.

Equally, Bergström et al. (2008) state that it might be difficult to strike a balance regarding role division for politicians due to their roles in detail and control. There is also the issue of policy entrenchment and the fact that civil servants have more information and expertise whereas politicians have more resources for public relations work and engagement with the media and stakeholders. As Belay (2002, pp.132-133) points out, administrative autonomy through the division of policy and execution can be difficult to achieve.

## 5. Discussion/Reflection

The focus of this study was to study and understand civil servants and politicians' experiences of administrative autonomy. According to previous research and theoretical assumptions, administrative autonomy is viewed as a governing tool that increases skills, increase client orientation, boosts performance in terms of effectivity, efficiency, and creativity, manage crises. But, also as a tool that can negatively result to moral hazards through allowing senior civil servants to promote their own agendas at the expense of the policies favoured by the government; promote unclear roles for politicians; and also decrease democratic engagement of politicians within the opposition. However, expectations for the governing philosophy of delegating administrative autonomy and mandate from the perspective of senior civil servants and some politicians in Östra Göinge Municipality was to facilitate crisis management, create a climate of effectivity and fast decision making, and introducing clear roles and responsibilities that value senior civil servants area of expertise, issues that the traditional way of governing had failed to contribute with. Therefore, it is left to ask what has become better or worse while using the governing philosophy of administrative autonomy in Östra Göinge Municipality through the perspectives of the interviewees that academia, and other municipalities and organisation can draw lessons from .

The results from this research study suggest that administrative autonomy is a concrete reality which significantly impact on the experiences of leaders and politicians. Administrative autonomy was appreciated and viewed positively by senior civil servants and some politicians, in Östra Göinge Municipality, in comparison to how it was traditionally governed before. That was in the light of professionalism, powerful seed for creativity, flexibility and efficiency, trust and collaboration, and clear roles and responsibilities for civil servants. That signifies that professionalism, creativity, performance in terms of flexibility in crisis management, efficiency, and trust, have become essential elements of governance in Östra Göinge Municipality compared to when the municipality was traditionally governed. That fulfils the expectation of the model by senior civil servants and politicians in Östra Göinge Municipality. That is because it addresses the weaknesses of the traditional model such as, unclear roles and responsibilities, complexity in managing crisis, and inefficiency as previously discussed in chapter 4. Therefore, drawing from these research findings it is evident that administrative autonomy has a positive impact on the



leadership and political setting within which important decision about the welfare of the public can take place. It allows the civil servants and politicians to be more sensitive to policy outputs and outcomes while promoting a robust relationship between them. It is also important to note that the research findings on the influences of administrative autonomy on the political class is almost consistent over time. We have seen political leaders and civil servants in various government position; deem professional concerns as a crucial part of their everyday activities, which is consistent with the research findings. The finding from the research are in line with theoretical framework in the study because they indicate that administrative autonomy plays a complementary role in realizing political, social, and developmental goals. The positive experiences corroborates theoretical arguments for administrative autonomy by previous researchers such as Engel 1970; Bringluis 2017; Christen 1991; Evan 1970; Jacobsson et al 2015; Overman 2016; Hirst et al 2011; Bouchard et al 2008; and Nickan 1971. Administrative autonomy promotes the implementation of the local policies, which are locally directed and driven through promotion of trust, accountability, and responsible leadership of the local political leaders making them more confident on the government's body, while boosting performance in terms of efficiency, effectivity, and creativity and increase local government reaction to the needs of the citizens.

From the this research study findings point of view it is evident that the autonomy is manifested by the competence of the civil servants and political leaders in the local authority to manage local patrimony for the efficient performance of their autonomous powers and influences. It means that the local leaders and civil servants base the administrative autonomy on the local culture in a specific area, which is run and managed. For instance, these leaders have access to the public and private resources in their territories, which they use to serve and improve the lives of the local people (Hansen and Villadsen 2010). As such, administrative autonomy emphasizes on their abilities to have discipline in self-management by using the local patrimony in accordance with the interest of the local population. In accordance with the findings in the research study, administrative autonomy is crucial in building an effective local government system, which is anchored on decentralization in the effort of achieving autonomy, transparency, and the overall working of a democracy. Administrative autonomy thus brings out the values, which are crucial in enhancing the delivery of service and development of the local economy. Within the context of the theoretical framework and developmental imperatives, the local leaders must be given critical powers and functions, which are related to providing their communities with the basic and essential services. Because the research findings indicate that leaders often have a positive experience when there is administrative autonomy, the local government with the fundamental power will have important foundation for building democracy, social and economic development in their respective territorial units (Niklasson and Pierre 2012). We also learn from the result that politicians have started to embrace the emergence of a governing model that is

based on professional competence and expertise and most of the political elites agreed on the role that administrative autonomy plays in terms of knowledge and handling issues in an expert manner compared to the past traditional way of governing. Therefore, administrative autonomy builds a solid foundation for an efficient local system of government which motivates political leaders and civil servants in various positions.

However, Some of the political theorists arguments such as that by Andersen et al 2019 assume that administrative autonomy can also be used as a tool that can negatively result to moral hazards through allowing senior civil servants to promote their own agendas at the expense of the policies favoured by the government, unclear roles for politicians, and also decreasing democratic engagement of politicians within the opposition. This assumption was negative in this study. Both Politicians and Civil servants believed that they were loyal and trusted each other and collaborated well therefore no need for shifting blames on each other. Trust and loyalty were emphasized as a salient instruments smoothening implementation of the governing philosophy. See an illustration below by one of the politicians, and senior civil servant:

“It was before which decision should politicians make, today it is more of a discussion between politicians and civil servants and the civil servants should analyse this and make their judgement over what should be done and they do it. Maybe it cannot be as I have wanted but it is like they do the judgement that they are profession, as in it is their profession to make correct judgement there outside. The politicians take a step back when senior civil servants and other managers shall make decisions outside. I cannot come and over-question that decision. It is all the time with dialog”

“There is trust from the politicians to senior civil servants to solve challenge that we are experiencing. Also, there is a belief and relation between the municipality director and the municipal council. The relation and trust between these two is important and should work 100%”

Trust is an essential tool that boosts relationship between partners, in this case politicians and senior civil servants (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). It depicts the need for politicians to delegate autonomy or control an organisation (Ibid). According to (Christensen 2011) the functioning, the administrative methods of management, the way budgets and expenditures are approved, the institutional and legal framework at the local level are organized based on the principle of local administrative autonomy. This is however only possible if organizational, functional, and administrative components are brought together in the light of trust (Orazi, Turrini and Valotti 2013). Therefore, the concept of administrative autonomy can be complex, and how it evolves

overtime will highly depend on the leaders understanding on the principle, it is critical application though practical and positive application in the local authority. Although the results from the research study are mostly positive many scholars have raised a concern about politicians and civil servants who do not embrace the professionalism and the democratic principle when given the autonomy. Administrative autonomy in this study indicates that it can provide leaders with vast experiences and opportunities, which are measurable over time. These positive experiences indicate the practical need for the leaders and political class to instill values within their administrative systems. Combined with experiences of administrative autonomy, this will result in well-rounded and local authorities because it will enhance the administration of the local government. With administrative autonomy influencing professionalism, the motivation will be leaders that fill a profession for well trained and qualified people.

Conventional knowledge dictates that political leaders and civil servants in any municipality must be guided by their action and should be limited in their decision-making by the rules and norms. Although they are given the administrative autonomy, they should behave like public professional which means they should be responsible for their own actions and more apt to serve the community better using the autonomy given to them just like how it is depicted in this study by civil servants in Östra Göinge Municipality. Administrative autonomy is also critical because it involves local government and leaders addressing the public concerns which rarely is a one size fits all solution. According to (Hill 2010) the positive experiences by leaders is because with this autonomy they are able to design a solution, which responds to the problem in hand just as depicted in the findings. As such, they are able to solve the immediate short-term situations, but also can look at the wider community, legal and social contexts to come up with more diverse long-term solutions (Orazi, Turrini and Valotti 2013). It is certain if the local leaders do not have the capacity to make autonomous administrative decisions, these leaders will have a more difficult time and experience when making important decisions and necessary adjustments to adapt to the changing needs of their communities. Change can come in various kinds, and according to (Hunter 2017) the community needs served by various leaders have several constraints including time, finances, and consequences. Therefore, for the leaders to provide the necessary services it is enhanced through administrative autonomy of the local leader and civil servants just as the findings of this study depicts. In addition, this autonomy allows the leaders to serve the needs of the community without much stress, which translate, to a positive experience for them, just as depicted in this study and previous other research.

The research finding however comes short in addressing the negative consequences of the administrative autonomy in the municipality. According to rich empirical studies, it is easy to note that the effects of any kind of autonomy of political leaders and civil servants are more scattered. The local leaders especially those in the lower positions in seem to ultimately pay less

attention to the political considerations than leaders in higher positing when making critical decisions. This means that administrative autonomy might have an impact on priority setting leaders. In addition according to (Trondal and Peters 2013, p 297) autonomy attracts and can serve as blames magnets for allegations of policy failures and mismanagement of public resources. As indicated by (Kuhlmann and Wollmann 2019) when public tasks are completed by autonomous local leaderships or the government officials in higher positions have no any apparent impact on the communities satisfaction with the services provided by these leaders. On the other hand, when the communities are not satisfied with the services provided by autonomous leaders does not have the same consequence as these leaders absorb the blame. These assumptions were however negative in the case of Östra Göinge Municipality. But it was evident on the hand that administrative autonomy had negative political consequences in terms of balancing political power between politicians and administrators. Consequently, it is depicted in findings that delegation of administrative autonomy undermines politicians their roles in terms of engagement, and also the fact that this results to vague political roles for politicians in not differentiating distinctions in terms of policy initiations “what” and implementation in terms of “how” as previously discussed. That is what makes the model worse than the traditional governance which embraced engagement and participations of politicians, This unfolds the monster in this research which is *how to balance the role of administrative autonomy as an administrative asset that boosts performance, and as a political asset that boosts political engagement and participation*. That also reflects Fukumaya’s challenge (2014, 519) who stated that the key challenge for a modernized public organisation is how to ensure that democratic electorates grant civil servants appropriated autonomy whilst remaining politically active and in firm control of the policies about goals that they are meant to represent from citizens. The challenge on how to ensure that democratic electorates grant senior civil servants appropriated autonomy whilst remaining politically active and legitimate to the needs of the citizens is trans historically relevant. For example, the tension was also evident in ancient-china administration, the ottoman empire, and Egypt (Andersen et al, 2018). There were challenges of balancing administrative autonomy and political roles. The challenge was not only based on the issues of bureaucratic autonomy vis-à-vis corruption and politically affiliated civil servants but also on the issues of allowing politicians to delegate administrative autonomy whilst maintaining their active engagement as politicians (Ibid). Carboni, 2015 also questions the same questions on balancing political and administrative power within the administrative reform of administrative autonomy.

Therefore, the main puzzle that remains is how politicians can engage more without grabbing civil servants their autonomy? Since it is the issue of political engagement in administrative issues, responsibilities could foremost lie on senior civil servants finding strategies to engage politicians in administrative issues in a more integrative way or politicians finding strategies to monitor implementation process without interfering the work of administrators. Östra Göinge

Municipality per se is trying to solve the matter on a more formal level by engaging politicians in administrative issues. The model they are using is a *ex-post* control that was discussed before in chapter under political control. That is based on whether the intended set of organisation goals and result targets have been achieved. Östra Göinge Municipality has introduced a result committee that consists of the municipality director and municipality strategists in cooperation with politicians both ruling majority and minority in cooperate. The platform is to give politicians an opportunity to analyse and discuss departments reports in cooperation with senior civil servants. I personally attended during one of their meetings while i pursued my internships at the municipality. It is good platform that engage and allow for interactions between politicians and the municipality director and strategists. However, it is critical because it only offers politicians an over-surface of the result of implementation process, and it is also exclusive both politically and administratively as only a few keynote politicians and administrators participated. Therefore, the model could be backed up by the following recommendations below to give a sustainable result in terms of balancing administrative autonomy as a political and administrative asset.

Carboni, 2015, p.380 states that one of the solutions might be in recognising the reciprocal values, role and influence that underlie complementarity or cooperation between administration and politics as complementary. Politicians in theory can dominate administrative action. But should be bounded by a respect for bureaucratic competence and commitment, and bureaucrats could use their relevant resources to become self-directed but should be constrained by a commitment to accountability (Ibid, p.380). In Andersen et al 2018 different strategies that could strike a balance between administrative autonomy and political control/participation are discussed. An instance that is relevant for this essay is the use of meritocracy, modern day professionalism that is confined with sensible performance of pay and monitoring of senior civil servants by politicians. That allows professionally educated administrators to manage their autonomy while enabling them to make competent decisions that ultimately answer politically preset task (Dahlström et al, 2012, cited in Andersen et al, 2018, p.17.) Additionally, Jacobsson et al, 2015 also recommend governing by microsteering as a predominant strategy that lets politicians balance between giving administrators autonomy and professional space to overweigh overload that politicians have, and democratic legitimacy that entails active political participation that leverages to the needs of the citizens. According to Jacobsson et al 2015, these strategies should be based on *trust*. Jacobsson discusses the strategy of anticipation, inviting authorities, re-politicization, and modification. For the monster of this essay, only anticipation and inviting authorities are relevant as they are based more on cooperation and relation building between

politicians and civil servants<sup>1</sup>. These strategies can be practically applied by Östra Göinge Municipality to balance administrative autonomy as an administrative and political asset. Firstly, the strategy of *anticipation* that stresses for civil servants to use various techniques to develop a sense of knowing how to act and adjust in accordance with the wishes and desires of the politicians. This can be through relying on previous exchanges with the politicians and initiating informal exchanges with politicians that engages and includes every politician (Ibid, p.77). The dimension of informal exchanges, aside from the formal exchange that is more top-down based, breaks the hierarchy of top-down and control and misunderstandings in roles between politicians and civil servants, and rather also includes civil servants and agents that are not consistent with the protocol (Ibid, p.79). Also, creates dialog and interaction between civil servants and politicians which has a *win-win* impact for both politicians and civil servants. The win-win impact is that politicians get to engage more without crossing borderlines of professionalism and administrator's autonomy, while administrators who are civil servants in this case get to know politicians very well on how they perceive problems, solutions they prefer, and actors they consider important (Ibid, p.80). From this, over a time civil servant attain knowledge of what the politician wants without necessarily crossing the borderline of politics through communication each issue (Ibid, pp.80-81).

The second relevant strategy is *inviting authorities*. Within this strategy, civil servants have a role to play in engaging politicians in administrative matters that are political (Ibid, p.79). Through *inviting authorities* who are politicians, agencies who are civil servants can always check with politicians if they are at the right track. An instance that is cited in Jacobsson et al, 2015, p.86 is that of SIDA-the Swedish International Development Cooperation. The agency has often applied the strategy of *inviting authorities*- through meeting with the Swedish governing department to search for signal regarding how the assignment to implement proposals should be structured (Öhrman, cited in Ibid, p.86). Similarly, as Jacobsson et al 2015 stated, the strategy of *inviting authorities* is also advised by Öhrman cited in Jacobsson, 2015 to be marked by high degree of trust and smooth cooperation between politicians and civil servants. Moreover, politicians can also engage per se through using the strategy of inviting authorities through inviting both formally and informally and informing civil servants on political issues that can have an influence of administration issues.

Therefore, the named strategies in combination with the model introduced in Östra Göinge Municipality through using trust as a toll, can be used as an inspiration to other organisation inspired to introduce the governing philosophy of administrative autonomy that can be an asset for both the administration and the political, and that is based on trust.

---

<sup>1</sup> Readers interested the other three strategies are advised to read further, Jacobsson et al 2015, pp.77-104

## 6. Conclusion

Can administrative autonomy be enough? From this study administrative autonomy seems to be mostly enough for administrators-senior civil servants-, and slightly enough for politicians. Also, the fact that administrators win more than politicians in the administrative reform of autonomy. That is because it enhances professionalism, creativity, performance in terms of flexibility, efficiency, and effectivity, builds trust and cooperation between the organisation and politicians and civil servants, weighs off politicians' overload and contributing with expertise knowledge in times of turbulence. These aspects are all salient for organisational development in times of crisis, and an organisation that is inspired to work more with citizens orientations and leverage citizens expectations just as cited in the interviews, results, and analysis. However, it is debatable as depicted by the interview and previous research, to a smaller extent whether administrative autonomy can be enough as a political asset in terms of fulfilling political roles that politicians have. This is because according to the interviews, administrative autonomy obscures political participation and engagement of some politicians especially the opposition and free-time politicians whilst making political roles vague. Through previous research and interviews we learn that trust, interactions, and cooperation are some of the remedies that can make administrative as valuably enough governing asset for administrators and politicians.

Therefore, administrative autonomy can only be fully enough as a political and administrative asset if trust, interactions, cooperation between politicians and administrator, and including other politicians are the rules of the game. According to Bach (2016), the concept of administrative autonomy is basically a description of the relationship that exists between organizations and the elected officials and executive politicians. Regarding the municipal application, the concept describes the involvement of politicians in the leadership and decision-making process of the municipal. As such, it can be adduced that apart from trust another common factor in administrative autonomy is politics and politicians. The involvement of politics in the affairs of the municipal or of an organization serves as the prerequisite for administrative autonomy. It is through this involvement that this style of leadership comes to being. Politics is administration and administration are politics as this study also depicts. The concerns about the political engagement in municipals act is the knowledge gap that needs to be addressed to make it more efficient and effective.

Furthermore, leadership in the public sector can be viewed to contain several large numbers

of organization, which are different in the terms of their formal status and powers delegated to them. They are however also a creation of the political leaders elected by the society. As such, they will have the capacity to develop a distinct institutional identity. This means that administrative autonomy in both the formal and actual is very important for a complete decision and policy making in any government (Orazi, Turrini and Valotti 2013, p.490). The conclusion, which emerges from the above analysis, is that when leaders have the administrative autonomy, they have a higher level of positive experiences when serving the people. It is also evident that administrative autonomy is one of the most effective and efficient norms of allowing the leaders to self-govern and self-management (Greer 2012). As such, it is important for researchers to stress on the need for the government to ensure administrative autonomy of the local leaders and civil servants. In addition, it is also important to emphasize on the concept of administrative autonomy and its performance on the experiences of political leaders when serving their communities

My study is just a small contribution to a continuing debate of politico-admin dichotomy on issues to do with administrative autonomy and political control. Much more research is needed to answer the complex controversy. A research that can find a valuable governing philosophy that answers both to politicians and administrators. We have to know that public institutions are political institutions framed by political issues and the standard of politicization has to be stable in order for the institution to be relevant, but these political issues can only be solved and implemented by offering experts autonomy to apply professional knowledge since they are professionally trained to practically handle complex issues. The puzzle perpetuates: how can academia find a balance for governing a public institution without separating politics from administration? How should political engagement in the sphere of public administration look like without destroying administrative autonomy?



## 7. Further research recommendations and other reflections

As it has been stated earlier, the decision-making process in the light of professionalism is more flexible since it is guided by the availability of empirical evidence and the needs of the public or the people concerned. Administrative autonomy can be applied in an authoritative system or in a democratic system. When applied in an authoritative system, it is less likely that professionalism can be applied. This is since political influence is the key factor in the decision making and the views of the public are not considered. It is less effective and highly rigid at the same time. However, when applied in a democratic system, professionalism becomes a key factor. Professionalism contributes greatly to quality and evidence-based management and plays a major role in public values. It required the contribution of the public in the decision-making process and hence any decisions made are guided by evidence and expertise. Use of discretion, in this case administrative autonomy by public executives creates public value and can improve governance. In administrative autonomy, the public executives have the freedom to make decisions on what need to be done (Moore, 1995). This freedom can create public value for governance since the executive will be made of professionals who have a high understanding of the need for evidence and who have significant knowledge in the areas of decision making. Therefore, it would be interesting for further research on the role of administrative autonomy to qualitative management. More so, the extent to which administrative autonomy impact citizens expectations, participation, and engagement.

Moreover, while interviewing I got statements on the fact that some municipalities in the southern- part of Sweden, such as Osby, became inspired of the way of governing in Östra Göinge Municipality and therefore introduced the governing philosophy of delegating administrative autonomy but failed and went back to the traditional way of governing with more political control and engagement. A study on the experiences of these municipalities would offer more insights on the governing philosophy of administrative autonomy that could be valuable. However, future studies on experiences of municipalities that still use the traditional way of governing with more centered political control and engagement such Kristianstad and Malmö municipality could be carried out. Also, Horby municipality is on the debatable phase of

introducing governing philosophy of delegating administrative autonomy and mandate to its civil servants. It would be insightful to study the reasons for introducing such a governing philosophy, and, its implementation process.

Lastly, through the interview processes however much interviewees discussed positive experiences and negative experiences of administrative autonomy, they stated that one of the challenges, that is outside the scope of this study is to do with implementation process of the governing philosophy. Such as lack of sufficient resources, culture change for employees to embrace the governing philosophy, insufficient action capacity in terms of competence, control by the central government, and lastly national rules and regulations that affect their autonomy to act. Also, there were responses on the fact that delegated administrative autonomy and mandate never reached the bottom. See illustration by anonymous within the municipality:

“One gets delegated trust and administration autonomy from politicians, but it does not mean the whole organisation is influenced by trust and administrative autonomy. Autonomy in governance is about groups in politics and organisation. Trust in terms of autonomy shall go downwards to the clients. Trust disappears somewhere in-between”

Therefore, a more extensive future study should be done on the implementation process of administrative autonomy as a governing philosophy in Östra Göinge Municipality. Also, implementation study will unfold whether the concept of administrative autonomy travels way through the organization or it is just an issue for senior civil servants and municipality director, and whether Östra Göinge Municipality is really succeeding with the philosophy. I believe if these future studies are completely carried out, a more whole picture and insight on the role of administrative autonomy vis á vis traditional way of governing through political control and engagement would be unfolded. Also, remedies on how to balance administrative autonomy as an administrative and political asset would be broadly realized.

*“We have worked for this in 10 years, we have done mistakes. There should be action game between politician and administration. It should be both on a political level and administration level”* The senior civil servant for social development, Mikael Torberntsson

## 8. References

- Adler, P.S., 2001. Market, hierarchy, and trust: The knowledge economy and the future of capitalism. *Organization science*, 12(2), pp.215-234. (Accessed 28 march 2020) Available at: <https://pubsonline.informs.org/doi/abs/10.1287/orsc.12.2.215.10117>
- Andersen, D. and Møller, J. (2019). The Transhistorical Tension between Bureaucratic Autonomy and Political Control. *Political Studies Review*, 17(3), pp.284-295. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1478929918798495> (Accessed, 17 February)
- Andersen, D. and Møller, J., 2019. The Transhistorical Tension between Bureaucratic Autonomy and Political Control. *Political Studies Review*, 17(3), pp.284-295. Accessed 14 April 2020 Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1478929918798495>
- Bach, T. (2016). Administrative Autonomy of Public Organizations. Global Encyclopedia of Public Administration, Public Policy, and Governance, 1-9. doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-31816-5\_143-1 Available at: <https://www.lub.lu.se/en/lund-university-libraries>
- Badie, B., Berg-Schlosser, D. and Morlino, L. eds., 2011. *International encyclopedia of political science* (Vol. 1). Sage. (Book)
- Bergström, T., Magnusson, H. and Ramberg, U. (2008). Through a glass darkly: Leadership complexity in Swedish local government. *Local Government Studies*, 34(2), pp.203-220.
- Blaikie, N. (2010) *DESIGNING SOCIAL RESEARCH*. Malden, USA: Polity Press. (Book)
- Bouchard, G. and Carroll, B.W., 2002. Policy-making and administrative discretion: The case of immigration in Canada. *Canadian public administration*, 45(2), pp.239-257. Accessed 20 May 2020 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-7121.2002.tb01082.x>
- Bringselius, L., 2017. Tillitsbaserad styrning och ledning: Ett ramverk. *Samtal om tillit i styrning*-Trust based governance and leadership: A frame. *Conversation about trust in governance*.
- Bringselius, L., 2018. Tillit: En ledningsfilosofi för framtidens offentliga sektor-Trust: A governing philosophy for future public sectors. (Book)
- Carboni, N., 2010. Professional autonomy versus political control: How to deal with the dilemma. Some evidence from the Italian core executive. *Public policy and administration*, 25(4), pp.365-386. (Accessed 02, June, 2020) Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952076709356886>
- Christensen, T. and Læg Reid, P., 2003. Coping with complex leadership roles: The problematic redefinition of government-owned enterprises. *Public Administration*, 81(4), pp.803-831. Accessed 20 april 2020 Available: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-3298.2003.00372.x>
- Christensen, T., 2011. University governance reforms: potential problems of more

- autonomy?. *Higher education*, 62(4), pp.503-517.
- Creswell, J. (2009) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, Mixed method Approaches*, Fourth edition. United Kingdom, London: Sage publications. (Book)
- Ebneyamini, S. and Sadeghi Moghadam, M.R., 2018. Toward developing a framework for conducting case study research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), p.1609406918817954. (Accessed 26, May 2020) Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1609406918817954>
- Engel, G.V., 1970. Professional autonomy and bureaucratic organization. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, pp.12-21. Accessed 20 May 2020, Available at: [https://www.jstor.org/stable/2391182?seq=2#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/2391182?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents)
- Evans, T. and Hupe, P.L. eds., 2020. *Discretion and the quest for controlled freedom*. Palgrave Macmillan. (Book)
- Farazmand, A. ed., 2018. *Global encyclopedia of public administration, public policy, and governance*. New York, NY: Springer. Accessed 14th march, 2020. Available at:
- Floersch, J., Longhofer, J.L., Kranke, D. and Townsend, L., 2010. Integrating thematic, grounded theory and narrative analysis: A case study of adolescent psychotropic treatment. *Qualitative Social Work*, 9(3), pp.407-425. (Accessed 03 August, 2020) Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1473325010362330>
- Fox, C.J., 1992. What do we mean when we say "professionalism?": a language usage analysis for public administration. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 22(1), pp.1-17. Accessed 03 August 2020 Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/027507409202200101>
- Frederickson, H.G., Smith, K.B., Larimer, C.W. and Licari, M.J., 2003. *The Public Administration Theory Primer*, Boulder. (Book)
- Grant, B., 2014. Leadership and the politics-administration dichotomy: A comparative study of political influences in four Florida state agencies. (Accessed 25 march 2020) Available at: <https://fsu.digital.flvc.org/islandora/object/fsu%3A252833/> (Doctoral Thesis)
- Greer, S.L., 2012. *Nationalism and self-government: the politics of autonomy in Scotland and Catalonia*. Suny Press.
- Hansen, J.R. and Villadsen, A.R., 2010. Comparing public and private managers' leadership styles: Understanding the role of job context. *International Public Management Journal*, 13(3), pp.247-274.
- Hill Collins, P., 2010. The new politics of community. *American Sociological Review*, 75(1), pp.7-30.
- Hirst, G., Van Knippenberg, D., Chen, C.H. and Sacramento, C.A., 2011. How does bureaucracy impact individual creativity? A cross-level investigation of team contextual influences on goal orientation-creativity relationships. *Academy of Management Journal*, 54(3), pp.624-641. (Accessed 13 June 2020), Available: <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2011.61968124>
- Hunter, F., 2017. *Community power structure: A study of decision makers*. UNC Press Books.
- Jacobsson, B., 2015 b. *Fotnoter till förvaltningspolitiken: Lärande, styrning and all that jazz...* Södertörns högskola. (Book)
- Jacobsson, B., Pierre, J. and Sundström, G., 2015. *Governing the embedded state: The organizational dimension of governance*. OUP Oxford.
- Kalimullah, N., Alam, K., & Nour, M. (2012). *New Public Management*:

- Emergence and Principles. *BUP Journal*, 1(1).
- Karlsson, D. and Gilljam, M., 2014. Svenska politiker. *Om folkvalda i riksdag, landsting och kommun. "Swedish politicians. About people chosen in parliament, regions, and municipalities"*. Stockholm: Santérus förlag-
- Katz, R.S., 2014. No man can serve two masters: Party politicians, party members, citizens and principal-agent models of democracy. *Party Politics*, 20(2), pp.183-193.
- Kristianstadsbladet, 2018. Göingemodellen förtsätter att spridas- *The Göinge Municipality model continue to be spread*. Available at: <https://www.kristianstadsbladet.se/ostra-goinge/kommunens-modell-fortsatter-att-spridas>
- Kuhlmann, S. and Wollmann, H., 2019. *Introduction to comparative public administration: Administrative systems and reforms in Europe*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Lægreid, P., Verhoest, K., & Jann, W. (2008). The Governance, Autonomy and Coordination of Public Sector Organizations. *Public Organization Review*, 8(2), 93-96. doi: 10.1007/s11115-008-0056-5
- Lamont, M. and Swidler, A., 2014. Methodological pluralism and the possibilities and limits of interviewing. *Qualitative Sociology*, 37(2), pp.153-171. Accessed 16 Augusti 2020, Available: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11133-014-9274-z>
- Liverani, M., Hawkins, B., & Parkhurst, J. (2013). Political and Institutional Influences on the Use of Evidence in Public Health Policy. A Systematic Review. *Plos ONE*, 8(10), e77404. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0077404
- Lowndes, V., Marsh, D. and Stoker, G. eds., 2018. *Theory and methods in political science*. Macmillan International Higher Education. (Book)
- Moore, Mark H. 1995. *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Morgan, R.M. and Hunt, S.D., 1994. The commitment-trust theory of relationship marketing. *Journal of marketing*, 58(3), pp.20-38. Accessed 03 August, 2020. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224299405800302>
- Mosley, L. ed., 2013. *Interview research in political science*. Cornell University Press. (Book)
- Niklasson, B. and Pierre, J., 2012. Does agency age matter in administrative reform?: Policy autonomy and public management in Swedish agencies. *Policy and Society*, 31(3), pp.195-210.
- O'Flynn, J. (2007). From New Public Management to Public Value: Paradigmatic Change and Managerial Implications. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 66(3), 353-366. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8500.2007.00545.x
- Orazi, D.C., Turrini, A. and Valotti, G., 2013. Public sector leadership: new perspectives for research and practice. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 79(3), pp.486-504.
- Östra Göinge Municipality. 2020. Styrning och ledningssystem-En sammanställning Östra Göinge Kommun. *Governing and leadership system in Östra Göinge Municipality-A summary*. (Östra Göinge Municipality internal document)
- Overman, S., 2016. Great expectations of public service delegation: A systematic review. *Public Management Review*, 18(8), pp.1238-1262. (Accessed 26 march 2020) Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2015.1103891>
- Poocharoen, O.O., *Routledge Handbook of Public Policy Chapter 25–Bureaucracy and the Policy Process*. (Accessed 15 march, 2020) Available at:

- [https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cluster=18104255240325590583&hl=en&as\\_sdt=0,5](https://scholar.google.com/scholar?cluster=18104255240325590583&hl=en&as_sdt=0,5)
- Quality magazin-kvalitetsmagasinet, (3, November, 2015) “ Låt proffs vara proffs” (News paper) Available at: <https://kvalitetsmagasinet.se/lat-proffsen-vara-proffs/>
- Queirós, A., Faria, D. and Almeida, F., 2017. Strengths and limitations of qualitative and quantitative research methods. *European Journal of Education Studies*.(Accessed, 25 April ,2020) Available at: <https://oapub.org/edu/index.php/ejes/article/view/1017>
- Rhodes, R.A.W., 1996. The new governance: governing without government. *Political studies*, 44(4), pp.652-667.Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1996.tb01747.x> (Accessed, 19 February)
- Roulston, K. 2010, *Reflective interviewing: a guide to theory and practice*, SAGE Publications Ltd, London, [Accessed 3 August 2020], doi: 10.4135/9781446288009.
- Seidman, I., 2006. *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences*. Teachers college press. (Book)
- Serpa, S. and Ferreira, C.M., 2019. The Concept of Bureaucracy in a Depraved Nigerian Economy: Challenges and Prospects. *Int'l J. Soc. Sci. Stud.*, 7, p.12. Accessed 15 march, 2020 Available at: [https://scholar.google.se/scholar?hl=en&as\\_sdt=0%2C5&q=doi%3A10.11114%2Fijss.v7i2.3979&btnG=](https://scholar.google.se/scholar?hl=en&as_sdt=0%2C5&q=doi%3A10.11114%2Fijss.v7i2.3979&btnG=)
- Silverman, D., 2013. *Interpreting qualitative data*. Sage. (Book)
- SKR-Sverige's Kommuner och Regioner-Swedish Municipality and Regions, 2020. Fakta om Kommuner och Regioner- *Facts about Municipalities and Regions*. Available at: <https://skr.se/tjanster/kommunerochregioner/faktakommunerochregioner.432.html>
- Sławecki, B., 2018. Paradigms in qualitative research. In *Qualitative methodologies in organization studies* (pp. 7-26). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. (Accessed, 20 may 2020) Available at: [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-65217-7\\_2](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-65217-7_2)
- SOU-State Public Analysis (2018:47) Med tillit växer handlingsutrymmet-tillitsbaserad styrning och ledning av välfärdsektorn- With trust grows autonomy-turst based governance and leadership of welfare sectors.
- Swedish Government Office., 2019. Den statliga värdegrunden-gemensam principer för en god förvaltning ”the state value grounds- collective principles for good administration. Accessed 20 march 2020, available at: <http://www.statskontoret.se/globalassets/publikationer/2019/statliga-vardegrunden-2.pdf>
- Trondal, J. and Peters, B.G., 2013. The rise of European administrative space: Lessons learned. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 20(2), pp.295-307.
- Verhoest, K., Roness, P., Verschuere, B., Rubecksen, K. and MacCarthaigh, M., 2010. *Autonomy and control of state agencies: Comparing states and agencies*. Springer.0). (Book)
- Winsvold, M. and Zeiner, H., New Public Management, new accountability? On delegation practices and accountability perceptions in Norwegian municipalities.
- Yamamoto, K., 2006. Performance of semi-autonomous public bodies: linkage between autonomy and performance in Japanese agencies. *Public Administration and Development: The International Journal of Management Research and*

*Practice*, 26(1), pp.35-44. Accessed 18 May 2020 Available at:  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.369>

Zainal, Z., 2007. Case study as a research method. *Jurnal Kemanusiaan*, 5(1).  
Accessed, 26 May 2020, Available at:  
<https://jurnalkemanusiaan.utm.my/index.php/kemanusiaan/article/view/165>

## 9. Appendix

### 9.1 Interview questions to senior civil servants

1. Hur länge har du jobbat i Östra Göinge kommun? Vilka är din verksamhets huvudsakliga uppgifter?
2. Hur skulle du beskriva styrningen av din verksamhet?
3. Var tas besluten i er organisation och av vem?
4. Hur ser relationen ut mellan din roll och politikens roll? Hur skulle du beskriva ditt handlingsutrymme gällande mål- och resultatplanen? Är det begränsat/obegränsat tillräckligt/otillräckligt? Motivera.
5. Om du upplever att du har tillräckligt handlingsutrymme, hur upplever du möjligheterna att höja kvaliteten i grunduppdraget och samtidigt implementera mål- och resultatplanen? Hur påverkas arbetssättet?
6. Vilka utmaningar upplever du i arbetet enligt mål- och resultatplanen och det handlingsutrymme den ger?
7. Vad upplever du begränsar/stödjer dina möjligheter att tillgodose verksamhetens mål, och kundens behov? Utveckla!
8. Vad tänker du när du hör begreppet ”tillitsbaserad styrning” i relation till det handlingsutrymme som ges av kommunens politiker?
9. I Östra Göinge kommun jobbar ni enligt ledningsfilosofin, där förvaltningen/kommunchefen, har fått mandatet från politiken att jobba med ”hur-frågorna” och politikerna med ”vad-frågorna”. Vad har du för tankar om ledningsfilosofin? Vad är positivt och vad är mindre positivt? Vad finns det för andra att lära sig av arbetet enligt ledningsfilosofin? 10. Varför infördes det? Hur styrdes förvaltning tidigare?
11. Har det förkommit motstånd mot modellen? Innebär modellen något risktagande?
12. Hur upplever du att organisationens och politikens styrning påverkar ditt handlingsutrymme att ta beslut utifrån verksamhetens och kundens behov?
13. Vad är din personliga idealbild av styrningen och rollfördelningen mellan politik och förvaltning i en kommun? Hur tycker du att en ideal relation skulle se ut?

*Translated to english*

1. How long have you worked in Östra Göinge Municipality? What are your main tasks? How would you describe governance of your department?
2. Where do decisions take place in the organisation and by who?
3. How is the relation between your role and politicians' roles? How would you describe your autonomy as top civil servant? Is it limited or not? Motivate?
4. If you experience that you have enough autonomy, how do you experience possibilities to implement political objectives. How is your working ways influenced?
5. What challenges do you experience in your work in relation to the autonomy that is given by politicians?
6. What limits or strengthens your possibilities to meet up with the department goals,



and client's needs?

7. What do you think when you hear the concept "trust-based governance" in relation to the autonomy it gives of the municipality politicians?
8. In Östra Göinge Municipality, you work according to the leadership philosophy in which the municipality chief executive has been delegated mandate to work with "how" and politicians with "what". What are your thoughts on this? What is positive and less positive? What is there for other organisation to learn from it?
9. Why was the Göinge philosophy introduced? How was the organisation governed before?
10. Have there been oppositions against the model? Does the model mean certain risk taking?
11. How do you experience the organisations- and politicians way of governing influence your autonomy to take decisions?
12. What is your ideal picture of governance and role division between politicians and organisation? How should an ideal relation look like?

## 9.2 Interview questions to politicians

1. Hur skulle du beskriva styrningen av din verksamhet?
2. Hur ser relationen ut mellan förvaltning och politik i Östra Göinge kommun? Beskriv vem som gör vad!
3. Hur upplever du Göinge ledningsfilosofin sätt att styra? Vad är bra och vad är mindre bra?
4. Göinge ledningsfilosofin ger betydande mandat och handlingsutrymme till förvaltningen. Vilken är din syn på det?
5. Hur får du insyn i verksamheten närmast kunden?
6. Vilken möjlighet har du som politiker att bilda dig en uppfattning om och påverka kvaliteten i verksamheterna gentemot kunderna?
7. Vilka utmaningar har du mött i arbetet med ledningsfilosofi?
8. Hur förhåller du dig som politiker till detaljstyrning och kontroll? Motivera ditt svar.
9. Beskriv en politikers arbete med styrning i Östra Göinge kommun.
10. Vilka är dina tankar om den tydliga rollfördelningen mellan förvaltning och politik? Vad har du för tankar om graden av samverkan mellan förvaltning och politik i hela processen, från strategi till implementering? Motivera ditt svar. Hur bedömer du att det fungerar här i Östra Göinge kommun?
11. Vad är din personliga idealbild av styrningen och rollfördelningen mellan politik och förvaltning i en kommun? Hur tycker du att en ideal relation skulle se ut?

*Translated to english*

1. How would you describe governance of your department?
2. How does the relationship look like between the organisation and politics in Östra Göinge Municipality? Describe who does what?
3. How do you experience the governing philosophy in Östra Göinge Municipality? What is good and what is not good?
4. The Göinge governing philosophy delegates mandate and autonomy to the organisation. What is your view on that?
5. How do you get view of departments working close to clients?
6. What challenges have you met in work to do with the governing philosophy?

7. How do you relate as a politician to detail steer and control? Motivate your answer
8. Describe politicians work with governance in Östra Göinge Municipality?
9. What are your thoughts about clear role division between the organisation and politicians?What thoughts do you have about cooperation between organisation and politics the whole process from strategy to implementation?Motivate your answer.How do you judge that is it is working here in Östra Göinge Municipality?
10. What is your ideal picture of governance and role division between politicians and organisation?How should an ideal relation look like?