LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN SWEDEN

Abstract

This article deals with the structure, function, duties, role and importance of the local governments in Sweden. Especially, it is concerned with the developments in 1980s, 1990s and later on in Sweden. The main reason why this article focuses on this process is the reorganization of local governments, especially in line with the globalization and localization policies as in many European countries. In accordance with the local government law enacted in 1991 central-local relations and the duties and authorities of the local governments were regulated. The authority and duties of the local administrations have been increased with the prepared law. Many powers belonging to the center have been transferred to the local governments. There have been some changes in the structure and functioning of the local governments by the aforementioned act. Thus, the article primarily focuses on this local government law.

Keywords: Local politics, county council, municipality, committee
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Anahtar kelimeler: Yerel siyaset, il konseyi, belediye, komite

Introduction

In Sweden, the state is represented at three levels. There are the parliament at national level (Riksdag); county councils at regional and local level (Landsting); municipal councils at local level (Komuner). Both county councils and municipalities have the right of the local self-governance. Many activities belonging to central government until the 1960s and 1970s were entrusted to local governments after 1980s particularly in 1990s. The relations between center-local have added up to a more complex structure after 1980s.

This situation has brought out a lot of debate. Feltenius explains this change by both internally and externally in his that where he discussed the topic with detail. He has figured out “europeization” and “globalization”, “decentralization” as internally factors, he has also considered changes in Sweden's political culture as externally factors in this issue (Feltenius, 2007:458). Local government act when enacted in 1991 which was affected by the policies of globalization and localization has guaranteed that local authorities will increase their power, freedom and self-determination. It has elaborated and strengthened the process of duties, powers, resources and decision-making of local assemblies and executive committees.

This study will focus on the local governments in Sweden, relation between local associations and committees' and the impact of local politics. In this respect, after a general overview of Sweden in the first part, the role, position, mode of work, duties and local politics of the local councils and committees will be explained in the second part.

1. The General Politics in Sweden

Sweden was established as a powerful centralized state with an autonomous and homogeneous population in the 16th century (Micheletti, 1995:5). Sweden has had great strength in Europe throughout the 17th century. But after the Battle of Poltava in 1709 with Russia, Sweden has decided to stay neutral in its international relations. This is reflected in the national policy, in the direction of the development of welfare state policies and the transformation of central and local politics for a long time (Montin ve Amna, 2000:23-25). Sweden has maintained its neutral position in international politics until the 19th century. Thus, this strategy of Sweden has affec-
Thus, in Sweden, as in the case of the political structure, small changes in the economic, social and cultural structure, which are slower transitions instead of continuous and rapid changes were also take place (Petersson, 1994:54-59). A tangible reflection of this is the Swedish constitution, the constitution is reflecting the national and local traditions of Sweden, as well as remains constant (Petersson, 1994:63).

Economic changes have been influential on the basis of Sweden's political transformation. Although the country does not have a very bright economic history, it has made a very rapid start since the end of the 19th century and the 20th century. Meanwhile Sweden was considered one of the poorest countries in Europe with a large agricultural and rural economy. However this started to change. Until the beginning of the 19th century, the country became a rapidly industrialized, modern welfare state, after Sweden had been able to handle its domestic iron ore, tree, and waterpower engineering areas. Especially during the Second World War, it began to expand economically and develop politically. This growth continued rapidly from 1945 to the 1970s. So much so that the Swedish industry has moved to a highly competitive country in exports (Sweden Country Report, 2013:5-7).

Political developments also continued during the economic transformations. After the Great Northern War victory in 1718, the Swedish parliament "Riksdag" and local assemblies were strengthened. A new constitution was drafted and the powers of the royal authority were limited. The new process, based on the supremacy of the parliament, brought by the new constitution, continued from 1719 to 1772. Parliament's powers have been expanded. Hence, it is regulated that the government, is appointed by the parliament and is responsible before the parliament, which is still valid today. Similarly, local assemblies have been strengthened (Gustafsson ve Svensson, 1999:14-16).

Therefore, both the central and local governments have begun to develop the parliamentary system in Sweden. Since 1971 Sweden has implemented a single-member parliamentary system. There were 349 representatives directly elected by the people in the parliament. General and local elections have been held together since 1970, elections made every 3 years until 1994, and have been increased to 4 years since that date (Petersson, 1994:70).

Sweden's national policy has been towards the expansion of the public sector. Particularly during the Second World War, and afterwards, the influence of the social democrats has increased the influence of the public. During this period, "understanding of welfare state" as a solution to Sweden's social problems - such as unemployment, inadequate housing, and poverty - was dominant as an optimistic solution. Many methods have been discussed for solving these problems at the national level (Aylott, 1999:34). It is even compared with system of other countries. It focuses on how public services can be provided and how social problems are solved. Public sector costs were reduced and an ambitious trading program was followed in the 1960s. It has thus led to a unique and remarkable expansion and development focusing on priorities (Aylott, 1999:35).

In the 1960s universities created cursors and departments that would make the public sector more efficient and productive. As a result that it became the world's largest public sector. The share of public expenditures was 50% in 2007. Taxes and ambitious welfare state initiatives
have expanded production towards the public sector. In particular, education and health, social security policies were regulated by the public sector. Public policies in these areas have brought different regions and social groups to the same level. Student grants and loans, pensions, home aids, health insurance, family payments were a significant part of the public spending (Sweden Country Report2010:9-10).

In Sweden's welfare state, different groups in the society were involved in policy making and the implementation of policies. Particularly it had been supported by unions, workers' and employers' associations and trade associations. Thus, in government policies, many political actors (such as trade unions and, employer associations) were involved in the 1930s. After 1945, this participation was increased. Since in this period the participation was supported, Sweden has been introduced as "corporatist state" to the World (Back,2003:95).

Sweden's "unique welfare state" has been successful in solving social problems and in the development of the country, but it caused centralization in the long run (Montin, 1993:53). If we look at the overall administrative structure in Sweden, the state administration has a three-tiered structure; central, regional, local. The government as a part of central administration, is responsible for all of the country. The implementation of government policies is supported by the ruling units and offices (Petersson,1994:65).

The Government Office (Regeringskansliet) consists of the Office of the President and the Office of Administrative Affairs. The Office of the Prime Minister is an office belonging to the prime minister and covering his authority, where the prime minister fulfills his duties with the relevant ministers. This office is relatively small compared to the Office of Management Affairs. This office employs 90 people. There are ministers in the office of management affairs. It is hierarchically under the office of the prime minister. The main function of the Government Office is the preparation, planning and coordination of the government policies (Olsson,1995:53-56).

Parliament (Riksdag) fulfills the legislative function. The Riksdag is hierarchically above the government and its 300 units. State services at the regional level are fulfilled by the county councils (Lansstyrelser), which are 21 provincial administrative units. County councils are regional authorities. But it is as important as the central units. Each county council can be directly supervised by the government. County councils are directly authorized by the central authority. In addition, decision-making bodies of the county councils are elected directly by the public. Public services at the local level are largely fulfilled by the municipalities. Local authorities are supervised by the center (government). However, this control is more a legal audit. The transactions and actions, and decisions are controlled from a legal point of view (Petersson,1994:70).
Duties of the central government are;

- Defense and foreign policy
- Public order and security
- Provision of justice
- Determination of macroeconomic policies
- Higher education and research services
- Creation of transport and communication channels
- Determining working policies and combating unemployment
- Determination of housing policies
- Social insurance and payments

2. Local Governments in Sweden

Sweden is divided into municipalities and county concils. Regional and local governments in Sweden have an autonomous locality in accordance with the European contract documents. Currently there are 21 regions, 20 county councils and 290 municipalities in Sweden. County councils and municipalities are formally independent from each other. There is no hierarchical structure between county councils and municipalities. The authorship and the tasks are different from each other. However, municipalities and county councils may themselves attend to the matters of general concern that are connected with the area of the municipality or county council or with their members and which are not to be attend to solely by the state, another municipality, another county council or some other body. (Local government act, 1991)

The Swedish local government act (Kommunallagen) went into force in 1991. This act is divided into 10 parts and each deals with the issues stated: Chapter 1 municipalities and county assemblies and areas of their responsibility. Chapter 2 duties of county councils and municipalities. Chapter 3 departmental organizations. Chapter 4 elected representatives. Chapter 5 assemb-
According to first item of this act: “The public power takes its source entirely from citizens in Sweden. Public administration is made up of free public opinion and general election rights. Public administration is carried out through representation parliamentary state system and local administration. Public power is exercised under the law.”

Moreover seventh item of local governmet act is “the basic units of administration are municipalities and county councils in Sweden. The decision-making authorization is used by the elected representatatives in both county councils and municipalities. Municipalities and county councils may levy taxes to fulfill their duties.”

Some changes were made within the scope of harmonization with the European Union in 1998, 2001 and finally in 2003. At the beginning of the local government act, it is emphasized that local governments are autonomous and that autonomous local governments are a complementary democratic component of the constitution. It also stated that it accepted the European Union criteria about local autonomy. In this context, the authorities and resources of local governments have been expanded for a better local autonomy (Montin ve Amna, 1999:157-159). Resources and authorities were transferred from the center. After the reform was arranged the division of duties and powers between the central and local governments as follows (Page, 1991:64-65):

Garbage collection service: This service is the responsibility of local authorities.

Health care: The general policy on health is determined by the center. Smaller and more localized services such as hospital services and preventive health services are the responsibility of the local authorities

Educational services: Kindergarten, primary school, high school education services are sustained by local governments. University education is carried out by central government.

Social services: Social service policies are determined by the center. However, child and elderly care services are untrusted to local governments.

Water resources: It is the responsibility of local governments.

Roads, streets, and parks: Roads, streets and parking services within the borders of the local administrations belong to the local administrations.

Public transport services: While local administrations provide city transportation services, central administration takes charge of the intercity transportation services.

Housing services: This service is mostly performed by local government.

Planning service: This service is fulfilled by local authorities.

“The local government act can be seen as the constitution for local government at municipal and county level. It does contain the fundamental provisions regulating the working of the municipal and county councils.” This act ensures that the local authorities are given greater freedom to determine their internal organisation for themselves.
**Bodies of local governments:**

Decision bodies;

Municipal assembly

County council assembly

Assemblies consist of elected representatives in general / local elections.

Members of the assembly are elected in the local elections carried on the same day, with parliamentary elections every 4 years. Elections begin on 1 November. Participants those who qualify for election vote. The representatives are distributed in proportion to the number of votes they receive between the parties. The minimum number of members is determined by the number of voters in the municipal or county council. In elections, parliamentary members, committee members and auditors are elected. According to the Swedish local government act, this number is at least 31 and at most 101. This number varies depending on the numbers of voters in the region.

The Assembly shall convene with more than half of the total number of members, and shall decide by the majority vote. A referendum may be requested at the request of 5% of the assembly members. The Assembly may audit the chairman and the committees through interpellation. Assembly meetings are open to everyone. The members of municipal assembly are also members of county council assembly at the same time.

The municipality and the county council can cooperate with each other as well as at the international scale. Cooperation is left to local government on any rule not foreseen in the local government act on this issue. Municipal assembly and county council assembly have equal rights. Municipalities and county councils can establish company, foundations and associations, and
develop commercial cooperation relationship. They can also do other services that will make public life easier.

Local governments have their own autonomous budget and staff from the center. Local governments get the allowance from both political parties and central government, and also income taxes that belong to their own region. The scope of allowance taken from political parties is decided by local governments assemblies. But it can not be unjustified.

Local assemblies can decide time and place of a meeting. It is announced to public at least 1 week in advance, by the chairman. The announcement should consist of meeting date, place and more importantly content of the meeting. The announcements are put on the related boards of local governments and local newspapers. Furthermore it is also sent to the members of assemblies.

The assemblies decide on the basis of the majority of votes. The decisions of assemblies are recorded and filed and then announced to the public. With the decision taken, discussions, proposals, and majority decisions are included in the announcement text.

**Duties of assemblies** (Local Government Act, section 9):

The assembly decides matters involving questions of principle or otherwise of major importance to the municipality or county council, especially

1. Goals and guidelines of activities,
2. Budget, taxation and other important financial questions,
3. The organisation and procedures of committees,
4. The election of committee and drafting committee members and alternates,
5. The election of auditors and their alternates,
6. The basis of financial benefits for elected representatives,
7. The annual report and discharge from liability,
8. Referendum in the municipality or county council.

**Executive body:**

**Municipal executive committee**

**County Council executive committee**

Executive committees are appointed by assemblies; county council

The county council assembly elects the county executive committee, and the municipal assembly elects the municipal executive committee. The executive committee members are selected among the candidates in the local election. The number of both executive committees and member of executive committees are determined by the local assemblies. In any case, the number of members can not be less than 5. Members of the executive committees are elected for 4 years. However, the assemblies decide the term of executive committee members. Members can be changed in 4 years if necessary. The assembly appoints a chairman among the members of committee. Committees determine the meeting place and date. The number of meetings and deci-
sion is more than half of the members. Committee decisions are announced by the committee chair. However, it is not announced in local newspapers. The municipal (political) leader is the head of the municipal executive committee. Unlike other European countries, there is no just one chief in Sweden. For this reason, the decision-making powers of these chiefs are very limited. Decisions are taken by the assemblies. Committees assist in the assembly duties. Committees report to the local assemblies on their activities. The local assembly controls whether the committees actively fulfill their duties. through these reports

The main tasks of the executive committee are mentioned in the local government act, chapter 6 section 1:

“The executive committee shall direct and co-ordinate the administration of the affairs of the municipality or county council and shall supervise the activities of other committees.”

Duties of committees

These duties can be listed as (Local government act, chapter 6 section 4):

- The committees fulfil a number of tasks where regulated by local government act and the other related acts.
- The committees can decide in some matters which given by local assemblies.
- The committees are also, responsible about carry out decisions of assemblies.
- The committees have to submit their activities reports to assemblies

Figure II: Local Committees
Co-determination

Municipalities and county councils may establish co-management and co-operation in law, unless otherwise agreed in the local government act. The co-management is established by the decision of the local assemblies. Local assemblies may determine by standing order, the content, duties and duration of the co-management. Co-management includes representatives of municipality, county council and employees (Local government act, 1991).

Fiscal administration

Municipalities and county councils manage their own funds. Every municipality determines rates of its own income tax. It is defined how to use resources for the local governments. Besides, the local assemblies are entitled to arrange detailed documents which show how the resources will be used by the local governments. Local assemblies decide how resources will be used in services and investments (Local government act, 1991).

Preparing of the budget

The budget of local governments is prepared annually. The draft budget is prepared by the executive committees. Other committees, municipalities and county councils may declare their views to participate in budget discussions. The budget does not exceed income. The prepared budget has to consist of local government activities, plans, economic management and how these expenses will be allocated during fiscal years.

If the budget exceeds incomes, the spendings will be balanced by the income of the next two years. The budget also shows the plan for the next 3 years. The draft budget is prepared by the executive committee before each October. It is completed before November and submitted to the local assembly. Assembly debates, accepts and declares the budget (Local government act, 1991).

Audit

The local assemblies elect at least 3 auditors for 4 years after the elections. Auditors can choose experts to help them. The auditors examine whether the accounts are held correctly, whether the expenditure is done correctly and on site, and whether the committees have done enough internal controls (Local government act, 1991). If there is a suspicious case or a violation of the law, corruption or irregularity, the local parliament sends a report indicating the situation. Each auditor is independent performing its duties. Every year the auditor reports of the year and the opinions of the experts are submitted to the local assemblies.

Conclusion

The new local government act, which was drafted in 1991, is based on public reforms that began in 1985 in Sweden. There, as in the whole world, the role of the state in the economy and social life has begun to be criticized and transformed in the direction of globalization. Therefore, it was aimed to share the duties, authorities and resources between the central and local authorities in order to remove the public criticism and make it more efficient by the reforms made during this period. In this paper the duties and authorities of the central government were reviewed.
While the responsibilities and resources were shared between center-local authorities and were entrusted at the possible level by the local government act as well. The incomes of local government were increased and made a new financial plan so that the duties and resources entrusted to local government could be performed smoothly. In this context, it was regulated that local governments can make taxes, set up company, and develop internal and external relations on the economic and social issues.

The local governments were given the freedom to create committees on the matter in the prepared act (1991). Mentioned act was also asked to increase the number of committees and expand their scope. Thus, many municipalities in Sweden have increased the number of committees. As a result, both the inner workings and the use of sources of local government were provided efficiency.

REFERENCES