

Three Rationales for Municipal Councils: The Case of the Faroe Islands

Trý sløg av hugburði til kommunur

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Úrtak

Í hesi grein verður víst á ymiskan hugburð til, hvat endamálið er við kommunum. Tríggir myndlar eru mentir: 1) Kommunan sum staðbundin sosialur felagsskapur, 2) Kommunustýrini sum vígvøllur at finna politiskar loysnir fyri sítt øki, og 3) Kommunan sum fyrisitingarlig eind at seta í verk politikk, sum landsmyndugleikar ella kommunustýri hava samtykt. Kanningar eru gjørdar í føroyskum kommunum 1992-2016, og fyri at lýsa meginhugburðin í teimum ymisku kommununum um landið, mugu allir tríggir myndlar takast í brúk. Myndlarnir umboða ymiska fatan um fólkaræði. Færri kommunur merkir minni umboðan frá øllum teimum 51 kommununum, sum hava verið, og sum tey, ið búgva har, framvegis eru meðvitin um. Hetta man vera ein orsök til mótstøðu móti ætlanum hjá landsmyndugleikum at minka um talið á kommunum.

Abstract

In the Faroe Islands, the national government has met obstacles in its goal to reduce

the total number of state municipalities to seven or nine. The municipal amalgamation process has thus far reduced the total number of municipal regions from 48 in 2001 to 29. As a result, many traditional councils remain alongside new constituencies based on larger aggregations of citizens. Though it is a micro nation with only 52,000 inhabitants, the Faroese experience is similar to that of larger countries when it comes to tensions between different conceptions of the municipality's purpose. Thus, three models to describe these municipal council rationales will be proposed and considered: Is a municipality first and foremost a community with which people identify (the social ties community model), a local arena for finding political solutions within community space (the local space municipality model), or is their main purpose to serve as administrative entities that implement local and national goals (the municipal administration model)? These ideal models structure the analyses of municipal councils in the Faroes from 1992-2016, based on electoral and survey data.

Introduction

As in other Nordic countries, opinions differ in the Faroe Islands concerning the proper size of municipal entities and the composition of the local councils. Traditional values confront changing local

government rationales. The municipalities' capacity to deliver public services may at times conversely relate to their feasibility as democratic institutions that represent local communities. Because of the reduction in the number of municipalities, many municipal councils no longer serve just one local community, but rather consist of several previously self-governed communities that have merged into larger entities. Divergent opinions on 'good representation' question the legitimacy of both the traditional and reformed municipal councils. On one hand, citizens in formerly independent municipalities may consider it their legitimate right to be represented within the new municipality council by a member of their traditional community. On the other hand, larger municipalities may be better suited to the increasing demands of stronger representation for under-represented groups. They may more easily mobilize people for common political interests when the group consists of more than just a handful of individuals (Newton 1982:201; Offerdal 1979:57). However, one of the consequences of municipal amalgamation is that this poses greater challenges for the general goals of highly-active democratic participation (Demokratiutvalget 2005). Most often, amalgamations lead to a reduction in the total number of local politicians. Though one person may possess several characteristics that represent his or her constituency, fiercer competition for fewer seats will *sine qua non* make it more complicated to fulfill the demands of what is considered good and fair representation in the municipal council.

This paper will first discuss the differing rationales for municipal councils and the perceived needs of democratic participation, offering three models by which to understand these rationales. Thereafter, it will present past and current changes that have been occurring in the Faroese municipality structure in light of these perspectives. It will take a closer look at changes in the recruitment of politicians during the period of municipal amalgamation, and thereby the loss of total representative seats for representatives, and finally, discuss the elected representatives' opinions on the size of the councils.

Data

Two sources of data have been collected. First, party lists of nominated and elected council members, with names showing gender distribution as well as results in municipalities of different sizes. While information retrieval of nominated and elected persons to municipal councils 1992 and 1996 was published as lists in newspapers, easier access to election results since 1998 is now available at the Faroese Broadcasting *Kringvarp Føroya's* website <http://kvf.fo/val>. The other source is questionnaires sent to all the nominees for the municipal elections in 2000-2008 (paper questionnaires), and to all the elected in 2012 (online questionnaires, QuestBack). The response rates were as follows: for the survey in 2004 of those nominated in 2000, 38 percent (359/951); for the survey in 2006 of those nominated in 2004, 50 percent (393/782); for the survey in 2012 of those nominated in 2008, 39

percent (235/600). Despite the low response rate, the distribution across the central variables is acceptable (Jákupsstovu and Kjersem 2005, Jákupsstovu and Kjersem 2008, Dam 2013). For the purpose of this paper, only the surveys of elected representatives are included. The last survey conducted in 2016 went to the municipal councillors who were elected in 2012. Their response rate was 63 percent (126/201).

Rationales for municipal councils

Perspectives on the purposes of municipal government change over time. In the words of Audun Offerdal (2007): 'The municipal structure in a country is a result of political processes, and it expresses the present hegemonic view in the political system on what a municipality is, and what the municipalities can be used for'.¹ Particularly in times of change, there will be different opinions on what the municipalities' political assignments should be, what its proper size and borders should be, and who should be acting as representatives in the council to shape the policies for a good community.

Although there are different understandings of *why* some issues are considered to be best handled at the local level, there is wide agreement within the literature on local councils' knowledge of local values and essential needs. Delegating power to the local level may lead to more effective government, as local knowledge can be used to find acceptable solutions at lower costs. Furthermore, the values of democratic participation and political liberty to form local society accompany the development of local

government (Sharpe 1970). For Nordic language users, it may be illuminating to observe how the two different aspects of the Scandinavian term '*kommune*' are reflected in the English language with the two concepts *municipality* and *commune*. The etymology of the English term '*municipality*' is from the Latin '*municipalis*', meaning 'a service performed for the community'. The term '*commune*' on the other hand, has a common root with the English word 'community' and 'common', thus referring to the *social relations* in a local society.

The strength of citizens' local identity will vary; it has been seen as especially strong when the settlement has old roots and immigration has been insignificant (Rose and Ståhlberg 2000). Wherever the municipal entity overlaps with locally defined communities, we might expect the municipal structures to express similarities with nation states, where the state covers only one nation. In that case, the community will consist of a group of people who, in Frazer's words, share 'a sense of allegiance' (1999:241).

Despite these benefits, several European countries have chosen to actively decrease their number of municipalities during recent decades, which results in 'local democracy... being changed and reinvented' (Ladner and Fiechter 2012:437). What is considered to be the proper size of a municipality differs, and municipal structures do indeed vary from country to country. The only common characteristic of municipalities is that they are not politically sovereign and need to adjust to decisions made by a higher authority on the national or federal level.

Tensions between supporters and opponents of municipal amalgamations often ground their positions on different foundational philosophies for including municipalities in a nation's government structure. On the one hand, municipalities are administrative systems that implement national policy, with providing local welfare services generally constituting the weightiest task. On the other hand, they are democratic institutions that are intended to solve genuine local issues (Offerdal 2007, Frazer 1999).

The size of a democratic system matters (Dahl & Tufte 1973). From one perspective, amalgamation is an advantage for the citizens since a larger-sized community base expands a system's capacity to provide services and deliver welfare solutions to the people. However, as Dahl & Tufte also point out, in a large community, the inhabitants will have fewer opportunities to participate in the political processes, and will more frequently feel personal insignificance in political outcomes. There will be a greater distance between the citizens and their representatives (Berg 2012). Anckar (1999) also discusses the probability that smaller polities are more likely to be homogenous and therefore, find political consensus more easily. When these issues are considered, some take the perspective that larger-sized municipalities should be resisted.

Peoples' local identity in the pre-industrial communities were themes in the works of Alexis Tocqueville from 1835 and Ferdinand Tönnies from 1887. These traditional values are emphasized in some of the current political and academic discussions, and some

have even tried to 'reconstruct' small-sized democratic governed local communities. These are often based on ideas of an egalitarian culture in small environments, as well as the ideals of participatory democracy for solving political problems (Florida 2017).

In the counter-cultural movement fifty years ago, young people in America as well as in Europe chose to establish alternative communities in rural areas, and many of these are still functioning. Similar experiments with alternative community government have been made by and for people living in urban environments. There have been anti-authoritarian groups such as Christiania in Copenhagen, occupying land for a 'free state', and their nature has been to be independent of all 'patriarchal' governing from the established state or local government. There have also been efforts by the establishment to prevent and/or limit political alienation in urban environments by constructing suburban community councils, though most often with limited political influence.

However, focusing solely on social ties in a community may hinder an understanding of the genuine values of and the need for democratic institutions at the local level. Local political power must be seen in connection with the control of public space and the built environment (Elliott 2010). One of the main virtues of local democracy is that people who live in and identify themselves with a geographically defined area through political institutions may find mutual solutions to conflicting interests (Offerdal 2007). Lasswell's classic definition of politics is

‘who gets what, when and how’ but, as Joni Lovenduski (2015) points out, ‘where’ and ‘why’ must also be added. The *where* depicts the importance of an institutionalized political arena. In municipal councils, elected representatives are those who possess the competence to make political decisions on issues that are delegated from the national to the local level.

Thus far, these discussions of the functions of local municipality councils have led us to identify three ideal-typical models (Weber 1971). One focuses on the prospect of increasing effective government through the use of local knowledge, which in turn benefits the local citizens and may lead to better and cheaper public services. This model can be labelled the *municipal administration model*. Another model emphasizes the social ties within a community that holds to mutual norms and values in local environments as fundamental for a political community. This model can be labelled as the *social ties community model*. An alternative approach is to focus on the local space, or more precisely, the geographic entity that people share, in which they are destined to live alongside others with differing values. In this approach, the main rationale for local councils is neither to effectively administer central policy nor to finding consensus through Habermasian dialogue for the ‘right’ solutions to local problems. Rather, by focusing on the geographic entity, the municipal council is seen as the local arena for finding political solutions to deal with conflicting interests within the community. This model can be labelled the *local*

space municipality model. While the *social ties community model* presupposes mutual norms and values in the community, both the *municipal administration model* and the *local space municipality model* prioritize good and fair representation of groups with divergent interests to be an essential value.

By amalgamating municipalities, governments may anticipate more effective public policy performance,² but these national plans may clash with the locals’ desires to maintain democratic institutions solely for the community with which they identify. There are mixed opinions about how many should be engaged in politics among those who have a *social ties* and *local space* view of local government. In traditional municipalities, there may be an understanding that ‘proper’ representation consists of local patrons in the seats (Goldsmith 1992, Kjellberg 1965, 1973). Others are concerned that the reduction of the number of seats in local government will demobilize previously politically active citizens (Offerdal 2016).

The present amalgamation processes have also coincided with changes in the understanding of which groups should have elected representatives in the local councils, especially when it comes to claims for gender balance and increased female representation. As Lovenduski (2015) says, women’s shared interests in policies that increase their autonomy should not be underestimated. However, this could also be said about other groups such as the poor, the immigrants, or the youth and the elderly, who might request representation as independent and able citizens rather than

remaining under the political care of professional, middle-aged, upper middle-class politicians. The consequence therefore, will be either increased competition for a seat on the municipality council or the reverse - political apathy from those groups who feel invisible.

In the next section, the Faroe Islands will serve as an example of a country where commitment to these different conceptions of municipal councils has resulted in protests during the restructuring that has occurred over the two last decades.

Changing the Municipal Structure in West Nordic Countries

To grasp the background for the identity of a distinct nation's municipal system, one needs to see it in a geographical, historical, socio-economical, cultural and political context. The Faroe Islands' municipal system shares some similarities with the two other West Nordic countries of Iceland and Greenland. The countries share the common heritage of being parts of the *amt*-structure in the Kingdom of Denmark (Greenland though having status as colony until 1952). All three countries obtained local democratic institutions in the 1870's. Their municipal systems were modelled after - but not copies of - the Danish system established from 1837-1841. Iceland gained sovereignty in 1918 and became an independent state in 1944, the Faroe Islands obtained its Home Rule in 1948, and Greenland in 1984. Though called 'enhedsstaten Danmark', in the Danish state system, financial affairs are and have been treated separately and uniquely in each of

the four countries. Today, Danish financial aid to Greenland is substantial, whereas aid to the Faroe Islands is rather insignificant and is now being phased out by the Faroese government. Despite the historical similarities, the municipality structures of these countries vary, primarily due to geographical and demographic differences. Iceland, with 357,000 inhabitants in 103,000 km² is the most populous. Greenland is the largest in size with the longest distances separating its communities that total 56,000 inhabitants on 1,443,000 km², and the Faroe Islands are the most densely populated, with 52,000 people in 1,400 km².

All three West Nordic countries have experienced various degrees of municipal amalgamations. In Iceland, the number of municipalities was reduced from 229 in 1950 to 124 in 2000 (Eythórsson, Gløersen, and Karlsson 2014, Reynisson 2008). A number of rural municipalities ceased to exist due to depopulation, and others through municipal amalgamations. The amalgamation process was started by government initiative in 1991, with the premise that all amalgamations should be voluntary. In 1993, referenda were held in 185 of 196 municipalities. This might have reduced the number to 43, but the proposals were voted down in all municipalities except one. However, quoting Eythórsson et al (2014, 18): „the ball had been set rolling and an amalgamation trend never known before had started“. By 2002, the number was reduced to 105. New referenda were held in 2005, only resulting in an immediate reduction by three, from 92 to 89. Further depopulation in rural districts combined

with new responsibilities transferred from state to municipal level have meant heavier tasks for small and poor entities, and further amalgamations. Today the number is 72.

Until 2008, Greenland had 19 municipalities, but between 2009 – 2018, this number was reduced to just four. Since January 1, 2018, the number has increased to five, as one of the municipalities split. Huge internal geographic and cultural differences can hinder effective internal communication within Greenland's municipal entities. However, Greenland also has 61 *bygdebestyrelser*, local councils with elected representatives that have long traditions in remote communities. Furthermore, protests against the restructuring of political power and loss of local councils have led to establishment of *lokaludvalg*, local committees, in less peripheral communities to compensate for some of the loss of democratic power due to the 2009 amalgamation.

The variation in form and speed in the amalgamation processes in Greenland and Iceland call to Klausen's (2016) classification of municipal amalgamation processes. He distinguishes between 1) *inertia* ('freezing' the municipal structure), 2) *continuous* (incremental adjustment to changing conditions), and 3) *episodic* (sudden changes, punctuated equilibrium).

Greenland experienced the most drastic change, qualifying within Klausen's *episodic* category. Greenland choose to follow the track of Denmark, who in 2007 went from 270 to 98 municipalities in one dramatic swoop. These kinds of sudden reductions

require top-down directives and implementation from state government, as local politicians, if they had been involved in the process, would most likely have opposed it (*ibid.*). Iceland's process may be placed in the *continuous* category, which manifests as a process that once started, is not easy to stop (*ibid.*). The amalgamation process may slow down, thereby interrupting the schedule set up by the government. However, once an initiative to structural change has political support in the national government and a decision to reduce the number of municipalities is taken, the amalgamation process according to Klausen (*ibid.*) may be expected to continue. But what then, may we say of the amalgamation process in the Faroe Islands?

In the Faroe Islands, the government has a goal of reducing the total number of municipalities to 7 or 9 in the future. As mentioned previously, the number of municipalities has thus far been reduced from 48 in 2000 to 29 in 2017. These amalgamations have been voluntary, and revisions made to municipality law in 2000 as well as public discussions on local government have led to widespread support for the creation of larger entities. Following the new political signals, the municipal election in November 2004 resulted in a rapid reduction of municipalities from 48 to 34. After the 2008 election, this number was reduced further to 30. Since then there has been only one new amalgamation; in January 2017, the total number became 29.

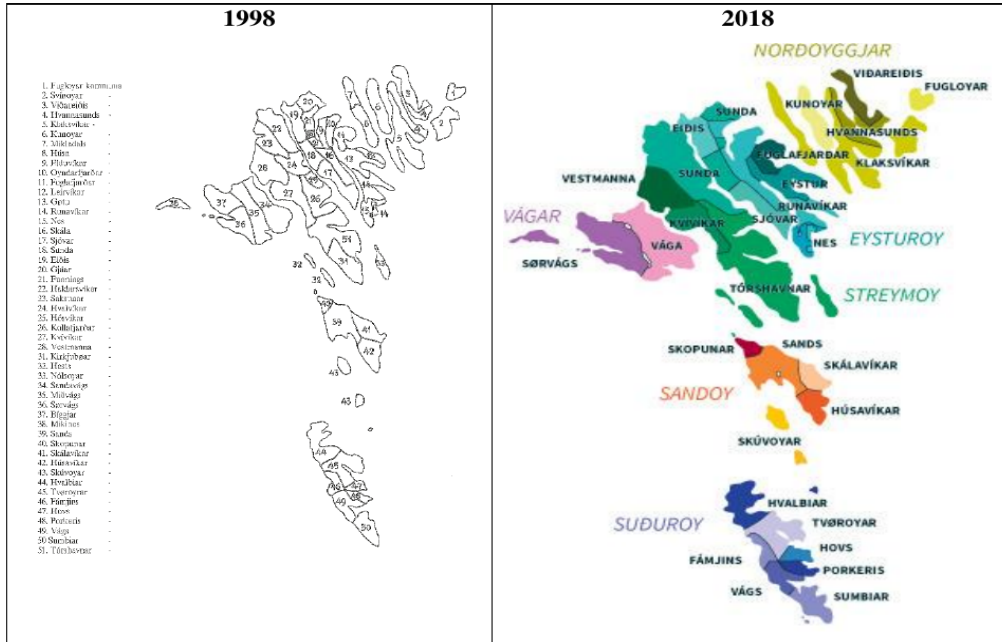
Since the amalgamation process has not gone as quickly as central authorities in Tórs-

havn had planned, some argue for abandoning the voluntary track and instead using the national government's legal power to implement a new municipal structure with only seven or nine municipalities. However, members of parliament are reluctant to force reform against the will of their voters. In 2011, the Minister of the Interior decided to arrange a referendum on the issue of amalgamation. If the minister's intention was to speed up the voluntary amalgamation process, the referendum had the opposite effect. Voter turnout was a meager 32.7 percent, a result that indicated that people were wary of the implications of such severe structural changes (Dam 2013). At the regional level, the majority in six of the country's seven regions rejected amalgamation. Only in Vágur, where an ongoing merging process was then occurring, was there a small majority in favor of amalgamation. At the municipal level, a majority in some of the municipalities who had expectations of becoming centers of these new large municipalities voted in favor. However, amalgamation seemed to be most popular among those who were not affected, which echoes the findings of Rysavý and Bernard (2013, 835). Only in three peripheral municipalities did a majority favor amalgamation in 2012, yet these municipalities are still intact today. The referendum in 2012 paused – or dealt a temporary blow – to the municipal structural changes. Since 2012, the only municipality that has merged actually voted no at the time, but local discussions and negotiations ended with the merging of this tiny municipality with Klaksvík after the

election in 2016, though a local referendum might still have given a negative result. Interestingly, in Tórshavn, it was the opponents of amalgamation who expressed their dissent in the referendum. Of the 20.3 percent of voters who turned out, 73.6 percent said no. Having already absorbed six surrounding municipalities since 1974, the people of Tórshavn obviously felt enough was enough.

According to Klausen's (2016) typology, then, the amalgamation process in the Faroe Islands before 2004 and after 2008 thus may be placed in the category of *inertia*, although there was a short episode of *episodic* amalgamation between 2004 and 2008. One way to grasp this stop-start-stop process is to take a closer look at the local democratic values that are held in different parts of the country due to uneven development. As Figure 1 shows, the municipalities in the periphery – Suðuroy, Sandoy and in parts of Norðuroyggjar – have chosen to retain their traditional structures. There seems to be less opposition to municipal amalgamation in communities in the central areas – Streymoy, Eysturoy, Vágur and Klaksvík - which are knit together by tunnels and bridges that the centrally located Faroese use to commute between the municipalities for work and school. The different attitudes toward local representation expressed within these regions will now be considered.

Figure 1 Faroese municipalities



Sources: Kommununevndin 1998b, 9; <http://www.kf.fo/kommunurnar>

The Faroese Municipalities – Communities Based on Social Ties?

The roots of local democracy run deep in Faroese society—to the very first Norse settlements. Records exist of rules and procedures for regulation of sheep farming, bird hunting, and so on in *Seyðabrævið* from as early as 1274. Even today, *grannastevna* may still be held between neighbouring communities, when decisions have to be made about use of common natural resources, though the urban portion of the population may not be aware of the existence of these local institutions. In these meetings, the head of the family represents the people of the house, ‘either a man or a woman’, as expressed in the Faroese Parliament’s resolution of 1884.³ However, with the modern style

of municipalities introduced during 1866–1872 came a new logic of representation. From that point on, the political franchise was confined to *citizens*. Yet, when it comes to municipal elections in traditional villages, there are indications that the idea of fair representation of *houses* or hamlets has been preserved in the collective consciousness.

In 1866, Tórshavn, the only town at that time, established a town council. A modern municipality system was established in the rural districts soon after, in 1872. The small population, which at that time consisted of fewer than 10,000 people, 800 of whom lived in Tórshavn, was the main reason that the Danish government stuck to the seven parochial districts in spite of recommendations from the Faroes to maintain the traditional

community structure of around 40 entities. Since that time, the number of districts in the Faroese municipal structure has both increased and decreased in numbers.

Geographical as well as perceived cultural distances from neighbor communities subsequently led to divisions, the first in 1874. By 1967, the number of districts was 51. Wang (1988) points to municipal taxes as a major stimulus for communities to establish separate municipalities. By becoming a separate entity, you would no longer have to pay for the investments of the neighboring community. Still, each municipality collects and dispenses separate local taxes within a given limit set by the government, but without any equalizing of the tax incomes among the various municipalities. When established, the municipalities' statutory tasks were few. This opened the way for local financial power and entrepreneurship in the municipal councils. They could also

choose to keep the taxes low, and therefore, the expenses of municipal administration and local welfare to a minimum.

The local identities have been very strong in the Faroes, but recent research shows that this may be changing. For example, it has always been possible to identify people's origin village by their local dialect. However, new linguistic studies show that this may soon become history, as young Faroese instead, are now consciously using typical *district* features in their spoken language rather than local village ones (Bugge, 2018). This demonstrates that they are choosing to identify with a larger conception of the 'local' geographical area. Additionally, local natural resources are less crucial for the villagers' lives than they were for previous generations. Consequently, the rationales that characterize the *social ties community-model* are losing hegemony. As Table 1 shows, the smallest municipalities are slowly fading out:

Table 1: Amalgamation = reduction of small municipalities

Number of inhabitants	Number of representatives in municipal councils	Number of municipalities				
		2001	2005	2009	2013	2017
Inhabitants January 2017*						
20.885	13	1	1	1	1	1
1.705-5.051	11	1	3	4	4	4
1.356; 1521; 2.060	9	3	2	3	3	3
529-1.256; 1.729	7	14	13	10	9	9
84-454	5	18	10	9	10	10
42; 45	3	11	5	3	3	2
<i>Total number of councils</i>		48	34	30	30	29

Note: Last election Nov. 2016. The number of inhabitants indicates the municipalities' size, though two municipalities have chosen to have fewer council members than other municipalities of the same size: Tvøroyri, (1,729 inhabitants and 7 councilmembers), and Eystur kommuna, (2,060 inhabitants and 9 councilmembers). Data is derived from <http://kvf.fo/val>

As mentioned above, a new municipality law was passed in 2000. One of the changes concerns the number of council members in the smallest municipalities. Under the previous 1972 law, each council was expected to have at least 7 members, though a council was permitted to reduce the number to five or even three when there were less than 1000 inhabitants in the municipality. Now, municipalities with fewer than 500 inhabitants have been declared to be in a permanent state of emergency, consequently directing councils in municipalities with less than 100 inhabitants to have only three members and those with less than 500 inhabitants, only five. However, councils that consist of only three members have met particularly difficult problems with basic functionality, as three is a notoriously awkward number for deliberative settings (Larsen 2008, Sunstein 2005). Comments on questionnaires (surveys 2004, 2006, 2012, 2016) exhibited annoyance toward situations when one member is in opposition to the other two on a three-member council.

One argument for merging the small municipalities into larger ones was a perceived need to strengthen the local democracy. There were concerns about future recruitment to municipality councils. A vivid local democracy is of course dependent on the people's sense of the importance of local political issues, as well as a confidence in the political representatives' ability to make a difference in local policy performance. One argument for delegating welfare issues, which was probably influenced by current discussions in neighboring coun-

tries, was to give the municipal councils more meaningful tasks. However, election data showed that worries about a lack of interest or mobilization in local politics seem exaggerated, or at least premature. It is difficult to find evidence of problems with council member recruitment.⁴ For Faroese municipal elections, a primary requirement is that the number of nominated candidates always exceeds the total number of seats in the council by two. This requirement has been fulfilled, according to this author's research, in every municipal election since 1992. These councils have few seats – between 3 and 13 – and becoming an elected representative still brings with it the incentive of power and prestige.

One way to confirm the ease of municipal candidate recruitment is to examine the frequency with which under-represented groups such as women and immigrants are nominated and elected. Individuals who fit within these two groups are easily identifiable. The female share of municipal councils will be more fully explored later in this paper, but when it comes to immigrant representation, the results are clear; since 1992 all elected officials in the Faroe Islands have been Faroese save one. In fact, the names of the nominated candidates indicate that extremely few candidates, and none from outside the Nordic region, made it into the nomination lists. The Faroe Islands have a highly homogeneous population; the 2011 census showed that only 1 percent of the population identified as non-Faroese identity. Since that time, the number of immigrants has increased (Ísfeld 2019, Hayfield

and Schug 2019). Nonetheless, the stark absence of non-Faroese on municipal councils may indicate a strong preference for native council members holding political office.

The Faroese's stable interest in local elections is also noticeable at electoral turn-outs. As Table 2 shows, the citizens in the 10 smallest municipalities surpass the capital when it comes to participating in elections:

Table 2 Turnout, municipal elections

	2016	2012	2008	2004
Average	83.8	80.8	78.4	82.6
Tórshavn	79.2	77.4	72.4	78.1
Average, 10 smallest*	91.4	87.0	88.3	85.9

Note: Electorate 2016, 2012, 2008: less than 300; electorate 2004: less than 150.

Source: Data is derived from <http://kvf.fo/val>

Oliver, Ha and Callen (2012:8) claim that 'One of the most common misperceptions about local politics is that ... their issues are insignificant and that the voters are apolitical. In fact, just the opposite is more often the true – local voters are much more likely to embody the classical notions of an informed and rational *polis* than are national voters.' They emphasize the influence of long-term residents and homeowners on the local political culture, as these citizens are not only likely to vote, but also generally are well-informed and engaged in local politics. They are driven to participate 'not simply from concerns over sustaining their property values, but also from attachments to a particular vision of their community' (2012:196). Oliver, Ha

and Callen's active citizens fulfil Fraser's characteristics of the republican citizen 'that all individuals within a community have an obligation to participate, to uphold the community's norms and laws, to sustain it as well as themselves.' (Fraser 1999: 210). The republican citizen, however, has a role in the municipality that is different from the community member in the *social ties community model*. We will now take a closer look at Faroese attitudes toward municipal democracy as seen from perspectives of the republican citizen within the *local space municipality model*.

Citizen Representation - the Local Space Municipality Model

With the introduction of modern municipalities in 1866-1872 came a new logic of local democracy based on the privileges of *citizen rights*. Only 'free men', not including women and the poor, were considered citizens.

Changes in economic life in the 20th and 21st centuries challenged the relative egalitarianity in the communities, especially in villages that grew into towns dominated by the fishing industry, where men became wage earners. As in Iceland (Styrkárdsdóttir 1998), the cleavage between male and female lives became more definite than in the old world, both in labour and in politics.

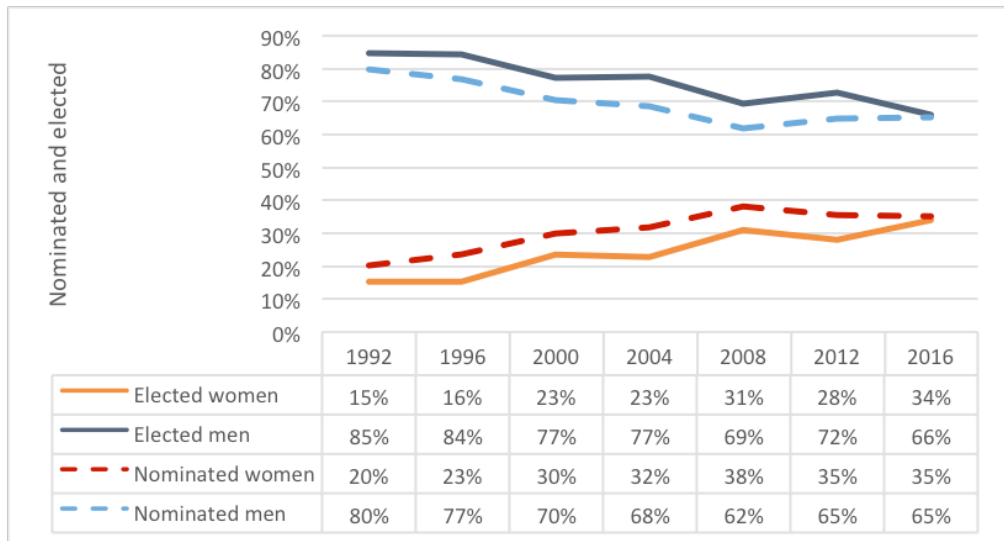
New cleavages have lead to new forms of political alliances and competitions in municipal elections. The municipal council has become a local arena for finding political solutions for conflicting interests in the community, a model here labelled as

the *local space municipality-model*. Local politicians were expected to deal with tasks belonging to the ‘male world’. They tried to make the municipality prosperous by assisting trade, providing for new infrastructure, and so on. Not until women also became wage earners in the last decades of the 20th Century did they begin to petition for representation in the municipal councils as a way to get welfare issues, such as kindergartens, on the political agenda.

Faroese women are thus latecomers to local councils as well as to the national

parliament, though they have been eligible for municipal elections since 1908 and to the parliament since 1916 (Jacobsen 2018, Jákupsstovu 2013, 1996). However, the attitudes toward ‘proper’ municipal representation in the model of *Local space municipality* are changing. To illustrate the process of inclusion of underrepresented groups, we turn a special focus here to women’s participation. Figure 2 shows changes in the gender distribution of municipal councils in the last 25 years.

Figure 2 Gender distributions at municipal elections. Percent.



Source: Data is derived from <http://kvf.fo/val>

The general trend is toward greater gender equality among local politicians. The 2016 election actually resulted in a female council member majority in Tórshavn, with eight women and five men, and the capital now has a female mayor for the second time in history. Could this indicate that value changes have opened up a new type of political elite that includes women, while peripheral municipalities still are male dominated? As Table 3 shows, the picture is not yet that clear.

er experienced the role of being invisible in the public space as housewives for the male bread winners?

The middle size municipalities have the poorest gender balance average. Compared to the development in middle-sized and larger municipalities, there is a noticeably slower increase in female participation in the former group. In the middle-sized municipalities, whose economies are all in some way based on the fishing industry, the municipal politics' power relations are

Table 3 Women's share of the elected positions in small, medium and large municipalities*. Percent.

	2004	2008	2012	2016
13 & 11	24	33	30	39
9 & 7	20	28	23	29
3 & 5	26	33	32	37

Note: *Municipality size here: size of the council, see Table 1.

Source: Data is derived from <http://kvf.fo/val>

This table shows that the female share is the same in the smallest municipalities as in the most urbanized municipalities. We find the same tendency in the prevalence of female mayors. Seven of the 29 mayors were women, four of them elected in the smallest municipalities. One reason for this may be that the population is very small and decreasing in the smallest municipalities with less than 500 inhabitants, thus mobilizing all electable citizens for service.

On the other hand, male candidates were available for mayoral positions and were not chosen. Could it be that women living in the small traditional villages nev-

cemented in the different interest groups or political parties. Oliver, Ha, and Calen (2012:192) emphasizing citizen's devotion to their traditional municipality, claim that '... it is very likely that politics will be dominated by a political regime oriented around an agenda of preserving the mal-apportionment of public resources'. The combination of high political mobilization in stable Faroese communities and traditional power regimes' efforts to preserve their control may provide some explanation for the different responses to amalgamation from central and peripheral municipalities.

Local Councils for Municipal Administration?

When established in 1872, the municipalities succeeded the *fattigkommisioner*, local poverty committees, in introducing and formalizing the logic of a public social system to the local level. However, municipalities were small and had few resources to solve such complex problems. A hundred years later in 1972, the only municipality that had yet developed a professional social and welfare department was Tórshavn. The rest depended on the then Danish-administered social and welfare administration in Tórshavn. These tasks were transferred from Danish to Faroese authorities in 1988.

In 1972, when the Faroes passed a new municipality law, one purpose was to encourage municipal amalgamations, but, by 1996 there were still 50 municipalities. A new endeavour was made in the 1990's by an initiative from the Faroese Home Rule administration to change the municipality system (Kommununevndin 1997, 1998a, b), and in 2000 the new municipal law was carried through the Faroese Parliament, the *Løgting*. At that time, the Home Rule government had assumed full responsibility of the welfare sector, and from their viewpoint, it seemed natural to imitate the structural changes being made in neighboring countries. Fewer municipalities might on one hand, give national authorities greater control over public finances at the local level, and on the other, arrange for a welfare policy formed at the local level by municipal councils. From the perspective of the

central Faroese authorities then, the local democracy's greatest quality was to be fit to perform those tasks that belong within the *municipal administrations* model.

Besides the general claims from the government that municipalities would soon meet new resource-demanding challenges, the 2000 law also contained new rules that motivated the closing of councils in the smallest self-governed communities. One of these new incentives was mayoral salary. While previously a municipal mayor might have continued in his or her original occupation, they now were obliged to serve in the position as a fulltime or halftime job. The only exceptions were for mayors of municipalities with less than 500 inhabitants, who were permitted to serve in a less than half time job. Hence, this resulted in a new level of professionalization of the municipal-level political leadership and a new understanding of municipal government according to the *municipal administration* model.

Incidentally, the present amalgamation processes also coincided with changes in the understanding of which groups should have elected representatives in the local councils, especially concerning claims for gender balance and increased female representation. For about forty years, there have been extensive campaigns to mobilize women for political duties, first organized by the Women Right's movement, and since 2006, also by the national government.

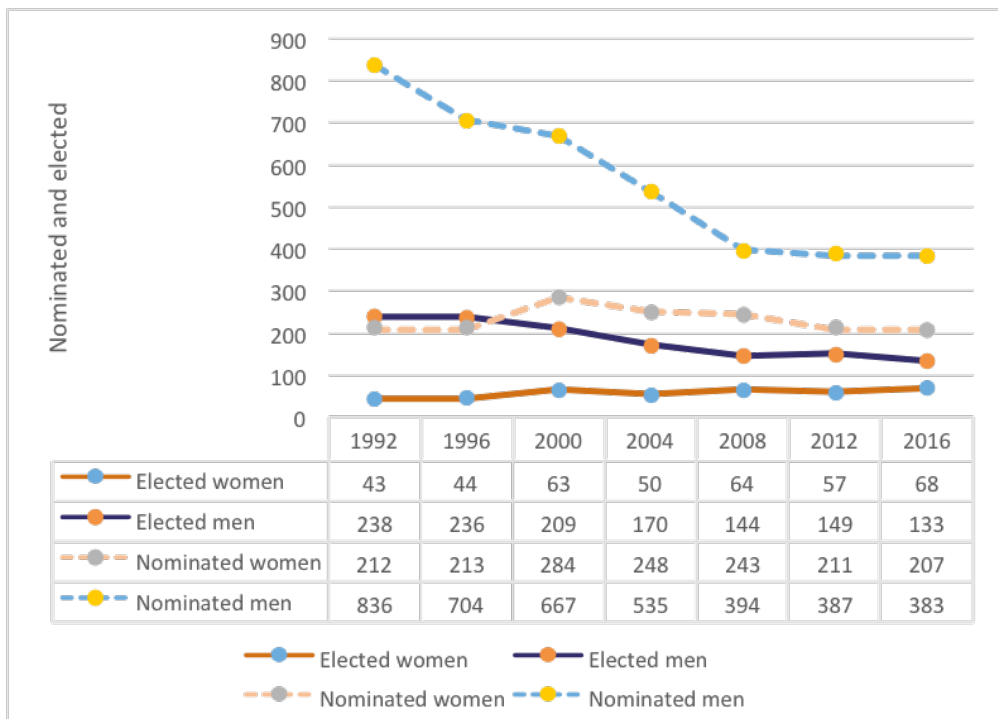
However, representation requires seats in the political arena. Due to amalgamations, since 2000 the number of members

in municipality councils in the Faroes has been reduced from 272 to 201. The smaller number of municipalities has particularly affected the number of nominations, which has shrunk from 1048 to 590 since 1992. While the national party system, as mentioned above, is only present in the largest municipalities, and most often does not represent all seven national parties at the local elections, even the smallest municipalities usually have two party lists, and medium-size municipalities three to five party lists, which represent special local interests. Sometimes these party lists cor-

respond to the ideologies of the national parties, but most often, they represent conflicting interests in the community. When municipalities disappear, obviously many party lists of nominees disappear as well.

As Figure 3 shows, there has been a 'landslide' in the overall number of nominated men per election. From 1992 to 2008, the number of nominated men dropped from 836 to 304. The 'democratic project' of this period has been gender equality, and the percentage of female municipality representatives has increased from 15 percent in 1992 to 34 percent in 2016 (see Figure

Figure 3 Gender Distributions at Municipal Elections. Absolute Number.



Source: Data is derived from <http://kvf.fo/val>

2). However, Figure 3 shows that the *number* of elected women has not shown any impressive increase, the total number being only 25 more women in municipal councils in 2016 than in 1992.

The overall reduction of municipal councils has less of an effect on the political mobilisation of women than on men, and thus the Faroes have become more gender equal in politics. Yet, from a democratic perspective, the price of the amalgamations has clearly been a dramatic demobilisation of local politicians. The total number of elected people has been reduced. This is contrary to recommendations made by the Nordic *Demokratiutvalget* (2005) to increase rather than decrease the number of elected representatives, as local politics should be looked at as a school of democracy, and more people should have the opportunity to become involved in political decision-making.

Positively though, Figure 2 demonstrates a slow, unsteady trend towards more equal gender representation. Interestingly, the results from the last election in 2016 do not show the traditional picture of voters preferring male candidates. Being a woman now does not seem to reduce a candidate's chances of being elected.

Elected Representatives' Opinion on the Composition of the Municipal Councils

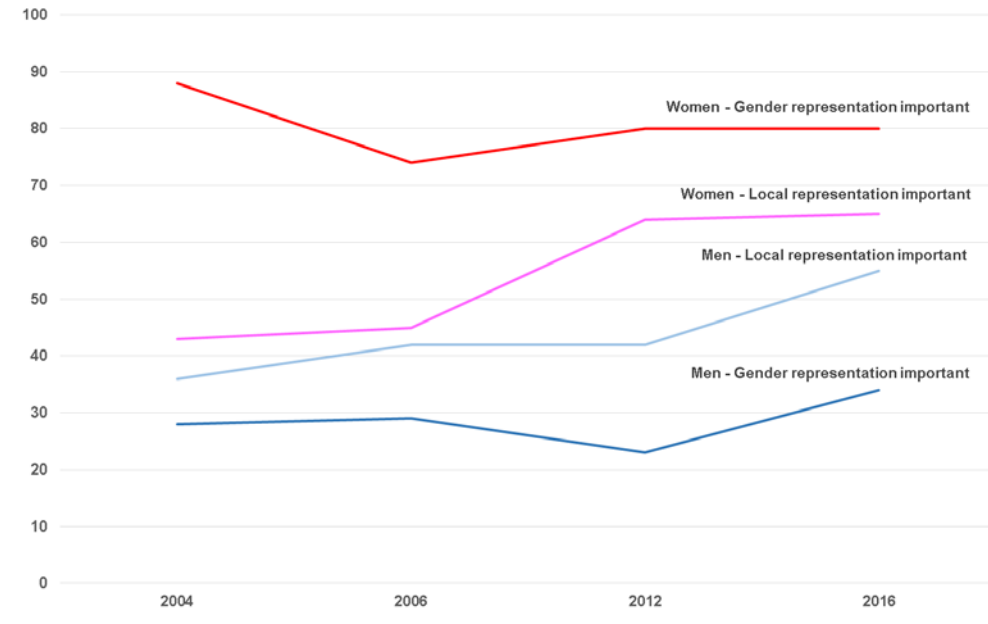
This study of municipality elections has shown that changes have taken place when it comes to gender representation. Women now hold a fairer share of the seats in the councils. However, is there a difference between the male and female councilors when

it comes to attitudes toward local and gender representativeness?

Within the rationale of the *local space municipality-model*, citizens will decisively believe in the importance of politicians' representativeness in the local council board. The representatives should look like, have common interests with, and share experiences with the represented, and they should act as delegates and defend their 'backlands' interests against conflicting interests. In the *municipal administration-model*, the forms of actual representation are less important; it is sufficient that the council members qualify as a well-informed source for the local and national public administration, mediating information about what is considered to be the local understanding of common needs and adequate solutions. How do these models apply to elected councilors' opinions on representation? Do men and women differ in their opinions?

A proclaimed need for increased representation of underrepresented women is congruent with the rationale in the *local space municipality-model* of councilors' representativeness. According to this model, there should also be a fair representation of different local communities in the municipal councils.

Local councilors elected in 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012 were asked for their opinion on the composition of the municipal councils when it comes to gender equality and the representation of local communities on a scale from 1 to 5. Figure 4 shows the share of men and women who answered that this kind of representation is *important* and *very important* (4+5).

Figure 4 Council Members' Opinions on Representation, in percentages

Note: Question 23, questionnaires 2004, 2006, 2012, 2016: Hvussu heldur tú at bygda/ býráðið eigur at vera samansett? Vinaliga set kross við allar pástandirnar, frá 1: lítlan týðning til 5: stóran týðning. **23 a:** Umleið sama tal av monnum og kvinnum; **23 d:** Umboð fyri ymiskar bygdir og býarpartar í kommununi.

Figure 4 demonstrates that while female politicians are very concerned about female representation, men find this important to a far lesser degree. A larger share of women also think that local representation is important, although women are not concerned about local council representation to the same degree. These findings indicate that there are some gender differences in views on political representation in the Faroe Islands. A major cause might be the massive emphasis on motivating women to become representatives in local councils and the national parliament. In training campaigns solely aimed at women, not men, women were trained in democratic thinking and were encouraged in political participation.

The campaigns' emphasis on female representation in the local councils may have influenced some women in municipal politics toward the rationale of the *local space municipality model*. On the other hand, since men seem less concerned about the councilors' representativeness, perhaps they are conceiving of municipal politics through a rationale that is closer to the *municipal administration model*, or rely on values in the *social ties community model*, where mirror representation has less significance?

One way of improving the representation of underrepresented groups and interests might be to increase the number of representatives in the councils. Generally, the opposite has been the case. However, from

a *municipal administration* point of view, the fewer politicians, the easier it will be to avoid ‘endless’ political debates; the politicians in power can, together with a professional administration, make decisions on how to manage local services. Decreasing the number of local politicians also means smaller disbursements of wages to politicians – ‘savings’ which may be used to finance a professional administration. Table 4 shows the local politicians’ opinions of the size of the councils:

national stated goals has slowed down the amalgamation process, and the municipal structure now exhibits a hybrid pattern, comprised of new constituencies based on larger aggregations of citizens in the central areas, while traditional municipalities with unchanged borders predominate in the more peripheral areas.

It is uncertain whether there will be more voluntary amalgamations, or whether national politicians, many of whom maintain strong ties to local communities, will carry

Table 4 Council members’ opinion on the size of the councils. Per Cent.

	2004	2006	2012	2016
Too many members	13	14	16	9
Right size	77	77	79	87
Too few members	8	8	4	3
N=	147	128	99	124

Note: Question 24a, questionnaires 2004, 2006, 2012, 2016. Hvat heldur tú um støddina á bygðaráðnum/býráðnum? Alt. 1: Vit velja ov nógv fólk til at sita í bygðaráðnum/býráðnum. Alt. 2: Tað sita passaliga nógv fólk í bygðaráðnum/býráðnum. Alt. 3: Vit velja ov fá fólk inn í bygðaráðið/býráðið.

As Table 4 shows, the vast majority of elected politicians find their council to be the proper size. The councils are small, and small councils makes the seats exclusive. The councilors do not have to share their power with many others.

Conclusion

In the Faroe Islands, we find great general interest in municipal politics, but also divergent opinions on what ‘good representation’ is when it comes to local and gender-equal representation. Local political resistance to

changes through by force. There still are many unanswered questions concerning what traditional municipalities will gain by merging with neighbor municipalities or what they will lose by preserving the status quo. In the central part of the Faroes, emphasis is on values connected to the *municipal administration model*. In some of the smallest communities, which have merged with the wealthier cities of Tórshavn and Klaksvík, the villagers are satisfied, as their previous local taxes could not provide the means to develop local infrastructure. A

consequence of the municipal mergers is that these villages are now able to fund needed infrastructure, for instance to meet the increasing stream of visiting tourists. Some of the formerly independent municipalities now have local committees (*staðbundna nevnd*) to articulate their requirements for their new, more remote municipal council, and some may even have an elected representative from their community in the municipal council (Jacobsen 2008). However, a transition from locally managed tax income and traditional problem solving by the municipal council, to a municipal-administration functioning council may not be attractive for other municipalities where local tax income sufficiently covers the infrastructure that the council wishes to implement. In these local communities, the legitimacy of local government is connected to the values of the *local space municipality model*, but also the *social ties community model*, in which representativeness is less stressed.

On the other hand, infrastructure and welfare services are separate values. A municipality not only provides infrastructure for the citizenry, it also frames the surrounding social community upon which the members wish to make their impact. Large municipalities may suitably solve local social problems; however, this would demand larger municipalities than the Faroese. Few to no Faroese municipalities other than Tórshavn possess the resources to provide their citizens with an administration of welfare services on par with the national welfare apparatus. From the indi-

vidual citizens perspective, there may also be negative expectations of welfare policy and performance that are being delegated from the national to municipal level, as 'direct relationship with the 'state' can be a liberation and a guarantee of his individual rights.' (Frazer 1999: 207).

Fewer municipal councils also means fewer elected representatives. Campaigns to increase the gender balance among political representatives have occurred synchronously with the government's endeavors to merge municipalities. Thus, the demobilization of municipal politicians has been felt especially deeply amongst the male population. Gender differences in attitudes to geographical and gender representation among elected representatives might therefore explain some of the difference in municipalities' rationale, as *actual* representation, where the representatives mirror the constituency, will be more decisive in the *local space municipality model* than in the *municipal administration model*.

As might be expected, male politicians seem less concerned about gender representation than female politicians are. The women reported both gender and geographical representation to be more important to them than their fellow male councillors did. One explanatory factor might be the gender segregated political cultures, in which women are more exposed to campaigns for increased representation of women as a group, while men's entrance to local politics may be more individually founded.

The three proposed rationales for the municipal councils have proved to be use-

ful tools to understand present changes and resistance to those changes in the composition of Faroese municipal councils. The different versions of local democracy in the 29 municipalities represent divergent values of the *social ties community model*, the *local space municipality model* and the *municipal administration model*. The interplay between 1) changing attitudes toward the municipal councils' expected duties, 2) attitudes toward representativeness, 3) reductions in the number of citizens involved in local politics, and 4) the entrance of more female politicians calls for further investigations. One next step might be to examine local power structures more closely.

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Endnotes

1. The text in Norwegian: *Kommuneinndelinga i eit land er resultat av politiske prosessar og uttrykkjer det synet på kva kommunane er og kva dei kan brukast til som til ei kvar tid er rådande innanfor eit politisk system*. (Offerdal 2007,11).
2. The prime justification for structural changes on the local level, led by the national government, is the presumed more effective welfare services in larger municipalities than in small units, a claim which does not have unified support from research in the field, but will not be discussed further here.
3. „ved en husfader forstås den, som repræsenterer familien, hvad enten vedkommende er mand eller kvinde.“ (Bjørk 1956/1957).
4. Rysavý and Bernard (2013) report on Czech municipal elections where there also are many municipalities and small councils. In the Czech Republic there is no rule that there must be more candidates than seats, „none contest“ thus being an alternative, but nevertheless they have experienced cases of lacking enough candidates to fill all the seats.