

Alcohol policy and local democracy in Sweden

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ABSTRACT

AIMS – Europeanisation has led to an elevated role for Swedish local government in the field of alcohol policy, as the national government has been deprived of many of its previous policy instruments. Municipalities are now responsible for handling the social effects of political liberalisation on the national and European level. But are the municipalities and local democracy ready to take this responsibility? This article investigates whether the fundamental prerequisites for democratic processes in the field of alcohol policy are in place in Swedish local government. Is the field politicised and are the ideological dimensions of the field mirrored by political parties, providing the local citizens with political alternatives on Election Day? **METHODS** – The data comes from a survey to 1,388 local councillors in 49 municipalities. **RESULTS** – Issues of alcohol policy are indeed politicised in Swedish local politics, with a clearly identifiable ideological dimension in the attitudes of local councillors. This dimensionality is partly mirrored in the councillors' party affiliation, and their ideological views on alcohol can to a certain extent be explained by their social attributes. **CONCLUSION** – The fundamental prerequisites are in place for Swedish local representative democracy to handle the field of alcohol policy.

KEY WORDS – Alcohol policy, local government, democracy, ideologies, politicians, political parties, Europeanisation, Sweden.

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Europeanisation and the new role of local government in the field of alcohol policy

An anticipated consequence of the European integration process is that supreme control of policy making in many areas is transferred from the realm of the state to the European level. European regulations and deregulations promoting a free market and decreasing state intervention set new limits on national politics, also in relation to social policy (Guillen & Alvarez 2004;

O'Connor 2005). If national regulations, motivated by public health concerns, are in conflict with the EU's overarching goals of free movement of goods, the latter principle normally prevails. This conflict between business interests and public health concerns has been especially evident in the field of alcohol policy (Österberg & Karlsson 2002) and perhaps most poignantly in the case of Sweden (Ugland 2000; Cisneros Örnberg 2008; Baumberg & Anderson 2008).

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Swedish alcohol policy has a long tradition of being restrictive and focused on limiting consumer access to alcohol (Johansson 2008; Nycander 1998). The restrictive policy has wide and continuous public support (Holmberg & Weibull 2008; 2009). Even though the prohibitive line has not officially been changed, Swedish membership in the European Union 1995 effectively restricted the range of policy instruments available to the state. However, despite the weakened authority of the Swedish national government in the field of alcohol policy, EU membership has also, quite paradoxically, led to an elevated role for local government (Andréasson 2002). In the Swedish welfare system, the local authorities are in charge of social services. Therefore, when the state finds it harder to limit alcohol availability, it is the municipalities that will have to handle the social effects of liberalisation and increased alcohol consumption. This is not primarily in the sense that issues formerly decided on the national level are now decentralised, but rather that other elements of social policy in relation to alcohol will increase in importance. The national government has openly recognised this new role of local government (Dir. 2001:22), and legislation is being adjusted to clarify the local responsibilities (SOU 2009:22). As a consequence, the political problems related to alcohol and its social effects that once claimed a national political agenda are now to a higher degree handled in Brussels and in city halls around Sweden.

The case of alcohol policy in Sweden is an example of how reforms at the top of a multi-level governance system may have great consequences in lower tiers of government. Administrative reshuffles com-

plicate accountability and earlier research have studied how higher political tiers of government strive to hold lower tiers accountable, sometimes with the result that more accountability leads to less democracy (Benz 2007). This is unfortunate, since the prime provider of legitimacy and the principal judge on matters of accountability in a democratic system is always the people. Redistribution of responsibilities is therefore a challenge to the democratic system, too: will the people be able to channel their concerns on social policy to new arenas and influence political decisions in a Europeanised welfare state? Swedish alcohol policy is confronting this challenge today.

Studies have shown that it is possible for member states such as Sweden to influence European alcohol policies to some degree (Cisneros Örnberg 2008). But the political processes on this international stage are taking place high above the people. Even the thought of influencing EU policy would be far-fetched for a concerned citizen. Conversely, the possibilities to influence policy at the municipal level are quite tangible. For example, earlier research has found that Norwegian municipalities have implemented policy changes in the field of alcohol policy with the support of the inhabitants (Saglie 1996).

The primary aim of this article is to investigate whether the fundamental prerequisites for functioning democratic processes in the field of alcohol policy are in place in Swedish local government. Is the representative democracy of Swedish municipalities prepared to handle alcohol policy issues?

A condition for allowing a political field

to be influenced by democratic processes in a liberal, representative democracy is that the field is politicised. The main issues of the field must be regarded as salient political problems, and alternative solutions to the core questions must be advanced by political actors. Ideally, candidates and parties should take opposite positions in the core questions in order to give the citizens room for political choice. In addition, a political field normally consists of many distinguished issues, all of which could be regarded as more or less decoupled from each other. Unfortunately, in a representative democracy voters cannot be expected to research the views on all political matters of all parties and candidates. Instead, voters will have to rely on sorting the options according to a few general criteria. In the ideal case, it is possible to reduce a multitude of opinions in different matters to positions on a manageable number of ideological dimensions. If you know that a candidate holds a certain position on such a dimension, you can predict which policy option he/she would propose in a great many hypothetical situations. In addition, knowledge of the existence and meaning of these dimensions is essential for anyone who seeks to understand the foundations of public policy in the studied field.

Since the key to the question of fundamental prerequisites for a functioning representative democratic system lies in the political positions of elected representatives, this study will focus on the attitudes towards alcohol and social policy among local councillors. More precisely, I will try to answer the following questions:

1. Is the field of alcohol policy in Swedish local government *politicised* in the

sense that councillors regard alcohol as a salient political problem? And are the variations in attitudes among councillors large enough to give voters the opportunity to choose from a range of relevant policy options in local elections?

2. Are there systematic patterns in the attitudes of the councillors, enabling voters to understand the political alternatives of local alcohol policy in the light of a controllable number of *ideological dimensions*? And if so, what are these dimensions?

3. To what extent is the *party system* able to mirror these dimensions and can it enable voters in party-based local elections to effectively influence the future policy of the field?

4. Are there other *explanations for ideological differences* among councillors than party affiliations, and if so what are they? Answers to this question enable voters to make more informed decisions. Basic knowledge of a candidate's social characteristics could be used to predict his or her attitudes on alcohol when voters use their prerogative of preference voting.

Alcohol policy in Sweden: Shifting roles between tiers of government

To fully understand the role of local government in relation to alcohol policy in Sweden, it is necessary to recognise the important function of the local level in the Scandinavian welfare system as a whole. The Nordic countries, particularly Sweden, are unique in their level of decentralisation of public services (Sellers & Lidström 2007). Local politics deal with issues across the political spectrum: gen-

eral welfare and social policy, taxes, education, environment, culture, leisure, business development, communications and infrastructure, etc. Local administration therefore plays a central role in the daily lives of millions of Swedes.

Alcohol-related matters have been local responsibilities since the creation of the modern municipal system in the 1860s. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the municipalities were responsible for serving restaurant permits, the distribution monopoly and the handling of social consequences of alcohol abuse. The distribution monopoly was transferred to a single company Systembolaget on the national level in 1955, and the responsibility for serving permits was nationalised at the same time. For much of the twentieth century, alcohol politics could be said to be an institutionalised policy area in local politics, manifested in a formal political institution, the "sobriety committees" (Åman 1962; Rosenqvist 1985). Until the 1970s, many municipalities had such standing committees under the council, with a responsibility both for the welfare of alcohol abusers and their families, and the administration of serving permits for local restaurants. In later years, the tasks of the sobriety committees were transferred to several other fields, decreasing the possibilities of getting a general oversight over the different aspects of alcohol in society.

On the state level, a number of policy instruments were applied throughout the twentieth century to uphold a restrictive line on alcohol. However, the situation changed in 1995, when Sweden joined the EU: state monopolies on the production and import of alcohol are gone, rules on private import are much more generous,

the purchase of alcohol through the Internet is now allowed, as are commercial advertisements for strong beverages. And even though the state monopoly of distribution remains, the accessibility of alcohol through other channels has put the state distribution monopoly under pressure. The high alcohol taxes have been lowered explicitly in order to adapt to an international price level (Andréasson 2002; Holdner 2000; Karlsson 2008; Lindström 2005; Cisneros Örnberg 2009; Ramstedt 2010). When it is not able to defend national alcohol policies, the Swedish government is confined to making its voice heard at the European level (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs 2009).

It is clear that EU membership has limited the scope of action for the national government, but the interpretation of the present situation is not as clear-cut. The Swedish national government still officially keeps the restrictive line. National committees and reports as well as financial support to pre-emptive programmes still exist (Tigerstedt & Karlsson 2003; Ramstedt 2010). Taxes have not been lowered in line with decreases in Denmark and Finland, and previous studies claim that the future of the distribution monopoly lies with the Swedish citizens rather than with the European Court of Justice (Cisneros Örnberg & Ólofsdóttir 2007).

The 1990s saw a "clear trend" of decentralising responsibilities for alcohol issues (Andréasson 2002, 270). This trend coincided with Swedish EU membership and the loss of policy instruments on the state level. Today, alcohol issues are part of local politics in more ways than one. Some responsibilities are mandatory, assigned by state law. Most notably, municipalities

are legally bound to deal with the consequences of alcohol abuse for alcoholics and their families through social services and provide access to rehabilitation programmes. The municipalities are also ordered to spread information and work pre-emptively in relation to alcohol abuse. Since membership in the EU, large public prevention initiatives have been implemented on the local level (Ramstedt 2010).

Since 1995, the municipalities are once again responsible for licensing restaurants to sell alcohol and for ensuring that the restaurants follow the rules. Permits can be revoked if the restaurants misbehave. However, the municipalities do not purely implement state regulations. There is considerable room for discretion, for example, in how thoroughly the municipalities scrutinise applications and supervise the restaurants (Andersen 2000). There is also a clear conflict of interest in being too restrictive against the entertainment industry, since most municipalities see it as their duty to do what they can to stimulate the local economy, generate business and attract tourists. The variation between municipalities has worried the national government, which has called for stricter guidelines in permit practices (Prop. 2010/11:47).

Apart from the obligatory duties, the municipalities are free to carry out their own alcohol policies in several departments, using a wide repertoire of policy instruments. The public school system is a local government responsibility, and all education and information provided about alcohol in schools is indirectly a part of local politics. Municipalities can, if they want to, form separate organisations in order to spread information and work pre-

emptively against alcohol abuse. They are allowed to support organisations in civil society financially, and in doing so there is scope for encouraging organisations that work pre-emptively against alcohol abuse. Municipalities are also free to incorporate voluntary organisations and churches when carrying out their social service responsibilities, and they can regulate public order, including the consumption of alcohol in public places.

Is the field of local alcohol policy politicised? – The survey

The data used in this article comes from a survey directed to all local councillors in the region of Västra Götaland in 2006. The net population of the survey was 2,132 councillors in 49 municipalities. The survey was answered by 1,388 councillors, giving a response rate of 65.5 per cent. Västra Götaland has 1.5 million inhabitants (17 per cent of the national population), many small rural and industrial localities, medium-sized towns and the major city of Gothenburg with its surrounding suburbs. In terms of population size and the ratio of inhabitants living in densely populated areas, the 49 municipalities of the region are almost a perfect representation of the whole country and its 290 municipalities (Karlsson 2007). In 46 of the 49 municipalities, the response rate was above 50 per cent.

In order to explore whether the field of local alcohol policy could be deemed as politicised, the questionnaire included a number of attitude questions on both principled and practical angles concerning alcohol. The questions used in this article are listed in Table 1 below.

The first criterion of politicisation, that

the problems of the field are regarded as salient political issues, is met convincingly. Very few councillors take the stance that alcohol-related matters are private concerns rather than public and political issues. The results show that most of the councillors believe that the public sector in general and local government in particular have an important role in the field of alcohol policy. A significant majority of the councillors also find the problems of alcohol policy as salient in the sense that they would like to prioritise programmes within the field even if this meant less money for other policy areas.

The second condition of politicisation is the presence of conflicting opinions. A good measure of assessing how divided the councillors are is the survey question of making a choice between two opposite propositions: A. *In my ideal society, public temperance is an undisputed goal* or B. *In my ideal society, alcohol beverages are an undisputed part of good life*. A moderate majority, or 57 per cent, come out in favour proposition B. Of these, 13 per cent hold definite views. Conversely, 43 per cent of the councillors agreed mostly with proposition A. Of them, 16 per cent were fully convinced. That this question correlates strongly to most other questions in this study indicates its importance. The difference of opinions in these central aspects is not just a matter of nuances; the positions are fundamentally divergent. It is therefore fair to argue that the field is not only politicised but polarised, too.

Since most councillors seem to find the field of alcohol policy both a public matter and their attitudes represent a broad range of conflicting positions, the conclusion must be that the field is sufficiently politi-

cised to be submitted to a functioning representative democracy at the local level.

However, in order to maintain an effective democratic process, voters cannot be expected to know the positions of parties and candidates in all relevant sub-issues within a political field. The ideal is that the many aspects of alcohol policy could be comprised into a convenient number of ideological dimensions. The existence of ideological dimensionality in a political field is essentially a prerequisite of representative democracy. And the awareness of the dimensions of a field and what they stand for are central for voters to understand their options on Election Day.

Ideological dimensions of alcohol policy

The search for ideological dimensions (sometimes referred to as parameters, political spectra, political dimensions, etc.) is a broad field in social science research. Some authors (Ferguson 1941) seek to find complementary dimensions to the hegemonic left/right division, while others hope to find alternative ways of understanding the political spectrum by focusing on specific political values (Rokeach 1973; Inglehart 1977). It could be argued that each policy sector has a number of unique aspects and value issues and that a more precise ideological dimensionality could be better understood by focusing on one sector at a time (Karlsson 2003). This is also the approach taken in this study in relation to the field of alcohol policy in Swedish local government.

Factor analysis is a technique well suited to discovering ideological dimensions by analysing the attitudes of a large population. According to the logic of the meth-

Table 1. Councillors' Attitudes on Alcohol Policy Proposals – Percentage In Support of Proposals and Factor Analysis.

	Per cent positive	D0	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5
Allow food shops to sell strong beer, wine and spirits	25	-.73	.76				
Decrease the tax on alcohol	42	-.74	.76				
The age limit for buying alcohol should be lowered [from 21] to 18 years	22	-.54	.61				
Expand the Swedish border patrol in order to prevent smuggling of alcohol	67	.64	-.61				
It is important to be restrictive in allowing restaurants to serve alcohol , for preventive purposes (Rather than: It is important to be generous in allowing restaurants to serve alcohol, for business/ tourism purposes)	66	.69	-.60	.38			
In my ideal society, public temperance is an undisputed goal. (Rather than: In my ideal society, alcohol beverages are an undisputed part of a good life)	43	.65	-.56	.29	.44		
To enjoy a glass of wine or beer in the park is a human right. (Rather than: It should be prohibited to consume alcohol in public places)	42	-.45	.55	.23	-.28		
The municipality should not interfere with how its adult citizens consume alcohol (Rather than: The municipality should actively inform citizens of the negative consequences of alcohol)	20	-.48	.55	.35		-.23	
The municipalities and the school carry the main responsibility for informing young people how to handle alcohol (Rather than: The parents carry the main responsibility for informing young people how to handle alcohol)	34	.27		.71			
The abuse of alcohol is a social problem and should be dealt with by the municipal social service (Rather than: Abuse of alcohol is a medical problem and should be dealt with by the health service (at the county level))	61	.24		.52		.23	-.34
It is important that none other than the municipality/the public sector is responsible for alcohol and drug abuse (Rather than: Voluntary organisations and churches should be given a larger responsibility regarding alcohol and drug abuse programmes)	66	.33		.48		.21	.40
To appear drunk is a sign of bad character	74				.72		
Leading municipal employees and politicians should be moderate in their drinking habits, as well as in their private life	68	.29	-.24		.57		
To drink alcohol is a sin	4	.20		.27	.54		
Increased [rather than decreased] public support : alcohol abusers	61	.42				.77	
The municipality should spend more resources on alcohol and drug abuse programmes, even if this means less money for other policy areas. (Rather than: The municipality should not spend more resources on alcohol and drug abuse programmes if that should mean less money for other policy areas)	62	.49	-.21	.25		.76	
In a municipal working place , alcoholism should never be grounds for dismissal	53	.20				.26	.71
It is wrong [for politicians/municipal employees] to drink alcohol [in official meetings or whilst entertaining guests] paid for by tax money	68	.37	-.26		.28		.56
Variance explained (percentage)		.23	.19	.09	.09	.08	.07

Comments: The first data column presents the percentage positive answers to each policy suggestion (where others are either neutral or negative). The following columns present results of two factor analyses. Column D0 represents the factor scores of the first and dominating dimension from an un-rotated analysis, and the five following are the result of a rotated analysis using varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalisation, converged in 6 iterations. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Only dimensions with Eigenvalue >1 is presented. Factor scores < .20 are omitted. All variables are built on survey questions with the form of a proposal (or in some cases the choice between two proposals). Higher values represent higher support of the proposal. N = 1,404.

od, patterns in the responses to survey questions may be related to a statistically manufactured latent variable that represents such a dimension. This new factor variable can then be used as an index-like dependent variable when we want to analyse what influences people's positions on these dimensions. A factor variable is standardised so that its mean is always 0 and the standard deviation is 1 (Kim & Mueller 1978).

In this article, 18 questions in the form of propositions from the survey are used in order to cover as many aspects of alcohol policy as possible. The result of the factor analysis are presented in Table 1.

At first glance, it looks like there is only one dimension dominating the whole field of local alcohol policy (D0, Table 1). Councillors place themselves at a continuum from positive to negative in relation to alcohol as a public phenomenon, and they either find alcohol and its consequences in general a social problem worthy of political intervention and restrictive measures from the local government or they do not. (Higher values on the D0 dimension represent more negative/restrictive attitudes). But underneath this rough positive/negative division, there are several more elaborated ideological dimensions based on other lines of reasoning. The method used to distinguish these dimensions is varimax rotated factor analysis. By rotation, we can single out five separate dimensions that (by definition) are not correlated to one another. The analysis shows that half of the variations in responses to the 18 questions are explained by these five dimensions.

Since dimensions identified by factor analysis are empirically and not theoretically derived, they can sometimes be hard

to interpret. Not so in this case. My suggestion is that the dimensions revealed in Table 1 could be related to questions of fundamental political beliefs which occur in all political fields. In short, the general questions are: *is there a political problem; who is responsible for solving it; what is the nature of the problem; how important is it; and what means should be used in solving it?* The questions are developed in Table 2, while the dimensions are analysed in the following paragraphs.

The liberal–restrictive dimension (D1)

The liberal–restrictive dimension is a key factor in Nordic alcohol policy (compare Anttila & Sulkunen 2001). Since the national referendum of 1922, when a proposition for total abolition was narrowly defeated, the Swedish political discussion on alcohol policy has focused on how the consumption of alcohol could be limited and which policy instruments are the most effective in reaching this goal (Johansson 2008). It is therefore not surprising that the first dimension (D1) that emerges when we study the attitudes of local politicians towards alcohol policy is connected to this discussion. (D1 is basically built on the core variables of the D0 dimension, as is to be expected in a rotated analysis, but in D1, higher values represent more liberal attitudes, whereas lower values represent restrictive views.)

The attitude questions bearing out D1 are of two kinds; there are the general questions on public sobriety as a political goal, and the support of local government paternalism when it comes to educating its citizens on the negative effects of alcohol.

The underlying dimension here con-

Table 2. The Five Dimensions of Alcohol Policy – Underlying Questions.

	The general policy questions	The questions relating to local alcohol policy
D1	Is the problem in question a public matter, and how vigorous should public policy be in order to solve this problem?	<i>Liberalism-restrictivism.</i> Is use/abuse of alcohol a public matter, and how restrictive should public policy be in order to prevent consumption and use of alcohol?
D2	Which actors in a multi-level governance society should be responsible for implementing the policy?	<i>Local responsibility.</i> To what extent should matters concerning alcohol be a responsibility for local government?
D3	To what extent is there an individual and moral component in the problem at hand, linking personal responsibility to its origins and solutions?	<i>Moralism.</i> To what extent is there a moral component in use/abuse of alcohol?
D4	What is the relative importance of different political problems, and what conclusions do we draw from this regarding priorities?	<i>Priorities.</i> Should the problems of alcohol abuse be prioritised in relation to other problems?
D5	To what extent is the means of achieving policy goals important, in terms of internal policies and symbolic actions?	<i>Internal affairs.</i> Is the municipality as an organisation and a work place an arena for implementing local alcohol policies?

cerns whether people's use of alcohol is a political problem and hence a public matter, while the dimensionality illustrates the extent to which the state or the local government should try to reduce the consumption of alcohol through the already available arsenal of policy instruments.

Most councillors tend to choose a more restrictive line in all aspects mentioned. A quarter support the proposal of selling alcohol in local shops. This implies abolition of the Swedish alcohol monopoly, which two-thirds of the politicians oppose. The questions on restrictions on restaurants serving alcohol and lowering alcohol taxes are more divisive, but here too, the liberals are in a minority. The most popular propositions relating to the liberal dimension suggest an expanded border patrol (supported by 64 per cent) and propose to make it even harder for young people to purchase alcohol (84 per cent).

The responsibility of local government (D2)

Three attitude questions that are not necessarily connected from an analytical

point of view form the base of the second dimension: 1) whether local government and the school (and *not* the parents) bears the main responsibility for educating young people on how to handle alcohol, a position preferred by 34 per cent of the respondents, 2) whether alcohol is a social problem that should be handled by local social services (and *not* a medical problem which the county level should deal with), which 61 per cent agree to, or 3) whether local government itself should bear the main responsibility for all abuse treatment (and *not* include voluntary organisations and churches), which is what 66 per cent of the respondents believe.

The answers to these questions could potentially represent positions on topics as wide-ranging as families and privacy, sociological interpretations of the causes of alcoholism and on the role of civil society, respectively. But what combines these disparate aspects in the minds of the local politicians can easily be understood from a public administration point of view. The dimensionality concerns the extent to which political responsibility in gen-

eral should be laid on local government in a multi-level governance system, and, in particular, the role of local government in relation to other actors such as families, counties and civil society. A premise for the councillors' positions is their understanding of the nature of the problem of alcohol abuse, and whether this problem area today is a local responsibility.

Thus, if the D1 dimension defines the general *scale* of public intervention in alcohol-related matters, the D2 dimension determines *who* should carry out these interventions, the local level or someone else. High values on the D2 dimension represent attitudes in support of a higher responsibility with the local authorities.

From a Public Administration point of view, the role assigned to each level of a multi-level governance system relates to ideological positions in a number of conflicting issues such as the importance of centralisation and service equality versus decentralisation and diversity, national bureaucratisation versus local democracy, and organised community as the leading principle of the locality versus family, church and civil society. The role of local authorities in European welfare states differs greatly depending on national welfare ideologies (Sellers & Lidström 2007). This issue has been an important aspect of Swedish welfare policy debate during the twentieth century. Parties have had strong opinions on the role of local government, but their stances in these matters have changed over time (Strandberg 1998). Today, this dimension with regards to alcohol policy is not, as we will see, very party-politicised, but it is nonetheless important when the local politicians form their attitudes on alcohol-related matters.

It does, after all, determine how these politicians view the scope of their own responsibilities.

It is interesting that opinions on these dimensions correlate positively with several other questions: if you believe in an extensive role for local government in alcohol matters, you are generally also a friend of restrictive policies. But we should note, too, that there is a positive correlation between support of this dimension and the anti-paternalistic view that local government should not interfere with how adult citizens consume alcohol (and *not* actively educate citizens on the negative consequences of alcohol). This indicates that D2 is not a traditional public/private (left/right) dimension, but rather a local government /not local government one.

Moralism (D3)

On the liberal–restrictive dimension (D1), the degree of public interventionism is in focus but the reason behind the restrictive or liberal policy is not automatically implied. There could be several grounds for limiting public consumption of alcohol. One such motive could be the recognition that alcohol abuse is a social problem and thereby a public and mainly local government responsibility. However, throughout the history of alcohol policy, the moral dimension of alcohol use has been important. The use and particularly the abuse of alcohol have traditionally been related to the drinker's character and choices. (Edwards 2010). From a religious point of view, especially among nonconformist Christian movements, drinking has been seen as a sin. The first Swedish law restricting alcohol consumption clearly defined overconsumption and abuse of alco-

hol as sinful behaviour (The Law against Gluttony and Drunkenness, 1733, cited in Kjellberg 1979, 22). The Temperance movement was from the start closely tied to nonconformist churches. Their motives for restricting alcohol consumption were both social and religious (Båtefalk 2000). In the early twentieth century, parts of the Temperance movement were secularised and associated with the labour movement. Even if the religious component was gone, the idea that temperance was a significant individual virtue lived on within the labour movement and in the Social Democratic Party, which came to dominate Swedish politics for many decades. For the emerging labour movement, an important goal was to legitimise the working class as proper citizens, just as virtuous and suitable for political positions as members of the societal elites (Ambjörnsson 1998).

Today, only 4 per cent of local politicians agree that *To drink alcohol is a sin*, but 74 per cent agree that *To appear drunk is a sign of bad character*. By taking a stand on these issues, the respondents do not analyse the abuse of alcohol in general, but rather the behaviour of individuals. It is apparent that most local decision makers readily connect drinking to personal morals. The answers to these two proposals form the core of the third dimension (D3), where higher values signify more moralistic attitudes towards alcohol. This dimension is also strongly connected to a proposal in the questionnaire to which 68 per cent agree: *Leading municipal employees and politicians should be moderate in their drinking habits, as well as in their private life*. A positive answer here builds a bridge between the private and the public sphere. Also positively correlated to

this moralistic dimension is the belief in public temperance as an undisputed goal.

Priorities (D4)

One of the key aspects of politics is deciding how to use limited common resources. It could very well be that you favour a political goal, but since you prioritise other things even more, you are not ready to support this particular goal any further. When asked if alcohol abusers were a group so *disadvantaged or discriminated against that they ought to be supported by the public in some way*, 37 per cent found the current levels of support sufficient, whereas 61 per cent wanted to increase the support. Only 3 per cent wanted to decrease or eliminate the support altogether. Another question on the same theme explicitly put forth divergent choices underlining the limited resources aspect: *should, or should not the municipality spend more resources on alcohol and drug abuse programmes, even if this means less money for other policy areas?* 62 per cent wanted to prioritise alcohol care. Together, these two questions are the foundation of the D4 dimension, where high values represent attitudes in favour of prioritising alcohol-related problems.

Internal affairs (D5)

Two questions, very different on the surface, have the highest scores in the fifth dimension: 53 per cent of the respondents think that *in a municipal working place, alcoholism should never be grounds for dismissal*, and 68 per cent agree that *It is wrong [for politicians/municipal employees] to drink alcohol [in official meetings or whilst entertaining guests] paid for by tax money*. The question of alcoholism

and dismissal is correlated to the ambition level in D4, and the question on alcohol during entertaining is associated with restrictiveness in D1 and moralism in D3.

That these two propositions group together in a positive correlation is interesting, since one of them is a statement supporting the rights of employed addicts, while the other supports the right of the local authorities to regulate alcohol consumption among employees. In other words, one proposition fosters tolerance whereas the other advances restrictiveness towards alcohol consumption.

The common denominator is that the two propositions relate to the social responsibilities of local administration as an organisation and a place of work. Higher values on the D5 dimension indicate attitudes that ascribe the local authorities a high degree of responsibility. The problem of alcohol abuse in the workplace is regulated by law, and the employer has a rehabilitation responsibility towards the employee, but only to a point (Iseskog 2009). However, there is room for the employer to be more or less supportive towards the employee in this situation, and to state that alcoholism should never be grounds for dismissal is not a sign of tolerance but rather an indication of the view that the municipal employer should have a high degree of social responsibility for its employees.

Each municipality decides its own policy with regards to alcohol in entertainment situations. Some are very restrictive, others more liberal. The most common argument for restrictiveness in serving alcohol to employees and others is the protection of those who struggle to stop drinking.

Generally, a Swedish municipality is

the largest *employer* in its territory. How alcohol-related matters are handled in the municipality as a workplace is of great social importance, both in practice and symbolically. In particular, consumption of alcohol at official dinners and for entertaining personnel and guests is a much discussed topic.

There are weak but negative correlations between the core questions on the D5 and D2 (local responsibility) dimensions, signifying that D5 is by no means a measure of the general degree of municipal responsibility in all alcohol-related matters, but rather the recognition of the importance of the municipality as an employer in forming local policies.

Party politics – The left/right dimension

Mirroring the national election system, local elections are based on voting on party lists with a limited scope for preference voting on a special candidate. The general elections are, in effect, party elections. With the fundamental dimensions of local alcohol policy identified, it is now time to see how functional the party system is as an instrument of choice for Swedish voters on Election Day in matters concerning alcohol policy.

Sweden has been described as a one-dimensional political system, where almost everything and the party system in particular seem to go back to the left/right dimension. Even if there is clear evidence of alternative dimensions, the left/right aspect is highly dominant (Gilljam & Oscarsson 1996). The traditional party positions on the left/right scale are therefore as follows: The Left Party (socialist) furthest to the left, accompanied by the Social Demo-

crats on the overall left. On right-of-centre we find the Liberal People's Party, the Centre Party and the Christian Democrats, and slightly further to the right the Moderate Party (conservatives). The order of the three centre-right parties is not easily determined and varies over time. The Green Party sometimes claims to be independent of this scale, but in attitude surveys, Green Party sympathisers and politicians are almost always placed firmly on the left side of the scale (Karlsson 2003). In the survey used in this study, the councillors placed themselves on 0–10-graded left/right scale. Party affiliation explains 72 per cent of the variation of the councillors' subjective left/right position.

For the un-rotated D0 factor of Table 1 (where higher values represent more negative/restrictive attitudes on alcohol), the correlation with a subjective left/right position (where higher values represent more leftist views) is Pearson's $r = .39$, since leftist councillors are generally more restrictive in all alcohol-related issues. For the rotated dimensions, correlation values are equally high in four cases (D1: $r = -.31$, D3: $r = .22$, D4: $r = -.27$, D5: $r = -.27$). The weakest correlation to a subjective left/right position is that of the local responsibility dimension (D2), but it is still significant ($r = -.14$). The results indicate that people to the left are more likely to identify social problems as structural rather than individual and moral, and they are more inclined than right-wing politicians to advocate political means when dealing with such problems. In this case, a councillor to the left is more likely to see alcohol abuse as a political (and not a moral) problem that should be prioritised and tackled by restrictive policies, not least by local gov-

ernment (and within the local administration).

In terms of the councillors' party affiliation, the traditional left/right pattern is repeated in all dimensions studied, with one important exception: the Christian Democrats. While socially conservative and centre/right-oriented in most other matters, the Christian Democrats are the most restrictive party of all in the D0 and D1 dimensions, putting them "to the left" of the Left Party. At the same time, they are more "right-wing" in the D3 dimension (on moralism and sin) than their conservative colleagues in the Moderate Party. Most likely, this is an effect of the Christian Democrats' close ties with nonconformist churches and the temperance tradition (Lejon 2002).

The result of taking the Christian Democrat factor into account is that party affiliation is a better determinant than the subjective left/right question when it comes to the councillors' views on dimensions D0 and D1 ($R^2 = .25$ and $.21$). But in the other four dimensions, the explanatory power of the parties is considerably less: D2 $R^2 = .03$, D3 $R^2 = .07$, D4 $R^2 = .07$, D5 $R^2 = .08$). In other words, more than 90 per cent of the variations between local councillors in these four dimensions cannot be explained by party affiliation. This leaves voters without much help, if they wish to influence local policies on these issues on Election Day.

Other explanations to ideological positions

Since the parties are of limited help when trying to explain why councillors hold certain beliefs, we are compelled to inquire which other factors interplay. From a citizen perspective, the possibility of preference voting for a particular candi-

date could be used in order to impact on the politics of the council, provided that the voters know which candidate traits are normally correlated to a certain belief. We should first look at some general individual and contextual factors and then focus on the special import of religion and personal drinking habits. The regression models used in this analysis are presented in Table 3.

Gender is important in all dimensions except D2 (local responsibility). Women councillors are more inclined to be restrictive, less moralistic and more concerned with the local administration's internal policies than are their male colleagues. These effects remain when controlled for party affiliation, religiosity and drinking habits.

Age is most notable as an explanatory factor in the D3 dimension: older councillors are more likely to point to the moral aspects of drinking.

Social class is a variable related to party membership, especially since almost half of the Social Democrats identify as living in a working-class home (48 per cent), compared with 5 per cent among councillors from the Moderate Party. But controlled for party membership, a working-class home seems to have effects on dimensions D3–5, so that working-class councillors are more likely to be moralistic, to prioritise alcohol abuse before other problems and especially to emphasise the role of local administration as a working environment.

Higher *education* seems to imply that a councillor is somewhat more liberal in the D1 dimension and less eager to carry out restrictive politics within the administration (D5), but nonetheless, higher educa-

tion also has a positive effect on wishing to prioritise alcohol abuse as a political matter.

In the analysis, three variables were used to sketch the *lifestyles* of the respondents: restaurant visits (indicating experiences of social interaction where alcohol is usually served), Internet usage (indicating possible openness for innovations and communications with people living far away) and reading books (indicating humanistic interests). As it turns out, frequent restaurant visitors want to prioritise actions against alcohol abuse but not through a restrictive intra-administrational policy. Experienced Internet users and avid book readers are especially critical of the moralistic perspective.

Municipal size was included in the analysis as a contextual variable. It appears that care for alcohol abusers is less prioritised by councillors in smaller municipalities, but they have more positive values in the internal affairs dimension (D5). These councillors may have less experience of abuse problems, and the relative importance of local administration as a workplace is higher in minor municipalities.

Religion

In international comparative studies, Sweden is normally described as one of the world's more secular countries (Tomasson 2002). Religion is more or less a taboo subject in political discourse. Not even the Christian Democrats use religious arguments in public debate. Yet, in the field of alcohol policy, religion is still a political factor.

The survey tells us that the average councillor prays nine times per year and visits a religious meeting or service on nine oc-

Table 3. Explaining Local Councilors' Positions on Ideological Dimensions – Five OLS Regression Models.

	D0 Positive/negative		D1 Liberalism		D2 Local responsibility		D3 Moralism		D4 Priorities		D5 Internal affairs	
	Mod. 5		Mod. 5		Mod. 5		Mod. 5		Mod. 5		Mod. 5	
(Constant)	.02	-.62 ***	-.02	.68 ***	.17	.40 *	.46 ***	.13	-.45 ***	-.32	.01	-.28
Gender (woman)	.18 *	.17 **	-.22 **	-.24 ***	.18 *		-.30 ***	-.28 ***			.31 ***	.28 ***
Age (65 or older)		.21 **			.43 *		.41 ***	.33 ***				
Ethnicity (born abroad)					.24 **		.21 *	.21 *		.23 *	.64 ***	.40 ***
Social class (working class home)	.46 ***	.17 *	-.18 *	-.14 *								
Education (high)	.18 *											
Lifestyle 1 (Visit restaurants; once per month or more)									.21 **	.20 **	-.25 ***	-.26 ***
Lifestyle 2 (Use the Internet; several times per week)	-.25 **				-.32 ***	-.26 **	-.39 ***	-.30 ***	.23 *			
Lifestyle 3 (Read books; once per week or more)							-.27 ***	-.20 **				
Municipal size (small - less than 10,000 inh)	-.21 *	-.17 *				-.18 *			-.38 ***	-.31 ***	.26 **	.30 ***
Model 1 Personal & municipal characteristics R²	.05		.02		.04		.08		.05		.10	
(Constant)	-.12 *		.13 *		-.02		-.40 ***		.15		.14 **	
Visit to religious meeting previous year (yes)		.22 **		-.15 *			.31 ***	.18 *			-.29 ***	
Prayed at least one time previous year (yes)		.14 *					.26 **	.22 **				
Member of a Nonconformist church (yes)	1.05 ***	.48 ***	-.08 ***	-.51 ***			.65 ***	.30 *				
Model 2 Religion R²	.08		.08		.00		.10		.01		.01	
(Constant)	-.20 ***		.18 ***		-.05		-.16 ***		.02		-.01	
Drinking habits (did not drink alcohol previous year)	1.51 ***	1.13 ***	-.140 ***	-.102 ***	.29 **		1.20 ***	.83 ***				
Model 3 Drinking habits (bivariate) R²	.17		.14		.01		.11		.00		.00	
(Constant)	-.44 **		.55 ***		.27		.18		-.12		-.17	
Member of ruling majority (yes)												
Top leader (Chair/vice chair of board/committee)					-.27 ***	-.22 **			.16 *			
Centre party			-.45 **									
Liberal	.33 *		-.50 **									
Christian democrat	1.30 ***		-.149 ***	-.53 **			.42 *					
Green	1.16 ***	1.08 ***	-.121 ***	-.110 ***								.60 *
Conservative	-.84 ***		.66 ***	.83 ***	-.52 **	-.64 **					-.48 *	
Social democrat	.65 ***	.52 ***	-.60 ***	-.48 **			-.49 **	.03 *	.38 *		.52 **	.46 *
Socialist (Party control group: "Other parties")	1.21 ***	1.23 ***	-.101 ***	-.94 ***			-.74 ***	.85 ***	.86 ***	.70 ***	.85 ***	1.04 ***
Model 4 Parties and positions R²	.26		.21		.04		.07		.08		.09	
Model 5 – All variables combined R²	.43		.34		.09		.23		.11		.16	

Comments: For each of the six dependent variables operationalised as factor variables introduced in Table 1) five regression analyses are carried out: Model 1: Personal & municipal characteristics (9 independent variables, N=1,241), Model 2: Religion (3 independent variables, N=1,290), Model 3 Drinking habits (1 independent variable - bivariate, N=1,320), Model 4: Parties and positions (9 independent variables, N=1,361) and Model 5: where all 22 independent variables are included (N=1,180). All independent variables are dichotomised and all B-values are therefore easily comparable. P-values: * = .05, ** = .01, *** = .001 (non-significant B-values are omitted).

casions annually, but there is of course a great deal of variation. We also know that 70 per cent of the councillors belong to the Lutheran Church of Sweden (the former state church), compared with 75 per cent of the population as a whole. About 13 per cent are members of a nonconformist church. It is possible to be a member of both, which is the case for more than half of the 13 per cent. Close to 22 per cent of the councillors are not members of any church.

The analysis shows that the three religious variables – prayer frequency, frequency of attending religious meetings and membership of a nonconformist church – are more helpful in explaining the variations in the councillors' answers in dimensions D0 (general positive/negative), D1 (liberalism) and D3 (moralism) than the many variables presented in the previous paragraph combined.

Religiosity is often connected to a person's left/right ideological beliefs. Among the councillors, the subjective left/right question and the prayer frequency are positively correlated ($r=.22$). Since the left/right dimension lies concealed in most ideological discussions, this partly explains the strong correlations. But when the effects of religion are controlled for party affiliations, they still remain significant, and in some cases they get stronger. Rather than only being a spurious left/right indicator, the religious aspect explains intra-party differences. Regardless of party affiliation, those who pray often, are active churchgoers or members of nonconformist churches advocate a more restrictive alcohol policy and are more likely to identify a moral and sinful component in alcohol policy.

Drinking habits

Finally, a word on the significance of the councillors' personal alcohol consumption. Studies on Swedish citizens have shown that personal consumption is more important than general ideological positions in analyses of attitudes to alcohol tax (Holmberg & Weibull 2008). When asked how often they drank spirits/wine/strong beer during the last year, 9 per cent report to have consumed these beverages "several times a week". One third of the councillors select the alternative "once per week", and about as many say that they drink strong beverages "once every month". About 20 per cent drink even more seldom, and 11 per cent claim not to have drunk any alcohol at all during the period mentioned. The average alcohol drinking frequency of local councillors is 31 times per year.

The results show that drinking habits are very strongly connected to the attitudes of alcohol-related matters. In fact, all but one dimension (D4, priorities) are significantly correlated ($p<.01$) with this variable. Councillors who consume alcohol more often are: more liberal on D1 ($r=.34$), less inclined to find alcohol to be a social problem on the local government agenda D2 ($-.09$) and less likely to see a moral component in drinking as of D2 ($-.25$). Finally, they are more negative towards using municipal administration as an arena for alcohol policy ($-.10$). Controlled for other variables, the effects of drinking habits remain significant on dimensions D0, D1, D2 and D3.

Conclusions

This redistribution of responsibilities in the multi-level government system has considerable administrative and demo-

cratic implications. The starting point for this article was the increased responsibility of Swedish municipalities in the field of alcohol policy, and the aim has been to investigate whether the fundamental prerequisites for functioning democratic processes in the field are in place in Swedish local government. Is the representative democracy of Swedish municipalities prepared to handle alcohol policy issues?

The first question asked whether the field of local alcohol policy in Sweden was politicised. The answer is a resounding yes. The vast majority of the political decision makers in Swedish municipalities see the use and abuse of alcohol as a salient political problem. The attitudes of the councillors also represent a wide range of opinions in all matters relevant to local alcohol policy.

The second question concerned the existence of systematic patterns in attitudes towards alcohol-related issues. The results confirm that there is indeed a substantial dimensionality in the councillors' attitudes. These dimensions indicate that in the minds of the elected representatives, the many various aspects of alcohol are interconnected in a systematic way. Even though they may not be explicit in the public debate, there are fairly visible conflict lines on the extent to which alcohol is a political problem and how vigorous local government should be in addressing it; on the role of local government in the multi-level governance system; the balance of responsibility between the municipality and the individual; how important the field is in relation to other urgent matters; and if the municipal organisation is to be used as an arena for implementing alcohol policy.

In the third question, the ability of the

party system to mirror such ideological dimensions, the results are mixed. As expected, the parties are a decent sorting tool for voters as long as the issues are in some way related to the left/right discourse. And since all dimensions identified in this article are in some way correlated to the left/right dimension, parties do matter. The Christian Democratic Party plays a key role here, allowing voters generally leaning to the right to avoid voting for parties with a more liberal view on alcohol policy. But in several aspects the party system is unable to reflect the full range of opinions among councillors concerning alcohol policy. In many cases it is just as valuable for voters to be familiar with the candidate's religious beliefs and drinking habits, since they, too, are strongly connected to attitudes in alcohol-related issues. As implicated in question four, knowledge of such correlations between social characteristics and attitudes could be helpful, when voters indicate their preference vote.

In summary, the results show that the fundamental prerequisites are in place for local representative democracy to handle the field of alcohol policy, and Swedish local government has potential to step into the shoes of the state in the field of alcohol policy.

What, then, are the political implications of these results for Swedish municipalities? First and foremost, the fact that the prerequisites for a functioning democratic process are in place does not imply that state policy could now be local policy in the sense that political decisions made and instruments used on the national level could be decentralised. After all, municipalities have to obey the same rules set by

the European Union as member states.

By showing active political leadership in the fields of social policy, education, public health, public order and business policy, the local government has a considerable arsenal of policy instruments at its disposal. Since the results show that local representatives have different views on which of these instruments should be used, and to what degree, the citizens have a potential range of options to choose from in the polling booth. Whether the politicisation and ideological dimensions are visible to ordinary people is another matter, however. The greatest challenge for local government is to progress from a situation where the fundamental prerequisites for a democratic process are in place to a context where the process is actually functioning.

For the local citizens to be fully able to

take control over the policy field, the political options must be explicit, and the debate must be open and lively. This is unfortunately seldom the case in local politics (Karlsson 2003), especially in smaller municipalities (Karlsson 2007). But if the local political leaders are willing to put in the effort to make their opinions on alcohol-related matters known, they are ready not only to carry the burden of a weakened national government but also to turn the municipalities into the democratic arenas where the alcohol policy of the future is decided.

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